

## Australian Centre for Photography presents

# Joan Fontcuberta Googlegrams

One of Spain's most prominent and innovative artists, Joan Fontcuberta is best known for exploring the gaps between art, science and illusion. In this series – first exhibited in Paris in November 2005 – he has used the popular internet search engine Google to create large, colourful photo-mosaics that construct an elegant metaphor for the current era's liaisons between mass media and ideas of collective consciousness.

In many of his previous projects Joan Fontcuberta has subverted the accepted understanding of photography to create beguiling fictions that hoist the viewer by the petard of their own unquestioned assumptions. In particular, they challenge the tacit trust we place in information when it is delivered in the formats of traditional systems of meaning: the museum display, the natural history book, the newspaper article. Here he stretches the concept of the artist and of the medium of photography even further. With the artist taking no direct hand in their 'crafting', these **Googlegrams** are the product of a conceptual method and the algorithms that run the Google image search program.

The images are created by a generative process which automatically culls images from the internet. The artist's only control is to select the initial larger image to be rebuilt and to define the specific key words for the search that generates the thousands of small 'tiles' from which the mosaic is constructed. Often-challenging, the results are a synthesis of language and a search-engine code that is designed for the market to generate results that satisfy more people more often. As such Google image search prioritises images that have, on previous searches, been selected by other users.



© Joan Fontcuberta Googlegram: Homeless 2005

Like traditional mosaics, Joan Fontcuberta's **Googlegrams** can be read on two different levels: micro and macro, or individual and collective. The results, at times witty at others challenging, create a tension. It is not simply a tension between the two scales of image but between streams of information that flow in the egalitarian but fundamentally uncritical space of the internet. (Individual sites may take a critical approach to a given set of ideas, but there is no overarching hierarchy of knowledge that marshals information on the web.) The now-familiar picture of Private Lynndie England humiliating a prisoner in Abu Ghraib detention centre is built from the images of the officials involved in the scandal. The image of a homeless man sleeping the

street which begins this exhibition dissolves, on closer inspection, into portraits of the world's richest men and women.



© Joan Fontcuberta Googlegram: Abu Ghraib 2005

**JOAN FONTCUBERTA** was born in 1955 in Barcelona, where he continues to live and work. He has exhibited extensively in museums and galleries in the USA, Europe and Japan. His work is in numerous institutions, including the New York Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He contributes regularly to scholarly journals and has published many books, including *Fauna*, *Sputnik* and *Miracles and Co.*

You can try your hand at creating your own Googlegrams using the same software employed by Joan Fontcuberta to create the images on exhibition here. Follow the simple instructions on the computer console in the left-hand gallery and watch the Googlegrams build on the screen in front of you. You can also try this at home by downloading the program *MACOSaix*, an open source program developed by Frank M. Midgley, available at:

<http://homepage.mac.com/knarf/MacOSaiX>