

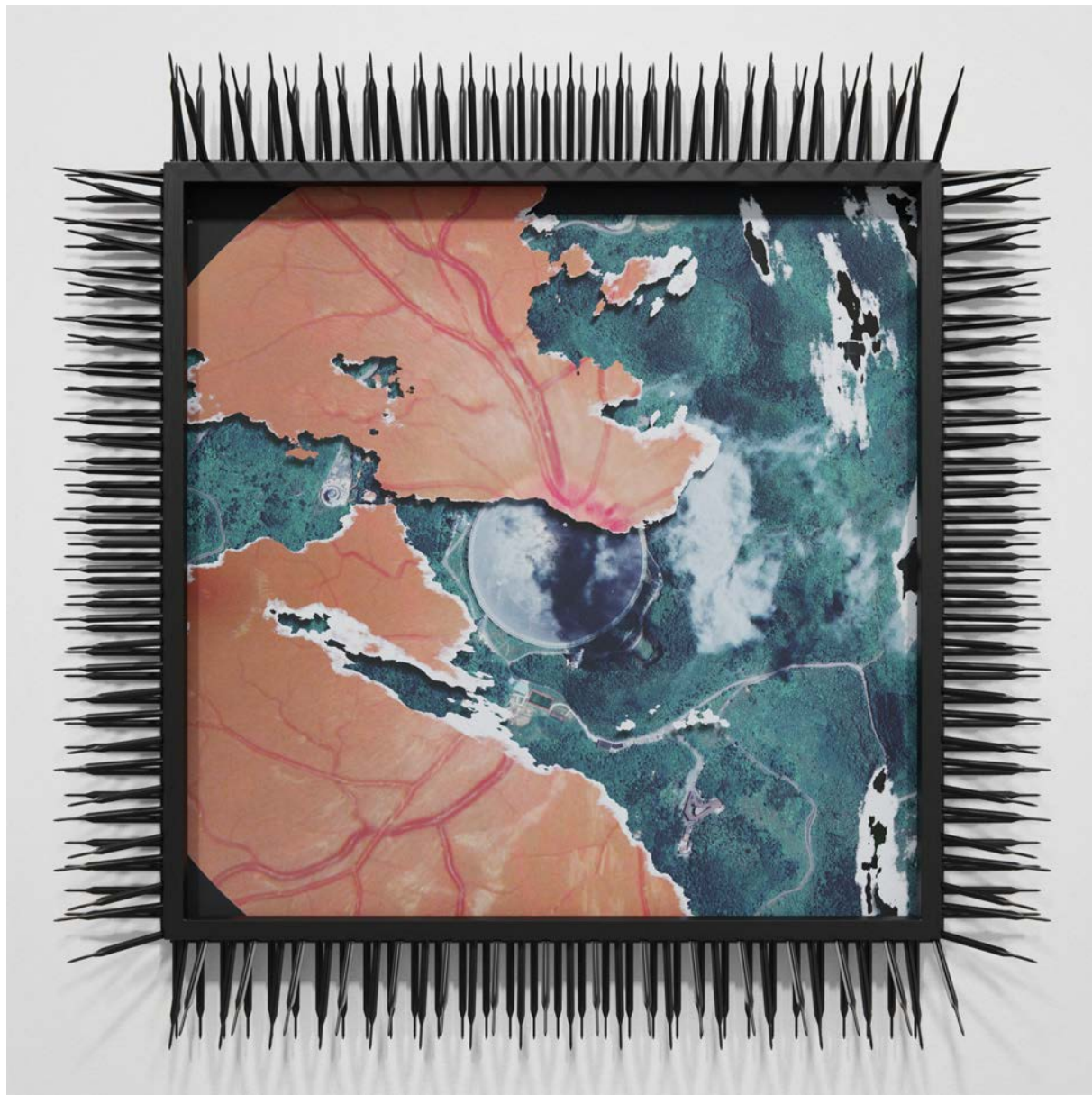
WAAP
WIL ABALLE ART PROJECTS

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STEVEN COTTINGHAM
When the drone cuts

NOV 11 - DEC 23, 2023

Image:
Steven Cottingham
The captive eye (cornea/satellite)
2023



Steven Cottingham
When the drone cuts

In a time of war, we bear witness to the unfolding crises of widespread displacement, devastating casualties, and environmental degradation. A flood of images, both authentic and propagandistic, captures imperialistic triumphs and defeats in equal measure. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that not all of these images truthfully depict military operations in the Donbas or Panjshir; instead, some imagery is derived from screen-recordings of the military simulation (milsim) software, ArmA 3.

ArmA is a photoreal virtual environment widely used by law enforcement training programs, private military companies, and enthusiast wargamers. While much of this simulated game footage remains confined to social media feeds, select clips have erroneously made their way into national news channels. This phenomenon has persisted since ArmA 3's public release in 2013, recurrently accompanying news reports on conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel, Syria, and Ukraine.

Despite ArmA 3's highly realistic portrayal of military tactics and even post-conflict reconstruction procedures, the milsim is troublingly devoid of women. As neither combatants nor civilians, the game contains zero female representations. Developers and users have justified this absence in various ways, citing technical limitations or the perceived irrelevance of gendered (non-male) avatars within a first-person shooter environment. Even the sequel, now in open beta, features exclusively male meshes and animations.

Amidst this tension between the game's photorealistic graphics and its unrealistic representation of wartime gender roles, the short film *As far as the drone can see* makes use of open source mods to insert a female journalist into ArmA. Embedded alongside a genderfluid guerrilla cell, the film charts their covert insurrection as they interrogate the ability of a simulator to depict conflict without accounting for gender and power hierarchies.

As an exhibition, *When the drone cuts* both extracts from and inserts into the environment of ArmA, delineating the ways in which the milsim coincides with and departs from the world it purports to represent. The virtual ruins of ArmA are materialized within the gallery space, taking the form of textiles adorned with urban camouflage mimicking the desolate construction sites, rubble heaps of redevelopment, and barbed wire fences of WAAP's East Hastings neighbourhood. However, in the context of Vancouver, the ruins are not intended to signify destruction, but revitalization. By bringing these ambient patterns to the fore, *When the drone cuts* attends to the latent environmental systems that shape our perception of value.

Throughout the exhibition, the drone is deployed as a multivalent figure, redolent of both a distant observer as well as an omnipresent background hum indexing industrial activity. Within the context of ArmA, the drone (literally, an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) becomes a way of shedding the ubiquitous male avatar. Finally, the drone manifests as a ruminative song, a suspended note meditating upon a picture of the world inseparable from its mediation.

Steven Cottingham

As far as the drone can see
2023

Edition of 2 + 1 AP

Single-channel video with sound
15 minutes, 49 seconds



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As far as the drone can see
2023

Edition of 2 + 1 AP

Single-channel video with sound
15 minutes, 49 seconds



Steven Cottingham

The captive eye (cornea/satellite)
2023

Thermoplastic bird deterrents, laminated inkjet print
on vinyl, custom frame

41 x 41 in (104.1 x 104.1 cm)



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The captive eye (cornea/satellite)
2023

Thermoplastic bird deterrents, laminated inkjet print
on vinyl, custom frame

41 x 41 in (104.1 x 104.1 cm)

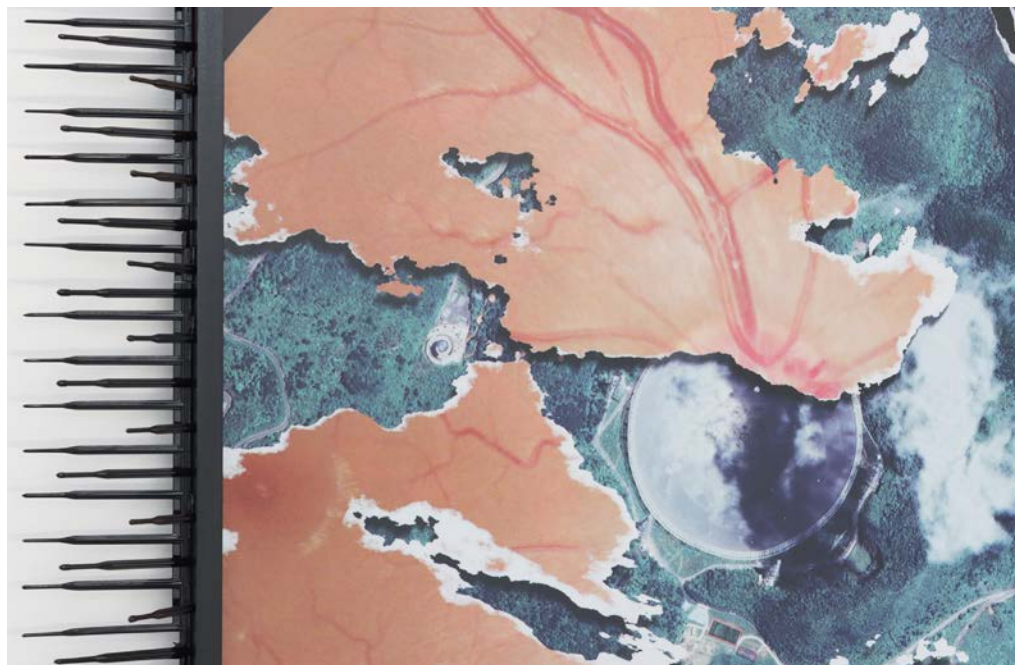


Steven Cottingham

The captive eye (cornea/satellite)
2023

Thermoplastic bird deterrents, laminated inkjet print
on vinyl, custom frame

41 x 41 in (104.1 x 104.1 cm)



Steven Cottingham

Indebted so it could be insured
(Urban camo for arson site)
2023

Reactive inkjet print on canvas, grommets, thread

43 x 24 in (109.2 x 61 cm)



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Indebted so it could be insured
(Urban camo for arson site)
2023

Reactive inkjet print on canvas, grommets, thread

43 x 24 in (109.2 x 61 cm)



Steven Cottingham

Released so it could be reinforced
(Urban camo for East Hastings)
2023

Reactive inkjet print on canvas, grommets, thread

59 x 59 in (149.9 x 149.9 cm)



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Released so it could be reinforced
(Urban camo for East Hastings)
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The captive eye (telephoto/bird scare)
2023

Thermoplastic bird deterrents, laminated inkjet print
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41 x 41 in (104.1 x 104.1 cm)



Steven Cottingham

Sacrificed so it could be quantified
(Urban camo for construction site)
2023

Reactive inkjet print on canvas, grommets, thread

72 x 64 in (182.9 x 162.6 cm)



Steven Cottingham

Sacrificed so it could be quantified
(Urban camo for construction site)
2023

Reactive inkjet print on canvas, grommets, thread

72 x 64 in (182.9 x 162.6 cm)



Steven Cottingham

Discounted so it could be equivocated
(Hunting camo for syncrude tailings pond)
2023

Reactive inkjet print on canvas, grommets, thread

72 x 40 in (182.9 x 101.6 cm)



Steven Cottingham

Discounted so it could be equivocated
(Hunting camo for syncrude tailings pond)
2023

Reactive inkjet print on canvas, grommets, thread

72 x 40 in (182.9 x 101.6 cm)



Steven Cottingham

The captive eye (cctv/ocellus)
2023

Thermoplastic bird deterrents, laminated inkjet print
on vinyl, custom frame

41 x 41 in (104.1 x 104.1 cm)



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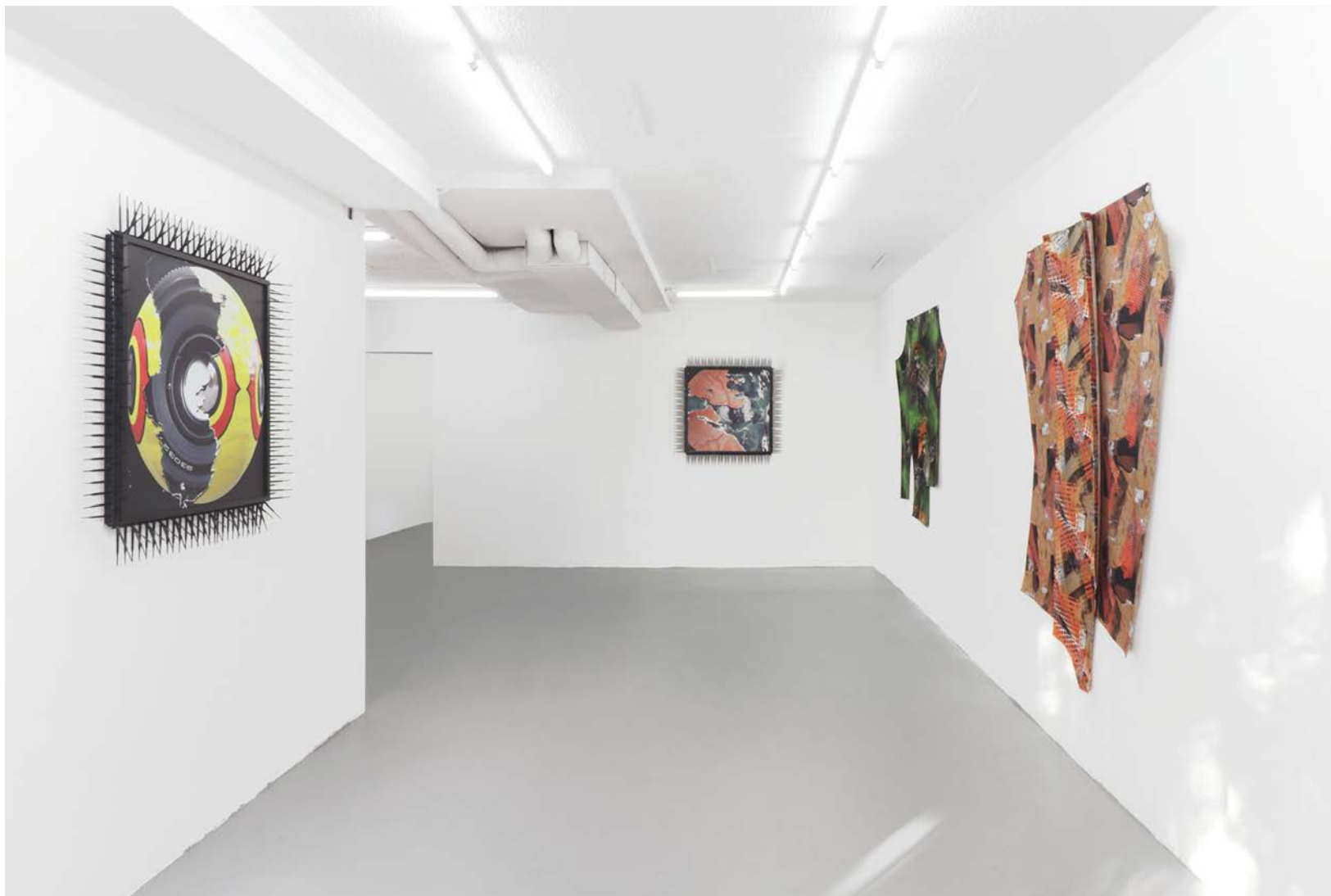
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The captive eye (cctv/ocellus)
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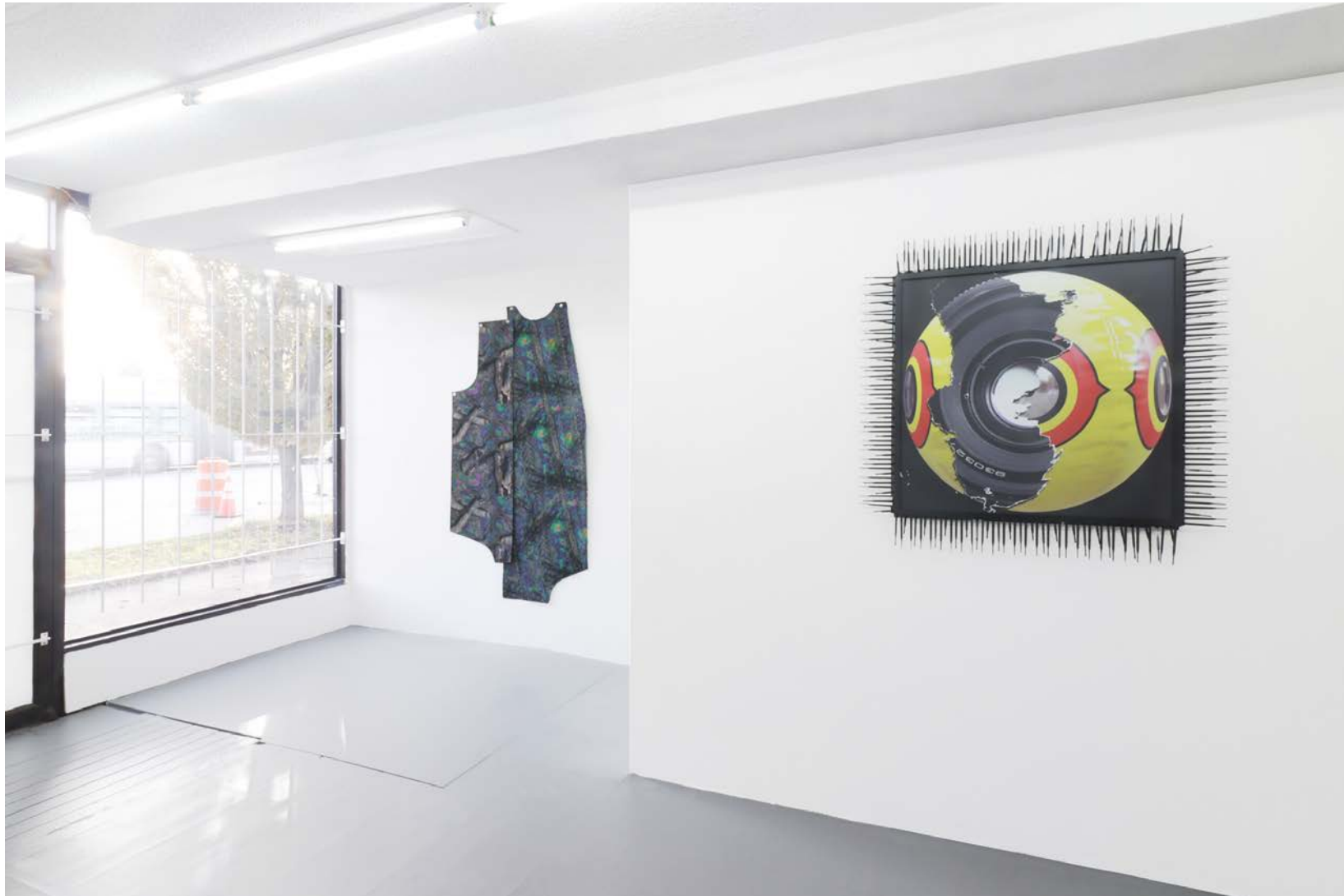
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STEVEN COTTINGHAM, Exhibition view, WAAP | Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver, BC, 2023



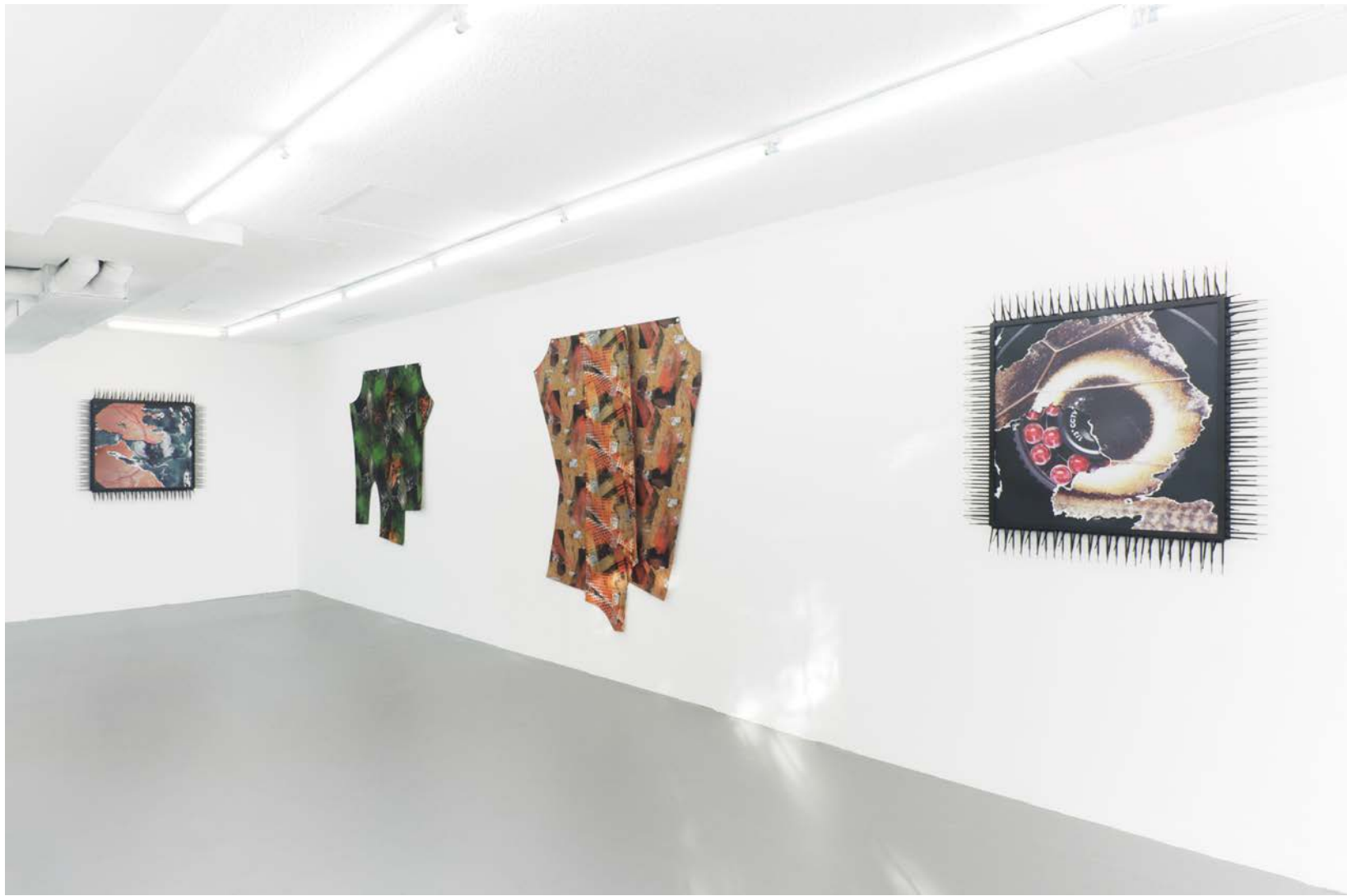
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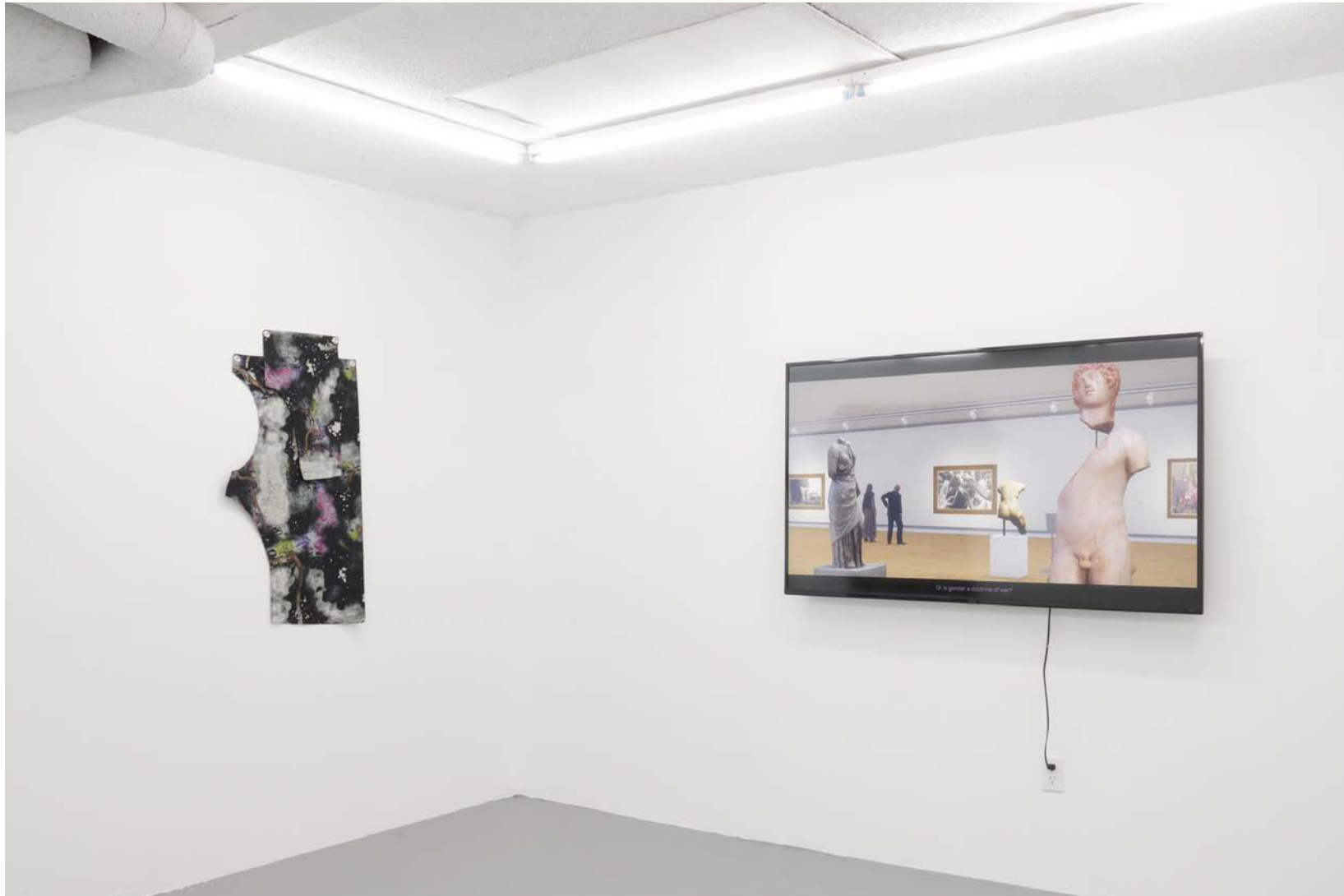
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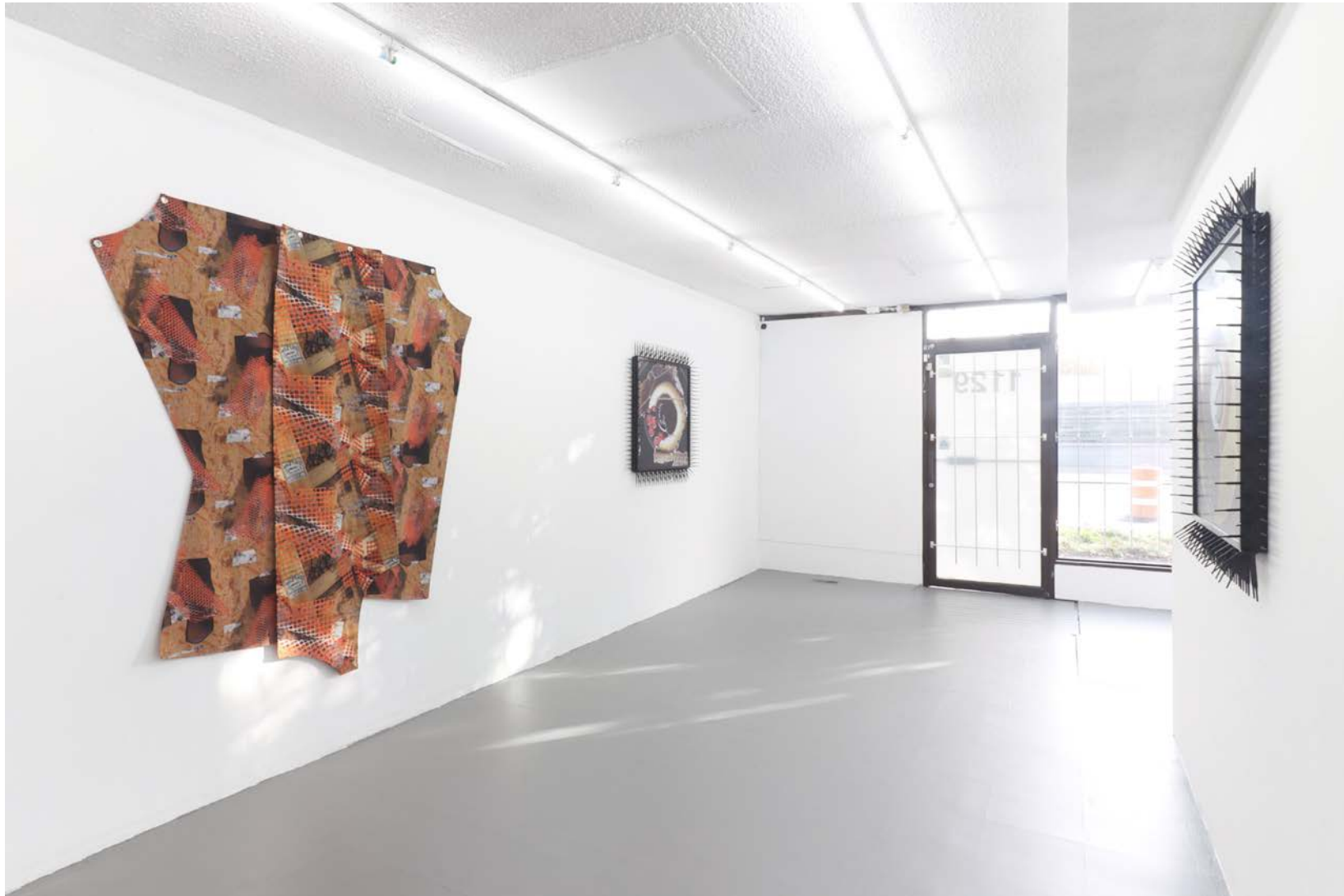
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STEVEN COTTINGHAM BIO

Steven Cottingham (b. 1989, Calgary) is a visual artist and filmmaker whose practice critically engages the concept of photo-realism in the domains of law, politics, and journalism. His video works explore bodycam policies, surveillance advertising, military simulation software, and the use of AI in prisons in order to historicize systems of control and analyze how emerging image technologies affect social behaviour through legibility and repetition.

Cottingham's recent solo exhibitions include ENTRE (Vienna, 2023), VRAL (Milan, 2022), Natalia Hug Galerie (Cologne, 2022), Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art (Kelowna, 2020), and Wil Aballe Art Projects (Vancouver, 2020). His work has been included in group exhibitions and screenings at The 8th Floor (New York, 2023), Catriona Jeffries (Vancouver, 2023), Artists Space (New York, 2022), Vector Festival (Toronto, 2022), The Polygon Gallery (North Vancouver, 2021), Avecez Art Space (Havana, 2019), Herbert Read Gallery (Cambridge, 2017), and The Museum of Capitalism (Oakland, 2017). He has participated in residencies at the Whitney Independent Study Program (New York, 2021–2022), Fogo Island Arts (2016), the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2015), and Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (Berlin, 2015). In 2017, he received his MFA from the University of British Columbia (Vancouver).