

# Evan Roth is making the art the meme stream Internet deserves

 [mashable.com/article/evan-roth-biennale-sydney](http://mashable.com/article/evan-roth-biennale-sydney)

Ariel Bogle

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'Internet Landscapes: Sydney, 2016' Credit: Screenshot/Evan Roth

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In 2016, American artist Evan Roth found himself very far from the riotous world of online culture that had formed his creative base for more than a decade.

Known in his previous life for his anarchic Internet stunts -- he managed to trick the Google algorithm into making him the No.1 search result for "bad ass mother fucker" and used ink to show the finger swipes needed to pass all levels of *Angry Birds* -- Roth was now standing on a secluded Sydney beach with just a video recorder.

SEE ALSO: Syrian artist's stunning calligraphy captures the hope of a war torn country. It was February and Roth was creating a work for the upcoming Biennale of Sydney - - "Internet Landscapes: Sydney, 2016," which will only appear online. The piece is based on a week-long period Roth spent in the city visiting and filming 11 locations where submarine fibre-optic cables that deliver the Internet come out of the water and meet the land.

By viewing the 11 infrared "network videos," as Roth calls them, the audience is engaging with the Internet digitally and physically, he told *Mashable Australia*. "You're watching videos that I shot at these locations in Sydney, that are then hosted on servers in Sydney," he explained. "By viewing the video you're part of making the network [you see] active."



Likewise, each clip's URL address doubles as GPS coordinates, which, when entered in Google Maps, takes the viewer to the filming location.

He acknowledged that for many people, the videos will be slow and may not be watched in their entirety -- they are filmed on nature's time. "Emails are coming in, you want to check Twitter ... all those little pieces of attention that are tugging at you are part of viewing the piece, in my mind," he said. "[It's] perception of time at a slightly slower scale than 140 characters."

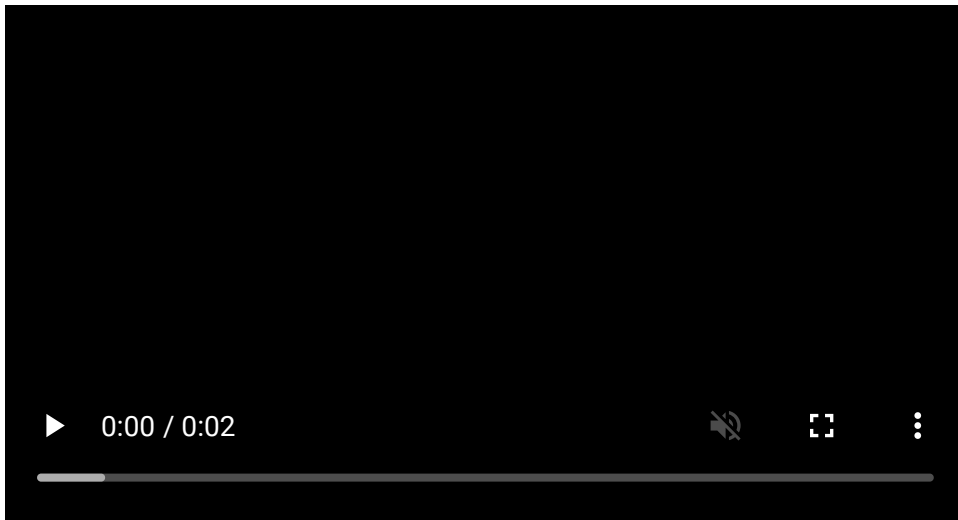
The new work, with its focus on the nuts and bolts of the Internet, is largely born out of Roth's sense of disillusionment with the state of life online. "At some point in the last several years, there have been fundamental changes in the Internet ... Part of that is the [NSA] spying scandal, but also that it's being monetised and centralised," he said. "I found myself thinking less optimistically about that space."

Roth had been part of the Free Art and Technology (F.A.T.) Lab, a freewheeling association of culture hackers with the slogan: "Release early, often and with rap music." Among its many activities, F.A.T. once created a fake Google driverless car that ended up doing donuts in front of Google's Manhattan HQ to the Internet's delight.

The collective closed down in mid-2015 declaring "Fat Lost - Prism won!" referring to the system through which the NSA reportedly collected user data from technology companies.

At the time, Roth was also feeling the need to make his own work more clickable and shareable, to make it easier to digest on corporate-run social media networks. According to Roth, the series for the Biennale is complete reversal: "Putting the brakes on really hard."

A large part of this change of direction is attempting to think differently about the Internet by venturing out and finding it physically. In this case, the man-made cables that deliver Netflix to your home.



Via [Giphy](#).

Roth suggested this engagement with the sum of the Internet's parts -- acknowledging it is not the free, formless cloud it was once thought to be -- is becoming more common in art and society generally. "All of us are getting used to the idea that whether it's direct spying from the government or whether it's Google reading our emails and sending it to advertisers, we're all less naive," he said.

We're starting to ask: What is this Internet? "There wasn't any reason to know what it was when it was just MP3s and LOLCats," he added.



Ariel Bogle

Ariel Bogle was an associate editor with Mashable in Australia covering technology. Previously, Ariel was associate editor at Future Tense in Washington DC, an editorial initiative between Slate and New America.

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