Exploring the Internet With Ghost-Hunting Equipment

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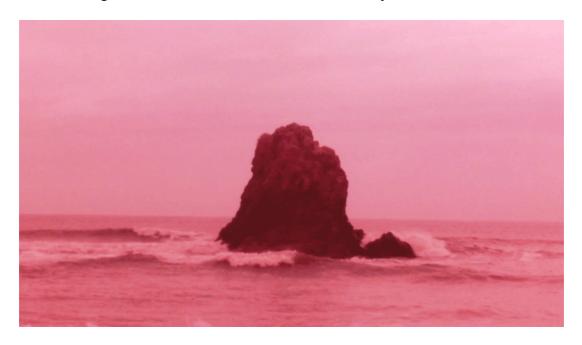Liz Stinson   March 13, 2015

It's a story as old as time: The artist, jaded and tired, sets out on a journey to reclaim his lost sense of wonderment. Along the way, he discovers truths about himself, his art, the thing that he's lost so much faith in. In Evan Roth's most recent exhibition, _Voices Over the Horizon_, now at Carroll/Fletcher Gallery in London, this is how the narrative begins.

And then it takes a slight detour.

If you're familiar with Roth's work, you know much of it centers around the way technology has sneakily and pervasively wiggled into our lives. _Voices Over the Horizon_ grapples with this same idea, only with a paranormal twist. The show is based around Roth's journey down the western-most edge of the United Kingdom in search of the internet's infrastructure. Armed with an array of ghost-hunting equipment, Roth set out to hunt down physical clues to the invisible network as a way to reconnect with the excitement he once felt for the web.

"I wanted to get back to a place where I didn't think so cynically about the internet anymore," he explains. The idea being, if he could see the physicality of it all---the manhole covers, the wires, the satellites---maybe some of his issues around privacy, distrust, the homogenization of the internet would fall away.

_Total Internal Reflection, f_ootage shot on a full spectrum camera.

Evan Roth

The internet's physicality has become a keen interest for artists and documentarians (we've written about it more than once). There's an intrigue to the things we can't see, but as Roth puts it "are swarming all around us." The disembodied human energy that flows

through fiber optic cables, he explains, isn't unlike the same immaterial energy that's often used to describe paranormal encounters. The internet we know is, in some sense, like a ghost.

In his *Dances for Mobiles* series Roth (mis)used a modified full spectrum camera, often employed in paranormal investigations for its sensitivity to ultraviolet and infrared light, to track the motion of a human hand using a phone. On the monitor you watch as hands dance across a screen, shrouded in the camera's violet hue. In another series, Roth shot landscape photos of the internet's physical markers in black and white and laser etched readings from a ghost-hunting device grabbed from the same location.

During his trip Roth traveled to Porthcurno, in Cornwall, a small town in the southwest of England that has acted as the UK's telecommunication hub since the 19th century when submarines terminated their cables at the landing. Today, more modern cable infrastructure rises up on its beaches, creating an unintentional shrine of sorts to the internet. In his piece *Web Portal* Roth made paper etchings of the manhole covers that surround the area, which are subtle hints at what lies beneath. Other works like *Burial Ceremony*, a sculpture made from two kilometers of fiber optic cable, visualizes infrastructure far more literally.

Roth, like his fellow ghost hunters, is looking for closure, or at least a way to make sense of how the web (and ultimately culture) is changing. "This really started from a place of how can I get back after this loss of innocence we've all had with the web," he says. "There's a kind of desperation in ghost hunting. Like, if shit wasn't that bad you wouldn't have to resort to these extreme measures. But the fact is, things have gotten relatively bad."