

# FRIEZE



## robert(a) marshall's Mirror Images Cast a Picture of the Present

At Participant Inc, the artist presents photographic and video works that reflect on our increased reliance on digital space

S BY [SAIM DEMIRCAN](#) IN [EXHIBITION REVIEWS, US REVIEWS](#) | 21 MAY 21



Alongside artworks originally planned for inclusion in the exhibition before it was postponed due to COVID-19, robert(a) marshall has updated 'Bardo Road' with photographic and video works that have been markedly influenced by an increased reliance on screen space and diminished physical contact in the advent of the pandemic. marshall prints images on silver vinyl, Mylar and Dibond – reflective surfaces with textures that add varying degrees of opaqueness and sheen, creating differing mirroring effects.

While the exhibition's title refers to a transitional state in Tibetan Buddhist afterlife, it also points more literally to the road as a passage of travel, exemplified in a number of photographs taken from car windows. In these, mundane features of indiscernible landscapes – trees, clouds, streetlamps, pylons – appear through tinted or dirtied glass. Whilst most are titled indexically, some likely refer to actual places, such as *Reuthe* (2021) or *A Bus Window in Alberta* (2018), evoking cross-country trips. For example, looking at *Avenida de la Muerte* (2018) – a photograph of an overhead motorway sign in Mexico City pointing towards Avenue of the Dead – I imagined Robert Smithson on his road trip placing mirrors throughout the Yucatan. Yet, one of marshall's main concerns here appears to be how to capture a fleeting image.





robert(a) marshall, *Bardo Road 1*, 2021, UV curable ink on mirrored Dibond.  
 Courtesy: the artist and Participant Inc, New York

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In many of these photographs, a rearview mirror or edges of a car interior are included within the frame, introducing this sense of the fugitive – what the artist glimpses in passing. In this sense, marshall's work sits somewhere in the middle of US curator and photographer John Szarkowski's claim – posited in *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* (1978) – that photography is either a window or a mirror: marshall's are images in flux.

Several short, looped videos play on flatscreens hung amongst the photographs. Notions of reflectivity continue here, too: the artist uses a feature of Zoom to superimpose footage of themselves, moving slowly in front of the camera, onto background images. Several of the photographs that appear as backdrops were pulled from the artist's family albums – images of marshall as a child (*Double Self Portrait*, 2021) or their father (*I Enter My Father's Chest*, 2021).



robert(a) marshall, 'Bardo Road', 2021, exhibition view, Participant Inc, New York. Courtesy: the artist and Participant Inc, New York

Some of the prints on display are stills from these videos: fragmented bodies collaged together to become abstracted renderings of marshall's own spectral being occupying negative space. Elsewhere, two of these works – *New to the City (In Memory of My Desires)* and *Looking for Experience (In Memory of My Desires)* (both 2021) – are of personal ads from the gay magazine *Homo Xtra* (1991–2009), which have been photographed from a screen. It could be said that the sense of separation here is a reminder of the recently renewed risk of bodily contact that has brought about comparisons between AIDS and the COVID-19 pandemic. In this respect, these works speak to a space between the desiring subject and the image, or an imposed longing through looking. Throughout 'Bardo Road', marshall ruminates on physical separation in relation to experientiality – the presence of the photographic image in space recapitulates seeing as a somatic act. As such, marshall's imagery is liminal. Or perhaps these are 'ghost images', to use Hervé Guibert's term from his eponymous 1981 essay: something apparitional that's both there and not there in the picture.

*robert(a) marshall's 'Bardo Road' is on view at Participant Inc, New York, through 23 May 2021.*

*Main image: robert(a) marshall, 'Bardo Road', 2021, exhibition view, Participant Inc, New York. Courtesy: the artist and Participant Inc, New York*

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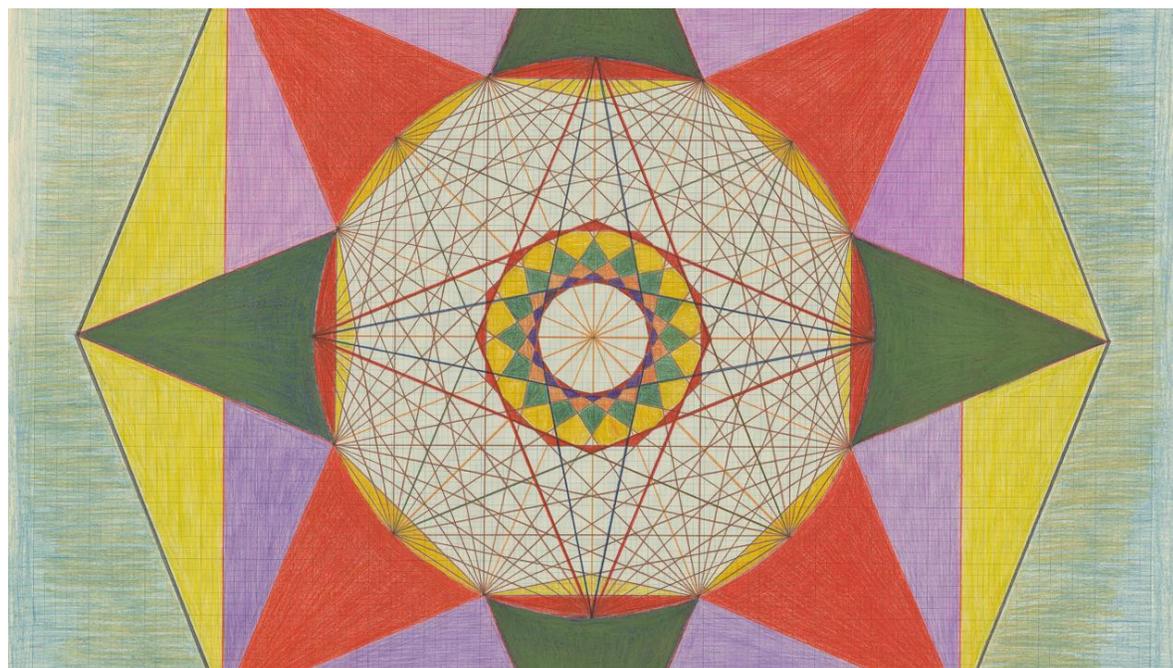
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