Evan Roth
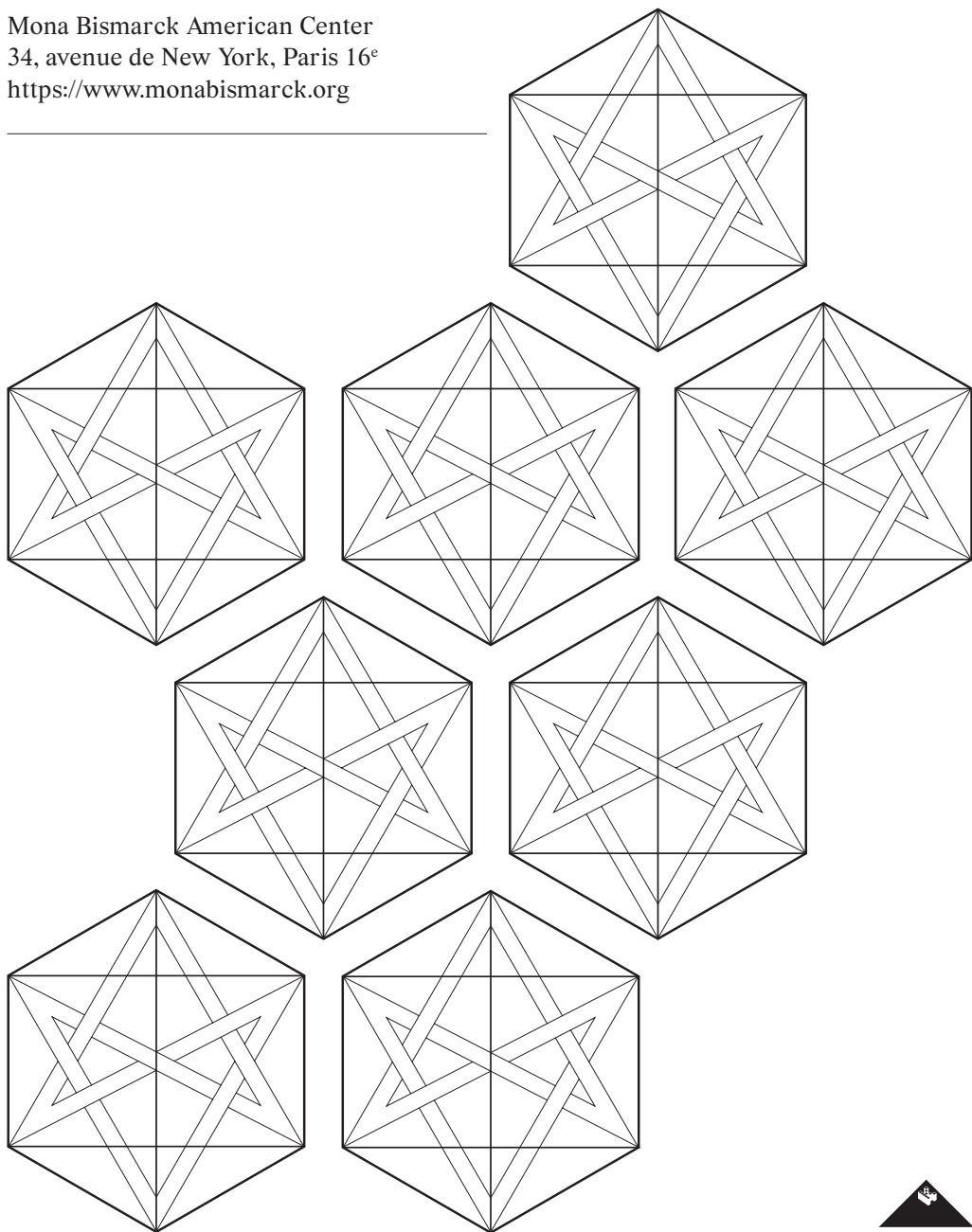
Landscape with a Ruin
20/10/2017–10/11/2017

Mona Bismarck American Center
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https://www.monabismarck.org

Landscape with a Ruin

In autumn 2014, Evan Roth set out on a peculiar kind of pilgrimage: he would seek out and visit coastal sites where undersea Internet cables emerged from the waters. The ensuing trips form the basis of an extraordinary body of work, Landscapes (2014–ongoing), exhibited here in its entirety for the first time. This series of videos and sculptures grapples with one of the most fundamental issues of today's networked condition: the fast-changing concept of being in time and space.

Back in the early 2000s, Roth saw the web's exponential growth as a starting point for an alternative, more benevolent power structure, based on global community-building and free exchange of information. With the rapid development of the Internet's corporatization and systemic surveillance, these hopes dissipated. The artist was left disillusioned and eager to find new ways of connecting with the ethos of the web's beginnings.

The Landscapes are born out of this quest. The first trip took Roth to Porthcurno in Cornwall, UK, the site of a fiber optic cable carrying around 25 percent of the world's global online traffic. There, he stumbled across a white pyramid marking the location of one of the first transatlantic telegraph lines. It was an auspicious sign: a pyramid is also a symbol found on The Pirate Bay torrent search engine. The triangular logo represents kopimi, an anti-copyright ethos. The artist captured this accidental monument to the noughties' infamous "weapon of mass distribution" with a handheld scanner, and printed it, glitches and all, on Dibond. Located right at the entrance, the intriguing sculpture Benben (2015) places the exhibition under the aegis of the increasingly obsolete ideals that the Pirate Bay originally represented.
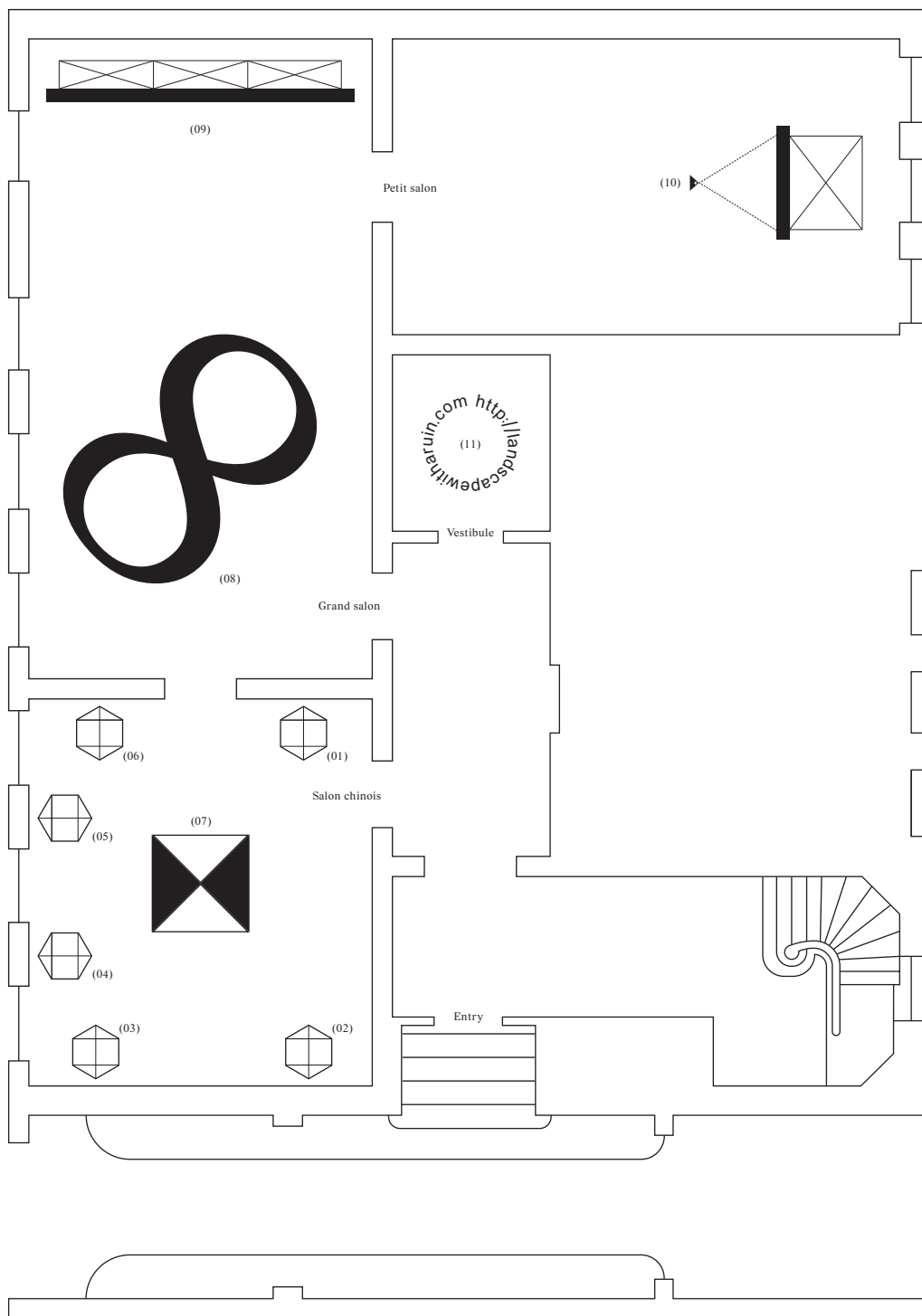
The kites on the walls also bear witness to Cornwall's past. Guglielmo Marconi used a similar one in 1901 to lift an aerial high enough to receive wireless signals from a Cornish beach to Newfoundland (now Canada). The inventor of the radio sent kites up, the story goes, after his giant antennae had collapsed in a gale. Printed with images shot at various cable-landing sites, the fabric hexagons compress temporalities and bring the viewer back to a more innocent period in the history of technology. Perhaps more importantly, Roth's kites suggest a different kind of scenario for the future, away from the seemingly unavoidable neo-liberal hegemony: one in which homegrown networks become a viable alternative to corporate infrastructures.

After the UK, Roth visited landing locations in Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, the US, Sweden, France, and South Africa. With every journey, the pilgrimage's original purpose receded a little more, the artist shifting his attention from mapping the place to simply being there. As if to further commune with each site, Roth recorded his work with a camera doctored to shoot in infrared, the frequency of the information traveling through fiber optic cables. Each video was then uploaded to a server located in the country of the site represented, and named after its GPS coordinates. Watching these works, then, is more than just watching the documentation of a place. It's an almost performative act of receiving data traveling physically from the work's places of origin. The monumental installation in the Grand Salon gathers every one of the 47 network-located videos Roth has produced for his Landscapes series to date. Hung salon-style, its tessellated perspective invites viewers to grasp the global scope of the project in one glance. The installation is best apprehended in tandem with the Petit Salon presentation. There, the single projection allows more focus on the images' mesmerizing details: the shimmering waves, bushy hills and gnarled trees, their leaves quivering in the wind. Occasionally, a concrete structure interrupts the bucolic scenes. A bird might silently fly by.

The Internet is always centrally figured in theories of contemporary cultural acceleration. But Roth's videos carve out a space for contemplation wholly absent from the digital sphere. Landscapes has little to do with an Internet (or, indeed, Post-Internet) aesthetic, drawing instead on romanticism, landscape painting, and the pictorial tradition of ruins. Inscribed in an artistic and philosophical history that has sought to come to terms with one's very place in the world, they rekindle an inquisitiveness and sense of wonder many had thought lost.

– *Coline Milliard*

(09)

Petit salon

(10)

(11)

Vestibule

(08)

Grand salon

(06)

(01)

Salon chinois

(07)

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(03)

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Entry

http://landscapewithruin.com

Salon chinois
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(07)   Benben

Grand salon
(08)   Burial Ceremony
(09)   Landscapes (various)
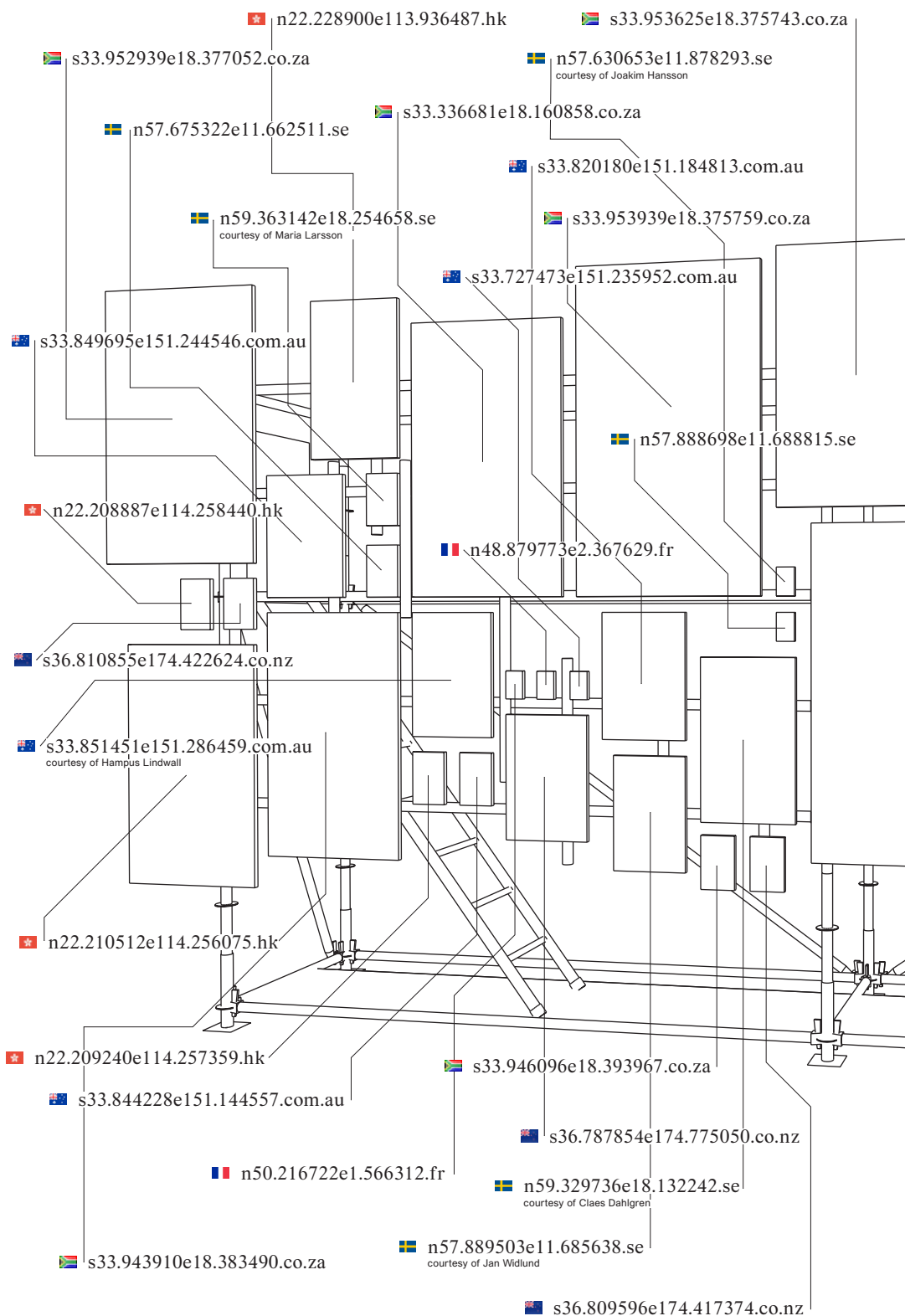
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Vestibule
(11)   landscapewitharuin.com

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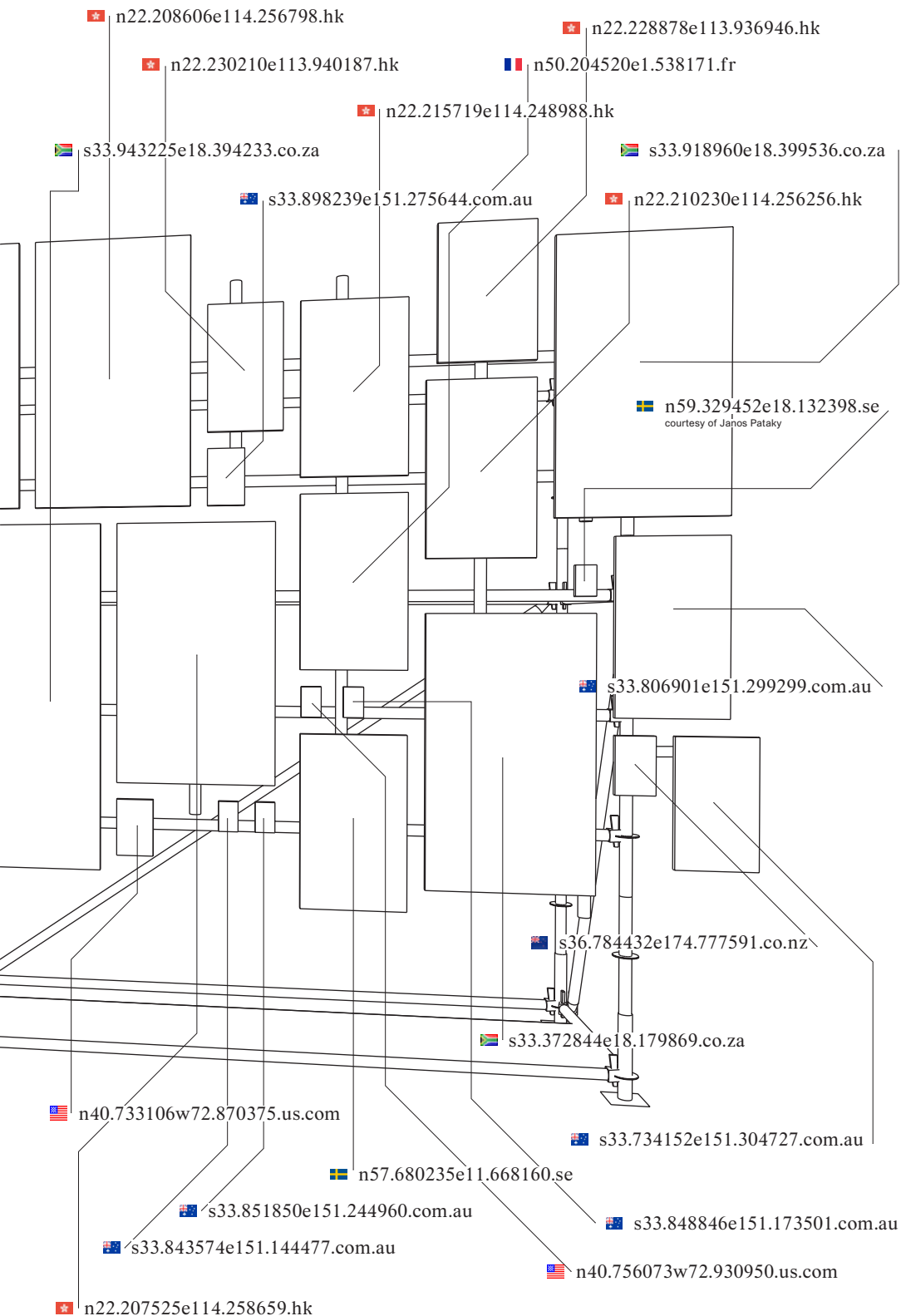## Evan Roth

Evan Roth (b. 1978, Michigan, USA) has tracked the impact of the Internet on global culture and social mores for over a decade. Spanning net art, installation, sculpture, and video, his practice is rooted in a commitment to the original ideals of the web as a place free and accessible to all, as well as in a deeply-held belief in art's capacity to challenge and transform reality. Based in Paris since 2010, Roth has exhibited internationally, including at the 2016 Biennale of Sydney, at Tate and the Whitechapel Gallery in London, and Bard College, New York. His work is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

Roth was an early adopter–and an autodidact. In the early 2000s, sensing the enormous possibilities afforded by the fast-developing Internet, he taught himself how to code, and began to upload net art online under a pseudonym. This seminal period set the artist on a path that led him to study at Parsons School of Design's Design & Technology department, from which he graduated in 2005.

The Graffiti Research Lab (2005-2007) shortly followed. Set up during Roth's fellowship at Eyebeam OpenLab in New York, it was conceived with fellow James Powderly as a way to create and disseminate free tools for graffiti artists and activists. At a time when social media was in its infancy, millions watched GRL videos. Downloadable instructions for making LED Throwies–which allowed anyone with LEDs and coin batteries to create spectacular temporary light displays–had a huge uptake, and are still in use globally.

The Free Art and Technology (F.A.T.) Lab was launched in 2007 as, in Roth's own words, "an Internet-based R&D lab and guerrilla marketing division of the free culture movement." A collective of twenty members, F.A.T. Lab set out to harness the power of viral distribution first tested with GRL. Among the group's best-known projects are the Eyewriter–a low-cost open source eyetracking system–and the Google Car, a public intervention with a fake Google Streetview car.

Taking stock of the NSA spying scandal and the increasing annexation of vast swathes of the Internet by a handful of corporate giants, F.A.T. Lab shut down in 2015. Today, Roth's modus operandi stands in stark contrast to the collective's strategies. Freed from the need to reach thousands, his practice now privileges, and seeks to provoke, meaningful individual experience. Poetic and often aesthetically restrained, it unfolds as an open-ended reflection on the way digital technology is shaping people's behavior and their sense of place in the world.

Roth has been awarded the Artangel Everywhere commission for a new project with global reach, which will be unveiled in 2018. In 2016, he was the recipient of a Creative Capital Emerging Fields Award and, in 2012, he was awarded the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian's National Design Award.

– *Coline Milliard*

Landscape with a Ruin, 2017 by Evan Roth at
Mona Bismarck American Center, Paris.

Organized by Mona Bismarck American Center
with the support of Creative Capital, TNS Parsons
and Jonathon Carroll. Exhibition production
by [SOFTEYES]. Design by Paul Bille. Additional
support by Atelier Boba.

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