

Louis Cameron

# Times Square Ring of Steel

September 13, 2014 - January 8, 2015



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The Gallery@1GAP

This booklet accompanies the exhibition "Times Square Ring of Steel"  
curated by Suzy Spence

This booklet was produced by Suzy Spence and Louis Cameron

Photographs by Louis Cameron  
Printing by Radix Media

The Gallery@1GAP  
One Grand Army Plaza  
Brooklyn, NY 11238

The exhibition is open by appointment, contact [info@spenceprojects.com](mailto:info@spenceprojects.com)

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Cover: Louis Cameron. Domain Awareness #3 (detail), 2014

## Louis Cameron

### Times Square Ring of Steel

Louis Cameron's painting series "Times Square Ring of Steel" and "Domain Awareness," depict surveillance images downloaded from public webcams stationed in New York City. The artist manipulates the images digitally, prints them on a large scale, and applies the prints to canvas by lifting the inks with an acrylic medium. Something transcendent occurs when he intervenes with these mechanical images: from webcam, to computer, to canvas, the manipulation of the image produces unforeseen visual and emotional affects.

In a series of black and white portraits, "Times Square Ring of Steel," Cameron's subject is the suspicious civilian passing through Times Square. The neighborhood is a security hotspot full of bright lights, commerce, and tourism. Ubiquitous cameras hang from lampposts and buildings above the bustle, logging visual records of foot traffic. Pedestrians, unaware that they're being recorded, stream one after another into overlapping fields of observation. The operators of these cameras are the NYPD, corporate entities, deli owners, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Homeland Security, and others. However, Cameron's interest seems to lie in images with an authoritarian perspective, situated above and behind the world below them. When he chooses specific photographs from a multitude of webcam recordings, the creative act begins at the moment of selection: a passerby carrying a backpack, a woman wearing a hijab, a man in a baseball cap, and so on.

Gleaned from a plethora of photographic opportunities, Cameron's work is not unlike traditional street reportage by photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson. Like Bresson, Cameron chooses an image at the so-called decisive moment. But while Bresson could have changed lenses,

or repositioned himself to get the shot, Cameron's perspective is one he can't control. The contemporary artist using webcam technology is limited to the viewpoint of a covert stationary machine.

In a parallel body of work, "The Poster Project," Cameron offers 11"x17" downloadable images of the same black and white portraits. These surveillance images are a free, endless multiple available on his website<sup>1</sup>; they can be printed and used by anyone. This relational approach to art making brings to mind artist Felix Gonzalez Torres, whose 1990 "Untitled (Death by Gun)", was an endless stack of giveaway posters appropriating imagery from *Time* magazine. "Untitled" depicted 460 people killed by gunshot in one week in the United States. Both Cameron's street portraits, and Torres's posters evoke curiosity, suspicion, empathy, and judgment from the viewer. Furthermore, the anonymity and randomness of Cameron's subjects suggests that what we see is in endless supply. Warhol's silk-screen portraits are a clear precedent, but so are the pop artist's multitudes of factory made objects – Coke bottles, Brillo boxes, soup cans. With so many throngs of people passing through Times Square, we become desensitized to the concept, and perhaps even the rights of the individual.

Finally, Cameron ushers the transformation of another series of rote surveillance photographs from public records to discreet art objects; he does so by accessing street webcams through websites where such images pour into the public domain. In "Domain Awareness", a series of colorful Brooklyn landscapes, Cameron has chosen images from the borough's busiest hubs: the Barclays Center, the corner of Flatbush Avenue and Bergen Street, and other locations. Like the familiar Google street view map system, city surveillance webcams produce online snapshots that capture the movement of traffic in real-time. Notably, for this exhibition, he photographed himself standing at Grand Army Plaza by using his cell phone to access a webcam. This elaborate self-portrait exploits the advanced technology and perspective that our particular historical moment allows. It also points to the vulnerability of any one individual to be easily located among a colossal maze of streets and buildings.

Limited to the webcams he utilizes, the artist engages his audience with questions about surveillance through selection: why does he paint the individuals and places he does? This concern plays into our own feelings of suspicion, and our own vulnerabilities. As viewers we're left to interpret the content of Cameron's work, to be complicit in the process of determining their meaning.

- Suzy Spence, Brooklyn 2014

<sup>1</sup> [www.louiscaeron.com](http://www.louiscaeron.com)



Times Square Ring of Steel #7, 2013. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36".



Domain Awareness #8, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 16" x 24".



Times Square Ring of Steel #24, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24".



Domain Awareness #9, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 16" x 24".



Times Square Ring of Steel #28, 2013. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18".

## A Conversation Between Artist Louis Cameron and Curator Suzy Spence, The Gallery@1GAP

**Suzy Spence.** We've discovered we're neighbors in Prospect Heights, but we were also participants at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture when we were beginning our careers. That moment was still analog – that is, very few people were using new technology in their work, least of all painters. Do you remember that year and what you were making at the time?

**Louis Cameron.** I definitely remember what I was making that summer. They were small, 6" x 6", paintings on wood panel with images of people against black backgrounds. The images of people came from the newspaper and I painted the backgrounds out with black paint. I was interested in making narrative connections between the figures in the paintings. Even at that point I was interested in photographic imagery. I attended Skowhegan between my first and second year of graduate school. When I returned to school I created a thesis project that was similar to the small paintings. It was an installation directly on the wall of five 8 foot by 8-foot squares with newspaper-based images pasted within them. In this installation the images were enlarged via the computer.

**SS.** You've come far and you're now on the Board of Governors at Skowhegan. You also teach Painting at Princeton and Pace University. Specifically you teach technique in Painting classes 1, 2, and 3. How does your knowledge of art history and the craft of painting, inform these works that employ new technology and but also rely on traditional stretched canvas?

**LC.** I made a decision a while ago to engage in a painting conversation. I feel that it has a rich and fertile history that allows one to engage in current cultural conversations in a unique way. I think photographic imagery is part of this continuum of image making. I don't see such a huge divide between the tradition of painting and that of photography despite what makes them unique. In making hybrid paintings that engage painting, photography, and printmaking. I incorporate aspects of each in the work such as the tactile and surface issues the painting, the mechanical image producing aspect of photography, and the color and image translation aspect of printmaking.

**SS.** These works seem to depend more on technology than on holding a paintbrush. Can you explain the process of making them?

**LC.** First, I take the images from public webcams online. I process the images lightly in a photo-editing program. Next, I take the image to the printer where they make large-format laser prints of the images. Then comes the transfer process: I put a layer of acrylic medium on canvas and while still wet I lay the laser prints facedown on the canvas. I let it dry then rub the paper off the canvas with water. Finally, I apply a finishing coat and stretch the canvas.

**SS.** I wonder about the editing process as you select the surveillance photographs you want to use. The mechanical surveillance photographs are being produced constantly. How do you make the selection; what makes a good painting?

**LC.** I choose the images that I take from the webcams based on aesthetic considerations as well as considering what images would best drive the conversation on surveillance.

**SS.** You told me you think that all good artists are formalists at the core. This suggests you demand of yourself, a high level of craftsmanship. Since you manipulate the images you retrieve from the webcams, I wonder how much you allowed for beauty, or eye-pleasing accidents. How did you negotiate the tension between something rather ugly with your desire to aestheticize?



Times Square Ring of Steel #21, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18".



Times Square Ring of Steel #15, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 47" x 35".

**LC.** Whenever a person looks at a work of art I feel that they need to have an aesthetic experience -- an experience in front of an object that they can't have from a reproduction of it in a book, or online. Therefore, I naturally try to make work that gives that experience. When I started making the paintings in the "Time Square Ring of Steel" series I started by using silkscreen to produce the paintings (two of which are in the exhibition). They didn't have the physical quality that I was looking for; they felt too mechanical. When I worked with the transfer process the mechanical aspect was present, but it was countered by the painterly incidents in the transfer process.

**SS.** I think of you as a painter and a conceptual artist. Which artists or art movements have been important to you?

**LC.** There's so much, where to start? I can talk about a couple of art exhibitions I saw in Paris last summer that made an impression on me. The first was going to the Louvre Museum. While there I visited the French paintings of the 17th century through the 19th century. In seeing these paintings it was very clear that painting was then at the height of its power. It was all very inspiring. The second exhibition that made an impression on me was Lorna Simpson at Jeu de Paume. It was a mini survey exhibition where I got to see the breadth of her work from the early conceptual image-text photographs to the newer video work. However, the work that really made an impression on me was her large-scale silkscreen on felt images. These works had a physical presence akin to what I was describing above. I was moved by the materiality of the felt, the scale of the images, as well as the subjects.

**SS.** The subject of this body of work is people being watched. There is something absurd about the constant watching, and it's something I wasn't so aware of before I began working with you for this exhibition. Did you have a personal experience that propelled you to make this work?

**LC.** The event that inspired me to make this work was the failed bombing attempt of Times Square in 2010. The incident was very disturbing. However, you immediately started to see images from security and surveillance cameras identifying or misidentifying the suspect. Soon after this incident, I was surfing the web and I found a webcam in Time Square. I thought this metaphorically alluded to the security cameras and surveillance that help identify and capture the suspect.

**SS.** Do you intend to turn the tables in this work? I mean, do you want to have the people in Times Square webcams appear as the victims rather than the other way around?

**LC.** I don't think it's an issue of victimization. My goal is to have the viewer become more aware of being watched daily in the city. This is an issue of our time, and it's more of a right to privacy and perhaps a moral question in terms of how the technology is deployed and what is done with the information gathered from it.

**SS.** Would you categorize the photographs you access on the webcams, as ready-mades?

**LC.** No, the photographs are not ready-mades. The decision of where the cameras are placed and pointed are predetermined, but I take the photographs.

**SS.** For me Adrian Piper's "My Calling Card" is a point of comparison to your work. (She would perform this work unannounced wherever she was on a given day between 1986 and 1990. Her multiples were short statements on brown and white cards that she handed out at cocktail parties and other occasions in which she expressed her viewpoint of casual interactions she'd had with individuals who she felt had passed judgment about her based upon her race or sex. The work expressed who she was and how she read the interaction). Do you see how I would make this comparison to "Times Square Ring of Steel"? The moment of judgment is a hot point.

**LC.** I can see a connection between my work and that of Piper's in the sense that we are both responding to interactions with our environment. In her case, it's with specific individuals in intimate settings. In my case it's with an institution in a public setting. I don't think I'm passing judgment with this work. I'm urging awareness and caution.

**SS.** I recently watched a You-Tube video via my Twitter feed. It was of a brown-skinned teenage boy in a deli talking to a security camera about how he knows he's being watched, again. Your self-portrait on a Brooklyn street corner has a provocative sentiment. In both cases (your paintings and the teenager's video in the deli), exhibits a knowingness, an "I gotcha" moment. Was that your intention?



Times Square Ring of Steel #20, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18".



LC. I wanted to both exhibit my awareness of these “seeing eyes” as well as identify myself as one of the many who are watched.

SS. This body of work is concerned with the effect that government surveillance has on people. Do you think your work could change the way people feel about the Department of Homeland Security, about privacy, and the police, and the rights of the individual?

LC. I suppose there’s the possibility these paintings will bring about some kind of change in our society by affecting the way individuals view surveillance in the city. However, I also feel that these paintings are a record of an artist imagining the extent of surveillance when it first started reaching a critical mass in New York City, and what it may potentially become.

SS. The images you took of Grand Army Plaza especially resonate in this exhibition; I’m glad we reconnected after so many years to collaborate- -- what a pleasure it’s been. Thank you Louis!

LC. Thank you.



Domain Awareness #3, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 32" x 47".



Times Square Ring of Steel #22, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24".



Times Square Ring of Steel #37, 2014. Toner and acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18".

### About the Artist

Louis Cameron was born in Columbus, Ohio; raised in Los Angeles, California; and lives in Brooklyn, New York. He earned a B.F.A. from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, and an M.F.A. from Tyler School of Art, Temple University in Philadelphia.

Cameron's work engages in a discourse on representation. Several bodies of work challenging product identity, looking at American identity, and recently examining issues concerning surveillance have dealt with this issue. Cameron has employed color, graphic design, and photo-based images as means for his explorations.

Cameron has had solo exhibitions and projects at the Saint Louis Art Museum; the Jersey City Museum, New Jersey; The Kitchen, New York; The Armory Show; and I-20 Gallery, New York. He has also participated in group exhibitions in the United States and abroad at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; the Contemporary Art Museum Houston; Portugal Arte 10, Lisbon; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Dakar Biennial, Senegal. Cameron has participated in the Artist-in-Residence program at The Studio Museum in Harlem and been a Fellow in Painting with the New York Foundation for the Arts. His work is in the collections of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the Saint Louis Art Museum. For more information, visit [www.louiscameron.com](http://www.louiscameron.com)

### About the Curator

Suzy Spence is an Artist, Curator, and Advisor. She began her twenty-five year career at Marcia Tucker's experimental New Museum in Soho, where she was Curatorial Assistant. Later, she exhibited her own work with Colin De Land at his gallery, American Fine Arts. De Land's space supported conceptual work while maintaining a loose business model in order to serve artists working at the edge, or outside of the market place. These early experiences inform Spence's approach to curating exhibitions, hosting salons, and developing art collections. Spence is the Curator for the exhibition program at the Richard Meier building in Brooklyn 'On Prospect Park', The Gallery @1GAP.

Spence has an M.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts (New York), a B.F.A. from Parsons School of Design (Paris and New York), attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and Smith College.

For more information, visit [www.spenceprojects.com](http://www.spenceprojects.com) and [suzyspence.com](http://suzyspence.com)

### The Gallery@1GAP

The residents of the Richard Meier building in Brooklyn, 'On Prospect Park,' have developed an in-house art program that seeks to contribute to the creative culture and energy of Brooklyn with three art exhibitions each year; these exhibitions are oriented toward supporting and showcasing the work of New York City artists. The program engages with an extended community of art enthusiasts by opening its doors for exhibition openings, salons, and special events.

For the curious passerby, a walk by the glass facades of the building reveals a full view of the dynamic conversation between Meier's architectural design, the contemporary art on view, and the vibrant city and park life just beyond the glass. The exhibitions that fill four large rooms in the building's common areas on the ground floor, are hand-selected by the building's Art Committee, led by Robin Sacks. Originally conceived by resident Dr. Alan Fleischer in 2009, the gallery has mounted numerous exhibitions by emerging and mid-career artists.

The Gallery@1GAP is a place where local artists of all backgrounds, education, experience, and personal vision are exhibited. This is a private residential building, and exhibitions are open by appointment. Please contact Curator Suzy Spence, [info@spenceprojects.com](mailto:info@spenceprojects.com).

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Presented by  
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