



Ullens Center for
Contemporary Art
尤伦斯当代艺术中心

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Nave, Long Gallery

Press material available for
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John Gerrard: Power.Play

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From 9 June to 7 August 2016, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) presents “John Gerrard: Power.Play,” the artist’s first exhibition in China and most comprehensive institutional solo show to date. The exhibition features three major works: *Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma) 2015*, a digitally modeled composite of one of Google’s server centers in Oklahoma; *Exercise (Dunhuang) 2014*, a reconstruction based on satellite imagery of a system of roadways located mysteriously in the middle of the Gobi Desert, which then becomes the site for a lengthy elimination game played among avatars modeled on factory workers in Guangzhou; and *Solar Reserve (Tonopah, Nevada) 2014*, a painstakingly accurate, virtual portrait of a functioning solar farm. Together the works raise important questions not only about key issues of the present historical moment such as power and surveillance, but about the very nature of the work of art in the digital age.

In his works of the past fifteen years, John Gerrard has pioneered the use of post-cinematic, virtual space through complex algorithms that generate imagery in real time. Deceptively similar to film or video, his works are simulations: virtual, graphical worlds that exist outside of physical time. Often exploring geographically isolated locations—be they the agrarian American Great Plains or remote reaches of the Gobi Desert—Gerrard’s works frequently refer to structures of power and networks of energy that have coincided with the expansion of human endeavor in the past century.

Illuminating the entryway of the Nave with the image of 10,000 mirrors, *Solar Reserve (Tonopah, Nevada) 2014* is a portrait realized as a virtual world, a massive light sculpture depicting a power plant located in the Mojave Desert. Everything appearing in the work has a real world antecedent copied by hand with 3D design software. As an artist, the game engine is Gerrard’s primary medium, and the artwork is exported as a piece of software, which, here, produces a non-durational image in real time projected without frame. This post-cinematic portal meditatively glides along a sixty minute orbit around the solar plant, a symbol of humanity’s reliance on and resistance to solar rhythm.



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John Gerrard's other works involve similar feats of documentation followed by painstaking digital replication. His requests for access to sites, however, are not always met with welcome. Such was the case for *Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma) 2015*. Rebuffed by Google, Gerrard hired a helicopter to assist in the production of a covert photographic survey of one of the company's server centers, or "data farms," in Oklahoma. While this process is not considered a part of the final work, it illustrates the guerilla-style production tactics the artist feels are necessary in approaching topographically extreme sites. Here, "extreme" describes both the surrounding geography—barren countryside—and the (conspiratorial) regulations delimiting access to these otherwise banal regions. Extending Gerrard's "Grow Finish Unit" series, which focuses on architecturally similar, computer-controlled pork production units in the American Midwest, *Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma) 2015* is a synecdoche of the information systems and power structures that organize the resources enabling it, eerily reminding viewers of the direct influence digital space carries over the real landscape.

Work on *Exercise (Dunhuang) 2014* began when a friend informed Gerrard of a mysterious network of roadways the size of a small town in the heart of the Gobi Desert. After visiting the site in person, Gerrard digitally reconstructed it using satellite depth-scans of the markings. To add another layer, Gerrard has placed avatars based on motion scans of thirty-nine workers from a Guangzhou computer manufacturing plant, wearing blue uniforms and paper bonnets, into the simulation, their movements as they wander through the vast network mirroring those of the actual workers. The players' paths across what can be read as a game board, landscape, or gigantic stage are determined by the A* algorithm used in GPS route-finding systems. The entire performance, play, competition, or exercise is depicted by three different virtual cameras: from human head height, from the point of view of a circling low-flying drone, and from a satellite's vertical perspective. Viewers of the dispassionate surveillance are telepresent and omniscient, yet strangely disconnected.

About the Exhibition

"John Gerrard: Power.Play" is curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari with assistant curator Guo Xi. The video equipment sponsor for the exhibition is Christie Digital System (Shanghai) Co., Ltd. The exhibition is supported by the Embassy of Ireland in China. The exhibition is accompanied



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by a bilingual publication that includes essays by Robin Mackay and Manuel Shvartzberg as well as a dialogue between Gerrard and Robin Peckham.

On the occasion of the exhibition, UCCA and John Gerrard have organized “Image.Object”, a series of master-class workshops focused on developing skills in 3D imaging to take place at four of China’s leading art schools: China Central Academy of Arts (Beijing), China Academy of Art (Hangzhou), Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, and Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts (Shenyang). Students are coached through processes inherent to John Gerrard’s works from conception to execution of an original artwork: producing 3D scans, importing the scans into game engines, and setting the diagnostics for a new simulated environment. Concepts and finished works will be assessed by John Gerrard and critiqued in the workshop setting. Each workshop concludes with an informal exhibition of completed student works.

About the Artist

John Gerrard (b. 1974, Dublin) now lives and works in Dublin, Ireland, and Vienna, Austria. Recent solo exhibitions of Gerrard’s work include “Solar Reserve” (Lincoln Centre in association with the Public Art Fund, NYC, 2014); “Dialogue (John Gerrard / David Claerbout)” (MuHKA, Antwerp, 2014); “Exercise” (Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul, 2014); “Pulp Press” (Kistefos) (Kistefos Museet, Norway, 2013), “Exercise (Djibouti)” (Modern Art Oxford, 2012); and “Infinite Freedom Exercise” Manchester International Festival (2011). Gerrard’s work is in private and institutional collections internationally, including Tate, London; Pinakotek der Moderne, Munich; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; and SFMoMA, San Francisco.

About Ullens Center for Contemporary Art

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is the international institution at the heart of Beijing’s 798 Art District. Each year it presents a wide range of exhibitions and educational programs, highlighting artists from China and beyond, and encouraging the public to engage with contemporary art and culture. Opened in 2007, UCCA is a non-profit, non-collecting, non-governmental museum sustained by the generosity of numerous patrons, sponsors, members, and visitors, beginning with founders Guy and Myriam Ullens. In everything it does, UCCA aims to elaborate an inclusive, cosmopolitan vision of China in the world.

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