

PORTRAIT OF A MOVING TARGET

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And we are alive in amazing times
Delicate hearts, diabolical minds
Revelations, hatred, love, and war
And more and more and more and more
And more of less than ever before
It's just too much more for your mind to absorb
It's scary like hell, but there's no doubt
We can't be alive in no time but NOW!

-from Yasiin Bey (Formerly Mos Def) "Life in Marvelous Times," 2009

Portrait of a moving target (idiom)

Definition:

: An attempt to represent a continuously changing situation.

// The anchorwoman gasped and fumbled, unable to describe the scene unfolding before her; she was trying to *paint a portrait of a moving target*.

: An inherently flawed assessment, limited by incompatible means and end.

// The contractor had forgotten his tape measure and was now measuring the wall using only his wingspan, "*It's a portrait of a moving target*" he said with a shrug.

.....
Introduction...

While applicable to any similar situation or scenario, I use the idiom "portrait of a moving target," to describe a series of artworks attempting to represent a constantly changing subject, i.e., the present. My thesis work's primary ambition is to gain a sense of the time and place which I currently occupy, and more clearly imagine the continuum of histories, geographies, and cultures which I inevitably move through. Naturally, trying to grasp such an expansive and ever-changing subject leads to head-spinning analysis on its very nature. The constantly changing moment is inherently contradictory, but undeniably exists. My MFA thesis exhibition *Portrait of a Moving Target*, is a mortal attempt to comprehend the paradoxical nature of the present; the series of open-ended documents portray an image of our world in the process of being observed.

Taking cues from different historical examples of documentary artforms, I examine the question of how to make a record of the present. The exhibition rethinks the documentary format to envision an open-ended document; not a record, but a recording. An open-ended document is less definitive, operating as an observation without the requisite binaries of complete or incomplete, fact or fiction, static or in-motion. Like the idiomatic title suggests, the work's attempt to record a never-ending subject ironically pokes fun at itself, and documents and archives as being redundant, cumbersome, and likely to change tomorrow.¹ In this format, the works can combine opposing elements, and reflect the endlessness, uncertainty, and activity of the moment which they set out to portray. Together, the various works operate as a concocted positioning system, pinpointing the here and now with a dull carpenter's pencil.

In the same way a series of painted foam balls on coat hangers can help imagine our solar system, each work is constructed in the form of a model. Each model demonstrates a distinct way of imagining, or conceptualizing the present. The methodology is influenced by Jorge Luis Borges' short stories *The Book of Sand* (1974), and *On Exactitude in Science* (1946). The stories model abstract concepts through an invented, physical and anecdotal example. For instance, *The Book of Sand* explores the concept of infinity via a book with endless pages.

Portrait of a Moving Target consists of works based in drawing, but diverse in appearance and technique. The exhibition evaluates the present as both the abstract concept, and an actual event. Each work embodies some aspect of the present, its qualities, how it behaves,

¹ "Archive," Madbury Club, <https://www.madburyclub.com/b-collection>

while also portraying characteristics of our world to include our social tendencies, ambitions, and pitfalls. By choosing specific examples from the world to epitomize each concept, the models relate the imagining to facets of our lives by depicting contemporary subjects.

An overarching theme of the project comes from the classical tale the Myth of Sisyphus, and its associations with the absurd. Like Sisyphus, the project sets a course on a laborious and futile task, which is likely impossible to complete. The project is not completely absurdist in principle. Rather, it accepts the task of representing a constantly changing subject as comparable to other work which can be temporarily completed but never finished - like the work of a library, or mapping the stars, doing the dishes, or keeping the bugs out of the house. The satisfaction and resolution resulting from completion that is denied from Sisyphus, is also denied in the exhibition.

Respectively, the different works in the exhibition imagine the present as a concrete casting tube, a dog chasing its own tail, the surface of the earth, and a radio broadcast. These various models form a concocted positioning system, pulling from miscellaneous disciplines to piece together a broader understanding of our physical and temporal location. They reference the countless combination of circumstances which combine to form our unique time and place. To somehow imagine our place within the local, global, intergalactic, as well as our place within world history, Hawaiian history, art history, et cetera. The exhibition attempts in its limited capabilities to recreate what our phones or Google Earth can do instantaneously, without our thought, to launch in from the cosmos and pinpoint a specific location, right here, right now.

The present as a concrete casting tube...

Portrait of a Moving Target is presented in a 28' x 14' gallery space. Two walls frame the area in an "L" configuration, with two sides open for viewers to enter. Placed at the midpoint of the gallery space, *Portrait of a Moving Target I (A Concrete Casting Tube)* consists of two 7' x 7' drawings mounted back to back on a freestanding support wall of the same size. Drawn using rust and dirt harvested from the depicted area, the drawings portray one empty concrete casting tube lying horizontally on the ground of a construction site. Installed back to back, the life-sized drawings work in tandem to depict two views, each seen through opposite ends of the same tube. The drawing's one-point perspective and placement on the gallery floor position a viewer as if they were standing directly in front of the tube, looking through its center. Details of the tube's worn and scratched interior take up a majority of the picture, but the center and corners of the drawings give context to the tube as resting within a construction site. A chain-link fence, various equipment, and a string of unfinished concrete pillars are spread throughout a landscape of leveled earth.

Portrait of a Moving Target I (A Concrete Casting Tube) imagines the present as a concrete casting tube. Like the present, a casting tube has the unique ability to hold change, it delineates before and after, past and future. The ground is empty until the steel casting tube holds a rebar skeleton over which concrete is poured and held by the form. The concrete sets and the cylindrical form is complete, be it a parking structure, guard tower, or rail system. A concrete pillar is now evidence of the change occurring. The structure of the tube physically embodies the

structure of the present, a form through which change flows. Like the present, a casting tube is a *change creating device*.

As part of the concocted positioning system, *A Concrete Casting Tube* identifies the local and physically envisions the gallery as a timeline. Placed in the middle of the space, the thin membrane of the independent wall symbolizes the turning point of past and future. By using two opaque squares to create a see-through tube, the model acts as a proof of the present's ability to combine opposing elements. A viewer looks *through* the center of the tube to its opposite end, without actually seeing *through* anything. Equally technical and absurdist, the drawing of an empty tube's interior is a drawing of air - effectively making a drawing of nothing - the drawing of nothing is also a drawing of something. Embodying abstract concepts through physical attributes comes from Borges, in *The Book of Sand*, the characteristics of the infinite are placed in a book. The book's unexplainable physical reality forces the narrator to grapple with what he believes is possible, causing a reconsideration of the real depth and actuality of the infinite. If the concept does exist, why can it not exist in a book? If the present moment can both change while staying the same, can an opaque drawing be seen through?

Beyond any metaphor, the drawn site literally depicts an ongoing construction project in my current locale of Honolulu. The pictured tube is one of many molds used to cast pillars in the construction of an elevated urban rail transit system, otherwise known as the Honolulu Rail project. My learning about, and engagement with, the rail project came in part from visiting its construction areas where I began collecting materials that were eventually used in the making of

the drawings. The documentation now functions as a limited survey of the rail, the largest public works project in Hawai'i to date.² Consequently, the survey reflects an image of present-day O'ahu and its place within the historical trends of 21st-century urban sprawl.

My consideration of construction as a metaphor for the present was reinforced when reading poet Wayne Kaumaulii Westlake's poem "Construction" (published 1987). My guess would be, the near omnipresence of construction on O'ahu in recent decades is what likely caused Westlake to draw a similar line between the subject and his questions of purpose, endlessness, repetition, and the absurd. His handling of the topic with uncertainty, curiosity, and humor, informed my own approach to the project. The poem begins:

*"everything that's happened
has happened before
and is happening right now and will
happen again?"*

...

And ends:

*i lay back down:
the absurdity of it all
tomorrow i go fill
in a lake...*

The work continues a lineage of art historical drawings completed to survey a landscape. Artists like John Webber and Richard Kern were commissioned to record various landscapes as

² Office of the State Auditor of Hawai'i. *Audit of the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation: Report 1*. By Leslie H. Kondo. Report No. 19-03. Honolulu, HI: State of Hawai'i, 2019. <https://files.hawaii.gov/auditor/Reports/2019/19-03.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2019)

topographers and draughtsmen during the course of different military expeditions. Specifically, Webber accompanied British explorers in Hawai'i (1785)³, and Kern, the United States War Department conducting route explorations for the transcontinental railroad in the American West (1853).⁴ These drawing surveys acted as state assessments of a place's topographical features, existing civilizations, and future potential. My drawings' technical execution and appearance - a monochrome, sienna-like linear description - references the style of these historical examples, which are commonly viewed today as oxidized lithographs or etchings. My survey also compares in assignment, as an assessment of the landscape's current state, only the contemporary results starkly contrast the unblemished panoramas found in Webber's and Kern's notebooks.

The present as a dog chasing its own tail...

From the entrance to the exhibition, on the left side of the longest wall, an animated video projects in an endless loop *Portrait of a Moving Target 2 (A Dog Chasing its Own Tail)*. The gestural charcoal animation shows an excited black dog running in circles, attempting to catch its own tail. Each frame is made by repeatedly altering one charcoal drawing with small changes to the dog's position. After photocopying the drawing following each alteration, the subsequent 24 copies were scanned and animated as a digital film. Projected low on the wall, the dog appears at roughly life-size, its feet circling just above the floor. The orientation gives a physical recognition to the video as behaving like an actual dog, not just offering an image of one.

³ David W. Forbes, *Encounters with Paradise: Views of Hawai'i and its people, 1778-1941*, (Honolulu, HI: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 1992), 16

⁴ Patricia Trenton and Peter H. Hassrick, *The Rocky Mountains: A Vision for Artists in the Nineteenth Century*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 73.

The video imagines the present as a dog chasing its own tail. Illustrating the paradox where our closeness to a subject directly results in it being hard to grasp. The present is a moment we are intrinsically linked to; like trying to watch a game you are playing in, analyzing that which you are a part of can be difficult. Our connection with the moment makes it impossible to gain an outsider's perspective. Like the dog's tail, the present does not stop when we try to ascertain it.

The animation plays a double game of describing the self while trying to describe the present. An unusual self-portrait, the meta-representation equates the futility found in both exercises. Chasing what one already possesses relates back to one of the main exhibition themes, portraits of moving targets, incompatible means and ends. *A Dog Chasing its Own Tail* symbolizes the absurdity of the project, taking on a never-ending task, asking an unanswerable question, or trying to rationalize the impossible. Chosen for its well-known relationship to working hard and accomplishing nothing, the dog's curious action reads open-endedly, it can be applied to me, the viewer, or society in general. The 'Sisyphean loop' inevitably raises questions of purpose, the type of existential questions I see as without a correct answer. Directly resulting from their un-answerability, these types of questions continue to live in the present.

On another level, the animated loop behaves like the present, sharing a similar paradoxical makeup. Always the same, but different, and without beginning or end, the path of a loop can be followed without deviation, forever. In the video, the repeating series of images do not change in appearance, speed, or order, but through a succession of time. In the same way the

present moment never starts or stops, only continues, a viewer is always in the middle of the video loop. The dog's tireless pursuit brings a movement and tempo into the gallery space. Dynamic components such as this work and *Photographs of Elk Mountain*, the other animated work in the show (discussed later) provide a present tense to the exhibition by connecting movement with time's passing. Similar to a clock's function of visually representing the immaterial passage of time, the dog's repetitive movement represents the continuously changing moment. As part of the concocted positioning system, the circling dog tirelessly locates the mental present, the momentary, or fleeting. Conducting a ceaseless chase to identify the moment right now, no right now, no right now!

The present as the surface of the earth...

Two different works, *Portrait of a Moving Target 3 (Books From the Future)*, and *Portrait of a Moving Target 4 (A Hole in the Earth)*, operate in tandem to imagine the present as existing on the surface of the earth, the midpoint of a vertical timeline. Giving the present a physical location, a viewer stands in the moment embodied, on the gallery floor, between two unending representations of past and future. *Books from the Future* looks upwards towards the stars to see into the future, while *A Hole in the Earth* looks downward into the ground, using the opposing direction as a comparative symbol for the past.

In the first work, *Portrait of a Moving Target 3 (Books from the Future)*, a sign modeled after semi-ornate but generic state historical markers is positioned on an independent stand and reads...

BOOKS FROM THE FUTURE - Visible from this lookout are assorted books descending onto earth from the future. The viewpoint seen today is not dependent on our unique geographic location or atmospheric conditions, but your own personal vision and perspective. While the books cannot be opened or read from the here and now, the provided binoculars can allow for a distant viewing of some of the titles.

The landmarker sign is placed at the outer-edge of the short wall, near a pillar along the boundary of the open side of the exhibition space. The sign points toward the gallery's lone corner where a curving and downward sloping bookshelf emerges from a cut-out hole, approximately 12 feet up the wall. The hole is not actually cut-out, but painted to resemble a circle cut through the plywood. The books increase in size as they emerge from the space-like dark void, exaggerating the illusion of spatial perspective in order to make the string of books appear to be moving toward the viewer. Next to the sign, two cinder blocks with painted-on footprint markers act as an elevated viewing point. An approaching viewer sees the landmarker sign and marked cinder blocks pointing in the direction of the bookshelf. After reading the prompt, a viewer can step on the cinder blocks, and use the provided binoculars to peer beyond the sign, across the gallery, and read the *Books From the Future*. While the books are presented as descending downwards to eventually 'hit' earth, the sign's language subtly states the vision of the future is not dependent on this unique viewpoint, but in fact results from a viewer's own

imagining. For this reason, the sign and books do not so much predict the future, but create an exercise for imagining it.

The titles were compiled by asking my peers and myself to consider what we believe might/could/hope/fear happens in the future. The titles were then altered to remain purposefully open-ended, either in structure, or by replacing their subject or most essential element with a blank underlined space, or adding an ellipsis. Some examples are: *The First...*; *Re-Defining _____*; *Amazon...*; *The Amazon...*; *The _____ of Death*, and *The Death of _____*. Each title is designed and drawn as individual dust-jackets for each book. For a viewer taking in the book's suggested scenario or topic, the titles prompt a contemplation of the future. In this sense, the book covers become emblematic drawings, a projection, wish, or vision of a possible future.

For a viewer reading the marker sign, *Portrait of a Moving Target 4 (A Hole in the Earth)* is located to their left, at the opposite end of the exhibition space along the same outer boundary. (*A Hole in the Earth*) reversing the direction of (*Books from the Future*) to look downward, into the ground, creating a comparative symbol for the past. Looking into the ground referencing archaeology and geology as well-documented methods for understanding history. A crudely constructed square barrier of screwed together plywood sits atop a small pile of dirt on the gallery floor. Inside the barrier, the dirt leads to an open hole in the ground, an illusion created from a photorealistic colored pencil drawing of a circular hole plummeting deep into the earth. The drawing lies on the gallery floor, with dirt placed on the paper, covering its periphery, extending to the drawn hole's edge. The illusion depends partly on the barrier, which obstructs

other vantage points into the hole. What the barrier encloses cannot be seen until the viewer is close enough to look over its walls, downward into the hole.

Within the concocted positioning system, the two works consider time and place from a vertical perspective. Artist William Kentridge also considered the vertical justifications for his position in the essay “Vertical Thinking: A Johannesburg Biography.” In the essay, Kentridge examines the establishment of his home town Johannesburg as resulting from the discovery of gold. Rather than geographic, the city’s location had an entirely geological justification, a vertical origin. He traces back the city's foundation two billion years, to a meteor impact site which pushed a layer of the earth’s crust containing the thin seam of gold toward the surface near present day Johannesburg.⁵ Similarly, our location in Hawai‘i is also vertically determined, if you believe the island chain was formed as a result of the Pacific tectonic plate moving over a volcanic hotspot on the ocean floor. *A Hole in the Earth* references this vertical origin, and acknowledges the connection of the present to a physical location. Naturally, a large hole in the ground makes someone extra aware of their current position, so as not to fall in, the drawing literally, and symbolically, serves as to remind a viewer of where they stand now.

In the same essay, Kentridge examines drawing’s ability to project into the future. He describes a drawing as a membrane, or meeting point of the world as it comes to us, and our expanded projection onto it. He cites a map planning out Johannesburg drawn three years after the discovery of gold, in 1889. The map is “a projection, a wish, a vision of a possible city. At

⁵ William Kentridge, “Vertical Thinking: A Johannesburg Biography” in *Six Drawing Lessons*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 73.

the time the map was drawn and printed, only about 3 percent of the streets and buildings and suburbs on it had been made. It is extraordinary that now, 120 years later, almost all that map exists as physical fact.”⁶ The drawn *Books From the Future* also act as a membrane, but this time, the mapmaker’s opportunity is given to a viewer. Standing in the present they bring the world as they know it now up to the viewpoint, and project a vision of the future onto the stream of books advances in their direction.

Both works are connected visually by the two circular openings which permeate the gallery’s wall and floor and extend indefinitely in both directions. Physically, they are associated with each other through their interactive looking. Whether downward into the hole, or upward through the binoculars, a physical movement and change in direction or orientation is required to view the works. The floor of the gallery sits in-between the two unknown distances, between the representations of past and future, at an arbitrary midpoint in a vertical line. The vertical line, or timeline, intersects the horizontal timeline created by *A Concrete Casting Tube* in the manner of a geometric origin. Effectively, this imagined origin sets the gallery space in the crosshairs of both axes, horizontal and vertical, reiterating to a viewer their current position in time (now) and place (the gallery).

Through a combination of opposing elements, the works’ materials, processes, and function take on the paradoxical nature of the present. First off, the historical sign placed for an event in the future is constructed from a shaped plywood panel. Using one material to reference

⁶ Kentridge, “Vertical Thinking: A Johannesburg Biography”, 76.

another, both black and white charcoal cover the flat plywood form to create the illusion of steel relief-cast letters, round ornaments, and a tubular stand. Drawn shadows and highlights describe the lighting effects which would occur naturally on a cast-steel sign. At the center of the landmarker sign where a state seal would usually reside, a paradoxical image of an elephant is drawn in. The “Shepard Elephant” or *L’egs-istential Quandry* is an optical illusion, or “figure-ground impossibility” drawn and published by psychologist and cognitive scientist Roger Shepard in his 1990 book, *Mind Sights*. “The elephant...belongs to a class of objects that are truly impossible in that the object itself cannot be globally segregated from the nonobject or background. Parts of the object (in this case the elephant’s legs) become the background, and vice versa.”⁷ Shepard’s elephant uses drawing for its ability to fool the eye, opening up and perforating space in the same impossible ways the drawn holes in the gallery wall and floor do.

The unending and uncertain qualities of the present are mirrored in the bookshelf’s fade into darkness, and through the viewer’s inability to access the books’ content. The confusing, deadpan presentation of the sign assuredly presents the invented as actual, using the language and aesthetic of the state for its assumed legitimacy. Invoking the adage ‘seeing is believing,’ the sign equates truth with belief, and places responsibility on the viewer to decide what they believe to be true. Borges uses a similar strategy in *The Book of Sand* when introducing his ‘imaginary’

⁷ Roger N. Shepard, *Mind Sights: Original Visual Illusions, Ambiguities, and Other Anomalies, With a Commentary on the Play of Mind in Perception and Art*, (New York: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1990) , 143.

scenario. The brief introduction to the story finishes by stating, "To claim that it is true is nowadays the convention of every made-up story. Mine, however, **is** true."⁸

The present as a radio broadcast...

Portrait of a Moving Target 5 (Photographs of Elk Mountain) acknowledges the present as a shared time connecting many places. Focus here shifts to a distant mountain, and its unique, remote presence on the internet. In my former home of Wyoming, the Department of Transportation maintains interstate and highway cameras to aid travelers with up-to-date road and weather conditions. These road cameras frequently update year-round and can be viewed online using the webpage <wyoroad.info>. While most cameras focus on the roadways, the camera of interest is trained on the broad profile of Elk Mountain. Elk Mountain stands south of Interstate 80, on the route between Laramie and Rawlins in south-central Wyoming.

Centered on the shorter wall of the "L" configuration, a 27" LCD screen hangs in a frame like a painting. A computer connected to the screen displays the webpage in its original format. Continuously refreshing in real-time, the webpage updates every six minutes with a new photograph of the mountain, replacing its former image with a more current version. The webpage's formatting includes a time/date stamp, location name, mile marker number, and state copyright information to relay to the viewer the camera's original function and real-time updating. *Photographs of Elk Mountain* connects the present moment in the gallery, in Hawai'i, to that of another geographic location. By creating a connection with another place, not

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sand*, trans. Norman Thomas Di Giovanni (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), 117.

physically but through the air, the work imagines the present as a radio broadcast connecting separated physical locations simultaneously. The present as a universal radio broadcast can be 'heard' from everywhere at once, but is experienced in connection to place.

A radio broadcast mimics the characteristics of the present because both contain the same uniqueness and haphazardness. Like the present, there is no replay, fast-forward, or rewind in a radio broadcast; each moment only exists when it exists. Photographs of Elk Mountain reproduce the infinite uniqueness of the radio signal, where each photo is only viewable during the six minutes until it is replaced. One by one, a photo appears and is gone forever. Showing the webpage without changing its original structure generates the most opportunity in the work. Directly resulting from their position in the gallery, at that time, every viewer has an individual experience seeing a unique image of the mountain.

The webpage's original function is already paradoxical and absurd. The mountain's tectonic pace sharply contrasts against the speed of the internet. The immediate dispatching of new images only to appear the exact same as the prior arguably nullifies the technological capability. Framing the webpage as if it were a painting further exaggerates the contradictory makeup, and continues the conflation of opposites set up throughout the exhibition. In the opposite manner of *Books From the Future*, now the actual appears as invented, and a true apparatus of the state appears like the artistic creation.

Webcam as source material documents the contemporary uses and prevalence of the camera, state surveillance, and the internet. The Wyoming Department of Transportation Elk

Mountain webcam can be regarded as a contemporary equivalent to the state survey artist, effectively providing similar roles to Webber and Kern. The framed screen references painting's role in depicting the Western landscape, and the history of the medium being seen as a window. *Photographs of Elk Mountain* proposes a scenario where both traditions are being followed to an obsessive extent. The webcam being an updated, and updating, landscape painting, one futilely attempting to behave like an actual window.

The road camera's presence as a public service now seems unnecessary, possessive, and pervasive. There is an unknown point where pursuits of clarity, knowledge, or advancement seem futile, or ironically reverse themselves and accomplish the opposite. Borges wrote of the inverse scenario in the short, one-paragraph story titled *On Exactitude in Science* (1946). He tells the story of an empire whose art of cartography became so perfected and obsessive; they could not be satisfied. Eventually, "The Cartographer's guild struck a map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire."⁹ The following generations were much less enamored with maps and saw it as useless, being the exact same size as what they started with, they needed a map for the map! The Elk Mountain web camera epitomizes the empire's improvement obsession meeting its turning point. A technological advancement designed to 'know' the weather, ironically reverses back in time, behaving like the First Peoples of the area likely did, studying the mountain to anticipate the incoming weather.

⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science" in *A Universal History of Infamy*, trans. Norman Thomas Di Giovanni (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 84.

Inside a context of art history, *Photographs of Elk Mountain* continues a lineage of video work connecting *reel* time to *real*-time, video works whose subject is not what the camera frames, but rather the framing apparatus. Andy Warhol's 8-hour plus film of the Empire State Building, *Empire* (1964), and Paul Pfeiffer's 3-month long study of a wasp building her nest, also named *Empire* (2004), are good examples. Both films use one stationary shot for their entire duration, without characters or narrative the works primarily explore the passage of time, and overtly acknowledge the materials and process of their making.¹⁰ The distinction, as Pfeiffer puts it, is the "non-narrative use of video, one that focuses instead on the nature of the medium itself. I'm trying to capitalize on the power of video to simulate reality, while consciously working against the grain of narrative conventions which coddle the viewer's desire for easy-to-digest stories with pat resolutions and predictable patterns of beginning, middle and end."¹¹ Pfeiffer's *Empire* goes further in its redirection toward the medium through its installation. The film projects from a small cart which holds the necessary servers to record a video of such length, and which now store the accumulated data. Projecting from atop the server cart, Pfeiffer's transparent presentation brings camera and data storage technology into the content of the work, updating Warhol's camera examinations of 1964.

Including the Elk Mountain road camera within the webpage, with original formatting and various markers, uses the same strategy of transparency to highlight the technological

¹⁰ "Andy Warhol: Empire, 1964," Art & artists, Museum of Modern Art, Accessed February 14, 2020. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/89507>

¹¹ Paul Pfeiffer, "Field Notes: Paul Pfeiffer," Interview by Nathan Lee, *Film Comment*, March-April, 2005, online, <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/field-notes-paul-pfeiffer-interview/>

apparatus of the internet. The repetitive photographing of the static subject means a change in image comes from a change in time. Like the present, the webpage operates silently, and can change without our noticing. To a viewer in the gallery space, the image refreshing itself acknowledges the time that has passed. Seeing the image change reminds the viewer of their accompaniment, or place within that recently-past span of time. As part of the concocted positioning system, the webcam identifies and acknowledges the global, even astronomical aspect of the present as a shared time, that connects any distance. Bracketing the exhibition with their placement, *A Dog Chasing its Own Tail*, and the *Photographs of Elk Mountain* visually illustrate the movement of time with their perpetual clock-like motion. The dynamic works span the wide scale of paces which occur side by side in the present. Like the hour hand on a clock, Elk Mountain's changes are nearly imperceptible, its pace is circadian, seasonal, tectonic. The dog behaves like the second hand, visibly in motion, its pace is arduous, cellular, cerebral.

Conclusion...

In a mortal attempt to comprehend the paradoxical nature of the present, *Portrait of a Moving Target* creates a series of open-ended documents to portray an image of our world in the process of being observed. In part, our place within the here and now is difficult to perceive because of its sheer vastness, but also because the present suffers from a set of undefinable boundaries and complete lack of reference points. As a way of envisioning its reality, I give the abstract idea of the present a set of defining characteristics, a method borrowing from Borges. Constantly changing, uncertain, contradictory, and without end, these features were found in, or

placed on various subjects to create physical models which depict and behave like the here and now. Each work embodies the paradox of the present through a combination of opposing elements or processes. A dog chases its tail, two opaque squares make a see-through tube, a historical marker is placed for an event in the future, and a mountain is spied on.

Using the traditions of painting, drawing, and photography as documentary artforms, I use the tools to create an incomplete, undecided, and open-ended document. The reimagined definition of documentary depicts a process of observation and understanding, not an assured and concluded statement. The attempt to represent a constantly changing subject, or even comprehend the oxymoron of constant change, is accepted and valued as an attempt. *Portrait of a Moving Target* is a Sisyphean task ironically pointing out the inherent limitations of all documents, record keeping, and pursuits of absolute knowledge and clarity. Making a *Portrait of a Moving Target* is a purposefully absurd act, one that accepts its inherent shortcomings and honors observation and understanding as never-ending tasks in themselves. The subjects documented in the project give context to our position in the second decade of the 21st century, and also recall examples of uncertainty, change, and incompleteness in our world. Zooming out, then zooming in, the distinct models create a concocted positioning system for gaining a sense of our current time and place. Four different models imagine the present in a physical form and attempt to comprehend its paradoxical nature. Together, they construct a varied and broad portrait of the world in the process of being understood.

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Figures



Fig. 1: Installation view I



Fig. 2: Installation view II



Fig. 3: Installation view III



Fig. 4: Installation view IV



Fig. 5: Portrait of a Moving Target 1 (A Concrete Casting Tube) - *facing Diamond Head*



Fig. 6: Portrait of a Moving Target 1 (A Concrete Casting Tube) - *facing Ewa*



Fig. 7: Portrait of a Moving Target 1 (A Concrete Casting Tube) - *facing Diamond Head* (detail)



Fig. 8: Portrait of a Moving Target 1 (A Concrete Casting Tube) - *facing Ewa* (detail)

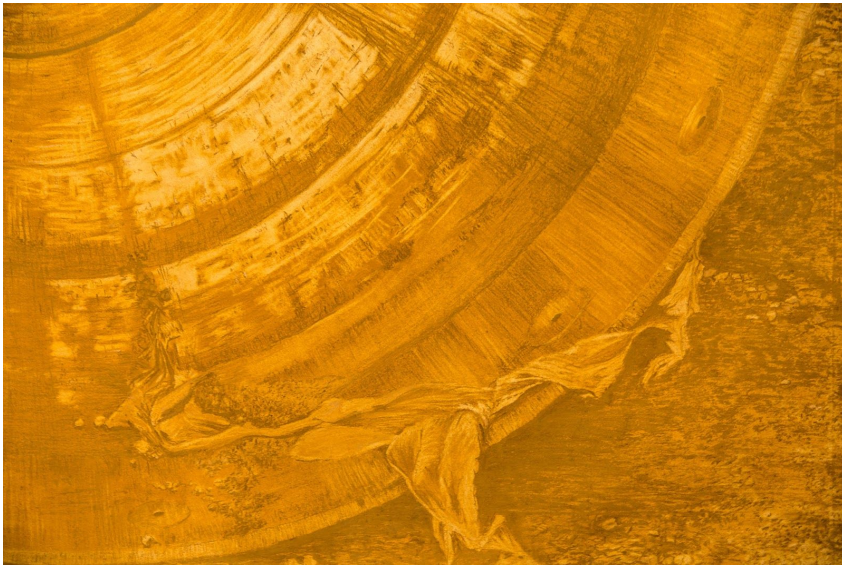


Fig. 9: (A Concrete Casting Tube) *Facing Ewa* (detail II)



Fig. 10: (A Concrete Casting Tube) *Facing Diamond Head* (detail II)



Fig. 12: Portrait of a Moving Target 2 (A Dog Chasing its own Tail)



Fig. 13: Portrait of a Moving Target 2 (A Dog Chasing its own Tail) II



Fig. 14: Portrait of a Moving Target 2 (A Dog Chasing its own Tail) - installation view

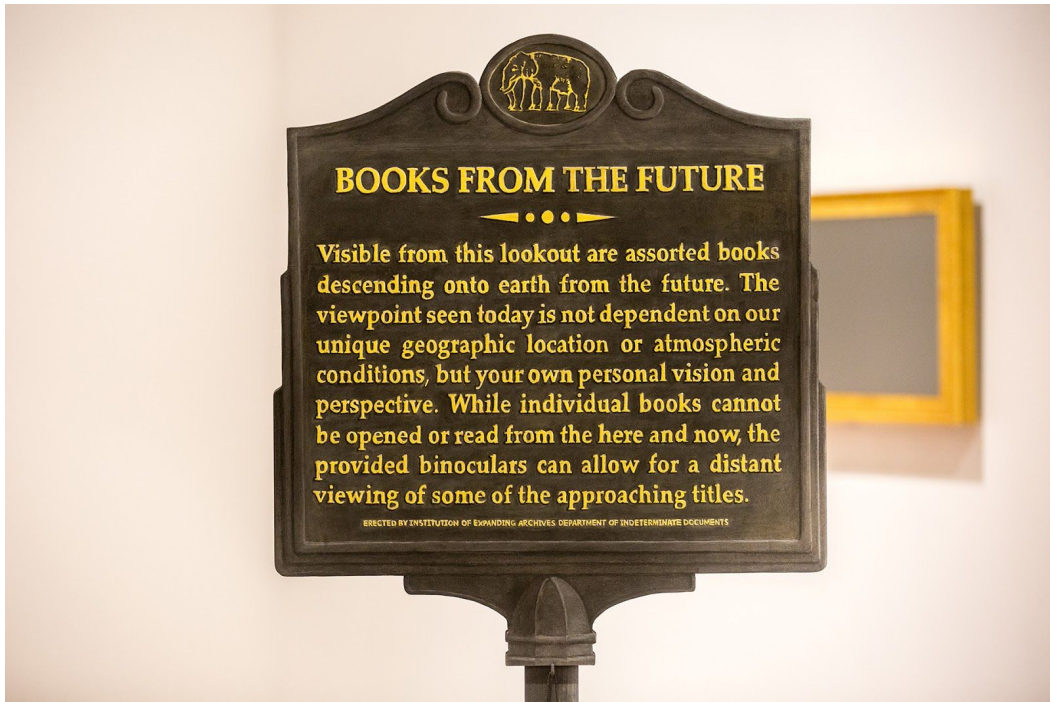


Fig. 15: Portrait of a Moving Target 3 (Books from the Future) - landmarker sign



Fig. 16:(Books from the Future) - back of landmarker sign



Fig. 16:(Books from the Future) - floor detail



Fig. 17: (Books from the Future) - books detail

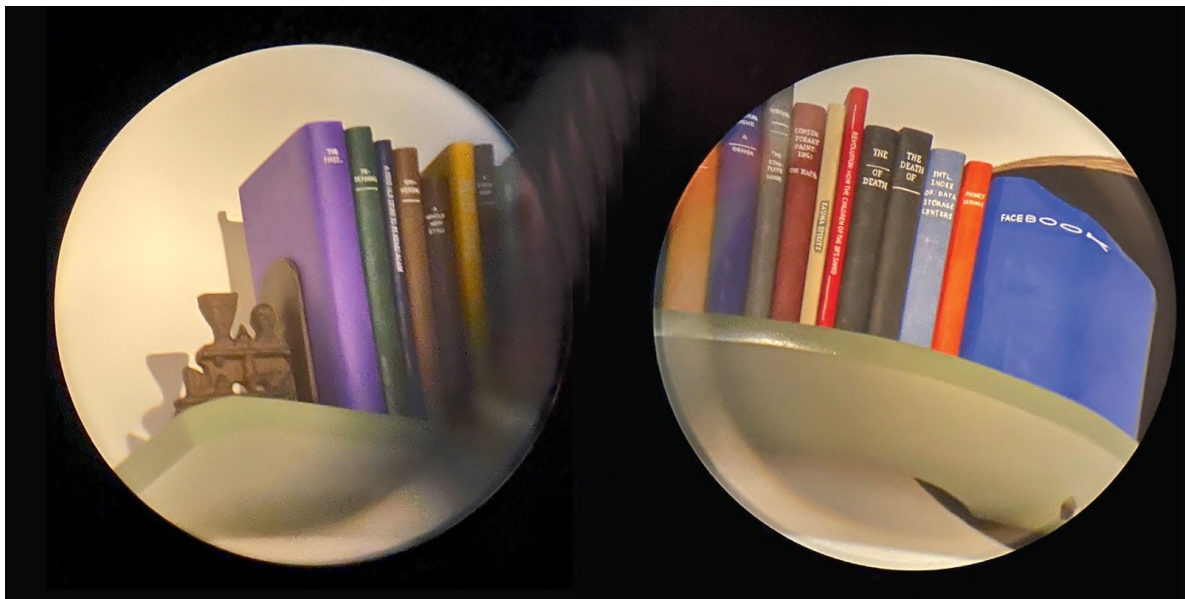


Fig. 18: (Books from the Future) - view of books looking through binoculars



Fig. 19: (Books from the Future) - books detail II



Fig. 20: Portrait of a Moving Target 4 (A Hole in the Earth)



Fig. 21: (A Hole in the Earth) - detail



Fig. 22: (A Hole in the Earth) - floor detail



Fig. 23: Portrait of a Moving Target 5 (Photographs of Elk Mountain) - *installation*



Fig. 24: Portrait of a Moving Target 5 (Photographs of Elk Mountain)



Web Camera: I 80 Elk Mountain (mm 255.6) - Elk Mountain
www.wyroad.info Tue 2019-06-04 20:02:31



Fig. 25: (Photographs of Elk Mountain) - screenshot