

HERE AND THERE

Susan Collins

Susan Collins places network cameras in remote locations constructing landscape and seascape images continuously, pixel by pixel over time. The work provides an in-depth study of place, introducing a representation of time showing simultaneously day and night views of the same scene studied and recorded over the course of the year. This presentation explores the introduction of new devices and language to the tradition of representation.



Glenlandia, 19 August 2005 09:53am, 2005, Susan Collins, Digital Still from Archive (detail), Copyright Susan Collins.

INTRODUCTION

I am a fine artist who works across a range of media including sound, internet, video and installation. Most of my work has been made in response to different sites and situations with my recent works mainly employing transmission, networking and time as primary materials, often exploring the role of illusion or belief in their construction and interpretation. It is a series of works exploring what it might mean to record a digital image and transmit it across space and time that I am going to present and discuss today, work which relies on transmission and the network for its fabrication.

I have been working for a number of years on recording landscapes using pictures transmitted live from remote network cameras. These images are made pixel by pixel, from top to bottom and left to right in horizontal bands continuously so that a whole image is made up of individual pixels collected over a period of time. When the image is completed, it starts again at the top left of the image and writes over itself. The images are low resolution – 320 x 240 – so that at the rate of a pixel a second, a whole image is made up of individual pixels collected over 76,800 seconds or 21.33 hours, just under a day.

FENLANDIA/GLENLANDIA

I have placed cameras in a number of locations resulting in works including *Fenlandia* – developed with Film and Video Umbrella – where a network camera was placed on the roof of a 17th c. coaching inn in

rural Cambridgeshire for a year; and *Glenlandia*, developed with Horsecross in Perth, where a camera was installed in a fisheries research laboratory looking out over Loch Faskally, Perthshire, Scotland for two years. Both these works deliberately trade on the convention – or rather the perceived convention – of how a landscape image might historically have been composed and constructed, however, while both compositions appeared to be of natural landscapes, technology was in fact embedded seamlessly into both images. With *Fenlandia* the camera was looking out over a technological marvel of an earlier age, the fens of Cambridgeshire – a reclaimed land of sluices, ditches and drains; whilst the subject of *Glenlandia*, Loch Faskally, is in fact, a manmade loch which services a hydro-electric dam in Pitlochry, providing power to the surrounding glens.

When archived and lined up together in series the images present a heightened sense of time, revealing all sorts of shifts and changes – from the thinning and widening band of black (nighttime) showing the lengthening and shortening days throughout the year – to the full moon that *Glenlandia* occasionally captured and which appears as if a white comet streaking through the night sky but is in fact, the moon slipping through the image over time.

I view this work as a kind of ‘open system’. One inhabited and activated by light, day, night, weather, movement of the sun, the moon, the seasons and all these analogue variables that conspire to produce an infinite variety of unique images.

SEASCAPE

I became interested in developing further the potential for abstraction in the work, and I began looking at the seascape as a potential subject while artist in residence at Monash University in Melbourne in 2006; experimenting by constructing images from Australian ‘surfcams’ – the webcams set up on surfer beaches to let the surfers know when the surfing is good.

The *Seascape* project emerged from this when I was invited to develop the work further with Film and Video Umbrella and the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, a modernist icon on the south east coast of England housing a gallery whose long wall of picture windows look directly out to sea. Between March and October 2008, networked cameras were installed at five different vantage points along the south coast of England: at Margate, Folkestone, Bexhill-on-Sea, Paghham (near Bognor Regis) and Stokes Bay (near Gosport). The intention was to create a panoramic work that would directly reference the Bexhill seascape view while extending it to encompass and appropriate other vantage points across the south coast. Each camera transmitted an image to its own server in London, which then constructed and archived the images. For *Seascape*, I changed the timing of the construction of the images so that a whole image was made from individual pixels collected over just under seven hours, which is approximately the time it takes for the tide to come in or go out.

At the De La Warr Pavilion, five live projections showing the seascapes being constructed in real time were projected into the windows, against the backdrop of the actual, live coast itself. I set the view for each camera to frame the sea and sky with a common horizon line so that each image might be seen to form a fragment of the continuous panorama that is the South East coast.

In some images, you can see the picture evolve from night-time through dawn with the sun appearing on the water later in the day. Sea and sky often became interchangeable, creating false horizons through the horizontal construction of the image combined with fast changing light and weather conditions.

I also selected a series of stills from the archive to show as prints, regarding each of these as a complete work in itself that might be seen as a form of timelapse caught within a single frame – positioned somewhere between the still and the moving image, the lens and the pixel.

CONCLUSION

Whilst this process reveals some things such as the movement of the moon through the sky in *Glenlandia*, it misses others. For instance, in *Seascape*, the most violent lightning storm might appear as just a few stray pixels giving little or no sense of a turbulent sea. A re-presentation of a familiar subject, it is reality but not as one normally witnesses it. Six or seven hours compresses into a single frame, time shifts, and while the source for the image may have come from a landscape or seascape, the image has the potential to become autonomous, something else, with the accrual of the image over time bringing its own set of artefacts and abstractions.