

Thomas Swinkels
Panorama Parking
26 April – 17 May 2023

A few months ago, Thomas crammed a surgical camera into his throat. The resultant photographs are strangely charming—free of the gagging sensation that he pushed through in order to make them. One such image opens this show. In it, a pair of tiny feet appear in deep perspective between glistening teeth. The little picture is spiked with body horror. In low-fi form, it touches the spookiness of how Big Tech places surreptitiously inside of us. Together, flesh and camera become material for a sculpture made from body, technology and image, about the way we're encased by ourselves, and the secrets that those encasements hold.

In this exhibition's central work the site of sculpture is extended to cars, video surveillance, architecture, and gruesome histories of empire. Eight monitors show the respective viewpoints of as many dash cams, attached to a single car. As if through the fragmented vision of a gigantic spider we see the passing city in a dark evening light. Before long the car travels a winding path up and down the garage's ramp which, owing to the building's cylindrical form, is shaped like an enormous corkscrew. On the monitors, the car's coruscating route becomes a tumbling and twisting film noir mosaic. The un-pictured driver is a void inside the image.

Thomas came across the parking garage several months ago on a stroll through Brussels. Called the *Rotonde Castellani*, its architecture was built 150 years ago as part of a grand project to reanimate history, by way of a 360 degree panoramic painting by Charles Castellani. Prior to the advent of cinema such panoramas suffused the modernising European consciousness with memories of military victory and colonial conquest. This particular panorama showed first the Battle of Waterloo, where Napoleon I suffered his final defeat, and then the Anglo-Zulu War, in which the British Empire conquered South Africa.

By 1924, with cinemas spreading through Europe, Castellani's panorama had become redundant. It was thereupon converted to a parking garage. While the panorama drove singular visions of history into Belgian minds, Thomas's eight videos show Belgian minds and eyeballs returning to the pre-cinematic propaganda device, albeit under the banal auspices of motor-propelled city life. In this bathetic mise-en-abyme, one technology of all-seeing vision twirls within the obsolete carcass of another.

Text: Mitch Speed