

OFFLINE ISLANDS

Nicolás Rupcich

In April 2022, Nicolás Rupcich completed a residency in the Arctic Circle, which involved a navigation through the Svalbard archipelago. During this journey, he captured various images in the fractured topography of the North Pole using a range of technologies, including digital photography, analog cameras, glacier scans, and drone videos.

The works Rupcich developed between 2022 and 2024 as a result of this residency are exhibited together for the first time in a solo show at Reiter Berlin. These works include video installations, graphic images, and objects.

With these pieces, Rupcich explores the processes of “objectification” of the sublime, a phenomenon that is in close tension with the experience of distant and inhospitable places in the world, and the overwhelming documentation, translation, and synthesis of these into image files. Landscapes like those present in this exhibition have been idealized and visually post-processed to the point of becoming *commodities*—currency for various markets, political discourses, and narratives surrounding the image of “the pure, pristine, and unreachable.” As such, these are territories that have been, are, and will continue to be instrumentalized.

Offline Islands highlights the problematic nature of the production and existence of these images: the energy consumption intrinsic to their very visualization renders them immediately paradoxical; reversing and distorting the gesture. The consumption, exhaustion, manipulation, and degradation of reality through this type of imagery can be seen as another contributing factor affecting the current condition of these landscapes.

This degradation and the material condition of the digital are manifested in the exhibited works, which approach the understanding of landscapes as translated into files and data from different perspectives. In the piece *Archipelago Archive*, screens display images from the aforementioned trip, but the installation encompasses the totality of the images captured by the artist—the full and complete volume of all recorded video files reproduced physically and spatially on a superposition of monitors, where the deprivation of temporal and/or spatial distance translates the landscape into a fragmented machine.

In the video *Archipelago*, the viewer initially sees video footage of the Fjortende Julibreen glacier, but as it progresses, it is translated into a data cloud of the same place that, in a constant stream of imagery, ends up dispersing on screen. In another piece, *Downward Drift*, we see a camera crudely interacting with the landscape. It is common to hear phrases such as, “We wanted to see everything,” reflecting today’s dynamic between people and their surroundings, phrases which the artist questions with this kind of work on specific territories. Will hyperproduction of images ultimately deconstruct what we understand as visible? In a world where everything has seemingly been observed, mapped, and translated into data, how do we see when everything has already been seen?

Rupcich suggests that this inherent observation—pushed to the limits of what technology allows—has led to a complex impossibility of disconnecting from the global infinite data network, affecting how we understand the visible, even in the most remote places that most people cannot access. Yet ironically, we have a continuous and perpetual virtual presence in these places.

The role of digital images in shaping our perception of reality is a deep and ongoing inquiry that Rupcich’s work undertakes. In this exhibition, the artist challenges the apparent aesthetic quality and pre-established symbolic load of Arctic images to highlight the contradiction inherent in the materialization of such images. Contemporary ideas and narratives, such as climate change, the myth of exploring spaces outside the realm of capital, consumption, manipulation, resource depletion and eroded concepts of “truth” or “reality” are confronted, frayed, and tested through a landscape of images that, ultimately, are active agents in the deterioration of a habitat.