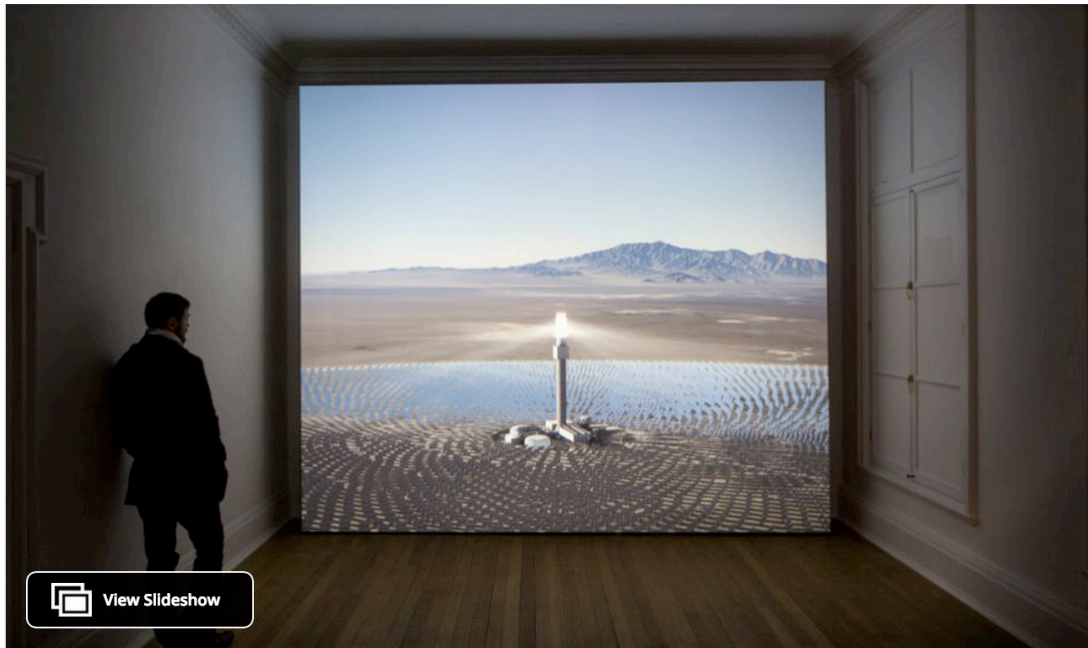


## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Nicholas Forrest, "INTERVIEW: John Gerrard on his "Slippery" Sims at Thomas Dane Gallery," *BlouIn Artinfo*, 16<sup>th</sup> February 2015



Installation View

Thomas Dane Gallery's second solo exhibition of Irish artist **John Gerrard** features two new works by the highly regarded pioneer of digital media. Using real-time computer graphics technology that was originally developed by the military and is now used extensively by the gaming industry, Gerrard creates virtual realities with incredible levels of detail. His most recent works often explore geographically isolated locations and frequently take structures of power and networks of energy as points of departure to satisfy what he describes as an interest in "the material qualities of life" and the "'slippery' space between the real and the representation of the real."

Showing for the first time in the UK at Thomas Dane Gallery is Gerrard's monumental public artwork "Solar Reserve (Tonopah, Nevada)," 2014. Originally presented in New York's Lincoln Centre Plaza by the Public Art Fund in late 2014, the hyper-realistic digital simulation re-creates a Nevada solar thermal power plant and the surrounding desert landscape. The exhibition also includes a new work titled "Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma), 2015" which simulates the google data server in Oklahoma (also known as a "data farm") with its diesel generators and powerful cooling towers. Gerrard had to conduct his photographic survey of the data farm via helicopter after being denied access by Google Inc.

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Gerrard's practice is as intriguing as it is complex. So to find out more, **BLOUIN ARTINO** got in touch with the artist and asked him a few questions about his work and the exhibition at Thomas Dane Gallery which is currently on show until March 21, 2015.

**Computer simulation is your visual language of choice. What differentiates and distinguishes the works you create from the reality they simulate?**

We simulate the orbit of the earth around the sun and the turn of the earth – so light conditions in effect, but exclude both the weather (rain, snow etc) and also the local human workers. We also produce portraits of the subjects – the buildings – but do not stick so closely to that rule for the scene. We will often leave things out to create a simpler scene.

The medium of simulation speaks to these scenes as they are in effect minimal, and have a curious synthetic quality. They are also part of a vast network of invisible facilities that make the luxuries of contemporary life possible – there is a virtuality to the now – petro realities that are so embedded as to be invisible. The medium talks to these conditions in a curiously precise manner.

**How does the way you use and engage with the medium of computer simulation translate into the way people experience and interact with your works?**

The works primarily break with histories of cinema in a sort of non-duration embedded within them. They are not 90 minutes long, and cannot be fully consumed by the public. This is at the core of the potential of simulation in my work; the engine holds instructions and these are executed – this is a model in effect – and we play with the model, with the camera, with the light. These are very much areas that are possible in simulation.

**Technology has enabled greater communication between human beings and has made the world a smaller place; yet the two works in your exhibition at Thomas Dane Gallery explore isolated locations. What do you want to convey to the viewer with this comparison?**

I would tend to disagree with the statement – geography is tangible and has real effects – technology has not had an effect on it. Both these scenes are computer controlled productive scenes of the US landscape, sort of like a postmodern pastoral. I want the London public to be more aware of these sites, as it is here that we consume their work. In the new piece Farm there is a more ambiguous sense as it is not clear if we consume the products of this Farm, or are consumed ourselves.

**The starting point for “Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma),” 2015 was an aerial photographic survey of a Google data server building in Oklahoma. How did the survey translate into the finished work?**

2,500 pictures were shared with an external producer, Max Loegler, who spent 8 months building the building as a 3D doppelganger in Maya. These were textured using painted resources and also original adjusted photographs.

The models were built in production softwares such as Maya, textured using photoshop. The engine is UNIGINE; a Russian engine.

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**In “Solar Reserve (Tonopah, Nevada),” 2014 you have created an incredibly complex and realistic simulation of a functioning solar power plant. In this work, what does computer simulation allow you to convey that reality doesn't?**

I am interested in this 'slippery' space between the real and the representation of the real. I am less interested for the work to have an aesthetic as such, and realism is something of a path of least resistance toward that... That said – and as per above – we can simulate the scene over a full solar year. It is something to be experienced, not watched to finish in a sense.

**Your works often reference structures of power and networks of energy. What is your interest in these frameworks?**

The term power is often discussed in a purely social or perhaps geo political manner. I am, as per above, to look at power through the prism of energy and to ask from whence does this power emerge? From what landscape? What does that place look like?

At this time I am interested in the material qualities of life, as opposed to the identities of those who are involved. For instance a central project is to transpose the sites of production over the sites of contemporary consumption and in so doing really collapse geographies, at least in a hybrid sense between art, portraiture and public space.

**You are regarded as a pioneer of digital media. What does the term “digital media” mean to you and where do you see its place in the contemporary art zeitgeist?**

I have a peculiar commitment to the 3D scan as such – and by extension to the game engine – which allows these 'image objects' to exist outside of the collage base, linear and narrative traps as such of more traditional media such as video or more originally photography. I certainly am an 'early adopter' however some of the true pioneers of the digital were working much earlier. I rest on the work of the military in their flight simulations of the 70's and the explosion of commercial entertainment game engines of the 90's and 2000's.

Technology lies at the heart of the contemporary rich world and increasingly so in the developing worlds as well – thus I can see no good reason why artists will not and should not speak through it at increasing volume and put it to work in a fuller sense in contemporary art. Things need to change in the art schools to see this speed up but I would expect it is inevitable with what is described as the post internet generation emerging. There are many histories of art and contemporary art and to discuss the invisibility of the digital in the one we work in now is too broad a subject for now. Mainly it is a good time to be working in terms of the technical landscape and I am far from the only one, or even a pioneering one, to be aware of this.

<http://uk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1103413/interview-john-gerrard-on-his-slippery-sims-at-thomas-dane>