Dubious Views. *Subversive Souvenirs*, online exhibition by Gallery TPW, Toronto, ongoing

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The emerging phenomenon of the virtual exhibition is creating both tremendous possibilities and challenges, particularly for photographers. Virtual venues offer new ways to disseminate artworks and challenge the curatorial imaginary. Virtual exhibitions privilege images and the curator’s words. Virtual exhibitions are a boon to virtual works. Artworks designed for the screen are not generally diminished by an online showing. But works with a primary, non-Web identity are affected by the translation. There is an ontological difference between a tiny jpeg and Yoon’s large original. Too often, the miniaturization ends up becoming a quotation that serves the text meant to serve the artwork.

Current virtual gallery formats often have the curatorial voice share equal space with the art. In Subversive Souvenirs, the essay subtly overwhelms the art. At the top of the “exhibition” column are three images. The first juxtaposes the Eiffel Tower with firefighters responding to the recent Paris riots. The idea is that tourist images do not represent all of reality. The next picture shows people taking photographs of the pope’s funeral. The message is that people prefer to mediate their experience rather than get it directly. There is no line between the three essay illustrations and the art that follows. In fact, the Paris pictures might be a contribution to the exhibition by the author: they closely resemble Mitch Robertson’s work. This trespass renders the exhibition images into illustrations for the essay and the whole project more closely resembles a book format than an exhibition. Instructively, these problems are not as significant in Subversive Cartographies, in which much of the art is digital. In many cases, what we see (or search for, following the prompts) are the works themselves rather than small copies. Where the Souvenirs essay screens the art through Debor- dian theory and keeps only what it recognizes, the Cartographies essay is more porous and constantly overwhelmed by the art. Ironically, the Subversive Souvenirs essay closely resembles the machinery that it critiques. The essay explains that dominant industry images — because they are visually appealing, government-funded, authoritative and well-distributed — displace competing versions. Dubious Views is a visually appealing, government-funded, and well-distributed set of images offering an authoritative version of certain artworks. Perhaps a text that deploys old-fashioned, oppositional, conspiratorial theory cannot afford to be blind to its own complicity in the image-making and contextualizing Matrix. Curators are more likely to produce new ideas if they follow the lead of the works rather than looking for theory matches that convert art into illustration.

David Garneau is an associate professor of visual arts at the University of Regina. His practice includes painting, drawing, curating, and critical writing. His solo exhibition Cowboys and Indians (and Métis?) toured Canada (2003–07).