ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a multidisciplinary companion for middle school and high school educators bringing their students to view To See Without Being Seen: Contemporary Art and Drone Warfare, on view at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum from January 29 through April 24, 2016. Our intent is to offer a range of learning objectives, gallery discussions, and postvisit suggestions to stimulate the learning process, encourage dialogue, and help make meaning of the material presented. Teachers should glean from this guide what is most relevant and useful to their students.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

We are in the dawn of the drone age, a turning point in history when the technology of surveillance and remote engagement is changing the way we live and understand the world. Over the past decade the United States and other countries have increasingly utilized unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), colloquially known as drones, as part of a global network of image gathering and data collection employed to monitor collective life and target individuals. As drones redefine contemporary policing and warfare, their impact is filtering into art and visual culture, generating new investigations into issues of agency, power, visibility, technology, and fear.

To See Without Being Seen: Contemporary Art and Drone Warfare presents an international array of contemporary artworks that engage with the geopolitical aspects of drone warfare and surveillance. Comprising video, sculpture, installation, photography, and web-based projects, the artworks in this exhibition raise fundamental questions about increasingly invisible and seamless military technologies, undeclared wars, undeterred surveillance, and the amassing of data.

IN THIS GUIDE

Before You Visit | p.2
In the Gallery | p.2
In the Classroom or at Home | p.4
Vocabulary | p.4
Additional Resources | p.5

This guide was prepared by Allison Taylor, manager of education, and Amy Miller, assistant educator. To schedule a visit to the Kemper Art Museum, contact Amy Miller at amy.miller@wustl.edu or 314.935.5624.
INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Students will explore the various media artists are using to investigate the increased use of military drones.
Students will discuss the relationship between art and political activism.
Using specific works in the exhibition, students will examine the ethics and politics of drones as weapons and as devices to monitor citizens.
Students will discuss the role of contemporary art in generating relevant and often challenging conversations pertaining to global issues and hone 21st-century learning skills such as critical thinking, analysis, and interpretation.
Students will investigate the notion of vertical perspective and how it has changed not only mechanized warfare but also our understanding of the world around us.

BEFORE YOU VISIT
Suggested topics to explore, research, and discuss before visiting the exhibition

DRONES
Have your students research the rise of drone usage in the military and daily life by looking at online articles or videos. What are some common concerns about drones and how they are used? How does drone usage involve issues of privacy, liability, and public policy?

PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS
Have your students write down what they know or think they know about drones. Revisit this list after your visit to the exhibition. Did their notions about drones change? If so, in what ways? What surprised your students the most? What did they get right?

IN THE GALLERY
Ideas to consider when viewing the exhibition

To See Without Being Seen: Contemporary Art and Drone Warfare is divided into three sections—“Bringing the War Home,” “Tracking and Targeting,” and “Countersurveillance”—which together seek to catalyze discussion around the complex of disconnected violence and concealment that characterizes militarized drone technology.

SECTION ONE: BRINGING THE WAR HOME
This section explores the idea of “home” as a site from which war is remotely waged and the notion of the all-seeing drone being a ubiquitous part of daily life. By looking at the United States the way the US military is looking at other countries—through a drone’s perspective—and contextualizing the drone as an element of daily existence, these works variously provoke interest, empathy, and possibly paranoia.

Trevor Paglen
Untitled (Reaper Drone), 2010
Trevor Paglen, who trained as a photographer and geographer, makes photographs that focus on covert military activity. Untitled (Reaper Drone) seems at first glance to depict a glorious sunrise, but close observation reveals a tiny speck. Once the viewer identifies it as the drone referenced in the title, this barely visible dot becomes the ominous focal point of the photograph. Using an Orion refractor telescope, a tool built for astrophotography to take long-distance images, Paglen created this photograph, which acts as a metaphor for the blurred boundaries of truth in an era of increased covert government activity. Paglen has taken thousands of photographs of classified defense activity since the War on Terror was launched by the Bush administration in 2001.
Discussion Questions

How is Paglen's photographic work similar to traditional landscape and abstract paintings? How is it different? (You may want to visit the Kemper Art Museum’s permanent collection and Teaching Gallery exhibition to view examples of 19th-century landscape painting with your students for comparison.) How does Paglen’s work enhance the clandestine nature of drones?

Tomas van Houtryve
Selections from *Blue Sky Days*, 2013–14

*Blue Sky Days* by photojournalist Tomas van Houtryve takes its title from a statement made by a young Pakistani boy at a 2013 congressional hearing investigating an American drone strike that killed his grandmother: “I no longer love blue skies. In fact, I now prefer gray skies. The drones do not fly when the skies are gray.” Citizens in regions of the world where drone strikes are common are more fearful on clear days because of the higher probability of drone presence and, consequently, an increased potential for death and destruction. In *Blue Sky Days* Van Houtryve offers a visual narrative to go along with modern drone warfare. His photographs, which are taken with a drone camera, of sites in the United States allow civilians to see the world from a drone’s point of view and consider the perspective of those caught in the drone’s line of vision as well as examine the potentially problematic nature of such vertical bird’s-eye views.

Discussion Questions

If you were to look at Van Houtryve’s images without reading the labels, could you determine what is going on in the photographs? Discuss with your students the ambiguity of these images and what that means in the context of drone warfare. How is vertical perspective (compared to horizontal perspective) changing the way wars are conducted?

SECTION TWO: TRACKING AND TARGETING

Drone tracking and targeting systems are based on screen interaction and algorithmic pattern recognition. These partly automated processes confront the viewer with urgent questions regarding the conduct of war and the relationship between humans and machines. Works in this section aim to make these abstract and often unseen operations visible.

James Bridle
*Dronestagram*, 2012–ongoing

James Bridle’s *Dronestagram* uses an ongoing social media feed to provide satellite images from Google Maps of drone strike locations shortly after they are reported by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. Bridle’s live Instagram account, *Dronestagram*, attempts to educate the public by providing information relating to military drone usage, such as the locations of strikes and numbers of civilian casualties. By raising awareness about and providing visual images of the covert aspects of drone activities, Bridle is advocating for governmental accountability and greater transparency. The blurriness and vagueness of the images are part of Bridle’s commentary and can be read as a metaphor about the secretive nature of most military drone strikes.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the power of social media. How has social media changed the way information is disseminated? Do citizens have a right to information about drone warfare? Compared to past wars, is this kind of warfare part of the public consciousness? Why or why not?
SECTION THREE: COUNTERSURVEILLANCE

With surveillance becoming ever more ubiquitous, a visual politics based on going undetected and becoming obscure has gained increased relevance and urgency. The works in this section examine ways in which the technology of visibility is changing, raising such questions as how to evade the mechanical eye of a drone.

Hito Steyerl

HOW NOT TO BE SEEN: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File, 2013

The inspiration for Hito Steyerl’s video installation HOW NOT TO BE SEEN was a story about Afghan rebels devising ways to avoid being detected by drones, turning the need to disappear or go off the grid from a theoretical scenario to a real-life situation. Because drones detect movement and body heat, the rebels would cover themselves with reflective plastic sheets, douse themselves with water to bring down their body temperatures, and remain immobile (sometimes by just reading books) until the drones left the area. Steyerl’s video installation explores the dark side of surveillance in a parody of instructional films as she presents various methods civilians can use to remain “unseen.”

Discussion Questions

Discuss how being constantly under surveillance would affect your existence. What parts of your daily routine might need to change? How is avoiding detection by drones—machine vision—different from avoiding detection by human vision? Compare and contrast drone avoidance and camouflage (i.e., the attempt to thwart a technology that is trying to find and track you versus the attempt to visually blend into your surroundings). What types of countersurveillance strategies can your students devise?

IN THE CLASSROOM OR AT HOME

Suggested activities to follow your visit to the Museum

SCREEN SELECTIONS FROM GOOD KILL

Good Kill (rated R) is a 2015 thriller by director Andrew Niccol about a drone pilot who remotely drops bombs on Afghanistan by day and returns to his family in Las Vegas each night. The film examines the mental toll of warfare that is conducted virtually but has effects that are all too real. As the trailer for the film asks, “If you never face your enemy, how can you face yourself?”

IMAGES OF WAR

Have students research and find images of the War on Terror in the Middle East, particularly those involving drones. Then have them research and find images from the Vietnam War. What differences do they see in the images that are circulated?

VOCABULARY

algorithmic pattern recognition – A set of machine learning techniques used to analyze large data sets (such as audio, still images, and video) to find patterns, which can then be recognized later in similar data (e.g., different video clips).

counterintelligence – Activities designed to prevent or thwart spying, information gathering, or sabotage by an enemy or other foreign entity.

countersurveillance – Measures undertaken to prevent being spied upon or being seen.

drone strike – When an unmanned aerial vehicle, or drone, operated by an authorized military pilot on the ground, often in another country, uses missiles to attack specific targets.
undeclared war – A military conflict between two or more nations without either side issuing a formal declaration of war; such conflicts are often characterized as a “military action” or “armed response.”

unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) – A small unmanned aircraft, commonly known as a drone, used both by civilians and the military.

vertical perspective – Bird’s eye view from above, which can lead to a dehumanization of the enemy and misinterpretation of behavior and situations.

War on Terror – A global military, political, legal, and conceptual struggle against both organizations that are designated as terrorist and regimes that are accused of supporting them. The US War on Terror was initiated after the September 11 attacks in 2001.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Exhibition catalog

About the Artists
James Bridle
http://dronestagram.tumblr.com/
http://booktwo.org/notebook/dronestagram-drones-eye-view/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zwxLRJnbDY

James Bridle and Tomas van Houytrve
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/the-unquiet-sky.html?emc=eta1&_r=1

The Center for Land Use Interpretation

Tomas van Houtryve
http://tomasvh.com/2015/05/02/icp-video/

Trevor Paglen
http://www.art21.org/artists/trevor-paglen

Hito Steyerl

About Drones
The Bureau of Investigative Journalism: https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/
Center for the Study of the Drone: http://dronecenter.bard.edu/