



Ascents

Climb

Mount

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# AGENTS OF CONCERN: IMAGES AND EMPATHY

*Agents of Concern* is organised by the research group FRAME at **PXL-MAD, School of Arts & Hasselt University**, in collaboration with *KRIEG?* and CCHA. The project is made possible with support from the Flemish Government, Doctoral Schools UHasselt, M HKA, and VDB.

***How are images used to raise concerns? Why do certain images concern us more than others? And when does the image itself become a cause for concern?***

The conference and exhibition project *Agents of Concern: Images and Empathy* brings together an international group of artists and scholars to examine the complex ways in which images affect our emotional and cognitive understanding of the experiences and mental states of others.

Comprising two exhibitions—one at PXL-MAD Gallery and the other at CCHA—and two conferences, *Agents of Concern* creates a dialogue between artistic and academic ways of speaking about, with, and to images. Exploring a wide spectrum of visual strategies for evoking empathy, the conference and exhibition contributors address diverse topics including the representation of migration, images of war and political protest, sentimentality in art, contagious images on social media, colonialism, visual investigations, human rights, and the creation of visual evidence.

***Conference***

The conference starts on Thursday **November 16 at 18:00** with an evening programme featuring a lecture by Florian Göttke on the burning of images and a presentation by Miglė Bareikytė and Natasha Klimenko on images of Russia's war against Ukraine. The conference programme continues on Friday and Saturday **November 17 and 18** with lectures by Paul Bernard-Nouraud, Filip Berte & Cliona Harmey, Birgit Eusterschulte, Ira Goryainova, Claire Jones, Kasper Lægring, Antigoni Memou, Bart Moens & Anse De Weerd, Paula Muhr, Nina Valerie Kolowratnik, Dámaso Randulfe, Amir Saifullin, James Swensen, Stella Viljoen, and Andrew Warstat. The keynote lecture will be given by Christina Varvia of Forensic Architecture on Friday **November 17 at 18:00**.

***Doctoral Symposium***

The doctoral symposium on Friday **December 15** brings together a group of PhD researchers from Belgium who will respond to *Agents of Concern's* questions with reflections and observations from their ongoing research projects. Featuring contributions by Giovanna Caimmi, Charlotte Dorn, Joery Erna, Maria Gil Ulldemolins, Mona Hedayati, Toon Leën, Clarisse Michaux, Eline Valkeneers, Vincent Van Meenen, and Charlotte Vanhoubroeck.

***Exhibition I***

Exhibition I at PXL-MAD Gallery opens on Thursday **November 16 at 14:00**. It features video works by Miglė Bareikytė & Natasha Klimenko, Ana Bilbao & Emilie Flower, Reel Borders, Harun Farocki, Chloé Galibert-Laîné, Jill Godmilow, Ira A. Goryainova, Florian Göttke, Jelena Jureša, Tõnis Jürgens, Nina Valerie Kolowratnik, Rabih Mroué, Goda Palekaitė, Dámaso Randulfe, Frank Theys, and Joeri Verbesselt.

***Exhibition II***

Exhibition II will open on Sunday **November 26 at 15:00** at CCHA. Focused on photography and other lens-based art it will feature contributions by berte & harmey, Jeroen Bocken, Dirk Braeckman, Tom Callemin, Annelies de Mey, Bieke Depoorter, Geert Goiris, Tine Guns, Robin Hombrouck, Clarisse M, Vincent Meessen, Max Pinckers, Lisa Schelkens, Dominique Somers, Lore Stessel, Guus Vandeweerd, Stephan Vanfleteren, Sine Van Menxel, Sybren Vanoverberghe, Chantal Van Rijt, Bram Van Stappen, Joselito Verschaeve, Aline Verstraten, and Kristof Vrancken.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART 1

<b>CONFERENCE</b>	<b>22</b>
NOVEMBER 16–18, 2023 PXL-MAD GALLERY	

<b>DOCTORAL SYMPOSIUM</b>	<b>65</b>
DECEMBER 15, 2023 PXL-MAD GALLERY	

## PART 2

<b>EXHIBITION I</b>	<b>80</b>
NOVEMBER 16– DECEMBER 15, 2023 PXL-MAD GALLERY	

<b>EXHIBITION II</b>	<b>114</b>
NOVEMBER 26, 2023– JANUARY 28, 2024 CCHA	

# UNDERSTANDING EMPATHY: AN INTRODUCTION

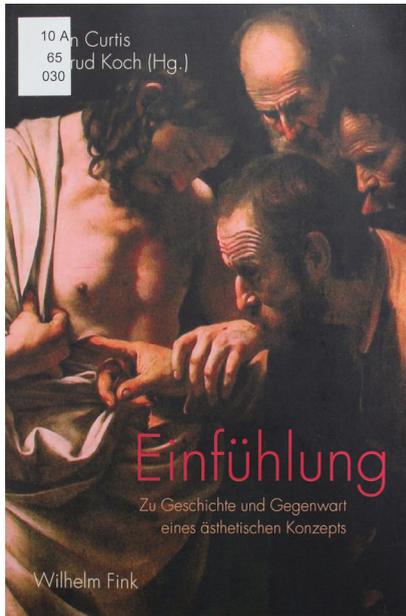
Empathy is an object of study in a wide array of disciplines across the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences and as a result it has many definitions. *Agents of Concern* uses the word empathy broadly as an umbrella term for a variety of affective and cognitive processes that allow us to understand or imagine other people's experiences or mental states, to adopt others' perspectives or match their affects and emotions, and even to feel our way into non-human entities, animals, objects, artworks, or landscapes. Through an exhibition and a conference, *Agents of Concern* aims to explore the role of images in these processes, suggesting there is such a thing as 'image-mediated' empathy. The project asks how images affect our understanding of others and how images are used to raise concerns or to provoke us into action. It examines these questions both from an artistic and an academic perspective by creating a dialogue between different ways of speaking about and with images. In order to facilitate this conversation, the following introduction proposes a partial overview of concepts and terms to help situate the complicated notion of empathy. It aims to prepare the ground for a differentiated discussion, while also articulating some of the thinking that guided the selection of video works for the exhibition at PXL-MAD.

## *Degrees of Empathic Response*

Our empathic response to other people has different degrees of complexity and intensity. To elaborate on this simple observation we can draw on the distinctions between **higher- and lower-level empathy** that literary scholars Aleida Assmann and Ines Detmers have defined. At its most basic level, the empathic response is almost automatic or instinctive, it doesn't demand a conscious effort—it is 'hardly more than a somatic reflex.' The second and third level feature increasingly complex cognitive operations that require imagination. At the third level, the 'imaginative incorporation of the other's perspective' is accompanied by a 'conscious reflection on the state of the other.' A fourth stage is reached when these acts of imagination also lead to 'active responses' and 'pro-social feelings are transformed into pro-social actions.' Lastly, the fifth stage 'mark[s] the transcendence of empathic feelings and acts over social borders and barriers'—a kind of empathy that also concerns those who have no obvious similarities to the empathising person.<sup>1</sup>

When considering the role of images as mediators in empathic processes, this distinction between various levels of empathic engagement can offer a useful model of analysis. If a smiling face on a billboard makes you smile back, this empathic response can be understood as rather basic and automatic. Whereas, if news footage of war victims in a faraway country makes you drop everything to join the fight against the victims' aggressors, your response clearly indicates a higher level of empathy—and it would be fair to assume that the image operations that cause or facilitate such far-reaching empathic acts are equally complex.

Equally, if you lived in a time without screens and a sudden post-mortem apparition of Jesus encouraged you to stick your finger into his mysteriously reanimated corpse, both the sophisticated visual appearance itself and your ambiguous response to it would probably score quite high on the complexity-scale of empathy. It is not surprising, therefore, that Caravaggio's depiction of this very scene, that occurred to Saint Thomas, found its way onto the cover of a volume of essays exploring empathy as an aesthetic concept.<sup>2</sup>



Robin Curtis, Gertrud Koch (eds.),  
*Einführung: Zu Geschichte und Gegenwart  
 eines ästhetischen Konzepts*,  
 Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008

The apostle's gesture expresses both a desire to *feel his way into* Christ and an urge to examine the potential illusionism of Christ's resurrection-performance. Thomas feels compelled to investigate: is this indeed the living Jesus or just an animated reproduction? Piercing the surface—the skin—of the image in front of him, he appears to ask, is there really a body like my own inside this other person?

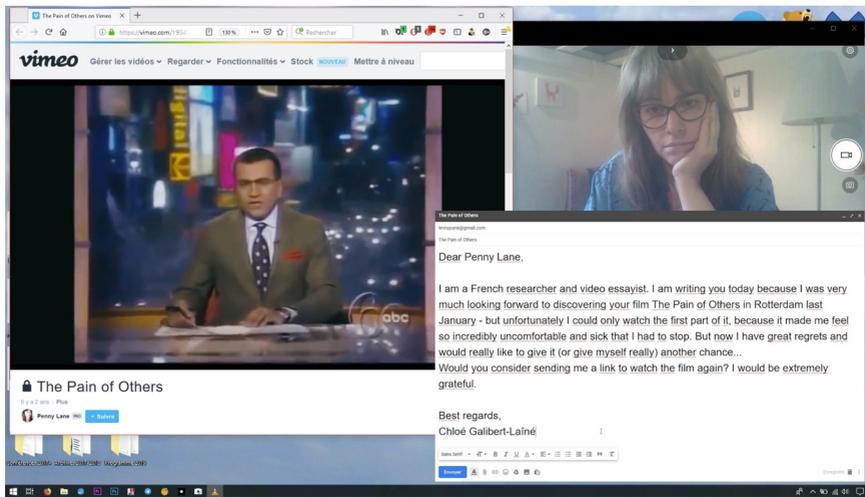
Thomas' inquisitive gesture aptly illustrates a question that underlies all research on empathy: how do we get access to someone else's inner self? What tools do we have for entering someone's mind *and* body, as it is suggested in the French expression *se mettre dans la peau de quelqu'un*.<sup>3</sup> How do we gain reliable knowledge about others in terms of their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and intentions? In contrast to an objective or 'third-person' perspective, empathy 'involves representations from a first-person point of view,' philosopher Amy Coplan argues. As an epistemological tool, empathy can provide us with an 'understanding of another person from the "inside."<sup>4</sup>

### ***Imitation, Projection, Imagination***

There are different concepts of how exactly we acquire insider knowledge of another person. In the last decades of the twentieth century, philosophers of mind advanced two competing models for what they call 'mindreading.' First there was the so-called '**theory theory**,' which emphasises an understanding of the other based on theoretical or logical reasoning. Then came '**simulation theory**,' which foregrounds our capacity to imagine ourselves in someone else's situation. While the former model is about how we process 'if... then' deductions, the latter is about how we create 'as if' scenarios for our own selves. As philosopher Andrea Pinotti summarises the distinction, 'To simulate the other person in myself, I understand what I would do if I were inside him/her, *as if* I were the other.'<sup>5</sup>

Such a process of simulation is usually referred to in psychology as **perspective taking**. Heidi Maibom defines this concept as 'a form of introspection via (partial) identification.'<sup>6</sup> An important distinction here is whether your imaginative efforts are '**self-oriented**' or '**other-oriented**,' meaning that you can either imagine how you *yourself* would feel in another person's situation, or how you would feel if you actually were that *other* person in his or her situation—which may be more complicated to work out accurately.<sup>7</sup>

The complex acts of imagination that enable us to understand, match, or share someone's emotions or affects in a conscious manner are facilitated by underlying neural mechanisms that humans share with other mammals.<sup>8</sup> Mechanisms like **motor mimicry** (yawning when others yawn, for instance) or **emotional contagion** (the automatic matching of another's affect) seem to be part of the evolutionary biological equipment with which we navigate intersubjective relations. Recent developments in neuroscience have led certain scholars to emphasise the importance of 'intercorporeality' to explain how we gain 'access to the "interior" of others.'<sup>9</sup> When we perceive someone performing a certain 'motor action,' like reaching for a cup of coffee with the intention of drinking it, the activation of so-called mirror neurons



Chloé Galibert-Lainé's video essay *Watching the Pain of Others* (2018) reflects on mechanisms of emotional contagion that certain vlogging practices on YouTube seem to thrive on. The work is about a mysterious disease that seems to be transmitted mainly through images, and through the activities of a number of vloggers who eagerly share the self-diagnoses of its symptoms that manifest on their (and potentially their viewers') skin.

produces a simulation of that action in our own motor system—'as if' we were doing it ourselves. Vittorio Gallese, one of the neuroscientists who pioneered the research on mirror neurons, speaks therefore of 'embodied simulation' as 'the basis of our faculty of imagination.'<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding these biological foundations, empathy is first and foremost a cultural phenomenon—something that is 'learned and practiced,' as Fritz Breithaupt argues.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, rather than examining how we spontaneously activate it, Breithaupt focuses on how we *control* our empathic inclinations in processes of suppression and re-activation.<sup>12</sup> Fascinated by its embeddedness in narrative structures, he defines empathy as a form of '**coexperience**,' during which you project yourself in the situation of another person—almost as if you found yourself playing their part in a complex, open-ended scenario. Instead of looking at empathy as



Frank Theys' video work *Milgram Rewoken* (2023) documents an experiment conducted at the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience in Amsterdam. The study asked whether seeing facial expressions of pain would cause different (empathy-related) neural responses in viewers depending on the degree of responsibility they had for the electroshocks that caused the other person's pain.

something that only takes place between two persons, Breithaupt widens the relational field in which he sees 'narrative empathy' at play. He looks specifically at conflict situations, in which we, as observers, are prone to taking sides between two parties. He suggests that such 'side taking' (rather than 'identification') plays a crucial role in how we experience empathy, reminding us of the fact that our empathic involvement is always selective. In other words, we can choose to empathise with the wrong person while rejecting empathy for others—a mechanism that can play a role in increasing polarisation.

Arguing that our capacity for empathy generally serves ourselves more than those with whom we empathise, Breithaupt developed a keen eye for the 'dark sides of empathy'—the title of his 2017 book on the subject. Besides exploring evil sounding aberrations including 'empathic sadism' and 'vampiristic empathy,' Breithaupt also describes how the empathic self can be led to fall into an

‘admiration trap,’ and how the dynamics between (excessive) empathy and a frail or troubled sense of identity can lead to a potential ‘self-loss.’ Others, who see a ‘clear self–other differentiation’ as an essential criterium for what empathy is, would of course just consider this to be the outcome of a failed type of empathy.

It seems that with each act of empathic involvement, we risk having to recalibrate the differentiation between our sense of self and our sense of the other. Following Pinotti, who sees the ‘tension between intersubjectivity and solipsism’ reflected in how different conceptualisations of empathy relate to each other, one could argue that our definition of empathy reveals something about how we understand the dynamic relation between the self and the other.<sup>13</sup>

Rabih Mroué’s ‘non-academic lecture’ *On Three Posters* (2004), displayed as a video work in the exhibition at PXL-MAD, raises similar questions about the entanglement of identity and imitation while employing a strategy of ‘perspective taking.’ The lecture centres on Jamal al-Sati, a member of the Lebanese Communist Party who joined the Lebanese National Resistance Front in the early 1980s to fight against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. In 1985, he became a martyr by carrying out a suicide attack against the Israeli army. Just before the mission, a video testimony was recorded in which he declared himself ‘the martyr comrade Jamal Sati.’ Through this declaration al-Sati projected his living self onto an imagined martyrdom. The video thus allows us to read his self-sacrifice as an act of imitation, and—as he went on to actually carry out the suicide mission—as a fatal gesture of extreme perspective taking.

Mroué, who was fascinated with this ‘image act,’ and with the paradox of declaring oneself dead while still being alive, used the video of al-Sati’s testimony in a theatre performance, co-created with Elias Khoury in September 2000. The piece started with a staged recording of a testimony by a fictional resistance fighter, played by Mroué himself. By adopting the perspective of a martyr



Rabih Mroué, *On Three Posters*, 2004/2021, video still

in this theatrical setting, Mroué blurred the boundaries between imagination and reality, and drew attention to the ‘fabrication of truth’ in al-Sati’s video.<sup>14</sup> The performance urged the viewer to reflect on the ambiguities in the construction of the image of martyrdom—and on how the self-denying emotional identification with that image can be exploited by political leaders.

### *Questioning the Empathic Gaze*

If empathy is a tool that allows us to feel our way into other people, it certainly is an unreliable and inaccurate instrument. While it is clear that empathy plays a crucial role in how ‘humans and other mammals’ behave socially, several scholars in the past decade have challenged the widespread view that empathy can provide a foundation for moral judgement. For Jade E. Davis, empathy is an ideological construct, a dehumanising illusion. In *The Other Side of Empathy*, she argues that technologically mediated empathy distorts our relation to the Other by ‘recreating oppression’ and ‘ensur[ing] that some people are only understood as suffering.’<sup>15</sup>

Uncovering the **colonial gaze**, which inhabits both archival photographs of ‘human zoos’ and recent virtual-reality projects that promise to ‘enhance empathy,’ Davis points out that ‘**empathy culture**’ is in fact harmful. It embodies ‘a colonial sentimentality based on missionary thinking.’<sup>16</sup> The empathic gaze not only reduces the Other to a passive object but also alienates the self. For Davis, decolonising empathy would mean discarding the term and replacing it with a ‘mutual recognition,’ which entails ‘accepting without understanding,’ and ‘recognizing that the Otherness is mutual.’<sup>17</sup>

In this regard it is interesting that the term empathy has its origins in German philosophy, more specifically in the notion of *Einfühlung*. It was psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener who introduced the word ‘empathy’ as a neologism in a text from 1909. Titchener used the word to describe how certain abstract concepts were not only rendered into visual images by his mind’s eye, but were also made palpable by his ‘mind’s muscles.’ Nothing spectacular, he claimed, just ‘a simple case of empathy, if we may coin that term as a rendering of *Einfühlung*.’<sup>18</sup>

Among philosophers in late nineteenth-century Germany, *Einfühlungsästhetik* was a popular school of thought that approached the aesthetic object not as determined by intrinsic formal qualities, but as constituted by the viewer’s physiological and psychological response to it.<sup>19</sup> Philosopher Robert Vischer coined the term *Einfühlung* in 1873, in an attempt to theorise how viewers establish emotional contact with objects. For Vischer, *Einfühlung* was the ‘unconscious **projection** of one’s own bodily form and of one’s soul into the form of an object.’<sup>20</sup> Expressing a ‘pantheistic urge for union with the world,’ the process of *Einfühlung*—subdivided into sensorial and kinaesthetic variants—allowed our sense of self to be ‘transferred and transformed’ into a lifeless form or a ‘non-self.’<sup>21</sup> This merging of subject and object was to be understood as more than ‘a simple projection.’ The viewer’s ego ‘actually penetrates the phenomenal object,’ as Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou emphasised in the introduction to their translation of Vischer’s text.<sup>22</sup>



The story of Pygmalion exemplifies the mechanism of empathic projection. The self projects its own sense of vitality on a lifeless statue, thus animating it through a joint operation of imagination and desire, only to then take advantage of the imagined other by harassing her. Hashtag *objectified self-enjoyment*.

Anne Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1813–19, Louvre, Paris

In the first decade of the twentieth century, *Einfühlungsästhetik*’s most influential proponent was philosophy professor Theodor Lipps. For Lipps, *ästhetische Einfühlung* was an instinctive mental activity through which a relation was established between subject and object that allowed the latter to resonate in the former and vice versa.<sup>23</sup> Prefiguring neurobiological theories of simulation, Lipps’ thinking was based on the idea that the body’s outward movements ‘have an inside’ as well. He understood *Einfühlung* as a form of imitation that is directed inwards. It is thanks to this ‘inner movement’ that we can empathise with an aesthetic object, a line, a gesture, an architectural form, or another person. To make clear how the ‘inside of imitation’ (*die Innenseite der Nachahmung*) was activated, Lipps gave the example of what happens when we witness acrobatic acts.<sup>24</sup> He argued that while we are ‘carrying out’ the acrobat’s movements in our mind, our consciousness transports us ‘up there’; ‘not next to the acrobat, but right there were he is’—inside of the acrobat.<sup>25</sup> Having thus ‘permeated’ the aesthetic object (or the image of the other), the self experiences an identification that allows it to ‘enjoy’ its sense of self in the object of contemplation. This led Lipps to define aesthetic pleasure as ‘objectified self-enjoyment.’<sup>26</sup>

For art historian Wilhelm Worringer, who responded to Lipps' theories in his 1907 dissertation, the aesthetic experience of being 'absorbed into an external object' had to be understood in terms of a desire for **self-estrangement** (*Selbstentäußerung*).<sup>27</sup> This desire manifested itself in different gradations in between two poles, which he identified as empathy versus abstraction. The urge for empathy expressed a desire to lose oneself in a trusted, *seemingly* self-affirming externality, while the urge for abstraction involved a desire to 'seek deliverance from the unpredictability of humanity as a whole, from the seeming arbitrariness of organic existence, in the contemplation of something that is inevitable and unshakeable.'<sup>28</sup>

By framing the aesthetic encounter as defined by a form of alienation rather than by an actual expansion of the self, Worringer pioneered a critique of a type of empathy culture that appreciates art mainly in light of emotional identification. He theorised about the value of artistic positions that are not comfortably at home in the world, that take a distance from reality, and—out of a fundamental 'spiritual fear of space'—distrust the natural appearances of the world.<sup>29</sup> Such artistic strategies do not seek aesthetic satisfaction in naturalism, in organic forms that express vitality, or in the projection of one-ness with the external world, but rather in a transcendental inclination to create 'life-denying,' geometric and abstract forms.<sup>30</sup>

Worringer's art historical thesis resonated with avant-garde artists of his time, some of whom (like Wassily Kandinsky) were on their way to embracing pure abstract form. The activity of *Einfühlung* came to be associated with a passive form of spectatorship and with 'bourgeois entertainment,' as opposed to artistic practices that agitated viewers in order to make them critically engage with the world.<sup>31</sup> For example, in Bertolt Brecht's didactic and critical theatre of the 1930s, actors were instructed to avoid empathising with their characters. Rather, they had to adopt an attitude of distance in order to evoke the right type of emotions in the theatre's spectators. Empathy had to be replaced with estrangement (*Verfremdung*).



Harun Farocki, *Nicht löschesbares Feuer*, 1969, film still © Harun Farocki GbR

Brecht's rejection of empathy was embraced by the filmmaker Harun Farocki, whose early work *Nicht löschesbares Feuer* (*Inextinguishable Fire*) forms an important point of reference in our exhibition. Farocki's short film was made between December 1968 and February 1969 in response to the Vietnam war. Remarkably, it starts with an opening sequence that manages to reactivate the critical potential of staging empathy. Addressing the viewer in a pose similar to that of a newsreader, Farocki reads a statement by a Vietnamese citizen testifying about the effects of a napalm attack on his village. After explaining that his film can only give us 'a vague idea of how napalm works,' he reaches for a cigarette and puts it out on his arm. The scene symbolises the principle of empathy while also demonstrating its limits with regard to images of war. A voiceover comments: 'If viewers want nothing to do with the effects of napalm, then they should investigate what they have to do with the reasons for its use.'

Discovering *Inextinguishable Fire* in the early nineties, more than twenty years after it was released, US-filmmaker Jill Godmilow was so 'stunned' by the film that in the following years she delved deeper into it in a way that can only be described as radically empathetic: she created an American imitation of Farocki's work, shot in Kodachrome colours, in contrast to the German black-and-white original.<sup>32</sup> Like Farocki, Godmilow used 'mostly friends and university colleagues' as actors and instructed them to say their lines with as little emotion as possible, afterwards dubbing their voices asynchronously to add a layer of Brechtian estrangement.<sup>33</sup> Here and there, Godmilow superimposed brief excerpts of Farocki's film onto her footage, as ghostly reminders that there was another film behind her own—and as a way to invite comparison.

One difference worth noting is evident in the way Godmilow dealt with the opening sequence: Farocki chose to extinguish the cigarette on *himself*, as the filmmaker, whereas Godmilow tasked an actor with this act of self-mutilation. Rather than posing as Farocki's direct counterpart in this iconic scene, she decided to appear only at the end of the film, to explain her motivations, making it clear that her copying gesture was less an act of appropriation than one of education. In a five-minute epilogue Godmilow reflects on the merits of Farocki's film: 'We could call it, maybe, agit-prop,' she says. Instead of the 'pornography of the real,' which so often 'seduces' the audience of documentaries into a kind of catharsis, Farocki's film offers 'real analysis and real provocation. ... It seeks to agitate, to stir things up, and then to propagate, to plant some new seeds.' Its purpose is 'to renegotiate the terms of the discussion, and to redirect it toward the cold facts of hard reality.'

At first sight, presenting viewers with the 'cold facts,' with hard evidence, may not necessarily produce an instinctive empathic gaze. However, faced as we are today with a visual culture that is so virulently pervaded by 'alternative' facts, disinformation, and conspiracy theories, how do we know which images are worth our empathy? We are surrounded by emotionally charged images that are decontextualised, manipulated, or even entirely generated by AI. Therefore, the question that arises is what value can our



Master of the Saint Bartholomew Altarpiece, Saint Thomas Altarpiece, ca. 1495–1500 (detail), Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne

empathic gaze have if it is not at all times accompanied by a sceptical, investigative gaze? Over the past decade, organisations like Forensic Architecture and Bellingcat have developed highly creative practices to turn scattered visual material into evidence, to add context, and to establish facts. Their transparent methods of visual investigation complement the work of 'traditional' journalists, and they activate growing networks of 'online sleuths' that weigh against the toxic operations of what Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins calls the 'counterfactual community.'<sup>34</sup>

If we return once more to Saint Thomas' exploration of Jesus' side wound, it becomes clear that the saint not only represents an empathic spectator but also a forensic detective. He is the personification of a committed investigator, delving into the visual traces of a human-rights violation. Today, 'open-source investigators' prod at society's open wounds with a similar combination of empathy towards victims of state violence and scepticism towards the images they encounter as they plough the internet in search for clues about what exactly happened. The images and video footage gathered from social media may reveal

factual truths only if they are thoroughly examined, geolocated, verified, and contextualised. Arguably, it is only with the help of such investigative practices, which give us the ‘cold facts of hard reality,’ that we can develop an accurate form of ‘image-mediated’ empathy.

In 2008, Farocki offered a tentative reappraisal of the term *Einführung*. It was ‘too nice of a word to let the opposing side have it,’ he wrote. ‘It has a taste of transgression. A combination of “penetration” and “sympathy.” A somewhat violent involvement. It should be possible to empathise in such a way that it results in estrangement.’<sup>35</sup>

It is clear that being touched by an image is not enough, we have to poke it back. Yet, assembling visual material into hard evidence is not the only way to critically address how images direct our empathic gaze. In reorienting our gaze, artistic, self-reflexive, or ambiguous employments of visual strategies like projection, imitation, and imagination are complementary to factual investigations. The various examples of such practices detailed in the talks and artworks featured in *Agents of Concern* demonstrate the different ways of probing into the mechanisms behind image-mediated empathy and of countering the biases and inaccuracies that inhabit it.

Toon Leën

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- 2 Robin Curtis, Gertrud Koch (eds.), *Einführung: Zu Geschichte und Gegenwart eines ästhetischen Konzepts*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008
- 3 Andrea Pinotti, *L'Empathie: Histoire d'une idée de Platon au posthumain*, VRIN, 2016, 24.
- 4 Amy Coplan, ‘Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects,’ in Amy Coplan, Peter Goldie (eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 18.
- 5 Pinotti, *L'Empathie*, 29.
- 6 Heidi L. Maibom, *The Space Between: How Empathy Really Works*, Oxford University Press, 2022, 29.
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- 8 Frans de Waal, Stephanie Preston, ‘Mammalian Empathy: Behavioural Manifestations and Neural Basis’ in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, Volume 18, August 2017, 498–509.
- 9 Vittorio Gallese, Michele Guerra, *The Empathic Screen: Cinema and Neuroscience*, Oxford University Press, 2020, 5, 33.
- 10 Gallese, Guerra, *The Empathic Screen*, 9.
- 11 Fritz Breithaupt, *Die dunklen Seiten der Empathie*, Suhrkamp, 2019 [2017], 12.
- 12 Fritz Breithaupt, *Kulturen der Empathie*, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012 [2009], 114.
- 13 Pinotti, *L'Empathie*, 53.
- 14 Rabih Mroué, Elias Khoury, ‘Three Posters: A Performance/Video,’ in *TDR: The Drama Review*, 50:3, 2006
- 15 Jade E. Davis, *The Other Side of Empathy*, Duke University Press, 2023, 96–97.
- 16 Davis, *The Other Side*, 9.
- 17 Davis, *The Other Side*, 36, 97.
- 18 Edward Bradford Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes*, The Macmillan Company, 1909, 21–22.
- 19 Thomas Petraschka, *Einführung: Theorie und Kulturgeschichte einer ästhetischen Denkfigur 1770-1930*, Brill, 2023, 23; Pinotti, *L'Empathie*, 158.
- 20 Robert Vischer, *Über das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik*, Hermann Credner, 1873, vii, 20.
- 21 Robert Vischer, *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics* [1873], in Harry Francis Mallgrave, Eleftherios Ikonou (eds.), *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics 1873–1893*, The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994, 109.
- 22 Mallgrave, Ikonou, *Empathy, Form, and Space*, 25.
- 23 Theodor Lipps, ‘Einführung und ästhetischer Genuß’ [1906], in *Theodor Lipps, Schriften zur Einführung* (ed. Faustino Fabbianelli), Ergon Verlag, 2018, 234–235.
- 24 Theodor Lipps, ‘Einführung, Mensch und Naturdinge’ [1903] in *Theodor Lipps, Schriften zur Einführung* (ed. Faustino Fabbianelli), Ergon Verlag, 2018, 70.
- 25 Lipps, ‘Einführung, Mensch,’ 71.
- 26 Lipps, ‘Einführung und ästhetischer Genuß,’ 229.
- 27 Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einführung*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007 [1908], 89.
- 28 Worringer, *Abstraktion*, 88.
- 29 Wilhelm Worringer, ‘Von Transzendenz und Immanenz in der Kunst’ [1911] in *Abstraktion und Einführung*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007, 170–171.
- 30 Worringer, *Abstraktion*, 72.
- 31 Juliet Koss, ‘On the Limits of Empathy,’ in *The Art Bulletin*, Volume 88, No. 1, March 2006, 139–157.
- 32 Jill Godmilow, *Kill the Documentary: A Letter to Filmmakers, Students, and Scholars*, Columbia University Press, 2022, 47–48.
- 33 Jennifer Horne, Jonathan Kahana, ‘A Perfect Replica: An interview with Harun Farocki and Jill Godmilow,’ in *Afterimage*, November/December 1998, 12–14.
- 34 Eliot Higgins, *We Are Bellingcat*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, 114.
- 35 Harun Farocki, ‘Einführung’ [2008], in Volker Pantenburg (ed.), *Harun Farocki: Lerne das Einfachste! Texte 2001–2014. Schriften. Band 6*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2022, 267–268.

# CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

THURSDAY  
NOVEMBER 16  
14:00–20:30

PXL-MAD GALLERY  
ELFDE-LINIESTRAAT 25  
3500 HASSELT

14:00 **EXHIBITION OPENING**

16:00 Opening drink

## **OPENING PROGRAMME**

18:00 *Introduction*  
Erwin Goegebeur, Professor Bert Willems,  
Pieter Vermeulen, Toon Leën

18:25 *Burning Images: Performing Resemblance*  
Dr Florian Göttke

### Q&A

Moderator: Dr Ying Sze Pek

19:15 *Images and Objects: Russia's War  
against Ukraine*  
Professor Miglė Bareikytė  
Natasha Klimenko

### *Panel discussion*

Dr Mykola Homanyuk  
Dr Bohdan Shumylovych  
Dr Denys Shatalov

FRIDAY  
NOVEMBER 17  
09:00–20:00

09:00 REGISTRATION & COFFEE

09:20 *Introduction*  
Toon Leën

**DEMONSTRATING CONCERNS**

09:30 *Sentimental Pictures Between  
beweeglijkheid and Einfühlung:  
Towards a Definition*  
Dr Kasper Lægning

10:15 *Sculpting Empathy: Representing the  
Destitute in Nineteenth-Century British  
Sculpture*  
Dr Claire Jones

11:00 COFFEE BREAK

11:15 *Imagineering Empathy: Empathic Projection  
with the Optical Lantern (1880–1920)*  
Anse De Weerd  
Dr Bart G. Moens

*Panel discussion*  
Moderator: Professor Nadia Sels

12:30 LUNCH BREAK

**POLITICS OF PROJECTION**

13:40 *Envisioned Projection and Projected Vision:  
The Agency of the Image in Early Soviet Art Praxis*  
Amir Saifullin

14:25 *With these Hands: An Examination of the  
Context and Legacy of Russell Lee's Most  
Famous and Most Empathetic Photograph:  
The Gnarled Hands of Theresia Ostermeyer*  
Professor James R. Swensen

15:05 COFFEE BREAK

15:20 *The Semiotics of the Kitchen*  
Professor Stella Viljoen

*Panel discussion*  
Moderator: Dr Tom Lambeens

16:30 COFFEE BREAK

16:45 *A Film Jar—On the Questions of Power  
and Innocence in Documentary Film Practice*  
Dr Ira Goryainova

17:30 COFFEE BREAK

**KEYNOTE LECTURE**

18:00 *Counter Shots*  
Christina Varvia, Forensic Architecture

19:30 Q&A  
Moderator: Professor Liesbeth Huybrechts

SATURDAY  
NOVEMBER 18  
09:00–17:00

09:00 REGISTRATION & COFFEE

09:20 *Introduction*  
Toon Leën

**VISUALISING MIGRATION**

09:30 *'Composite Images' and Counter-Forensics*  
Dr Antigonis Memou

10:10 *Presenting or Representing: Artistic Empathy  
to the Test of Contemporary Migrations*  
Dr Paul Bernard-Nouraud

10:50 COFFEE BREAK

11:10 *BIAŁO\_REC*  
berte & harmey

*Panel discussion*  
Moderator: Toon Leën

12:20 LUNCH BREAK

**CREATING COUNTER-IMAGES**

13:20 *Talking Back to History: Violent Pasts  
and the Politics of Representation in the  
Work of Nnenna Onuoha and Belinda  
Kazeem-Kamiński*  
Dr Birgit Eusterschulte

14:05 *Images as Empathic Agents in the Current  
Neuroimaging Research on Hysteria/FND*  
Dr Paula Muhr

14:45 COFFEE BREAK

15:05 *Eyes That Do Not See*  
Dámaso Randulfe

15:50 *Seeing with Your Own Eyes? When the  
Inter-American Court of Human Rights  
Visits Indigenous Territories*  
Nina Valerie Kolowratnik

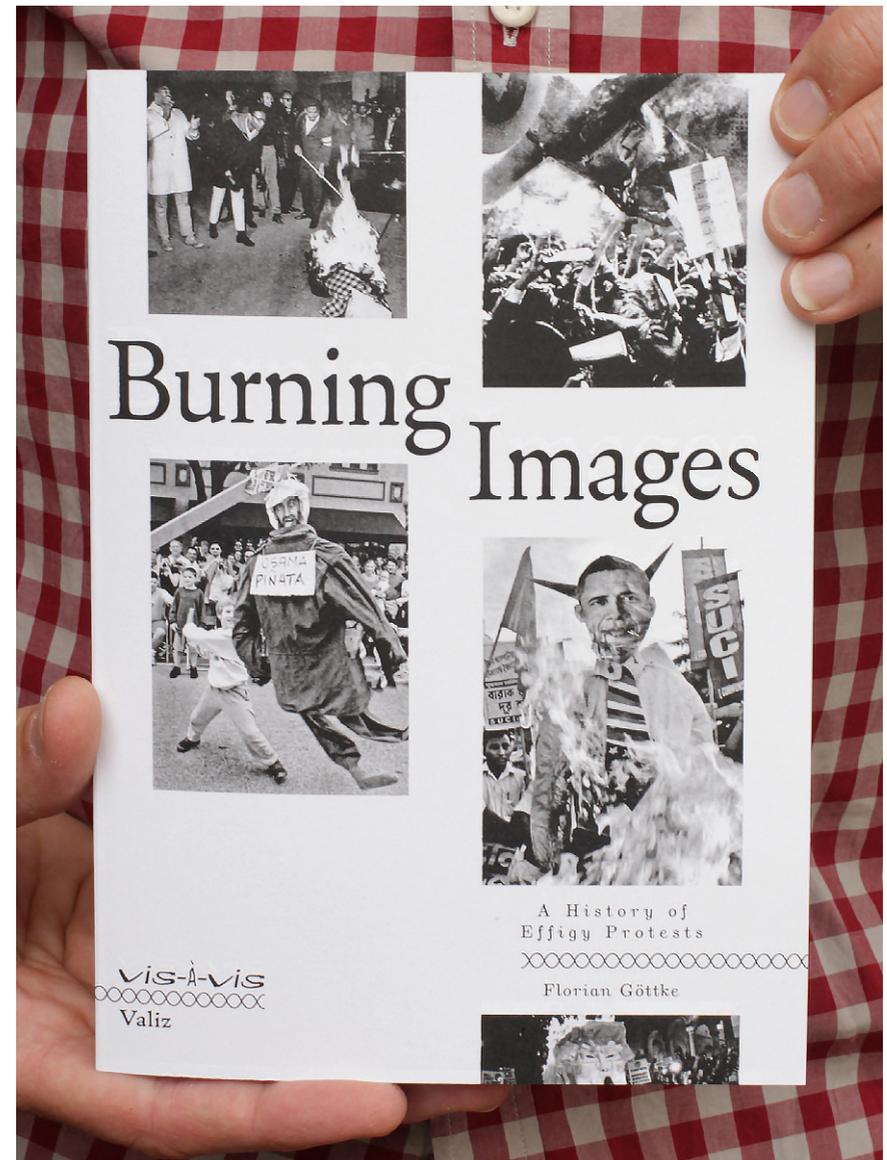
*Panel discussion*  
Moderator: Dr Maria Gil Ulldemolins

# BURNING IMAGES: PERFORMING RESEMBLANCE

Dr Florian Göttke  
University of Amsterdam & Dutch Art Institute

It has often been argued that people's empathetic (or antipathetic) response to images stems from images' visual resemblance to their 'prototype.' Drawing from my research on the use of effigies in political protest, I argue that it is not the perception of lifelikeness, but rather conventions governing these theatrical protest performances that compel people to engage in make-believe, to act as if these images were alive, and to experience and express feelings towards them.

**Florian Göttke** is a visual artist, researcher, and educator based in Amsterdam. He investigates the functioning of public images and their relationship to social memory, politics, and violence, combining visual modes of research (collecting, close reading, and image montage) with academic research. Göttke received his PhD from the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam on the peculiar practice of hanging or burning effigies—scarecrow-like puppets representing politicians—as a form of political protest. His dissertation, under the title *Burning Images: A History of Effigy Protests* (Valiz, 2021), combines two discursive narratives: a linear text and a parallel assemblage of images. Image narrative and text are like the two voices in a musical composition, each in turn taking the lead to introduce themes, structure the work, direct the reader, halt attention, or accelerate the flow.



© Florian Göttke

# IMAGES AND OBJECTS: RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

Professor Miglė Bareikytė  
European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)

Natasha Klimenko  
Freie Universität Berlin

Panel discussion (participating virtually):  
Dr Mykola Homanyuk  
Kherson State University

Dr Bohdan Shumylovych  
Center for Urban History, L'viv

Dr Denys Shatalov  
Centre for Advanced Study Sofia

The video essay *Images and Objects: Russia's War against Ukraine* explores the possibilities and boundaries of an empathic gaze, while providing a personal engagement with various forms of visual representation in the context of multi-sensory warfare. Using art and documentation by Ukrainian practitioners, *Images and Objects* explores the participants' personal or academic relationship to images, monuments, museums, and environments in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. This video is made in collaboration with Mykola Homanyuk, Svitlana Matviyenko, Gintautas Mažeikis, Denys Shatalov, Bohdan Shumylovych and features artworks by Kateryna Lisovenko, Mykyta Lyskov, and Danylo Movchan.

Following the screening of *Images and Objects*, Natasha Klimenko and Miglė Bareikytė will be in conversation with Mykola Homanyuk, Bohdan Shumylovych, and Denys Shatalov, who will join them virtually from Ukraine.

A wrapped-up Pushkin statue in Kryvyi Rih,  
Ukraine, March 2023 © Denys Shatalov



**Miglė Bareikytė** holds the Chair for Digital Studies at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), where she is a dual member of the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences and the European New School of Digital Studies (ENS). Her research focuses on digital war sensing, media geopolitics, and algorithmic accountability, with a particular focus on Central and Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine and Lithuania.

**Natasha Klimenko** is a PhD researcher at the Graduate School Global Intellectual History at the Freie Universität Berlin and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research looks at the transregional artist networks operating in Soviet Central Asia in the first half of the twentieth century, with a focus on the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic.

**Mykola Homanyuk** is a sociologist, geographer, and theatre maker. He defended his PhD thesis in sociology at V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine. Currently, he is an associate professor at Kherson State University, Ukraine. His research interests centre on the politics of memory, critical toponymics, ethnic studies, and documentary.

**Bohdan Shumylovych** studied art history at the L'viv National Academy of Arts, Ukraine and modern history at the Central European University in Budapest. In 2020 he received his PhD from the European University Institute in Florence. He is a researcher at the L'viv Center for Urban History, where he works on media history in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union.

**Denys Shatalov** obtained his PhD in history in 2016. Following the beginning of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war he started his research project *'That War' and 'This War': The Entanglement and Interaction of the Imagination, Commemoration and Memory of World War II and the Ongoing War in Ukraine*. He is a fellow of the Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship programme at the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia, Bulgaria.

# SENTIMENTAL PICTURES BETWEEN *BEWEEGLIJKHEID* AND *EINFÜHLUNG*: TOWARDS A DEFINITION

Dr Kasper Lægning  
Aarhus University

For the modernist avant-gardes, as well as for an art history moulded in its image, it seemed self-evident that sentimentality was a bad thing, both ethically and aesthetically. Lately, however, theorists have begun to revisit the sentimental art of the nineteenth century, and to question the claims that sentimental works of art can have no share in empathy. Using two key terms related to empathy in a phenomenological sense—*beweeglijkheid* and *Einfühlung*—this paper seeks to deepen our understanding of what sentimentality in painting entails.

**Kasper Lægning** is a theorist of architecture and the arts and is currently a New Carlsberg Postdoctoral Fellow in art history at Aarhus University, Denmark. He holds degrees in architecture (PhD, Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture; MSc, University of Pennsylvania) and art history (Mag.art., University of Copenhagen). His research interests broadly include emotions and empathy in painting, meaning in architecture, and modernism and postmodernism in urbanism. He has lectured, chaired conference sessions, and published widely on these topics. He is a contributor to *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries* (Brill/Rodopi, 2016–22) and *The Contested Territory of Architectural Theory* (Routledge, 2022), and his monograph *Nelson Goodman and Modern Architecture: A Belated Encounter* is forthcoming with Routledge. Together with Wayne Franits, he will be editing a themed issue of *Gouden Eeuw: New Perspectives on Dutch Seventeenth-Century Art* on emotions in Dutch seventeenth-century art.



Peter Julius Larsen, *Two Poor Children*, 1845,  
The National Gallery of Denmark

# SCULPTING EMPATHY: REPRESENTING THE DESTITUTE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH SCULPTURE

Dr Claire Jones  
University of Birmingham

This paper identifies a shift in sculpture in nineteenth-century Britain: an attempt by sculptors to represent aspects of modern life, which in turn enabled new subjects, narratives, and experiences to be articulated in sculpture. I focus on sculptures of the poor and destitute. I explore how these sculptures addressed lived contemporary experience, with the intention of prompting an empathetic connection between the viewer and the represented subject, and how they might also form a potential space for empathy today.

**Claire Jones** is associate professor in art history at the University of Birmingham, UK. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century sculpture, with a particular emphasis on the intersection of sculpture and the decorative, as well as discourses of making, display, and creative engagements with historic art. Publications include *Sculptors and Design Reform in France, 1848 to 1895: Sculpture and the Decorative Arts* (Ashgate, 2014); and *Sculpture and the Decorative in Britain and Europe: Seventeenth Century to Contemporary* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), co-edited with Imogen Hart. She is currently completing her next book, *Victorian Sculpture: In Pursuit of Modern Sentiment*, which explores how sculptors in nineteenth-century Britain attempted to engage with contemporary concerns and feelings, including representations of the everyday and creating empathetic connections between subjects and audiences.



Sir Richard Westmacott, *The Distressed Mother*, nineteenth-century, Parian ware, modelled after a statue in Westminster Abbey © Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington

# EMPATHIC PROJECTION WITH THE OPTICAL LANTERN: THE CASE OF TEMPERANCE PROPAGANDA (1880-1920)

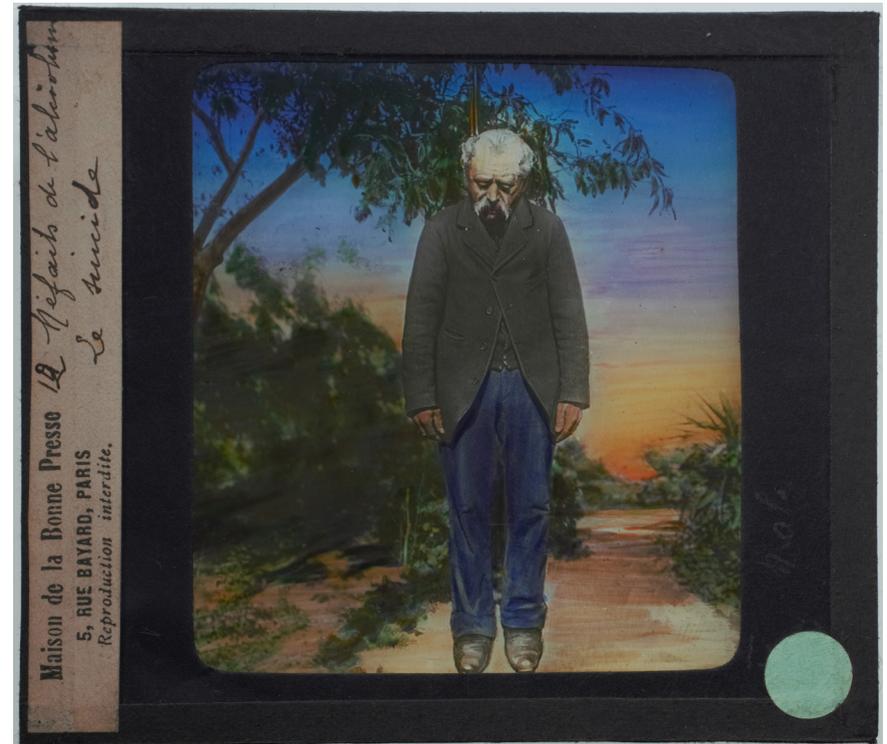
Dr Bart G. Moens  
Université libre de Bruxelles & University of Antwerp

Anse De Weerd  
Université libre de Bruxelles & University of Antwerp

Concentrating on a case of anti-alcohol propaganda by means of the optical lantern around the turn of the twentieth century, this contribution aims to scrutinise the notion of empathic projection (Fesmire 2003). Through a live optical lantern performance, we will explore the (intended) affective and empathic involvement with these projected images on a formal level (discussing techniques from the arts, theatre, and photography) and on a societal level (individually and collectively).

**Bart G. Moens** is postdoctoral researcher at the Université libre de Bruxelles and at the University of Antwerp within the framework of the ERC-funded project 'Science at the Fair: Performing Knowledge and Technology in Western Europe, 1850–1914.' His research concerns late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century visual culture from media archaeological and art historical perspectives. In 2023, Moens completed his PhD entitled 'Emotions on Demand: Melodramatic Structures of Feeling in Optical Lantern Culture (1890s–1920s),' as part of the EOS-funded research project 'B-Magic: The Magic Lantern and its Cultural Impact as a Visual Mass Medium in Belgium,' which he is currently reworking into a book.

**Anse De Weerd** obtained her master's degree in History in 2021 at the University of Antwerp. Her master's thesis focused on perceptions of Belgian solidarity with Palestine in the 1960s and 1970s. She is now a joint Ph.D. student at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and the University of Antwerp (UAntwerpen) on the project 'Travelling colonial pictures: circulation of colonial magic lantern images between science, politics, and religion in Belgium (1885-1950).' As part of the EOS-funded B-magic project, her research explores the role of the magic lantern in shaping perceptions and narratives related to Belgian colonialism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



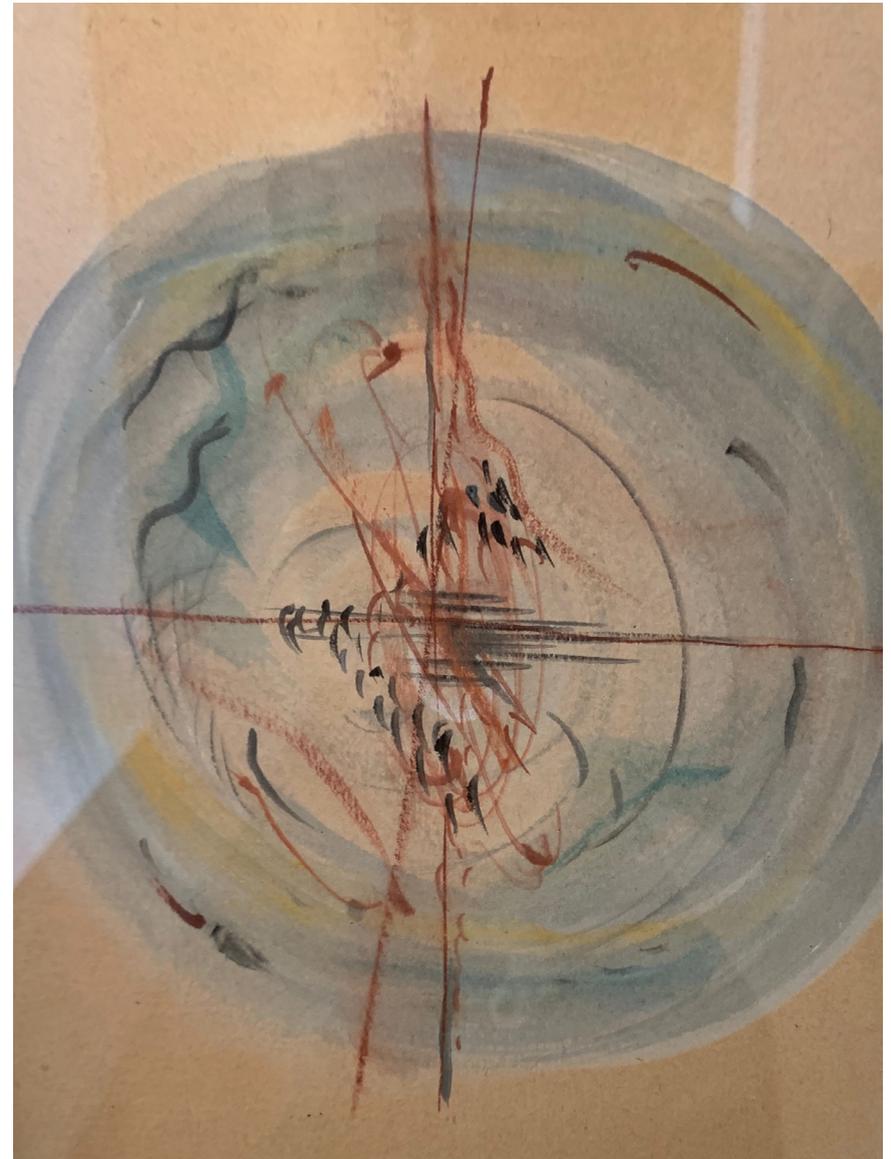
*Suicide*, Lantern slide 12 of 'Méfais de l'alcoolisme,' ca. 1910, Maison de la Bonne Presse

# ENVISIONED PROJECTION AND PROJECTED VISION: THE AGENCY OF THE IMAGE IN EARLY SOVIET ART PRAXIS

Amir Saifullin  
University of Zurich

My presentation focuses on projection as an artistic mode for organising political vision, as developed by the Projectionists—an understudied Soviet avant-garde movement from the 1920s. I explore how, within their praxis, the image mediates the relationship between projected vision and envisioned projection, and emerges as a reflection of how the world is perceived, thus becoming a means to transform perception. I then critically evaluate projection as a visual strategy, examining both the political and creative possibilities discovered by the Projectionists, as well as the limitations exposed by their work.

**Amir Saifullin** is a researcher based between Rome and Berlin. Saifullin studied philosophy and art history at the Freie Universität Berlin, along with visual and Renaissance culture at the Warburg Institute in London. He works at the intersection of anthropology and the histories of art, science, and philosophy, with a particular focus on exploring how various visual forms of translation and mediation communicate and shape human cosmologies, politics, and communities. Currently, he is pursuing these interests while writing his PhD dissertation on projection as revolutionary vision in early-Soviet art at the University of Zurich.



Solomon Nikritin, *Composition with Transparent Sphere (II)*, 1920s,  
Museum of Modern Art, Costakis Collection, Thessaloniki  
© Photograph: Amir Saifullin

# WITH THESE HANDS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONTEXT AND LEGACY OF RUSSELL LEE'S MOST FAMOUS AND MOST EMPATHETIC PHOTOGRAPH

Professor James R. Swensen  
Brigham Young University, Utah

On his first travelling assignment for the New Deal's Resettlement Administration (later known as the Farm Security Administration), Russell Lee photographed two homesteaders, Mr and Mrs Ostermeyer, as they were being evicted from their farm on a cold December day in 1936. One of Lee's pictures was a close up of Theresia Ostermeyer's hands. This deeply empathetic image—a powerful synecdoche of a life of hard work, hardship, and pain—became an icon of the Great Depression. This paper examines the context of Lee's photograph as well as the ways in which it has continued to resonate with audiences and image-makers.

**James R. Swensen** is professor of art history and the history of photography at Brigham Young University, Utah, US. His research interests include documentary photography, American photography, and the visual representation of the American West. He is the author of several articles which have appeared in *History of Photography*, *TransAtlantica: Revue d'Études Américaines*, *American Indian Quarterly*, and *The European Journal of American Culture*, among others. He is also the author of two books: *Picturing Migrants: The Grapes of Wrath and New Deal Documentary Photography* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), and *In a Rugged Land: Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and the Three Mormon Towns Collaboration, 1953–1954* (University of Utah Press, 2018). He also co-authored *Returning Home: Diné Creative Works from the Intermountain Indian School* (University of Arizona Press, 2021).



Russell Lee, *The hands of Mrs. Andrew Ostermeyer, wife of a homesteader, Woodbury County, Iowa, December 1936* © Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection

# THE SEMIOTICS OF THE KITCHEN

Professor Stella Viljoen  
Stellenbosch University

This paper considers three artists who utilise photography in their affective documentation of the kitchen. How does their art move the viewer towards a political understanding of taste and culture? How do these artists critique and construct narratives of kitsch(ens) and what is the relationship between 'distinction' and 'empathy'? Might sexy, consumable, and relatable images still function as semiotic provocateurs or agentic trouble-makers or is kitsch necessarily trite and impotent? The paper is a means of tracking empathy in the feminist archive.

**Stella Viljoen** is associate professor in visual studies in the department of visual arts at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. She has an MA in history of art and a PhD in media studies. She has written widely on representational cultures and how these index gender norms and political aspirations. Her current interest is in the capitalist imagination. She is a fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study.

Fatimah Tuggar, *Lady & the Maid*,  
2000 © BintaZarah Studios



# A FILM JAR—ON THE QUESTIONS OF POWER AND INNOCENCE IN DOCUMENTARY FILM PRACTICE

Dr Ira Goryainova  
Royal Institute for Theatre, Cinema and Sound (RITCS), Brussels



Ira Goryainova © Patrick Stevens

Starting with the premise that any documentary portrayal has something dominating and destructive in its nature, this performance—unfolding itself in the montage space of a filmmaker—tackles the relationship between the director and her protagonist, the construction and consequences of the gaze, as well as the vacuum of a film, which takes a real-life person hostage, engulfs, and seals them in forever.

**Ira Goryainova** is a film director, audiovisual artist, and researcher based in Brussels. The relationship between body, camera, screen, and spectator is her main area of interest, which she explores in essay- and montage films, video installations, and performances. Thematically her focus is on the body under extreme conditions—such as illness, death, and suffering—and how they can be read as political metaphors while still conveying explicit bodily, non-narrative meanings. Goryainova's work has been shown at IDFA, Hot Docs, Visions du Réel, Thessaloniki Film Festival, Artdocfest, Argos, Halle für Kunst Steiermark, ISELP, RIDM, Imagine Science Film Festival, Deutsches Theater Berlin, among others. Currently she is a postdoctoral researcher, as well as a hybrid and documentary film teacher at the Royal Institute for Theatre, Cinema and Sound (RITCS), Brussels.

# COUNTER SHOTS

Christina Varvia  
Forensic Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London  
& Aarhus University

On the 14 June 2023, a fishing vessel carrying up to 750 people seeking asylum in Europe sank off the coast of Greece causing the death of up to 600 people. The only vessel that was present at the time of the sinking was a Greek Coastguard ship. While Frontex planes equipped with thermal cameras and commercial vessels were ready to assist, the Greek Coastguard sent them away. When the survivors arrived on land, in Pylos, their phones were confiscated by the authorities. At the same time the media produced a particular image of the shipwreck, emphasising the human bodies in distress. The depictions of migrants and refugees are always politically charged. (In)visibilities cause a particular regime of (im)mobility in the frontier zones of Europe. The European borders are both hyper-visible and black boxed for military and anti-migration purposes, and visibility creates an uneven political field of access to the border spaces.

In this talk, Christina Varvia will present a series of cases by Forensic Architecture, where the dominant power of images is met by counter shots from the ground. Itinerant witnesses turn their gaze back to the state and help us see the way visual and biopolitical regimes stratify and racialise human life. Witnesses use social media to document how they are being shot or pushed back at the borders. Activists demand access to footage, while researchers dissect images pixel by pixel to extract their informational value. The operative life of images can be found on the way that images travel and mediate our understandings of events of conflict. Image-sections carrying evidentiary traces get assembled and re-assembled in different models in our news cycles and in our brains, forming the nebulas of truth.



The Pylos Shipwreck investigation: Survivor pointing to the location where the rope used for towing was tied onto their boat © Forensis, 2023

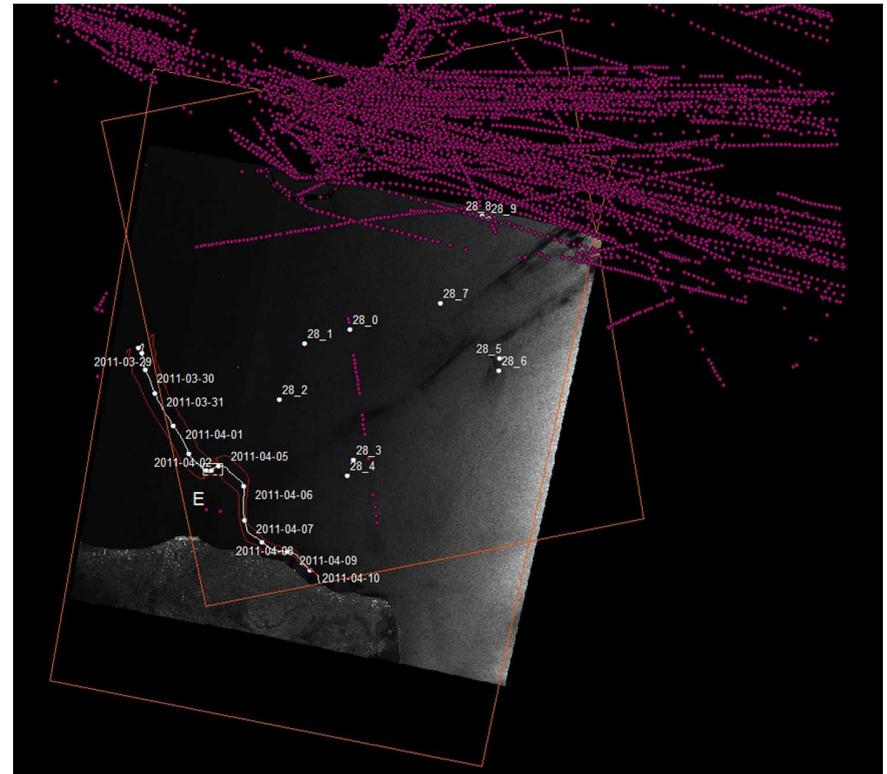
**Christina Varvia** is currently a research fellow and formerly the deputy director of Forensic Architecture. She was trained as an architect and has taught at the Architectural Association, London. She is currently a lecturer at the Centre for Research Architecture, at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is pursuing her PhD at Aarhus University, Denmark, where she has received the Novo Nordisk Foundation Mads Øvlisen PhD Scholarship; she is also a Fellow at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. She is a founding member and the chair of the board of Forensis.

# 'COMPOSITE IMAGES' AND COUNTER-FORENSICS

Dr Antigoni Memou  
University of East London

This talk examines *Forensic Oceanography's* interdisciplinary methodology for reconstructing 'composite images,' which attest to the systemic violence against migrant people at European Union's maritime borders. The talk questions the role these images can play in holding accountable those responsible for human rights' violations and the death of migrant people. The civic practice of 'counter-forensics' will be further discussed by asking whether new forms of political resistance to border violence can be constituted by rendering systemic violence and fields of pro-migration struggles visible.

**Antigoni Memou** (PhD, Courtauld Institute of Art; MA, University of Southampton) is senior lecturer in art history and the course leader of the BA (Hons) Photography at the department of architecture and visual arts at the University of East London. She has published in the journals *Third Text*, *Philosophy of Photography*, *Photographies*, *Art and the Public Sphere*, and in edited collections. She is the author of *Photography and Social Movements: From the Globalisation of the Movement (1968) to the Movement Against Globalisation (2001)* (Manchester University Press, 2013) and co-author of *Resist! The 1960s Protests, Photography and Visual Legacy* (Lannoo, 2018). Her research interests cut across art and activism, the history and theory of photography, socially engaged artistic practices, and critical issues of contemporary display.



Satellite image from March 28, 2011, with vessel detection (white) and AIS data overlaid (purple), from Forensic Oceanography's 2012 investigation *The Left-to-Die Boat* © Forensic Oceanography

# PRESENTING OR REPRESENTING: ARTISTIC EMPATHY TO THE TEST OF CONTEMPORARY MIGRATIONS

Dr Paul Bernard-Nouraud  
Aix-Marseille University



Christoph Büchel, *Barca Nostra*, at the 2019 Venice Biennale  
© Photograph: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra

Over the last decade, countless initiatives have been taken in the artistic field to address contemporary migration. Many commentators have criticised these projects for either lacking empathy or for displaying too much empathy. One of the main practical and theoretical issues that emerges in relation to such artistic approaches is the dilemma of presenting or representing migrations and migrants. This lecture aims to frame this debate and its theoretical concerns by focusing on several significant artistic proposals.

**Paul Bernard-Nouraud** is an art historian and art critic, based in Paris. He received his PhD from the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris. He is currently teaching at the arts department of Aix-Marseille University. Among his publications are: *Figurer l'autre: Essai sur la figure du 'musulman' dans les camps de concentration nazis* (Kimé, 2013); *Sur les œuvres silencieuses: Contribution à l'étude de l'art d'après Auschwitz* (Pétra, 2017). He is currently preparing a book on the representations of migration in contemporary art titled *Échelles de l'exil*.

# BIAŁO\_REC

berte & harmey

berte & harmey will co-present a lecture performance using a set of images from two research trips to the Białowieża forest in Poland—a site of fragile natural habitats, which also acts as a hostile, militarised environment for people on the move. How can the particular tools of art be used to navigate, interrogate, and reflect on such a charged context? Can images help us to engage with the experiential world of people on the move—whom we do not see? How can we empathise with an invisible subject?

**berte & harmey** is an occasional artist duo formed by Cliona Harmey and Filip Berte to share research and to explore ideas around spatial politics, critical geography, historical legacies, and socio-technical systems of exclusion and inclusion. berte & harmey showed their work as part of Tulca 2022 (Galway, Ireland), at Hugh Lane Gallery (Open House Dublin 2022), NCAD Gallery (Dublin) and BLANCO (Ghent).

**Filip Berte** is an architect and visual artist who explores space from multiple perspectives looking at issues such as migration, visibility, liminality, and the concept of borders. A critical engagement is integral to his interdisciplinary and process-oriented art practice. He considers his role as an artist as the one of a mediator, tackling questions of hospitality, polarisation, observation, surveillance, and control. With his work in general, Berte is trying to offer a reflective and poetic form of resistance.

**Cliona Harmey** works primarily with technology subtly exploring the politics inherent in both contemporary and historical socio-technical systems using material exploration and hands-on artistic practice to try to understand and reveal their materiality and logic. She is interested in different ways of making immaterial and mutable data tangible and the inscription processes of its capture and production.



BIAŁO\_REC\_1 © berte & harmey

# TALKING BACK TO HISTORY: VIOLENT PASTS AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN THE WORK OF NNENNA ONUOHA AND BELINDA KAZEEM-KAMIŃSKI

Dr Birgit Eusterschulte  
Freie Universität Berlin

In the exploration of the colonial past and coloniality in contemporary art, the question of how to deal with depictions of violence is of great importance. Focusing on filmic works by Nnenna Onuoha and Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, this lecture examines different artistic strategies of countering history and the respective ways of dealing with images of violent pasts. A central question is how do artists talk back to the violence of images and involve the viewer in reflecting on the dilemmas and politics of representation.

**Birgit Eusterschulte** is an art historian and postdoctoral research associate at the Collaborative Research Center 1512 'Intervening Arts' at the Freie Universität Berlin. After studying art history and German literature she initially worked as a curator. In 2017, she received her PhD in art history from the Freie Universität Berlin with a thesis on materiality in conceptual art; from 2017 to 2019 she was a research associate for the Einstein Research Project *Autonomy and Functionalization of Art* at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) with a focus on politically and socially engaged art and exhibition practice in Berlin after 1990; her current research project, *History as Material? Artistic Historicizing as Intervening Practice*, asks how different models of artistic historiography intervene in dominant narratives as a form of methodical unlearning. Recent publications include *Robert Barry: Materialität und Konzeptkunst* (Brill/Wilhelm Fink, 2021); *Funktionen der Künste* (J. B. Metzler, 2021; co-editor Judith Siegmund et al.); *Involvierte Autonomie: Künstlerische Praxis zwischen Engagement und Eigenlogik* (transcript, 2022; open access; co-editor Christian Krüger).



Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, *Unearthing. In Conversation*, 2017, video still  
© Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński

# IMAGES AS EMPATHIC AGENTS IN THE CURRENT NEUROIMAGING RESEARCH ON HYSTERIA/FND

Dr Paula Muhr  
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

Hysteria is no longer thought to exist. But since the 2000s, there has been a revival of medical research into hysteria, renamed as functional neurological disorder (FND), using state-of-the-art neuroimaging technologies. I argue that by linking FND patients' previous traumatic experiences to visualisable pathological changes in brain structure and function, brain images serve as agents of concern. By grounding the previously contested symptoms into trauma-induced neuroplastic changes, these images provide visual evidence for the reality of patients' experience of illness, which had long been dismissed as simulation.

**Paula Muhr** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for History of Art and Architecture, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and a visual artist. She studied visual arts, art history, literary theory, and physics before receiving her PhD in visual history from the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in 2021, published as *From Photography to fMRI: Epistemic Functions of Images in Medical Research on Hysteria* (transcript, 2022; open-access). In her doctoral dissertation, Muhr investigated active roles that diverse types of images have played in generating medical knowledge of hysteria across various historical contexts. Her interdisciplinary research is at the intersection of visual studies, image theory, media studies, science and technology studies, medical humanities, and the history and philosophy of science. She examines knowledge-producing functions of new imaging and visualisation technologies in natural sciences, ranging from neuroscience to medicine to black-hole physics.

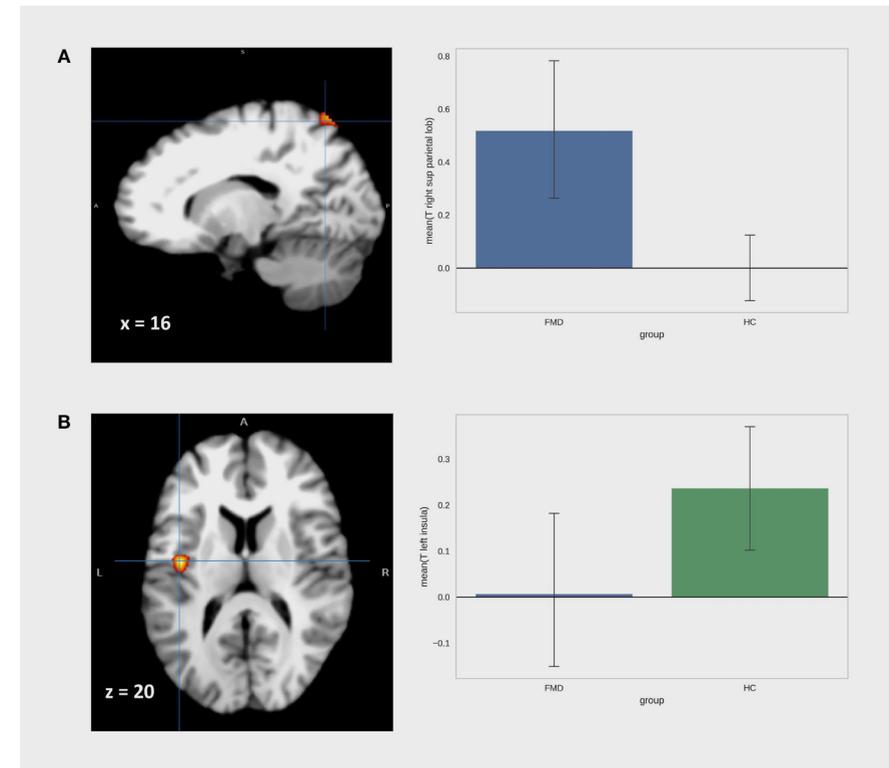


Figure from Petr Sojka et al., 'Processing of Emotions in Functional Movement Disorder: An Exploratory fMRI Study' in *Frontiers in Neurology*, Vol. 10, 2019

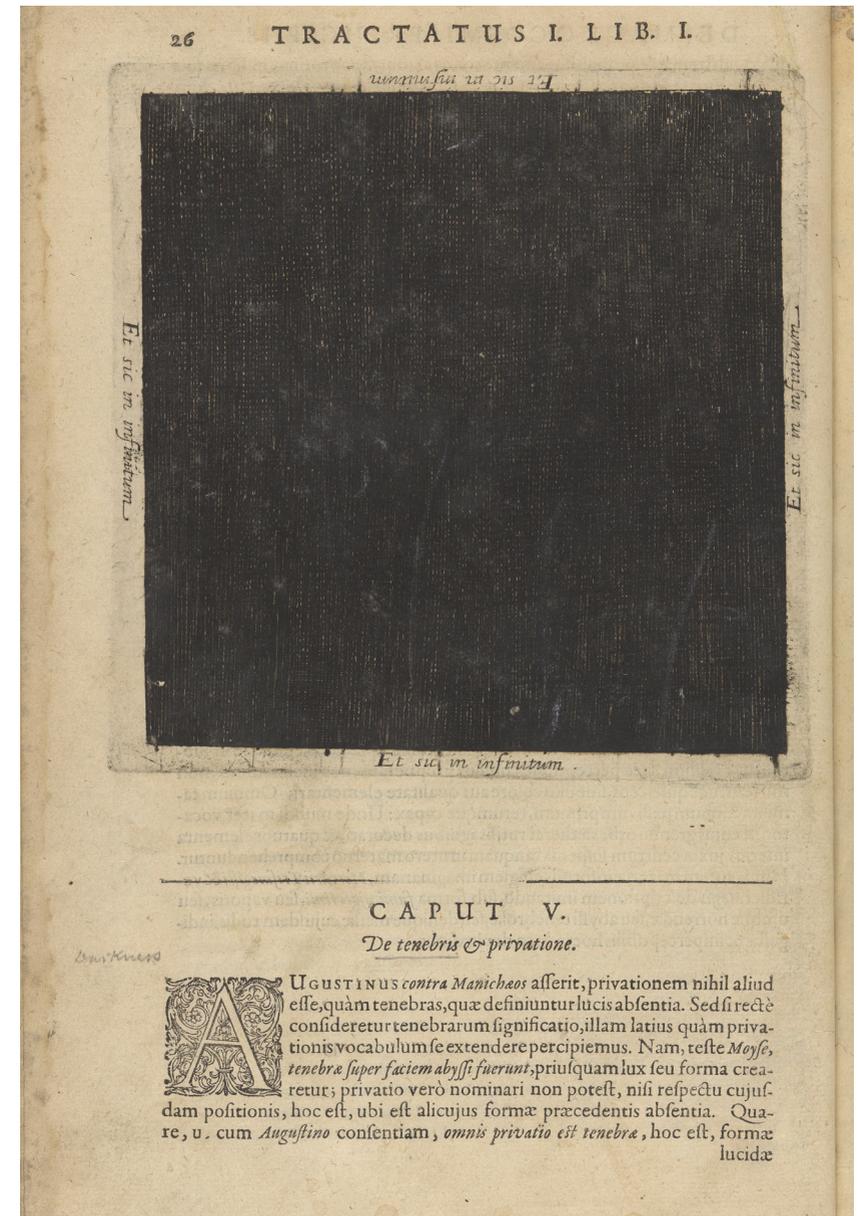
# SEEING NOTHING—EMPATHY AND INVISIBILITY (OR “BLACKNESS IS THE SITE WHERE ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS AND THE WORLD OF THINGS CONVERGE”)

Dr Andrew Warstat  
Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University

When an image presents us with something that we cannot see or face, we imaginatively move towards or create a *rapport sans rapport* (following Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy). The unstable ground of our relation to the image is a blurry zone where experience, aesthetics, ethics, and our bodies and senses merge and intermix. This lecture explores the necessary uncertainty about the disposition individual viewers should take when faced with something that is literally about the ‘un-see-ability’ of something. As a case in point, the talk will discuss the dismantling of Edward Colston’s statue in Bristol, UK as an ethical, empathetic action—an attempt to see something unseeable (the experience of slavery).

**Andrew Warstat** is a senior lecturer in art history and media theory at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University. He is a writer, photographer, and artist. Exhibitions include *After the Disaster* (Outpost, 2008) and *The Object of Photography* (The Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery, 2009). Recent publications include essays such as ‘S’attarder et regarder, ensemble et séparément—la photographie de Gavin Parry’ (2022) for Maison Louis-Jardin du Mesnil-sur-Oger, Médiathèques Simone-Veil et Daniel-Rondeau d’Epernay; writing on J.G. Ballard, ‘Speeding to the Doldrums: Stalled Futures and the Disappearance of Tomorrow in “The Dead Astronaut” in *J.G. Ballard: Landscapes of Tomorrow* (Brill/Rodopi, 2016); work on the artist John Stezaker in *parallax*, Volume 16, Issue 2, 2010; texts on the role of ignorance and ‘self-reading’ in contemporary art, ‘Un-teachable and Unlearnable: The Ignorance of Artists’ in *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think* (Blackdog Publishing, 2013); and on the filmmaker Lewis Klahr, ‘Adorno, Lewis Klahr and the Shuddering Image’ in *Drawn from Life* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

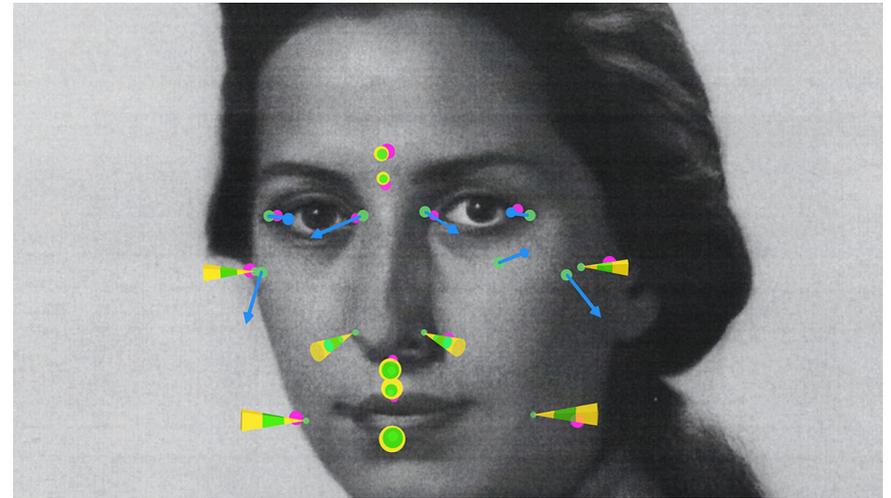
\* Due to personal reasons, Dr Warstat is unable to join us, and his talk will not be taking place.



‘Et Sic in Infinitum’—Robert Fludd, page 26 from *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia*, 1617–18  
© Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection

# EYES THAT DO NOT SEE

Dámaso Randulfe  
Royal College of Art, London



Dámaso Randulfe, *Eyes the Earth Will Swallow*, 2023, video still

Two exhumations frame the stratigraphy of the Spanish Empire. On one end, the sixteenth-century extraction of Sumaq Urqu's silver violently inaugurates a new geological and civilisational era. On the other end, the ongoing search for thousands of mass graves unearths the mechanisms of fascist terror in twentieth-century Spain. Exploring the entanglement of these pivotal exhumations, this lecture charts a fossil ecology inscribed between the surface of the image and the depth of the earth.

**Dámaso Randulfe** is an architect and artist based in London. Their work investigates the technologies, ecologies, and mythologies shaping contemporary ways of seeing and inhabiting the earth. They are an editor of *Migrant Journal*, a publication series on the spatial politics of more-than-human migrations, and a faculty member at the School of Architecture, Royal College of Art and the School of Art, Architecture, and Design, London Metropolitan University. Their work and various collaborative projects have been presented at the Oslo Architecture Triennale, Triennale de Milano, Index Biennial of Art and Technology, Design Museum, Tate Modern, and The Showroom. They are currently an AHRC-funded PhD candidate at the School of Architecture, Royal College of Art.

# SEEING WITH YOUR OWN EYES? WHEN THE INTER-AMERICAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS VISITS INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES

Nina Valerie Kolowratnik  
Ghent University

In 2012, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, based in Costa Rica, decided to exchange legal robes for backpacks and visit for the first time the land of the Sarayaku people in the Ecuadorian Amazon so its judges could ‘see with their own eyes’ how the community there was affected by alleged human-rights abuses. The court has since organised five more in-situ visits to Indigenous territories. This talk discusses how the court’s first case involving Indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation, the ongoing case of the Tagaeri and Taromenane Indigenous people vs the Ecuadorian state, challenges the court’s approach to ‘seeing’ evidence—both conceptually and practically.

**Nina Valerie Kolowratnik** is an architect and a PhD candidate in law at the Human Rights Centre, Faculty of Law and Criminology at Ghent University. Her research focuses on Indigenous peoples’ knowledge in human-rights courts and the impact of the evidentiary regime on access to justice and knowledge representation. She is part of the larger ERC-funded project DISSECT: Evidence in International Human Rights Adjudication. She holds an MSc in Critical, Curatorial, and Conceptual Practices in Architecture from Columbia University and a BSc and MSc in architecture from Graz University of Technology. Following her postgraduate studies, she founded a research and advocacy practice that develops spatial visualisation systems that operate as translational tools in the context of forced migration, cultural claims to territory, and Indigenous rights. She is the author of the book *The Language of Secret Proof: Indigenous Truth and Representation* (Sternberg Press, 2019) and she is currently in Ecuador for a year to conduct fieldwork for her PhD.



Nina Valerie Kolowratnik, *Arrival by boat to Waorani Territory*

# DOCTORAL SYMPOSIUM

Concluding the exhibition at PXL-MAD Gallery, the doctoral symposium brings together selected PhD candidates from Belgian universities and academies who responded to *Agents of Concern*'s open call. They will address the project's thematic concerns in relation to their ongoing research projects.

The opening lecture will be delivered by Maria Gil Uildemollins, postdoctoral researcher at Hasselt University. Following her talk, the first part of the symposium will explore the agency of images in shaping empathic encounters between viewers and human or non-human entities—be it other people, objects, gods, or insects. In the afternoon, the symposium's second part will foreground reflections on the situatedness and personal experiences of researchers, with contributors addressing their subjective relationship to the objects of their study.

# SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

FRIDAY  
DECEMBER 15  
09:00–17:00

PXL-MAD GALLERY  
ELFDE-LINIESTRAAT 25  
3500 HASSELT

09:00 REGISTRATION & COFFEE

09:20 *Introduction*

09:30 *The Finger Pointing at the Picture:  
Performative Iconology and the Empathy  
of Citational Images*  
Dr Maria Gil Ulldemolins

09:55 *Empathy Beyond the Question of Deception:  
From Jagannath Images to Dall-E's Paintings*  
Clarisse Michaux

10:20 *Irresistible Images and Sceptical Empathy*  
Toon Leën

10:45 *Discussion*

11:15 COFFEE BREAK

11:30 *Teaching—An Empathic Play*  
Eline Valkeneers

11:55 *Elastic Encounter*  
Joery Erna

12:20 *Discussion*

12:45 LUNCH BREAK

13:45 *Empathetically and Artistically Engaging  
with the Insect World*  
Charlotte Dorn

14:10 *Tiber: A Pulsional Portrait of Europe*  
Giovanna Caimmi

14:35 *Affective Frequencies: Human-Machine  
Sensory Performativity*  
Mona Hedayati

15:00 *Discussion*

15:30 COFFEE BREAK

15:45 *Confessions of a Crypto-Memelord*  
Vincent Van Meenen

16:10 *Louise and Me. An Intimate Liaison  
An Exploration of the Empathic Dynamics  
between the Artist and Her Object of Study*  
Charlotte Vanhoubroeck

16:35 *Discussion*

# THE FINGER POINTING AT THE PICTURE: PERFORMATIVE ICONOLOGY AND THE EMPATHY OF CITATIONAL IMAGES

Dr Maria Gil Ulldemolins  
Hasselt University

Inspired by Aby Warburg's seismographic approach to depictions of embodied emotion, this creative-critical lecture seeks to suggest the performative possibilities of iconology, creating a study that becomes self-aware of its own gesturality and position. An empathetic network of different agents (images, researchers, audiences, etc.) emerges. The seismographic ripples detected in different images speak of citational, and otherwise intermedial capacities for recognition and identification—of the pictures, and of the finger pointing at them, too.



Collage by Maria Gil Ulldemolins

## Maria Gil Ulldemolins

is a postdoctoral artistic researcher at the Faculty of Architecture and Art at Hasselt University, Belgium. Her work uses auto-theoretical, transdisciplinary, and performative writing practices in order to generate meaning through unexpected, and often anachronistic, encounters. She is concerned with the relationship between visual material, interiority, spatiality, and text/language.

# EMPATHY BEYOND THE QUESTION OF DECEPTION: FROM JAGANNATH IMAGES TO DALL-E'S PAINTINGS

Clarisse Michaux  
UCLouvain

The anthropologist Alfred Gell proposed treating the artwork as a person or as an element of a 'distributed person' as the most effective way to decolonise our theoretical understanding of the reception of artworks. Building on his work, I would like to discuss the connections between approaches considered 'primitive' in art and those prompted by recent cases of digitally generated artworks created by algorithmic intelligences. In images of Jagannath, as in virtual reality, the phenomenon of empathy becomes more complex. It is indeed a matter of treating the object as a person and therefore with empathy—without, however, being deceived about its origin.

**Clarisse Michaux** is a PhD candidate in the philosophy of art and aesthetics, and a member of the Center for Phenomenological Studies (CEP) at the Higher Institute of Philosophy at UCLouvain, Belgium. She is currently working on the concept of authority in art.



Shri Jagannath with Shri Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra  
© Sahu Felix, Wikimedia

# IRRESISTIBLE IMAGES AND SCEPTICAL EMPATHY

Toon Leën  
Hasselt University & PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt

This lecture performance explores how certain images lure viewers into misguided and inaccurate types of empathy. Focusing on the digital infrastructures that shape our outlook on world events, this talk compares a series of puzzling images that exemplify the entanglement of two categories: the cute and the horrible. Seeking to develop a sceptical empathy, this lecture will present unreliable yet potentially irresistible evidence to help understand the motives and ambitions of these dubious images.

**Toon Leën** studied painting at Sint Lucas Antwerp. His work moves between painting, video, and lecture performance. Recent projects include the lecture performance *Personally, I'm Most Interested in the Shapes and Colours* and an accompanying artist book of the same name (published with MER. Paper Kunsthalle in 2015); the concert lecture *Correspondances mystérieuses*, in collaboration with pianist Lucas Blondeel (2019–21); the short video *Zwischen den Bildern* (2020) and numerous lecture performances. His work is represented by Fred&Ferry Gallery in Antwerp. Currently, he is a PhD candidate in artistic research at Hasselt University and PXL-MAD, School of Arts.



# TEACHING—AN EMPATHIC PLAY

Eline Valkeneers  
PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt

In this lecture I will explore the value of the physical presence of students and lecturers within the same room during the act of teaching. Furthermore, I will examine the notion of the school as a public space.

**Eline Valkeneers** is a part-time PhD researcher and a coordinator and teacher on the educational MA in the visual arts at PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt. After obtaining a diploma in pedagogical sciences, she started working at PXL-MAD, School of Arts, educating MA arts students to become artists-teachers. After more than ten years of teaching experience, the many interfaces and similarities between an artistic practice and a pedagogical practice prompted her to submit a doctoral proposal on the theme of 'Contemporary Views on 'the Formation' (in Dutch 'vorming') of Art Education.'

## ELASTIC ENCOUNTER

Joery Erna  
LUCA School of Arts

In this performative lecture, Joery Erna will create a dialogue between the audience and himself. Starting from the traces left by three of his works, which have all had an encounter with someone, Erna discusses the ability or inability to capture a network of feelings that occur when photographing, and questions in which way his practice can alter our relationship with others.

**Joery Erna** is a maker from Belgium focusing on photography, film, and sculpture. His work focuses on the elasticity of the photographic act. What does photography conjure for the ones involved—maker, subject, and viewer? What traces are left behind when we photograph? What is the nature of relations between the subject and the maker? His artistic practice is supported by a PhD at LUCA School of Arts. During his research, he meets makers from different fields in a series of iterative encounters to understand his own practice more completely. He is also active as chair and docent for the visual arts department at LUCA School of Arts.



Joery Erna, *Elastic Encounter: Bed Dialogues*

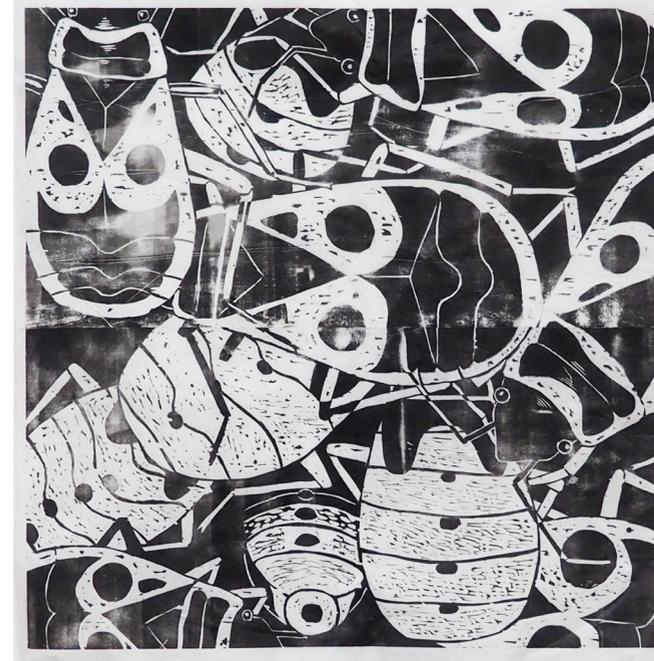
## EMPATHETICALLY AND ARTISTICALLY ENGAGING WITH THE INSECT WORLD

Charlotte Dorn  
LUCA School of Arts & KU Leuven

The video *Moments in a Firebug's Life* addresses visual strategies to increase viewers' emotional involvement with other-than-human animals through animated storytelling. The short animation will be accompanied by a reflection on artistic strategies to increase empathy for the other-than-human being. The film narrates a story around an insect's life because these beings are often viewed or encountered with disgust. Giving visibility to the microcosms that exist at the level of our feet increases the attention we give to our environment.

**Charlotte Dorn** is an artist and researcher living in Brussels. She is currently completing an artistic PhD at LUCA School of Arts and KU Leuven. Her work mainly consists of printmaking and installations. Her aim is to create works that increase the empathic engagement for and consideration of other-than-human animals. She investigates ways of making sense of other-than-human beings through art and integrates environmental awareness in the creative process. She also teaches art at the European School Brussels I.

Charlotte Dorn, *Moments in a Firebug's Life*



# TIBER: A PULSIONAL PORTRAIT OF EUROPE

Giovanna Caimmi  
Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna  
& PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt

Last year a friend lent me a book about the *Deutschrömer*, German artists who came to Rome in the early-nineteenth century. Opening it, I found a photocopied article about an album of drawings by the Swiss engraver Samuel Amsler, which contained thirty-three portraits of these young artists depicting refined intelligent faces. I immediately empathised with these forgotten artists, and began making a series of polaroids and drawings to bring them into the here and now, creating a cartography of their restless travels as a pulsional portrait of Europe.

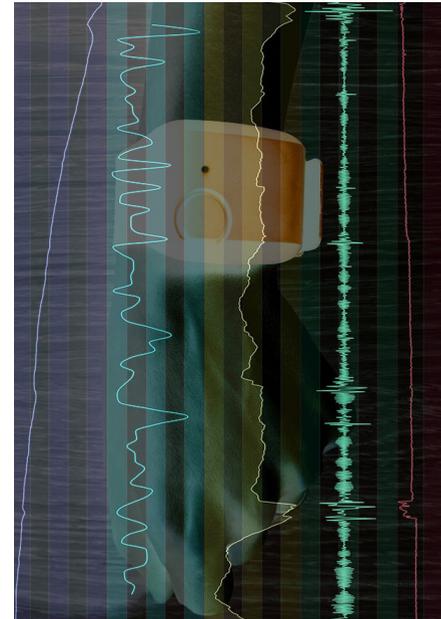


**Giovanna Caimmi** is a second-year PhD student at PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt. She graduated with honors from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna. From 2020 to 2022, she was the coordinator of painting at the department of visual arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, where she was also a professor in the department of visual arts since 1991. From 2013 to 2016, she was a member of the board of directors of the Zucchelli Foundation, where she started curating exhibitions of young artists. She has given numerous public lectures in Italy and abroad. As an independent artist, she has exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in galleries and museums in Italy and abroad.

Giovanna Caimmi, *Tiber*, 2022–23

# AFFECTIVE FREQUENCIES: HUMAN-MACHINE SENSORY PERFORMATIVITY

Mona Hedayati  
Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (ARIA)  
& Concordia University, Montreal



This talk will outline my doctoral trajectory centred on performative experiments as a way to communicate my lived experience of migration and exile through sensory registers rather than traditional narration. As such, sound became my sensory medium of choice as I increasingly became familiar with its affective properties as a precognitive force. From obscuring the narrative voice to repetition and modulation and tapping into embodied registers by integrating breathing patterns, I have designed these experiments with the aim of confronting the audience with the complexity of affective residues tied to my multifaceted psycho-physiological states without reducing them into cognisable frameworks.

**Mona Hedayati** is an Iranian-Canadian artist-researcher and a joint PhD candidate in interdisciplinary humanities at Concordia University, Canada and the digital arts doctorate at Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts. Her interdisciplinary research-creation draws on computation arts, sound design, and sensory studies. She has a BA in translation studies, an MFA in digital media, and an advanced MA in social-political art and design. Hedayati has been awarded the prestigious Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grants for her MA and doctoral research. She has exhibited and presented her work across Canada and internationally at institutions such as Slade School of Fine Arts, University of Manchester's Whitworth Gallery and University of St Andrews in the UK; Trinity College, Ireland; Kunsthall Extra City, Belgium; and Agnes Etherington Art Center in Canada. Most recently she has been invited to present at Bauhaus University Weimar, Germany and Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria.

# CONFESSIONS OF A CRYPTO-MEMELORD

Vincent Van Meenen  
Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (ARIA)

During the beginning of the 2021 crypto bear market, I was working as a memelord for two different crypto-communities, work that I got paid for in specific tokens. In this lecture-presentation I will share my experiences, reflect on the nature of the memes that are being used in these communities, as well as the bias and worldviews they convey. Finally, I will connect crypto memes to my broader research into surrealist creation methods.



**Vincent Van Meenen** is a PhD candidate in surrealist creation methods at the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts. He is also the prize-winning author of five Dutch novels and an illustrated collection of poetry. He is the author of *EU* (Track Report, 2021), the first Dutch novel to be published as a NFT. His most recent novel *OxBlixa* (Das Mag, 2023) is centred on the Cryptoverse. He has written about contemporary artists and their methods for the Belgian art magazine HART and he worked as a theatre-maker in Athens and Belgium.

© Vincent Van Meenen

# LOUISE AND ME. AN INTIMATE LIAISON. AN EXPLORATION OF THE EMPATHIC DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE ARTIST AND HER OBJECT OF STUDY

Charlotte Vanhoubroeck  
Hasselt University & PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt

As part of my doctoral research in the arts I am investigating and reactivating the lost sentimental jewellery of Louise-Marie d'Orléans, the first queen of Belgium. During the course of this research, I realised that my work not only derives from art historical research, but also springs from a sense of empathy I foster for Louise. Did she become a friend, an obsession? Do I use her as a mirror, a soul-searching tool? And what am I to her? Curious about how this emotional interplay between us manifests itself, I will try to reveal and define the nature of this liaison.



Charlotte Vanhoubroeck, *Collage N° 37*

**Charlotte Vanhoubroeck** is an artist, jeweller, and art historian who brings gradually fading heritage back to life via contemporary art. After graduating from Ghent University, she was trained at d'Academie Sint-Niklaas, Belgium; Bishopsland Educational Trust in the UK; and at PXL-MAD, School of Arts. She is currently conducting a PhD in the arts at Hasselt University and PXL-MAD. Vanhoubroeck's 'Stilled Sentiments' collection has made her the VOCATIO Laureate 2020, was awarded a commendation for the BVK-Preis 2021 für Junges Kunsthandwerk 2021, and has won the Preziosa Young Prize 2021, the LAO Prize 2022, and the Inhorgenta Special Prize 2022.



# AGENTS OF CONCERN: IMAGES AND EMPATHY

## PART 2

### EXHIBITION I

NOVEMBER 16–  
DECEMBER 15, 2023  
PXL-MAD GALLERY

80

### EXHIBITION II

NOVEMBER 26, 2023–  
JANUARY 28, 2024  
CCHA

114

# EXHIBITION I

PXL-MAD GALLERY  
ELFDE-LINIESTRAAT 25  
3500 HASSELT

NOVEMBER 16–  
DECEMBER 15, 2023

EXHIBITION OPENING:  
THURSDAY NOVEMBER 16, 14:00

VISITING HOURS:  
MONDAY–FRIDAY, 13:00–18:00

\* Please note that some of the works on display will be turned off during the conference on November 17 & 18, and during the symposium on December 15.

The exhibition at PXL-MAD Gallery forms a central component of *Agents of Concern*'s exploration of ways of speaking about, with, and to images. While the conference on November 16 to 18 and the doctoral symposium on December 15 foreground performative modes of speaking that are grounded in academic and artistic research, the exhibition features more hybrid, ambiguous, and experimental ways of reflecting on images.

Juxtaposing sixteen video works, the exhibition explores how images direct our empathic gaze and shape how we empathise with others. Much like secret agents, images 'operate' in the world with a purpose: whether in the service of political, economic, or religious concerns or with an agenda of their own, they can manipulate viewers emotionally, create false impressions, or cause misunderstandings. However, crucially they also provide evidence, raise public awareness, and enrich our understanding of others.

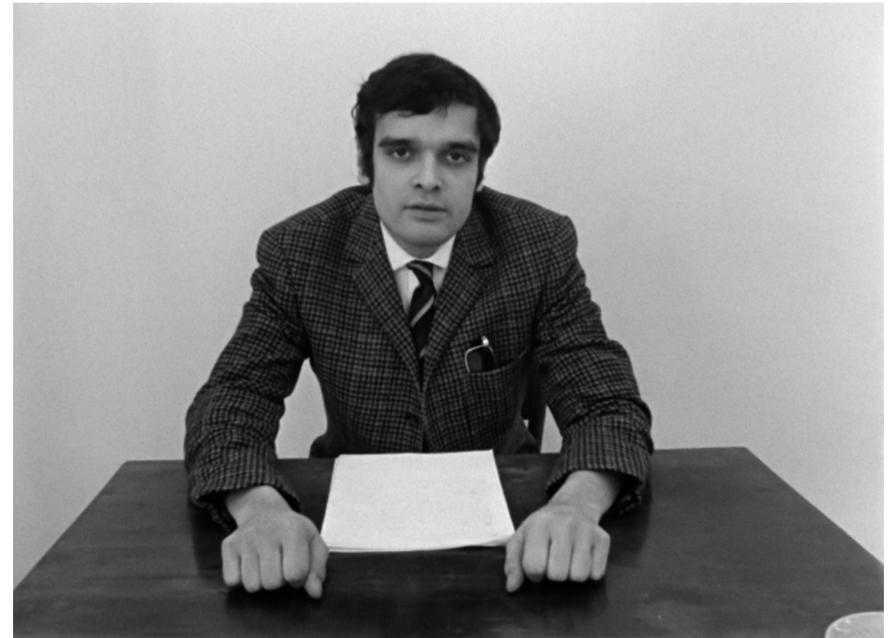
Looking at images as 'agents of concern,' we seek to uncover some of the methods and constructions they adopt as mediators of our empathic involvement with the world. The videos in the exhibition address such image 'operations,' both by critically employing certain visual strategies and by commenting and reflecting on them in words.

Eight video works were selected as initial reference points for *Agents of Concern*. They include iconic works like Harun Farocki's 1969 film *Nicht löschesbares Feuer* (Inextinguishable Fire) and Rabih Mroué's non-academic lecture *On Three Posters*, created in 2004. In addition to this central body of works, eight video contributions were selected from the *Agents of Concern* open call. Six of these videos are new works, created or adapted especially for this project. As a performative counterpart to their videos, five of the exhibiting artists will also give a presentation at the conference on November 16 to 18.

# ① NICHT LÖSCHBARES FEUER, 1969

Harun Farocki 22'07"

*Inextinguishable Fire*, an early work by the artist Harun Farocki, employs a concise, experimental documentary style blending text, narration, and mass-media imagery. The film critiques the Vietnam War and the industrial production of chemical weapons by the Dow Chemical Company. Farocki opens with a striking statement: 'When we show you pictures of napalm victims, you'll shut your eyes. You'll close your eyes to the pictures. Then you'll close them to the memory. And then you'll close your eyes to the facts.' With this work, the artist explores how media, politics, technology, and violence are interconnected through the creation and consumption of media images. (PV)



Harun Farocki, *Nicht löschesbares Feuer*,  
1969, film stills © Harun Farocki GbR

**Harun Farocki** was a German filmmaker, video artist, and writer. His work critically analysed visual media, exploring how images shape our understanding of reality. Since 1966, Farocki produced, wrote, and directed more than one hundred short and feature-length films for television and cinema. He began with experimental films that challenged conventional narratives, later expanding into video installations. He also authored essays on film theory and technology's impact on visual culture. Through his thought-provoking contributions, Farocki remains a lasting influence on the interpretation of images and their societal implications. His work has been exhibited in established museums and galleries worldwide, including MoMA, New York; Jeu de Paume, Paris; Fundació Antoni Tapies, Barcelona; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and National Museum of Modern Contemporary Art, Seoul. Farocki participated in documenta in 1997 and 2007.

## 2 WHAT FAROCKI TAUGHT, 1998

Jill Godmilow 30'44"

Jill Godmilow's oeuvre resists stereotypical documentary methods of evoking viewers' empathy. Instead, her filmmaking refuses 'to exploit the pedigree, the pornography, and the imperialism of the real.' For Godmilow, non-fiction films should 'refuse the codes that encourage useless empathy.' Instead of making us cry, documentaries should be 'useful,' they should increase our 'capacity for analysis and understanding' and motivate us to act. Defining her approach as 'postrealist,' she strives for an 'antispectacular' type of film, that 'refuses documentary transparency, evidentiary arguments, classic narrative structure, psychological explanations, and the sympathetic identification systems that posit us/them symmetries.' Thus when Godmilow discovered Harun Farocki's film *Inextinguishable Fire* in 1991, she valued it for 'employ[ing] logic over morality, or empathy, or psychology,' while making viewers aware of their 'unwitting participation in the war-making of the state.' Admiring Farocki's oeuvre in general for its didactic approach, for 'training the viewer's eye and mind in the lifecycles of images,' she decided to recreate the film, with a gesture similar to that of a painter studying the old masters by copying them. The result of this endeavour, *What Farocki Taught*, is both a meticulous study—an exercise of sorts in empathising with a film by imitating it—and a homage from one empathy-averse filmmaker to another. (TL)

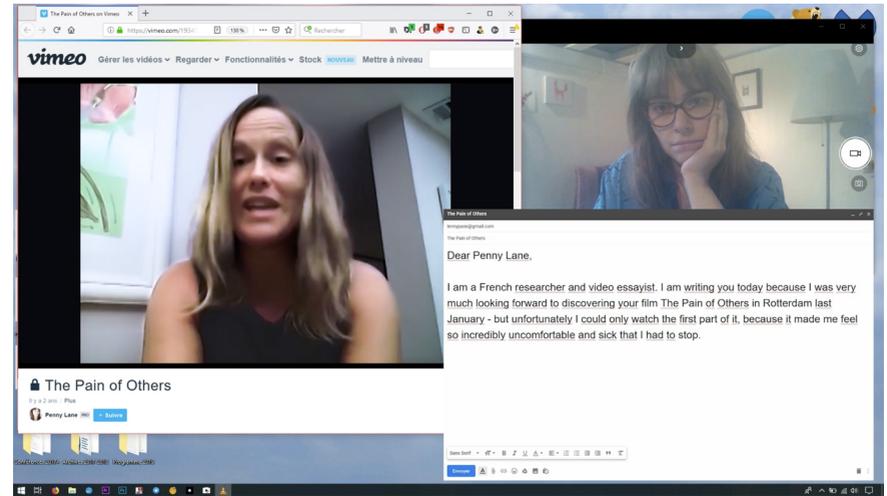


Jill Godmilow, *What Farocki Taught*, 1998, film still  
Courtesy of the Video Data Bank at the School of  
the Art Institute of Chicago

**Jill Godmilow** is an independent filmmaker and professor emerita at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, US. Her films include *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman* (1974), an Academy Award–nominated documentary about conductor Antonia Bruckner; *Far from Poland* (1984), an experimental documentary about the Polish solidarity movement shot in the US; *Waiting for the Moon* (1987), a feature film about the literary couple Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas; and *What Farocki Taught* (1998), a meticulous remake in English of Harun Farocki's *Inextinguishable Fire*. In 2017, together with Joanna Krakowska and Magda Mosiewicz, she made a Polish remake of Carole Roussopoulos and Delphine Seyrig's 1976 film *SCUM Manifesto*, inspired by Valerie Solanas's infamous feminist text of the same title. Recent films include the short animation film *On the Domestication of Sheep* (2019), and the notable classroom film *For Teachers and Students—Notes and Images from the Vietnam War* (2022). She is the author of *Kill the Documentary* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

### 3 WATCHING THE PAIN OF OTHERS, 2018

Chloé Galibert-Lainé 31'22"



Chloé Galibert-Lainé, *Watching the Pain of Others*, 2018, video still

In recent decades, various scholars in film and media studies have started using video as a medium to reflect on the work of filmmakers and video artists in addition to traditional academic writing. The results of this so-called 'videographic criticism' are often referred to as 'video essays.' Chloé Galibert-Lainé's *Watching the Pain of Others*, created in the context of her PhD research on 'netnographic' non-fiction cinema, is an acclaimed example of this practice. Adopting the subgenre that the critic and filmmaker Kevin B. Lee has called 'desktop documentary,' Galibert-Lainé's video reflects on her personal experience of watching the 2018 film *The Pain of Others*, by US filmmaker Penny Lane. Lane's film is about the vlogging activities of a number of women who claim they are affected by a skin disease called Morgellons. Musician Joni Mitchell is quoted as describing how this mysterious illness caused her body to exude 'fibers in a variety of colors protrud[ing] out of my skin like mushrooms after a rainstorm.' While portraying her own fluctuations between scholarly distance and empathic involvement, Galibert-Lainé's video addresses the mechanisms of emotional contagion that drive the affected women's prolific YouTube-output. (TL)

**Chloé Galibert-Lainé** is a French researcher and filmmaker. They are currently working as senior researcher at the Lucerne School of Art and Design in Switzerland. They regularly teach theory classes and artistic workshops about film and media. Their work explores the intersections between cinema and online media, with a specific interest in questions related to modes of spectatorship, gestures of appropriation, processes of knowledge production, and mediated memory. Several of their films are desktop documentaries, and relate to the video-essay format and videographic research methods. Their films have been screened at festivals including IFFRotterdam, FIDMarseille, Ji.hlava DFF, Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, True/False Festival, EMAF, transmediale, Images Festival, Ars Electronica Festival and FIPADOC. Recent grants and residencies include a writing grant from the French CNC, a residency at m-cult through the European Media Art Platform (EMAP), and an Art of Nonfiction Grant from the Sundance Institute.

## 4 TOPPLED, 2011

Florian Göttke 15'09"



Florian Göttke, *Toppled*, 2011, video still

Visual artist Florian Göttke's video *Toppled*, which was made in conjunction with an eponymous publication, focuses on representations of Saddam Hussein while examining the symbolism of iconoclastic gestures. The work explores various photographs that appeared throughout the global news coverage of the period from the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 to his trial and subsequent execution on December 30, 2006. Following the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Saddam was symbolically lynched in front of the international press on April 9, 2003, when a statue of Saddam, that was put up on Firdos square in Baghdad in 2002, was toppled by American soldiers together with a small group of Iraqis. A process of 'ritual cleansing' ensued, in which Iraqi citizens began punishing the dictator's omnipresent images. The video's narrator calls it 'the death of the statues.' In this process of 'dying,' Saddam's statues changed from mere 'representations of [his] power' into 'substitutes for the real body of Saddam Hussein. People enacted their revenge on the bronze bodies of the statues as if they could hurt the real Saddam.' (TL)

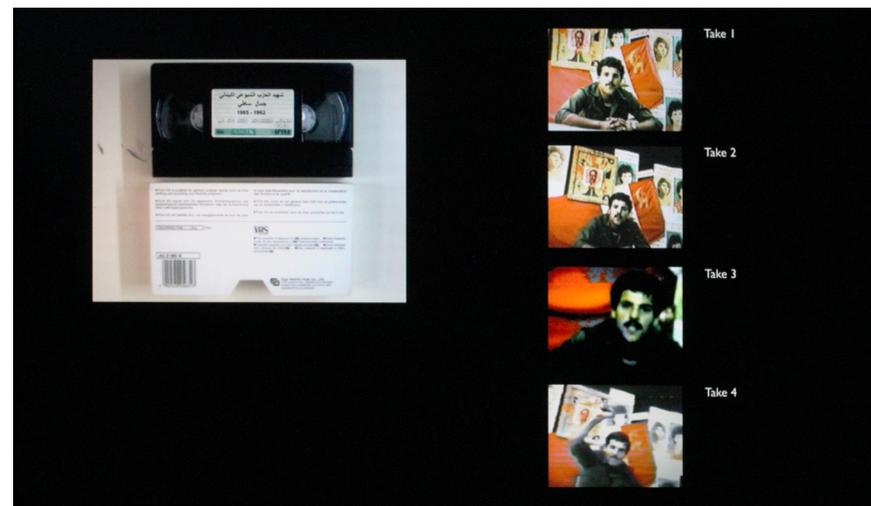
**Florian Göttke** is a visual artist, researcher, and educator based in Amsterdam. He investigates the functioning of public images and their relationship to social memory, politics, and violence, combining visual modes of research (collecting, close reading, and image montage) with academic research. Göttke received his PhD from the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam on the peculiar practice of hanging or burning effigies—scarecrow-like puppets representing politicians—as a form of political protest. His dissertation, published under the title *Burning Images: A History of Effigy Protests* (Valiz, 2021), combines two discursive narratives: a linear text and a parallel assemblage of images. Image narrative and text are like the two voices in a musical composition, each in turn taking the lead to introduce themes, structure the work, direct the reader, halt attention, or accelerate the flow.

## 5 ON THREE POSTERS, 2004/2021

Rabih Mroué 41'11"

*On Three Posters* examines the staging of martyrdom in the context of the Lebanese communist resistance against the 1980s Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Central to the work is a videotape containing an uncut version of the testimony that the communist resistance fighter Jamal al-Sati recorded in anticipation of his suicide attack on Israeli forces in Hasbaya on August 6, 1985. In contrast to an edited version that aired on Télé Liban that evening, the full tape features four separate takes, which draw attention to the hesitations and stuttering in al-Sati's 'performance,' revealing the human behind the heroic martyr figure.

In *Three Posters*, first performed as a theatrical piece in Beirut in September 2000, Rabih Mroué and writer Elias Khoury presented al-Sati's uncut video in combination with a staged testimony of a fictional martyr, played by Mroué, and a video interview with the political leader responsible for al-Sati's suicide operation. However, in the aftermath of Al-Qaeda's September 11 attacks in 2001, Mroué stopped performing the theatrical piece, mindful that audiences who were unfamiliar with Lebanon's history were confusing al-Sati's secular 'act of political resistance' with acts of Islamist terrorism. Instead, in 2004, Mroué created a video and a lecture about the piece and its context. *On Three Posters* reflected both on the work's reception and on the strategies of symbolic identification and fictionalising that play out in the work. The video on display here is a recording of this lecture, which was produced in 2021 for Mroué's exhibition *Under the Carpet* at KW in Berlin. (TL)



Rabih Mroué, *On Three Posters*, 2004/2021,  
video still

**Rabih Mroué** is a theatre director, actor, visual artist, and playwright. His work reflects on visual culture and political iconography, in particular with regard to Lebanese and Middle Eastern politics and history. After starting his career in theatre in the late 1980s in Lebanon, Mroué became a pioneer in the development of the lecture as an artistic format, creating a series of influential 'non-academic lectures' including *On Three Posters* (2004); *Make Me Stop Smoking* (2006); *The Inhabitants of images* (2009); and *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), part of a project that was also shown as an installation at documenta 13 in 2012. His work for the theatre stage is often created in collaboration with other artists, most prominently Lina Majdalanie. Mroué's acclaimed performances include *Who's Afraid of Representation* (2005), *Photo-Romance* (2009), *Riding on a cloud* (2013), *Ode to Joy* (2015), and, most recently, *Hartaqāt (Heresies)* (2023). Mroué's artworks have been shown in museums all over the world, from MoMA to the Centre Pompidou. His most recent solo exhibitions include *Under the Carpet*, at KW, Berlin (2022), and *Images Mon Amour*, at Extra City, Antwerp (2022). In 2020, Mroué received the Schering Stiftung Award for Artistic Research.

## ⑥ I WRITE WHILE DISAPPEARING, 2021

Goda Palekaitė 17'28"

*I Write While Disappearing* by Goda Palekaitė is a film based on found television interviews that the artist uses to create a fictional discussion between herself and fourteen women writers. French feminists find themselves in conversation with a Brazilian mystic, an Austrian playwright, a Soviet-Lithuanian romantic, and a number of others in an intimate sharing of what it means to be a woman and an artist. The writers reflect on artistry, sometimes humorously, sometimes melancholically. They emphasise that women are often denied a voice and thus disappear. Meanwhile, the author's own voice poses the question: 'If I steal does it mean that I write?' The film was created in collaboration with editor Rui Calvo and composer Adomas Palekas. It is installed on the furniture created especially for its viewing: a writer's desk and a tongue chair. (PV)

**Goda Palekaitė** is a Vilnius-born, Brussels-based artist and researcher working at the intersection of contemporary art, performance, artistic research, literature, and anthropology. Her practice evolves around projects exploring the politics of historical narratives, the agency of dreams and imagination, and the social conditions of creativity. Palekaitė holds a BFA in fine arts from Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, Lithuania, an MA in social and cultural anthropology from the University of Vienna, and an MA in artistic research from A.pass, Brussels. Currently she is a PhD candidate at Hasselt University and PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt. She has had solo shows at Beursschouwburg in Brussels; Västerås Art Museum, Sweden; Kunsthal Gent; Editorial in Vilnius; Centre Tour à Plomb in Brussels; Konstepidemin in Gothenburg, Sweden; and RawArt Gallery in Tel Aviv. Her performances and installations have been presented recently at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, BOZAR Brussels, Swamp pavilion at the 2018 Venice Biennale of Architecture, and at Transit Bratislava, Vilnius Contemporary Art Center, among others.



Goda Palekaitė, *I Write While Disappearing*, 2021

## 7 APHASIA (ACT THREE) – ‘A KID FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD,’ 2019

Jelena Jureša 47'



Jelena Jureša, *Aphasia (Act Three) – 'A Kid From the Neighbourhood,' 2019*, video still

*Aphasia* (2019), Jelena Jureša's feature-length film essay, deals with the politics of memory and oblivion inscribed in social and historical contexts. As a medical term 'aphasia' refers to the inability to speak or to find the right words. The third chapter of *Aphasia* places this phenomenon in a political context, starting from a well-known, unsettling press photograph, taken at the beginning of the Bosnian War (1992–1995), of a Serbian paramilitary kicking a woman's corpse. Although the photo is never revealed in the film, it is described and interpreted by two mirroring doppelgangers: monologuing journalist Barbara Matejčić, and Ivana Jozić, who performs a choreography of violence. Jureša's complex visual account revolves around issues such as complicity, state-sponsored violence, and historical trauma, leaving no viewer untouched. (PV)

**Jelena Jureša** is a visual artist and filmmaker, born in Yugoslavia. She has extensively worked on questions of cultural identity, gender, and the politics of memory and oblivion using film, video installation, and photography. Her recent research on practices of oppression—how they operate and implicate us in systems of violence—has resulted in multidisciplinary projects that are, on various levels, as political as they are highly personal. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including solo exhibitions at Argos centre for audiovisual arts in Brussels, Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst & Medien in Graz, Austria, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, Serbia. Jureša's most recent project *Aphasia* represented a disciplinary shift from film to concert performance, in order to foreground the topic of perpetrators and complicity through live spectatorship. The project began as a film project, produced by argos centre for audiovisual arts, Brussels, with support from the VAF Filmlab. The film was commissioned and exhibited by Contour Biennale in 2019, and the 2022 Manifesta Biennale. The eponymous concert performance premiered at Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels in 2022. Jureša teaches at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts (KASK) in Ghent.

## 8 MILGRAM REWOKEN, 2023

Frank Theys ca. 10'

With this work, Frank Theys presents a present-day interpretation of the controversial experiments of US psychologist Stanley Milgram, who explored the limits of obedience, conscience, and legitimate authority. The film is set at the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience (NIN) in Amsterdam, where fundamental research into the neural basis of empathy is being conducted under the direction of Christian Keysers. We see an experiment in which Chinese and Caucasian participants were observed in an fMRI-scanner in order to measure their empathetic reactions while seeing another person receive electroshocks. Nothing is what it seems, however, and the final data remain subject to different interpretations. (PV)



Frank Theys, *Milgram Rewoken*, 2023, video stills

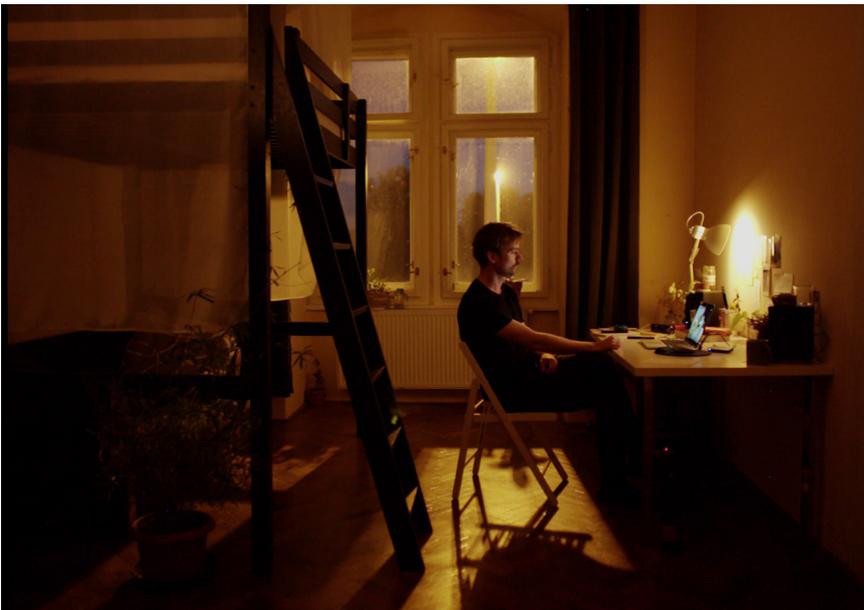


**Frank Theys** is a visual artist and filmmaker. His work often deals with new technological developments and how they influence our social structures and mindset. He explores scientific narratives and technical imaging across various disciplines such as live performance, experimental film, documentary and interactive-media installations. Recent work includes *Technocalyps*, a documentary series in which he explores truth and phantasmagoria within transhumanism; *Googly Moogly*, an action performance challenging Google's own privacy claims; and *Chronicle of an Extinction Foretold*, an interactive computer simulation in collaboration with the IPCC that visualises in one image how different aspects of climate change are expected to play out in the twenty-first century. His work has been awarded several international prizes and is in the collections of The Museum for the Moving Image, New York; the CNC French Film Archive, Paris; M HKA, Antwerp; and SMAK, Ghent, among others.

## 9 A PRACTICE FOR SURRENDER, 2022

Tõnis Jürgens 12'49"

Sleep has become an ideological field of tension. Our once romanticised realm of dreams is fragmented, clustered, and sold off as units of data. In the face of digital optimisation it would seem as if surrender and absence provide the best forms of resistance. In a brief paranoid scrutiny of self-surveillance and theories of digital humanities, this video essay is orbited by elements of distraction, adaption, and the inadvertent emergence of meaning.



Tõnis Jürgens, *A Practice for Surrender*, 2022, video stills

**Tõnis Jürgens** is an artist and writer working in Tallinn, Estonia. He holds a BA in cultural theory from Tallinn University and an MA in new media from the Estonian Academy of Arts. He has also spent a year studying at the Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design in Prague. Currently, he is a PhD candidate and guest lecturer at the Estonian Academy of Arts. His artistic research practice involves themes such as sleep surveillance, digital trash, and apophenia.

## 10 VIEWS FROM THE BORDER, 2023

Reel Borders 16'

Unlike media portrayals of fortified borders and migration crises, *Views From the Border* focuses on the unheard voices of Ceuta, a 14 km Spanish enclave bordering Morocco in North Africa. The ten-minute video essay was produced during a three-month workshop that combined participatory filmmaking and a cineforum to document the experiences of thirteen Moroccan women who reside in Ceuta and are employed in domestic service without either a work contract or a residence permit. After decades of work as cross-border workers, these women are now classed as undocumented migrants owing to the Spanish–Moroccan border reinforcement following the COVID lockdown. The video essay incorporates visuals and voiceovers created during the participatory filmmaking workshop and footage of Ceuta filmed between 1980 and 2015. The video's subjects give accounts of their experiences living in conditions of anonymity, internality, and immobility. Their testimonies were prompted by cineforum events where films were used to discuss border-related experiences and they represent nearly 800 cross-border workers trapped in Ceuta, hidden from the public eye. Their stories exemplify an ongoing colonial status quo in which gender, class, and ethnoreligious constructions mutually support each other to legitimise the exploitation of their labour. *Views From the Border* also highlights the images' humanity and empathy while celebrating the film's force for sharing stories in the search for justice and equality.

What is the role of film in shaping border imagination, contestation, and experience? **Reel Borders** examines the interrelation of borders and film by focusing on three specific borderlands: the Irish border, the Ceuta and Melilla exclaves at the Spanish-Moroccan border, and the Turkish-Syrian border. This research project, based in the communication department at



Reel Borders, *Views From the Border*, 2023, video still

the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and funded by the European Research Council, incorporates film and production analysis, expert interviews, cineforum, and participatory filmmaking, with short films created by 'borderlanders'.

**Irene Gutiérrez** is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and a PhD fellow at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and University Carlos III of Madrid. Her films and research address themes of borders, im/mobility, and migration through participatory filmmaking. As a filmmaker, she has directed *Border Diaries* (2013), *Hotel Nueva Isla* (2014), *Connected Walls* (2015), *Exile Diaries* (2019), and *Between Dog and Wolf* (2020).

**Silvia Almenara-Niebla** is a postdoctoral researcher at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She obtained her PhD in gender and migration studies from Universidad de La Laguna, Spain in 2020. Her PhD research on transnational belonging and media practices among refugees won the doctoral prize. She is vice-chair of the Diaspora, Migration, and the Media section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

**Kevin Smets** is an associate professor at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, where he teaches film history. He is co-director of the research group Echo: Media, Culture and Politics and coordinator of the project Reel Borders. He is a former member of the Young Academy of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts.

## 11 IMAGES AND OBJECTS: RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE, 2023

Miglė Bareikytė & Natasha Klimenko ca. 19'

Russia's war against Ukraine has been widely mediated, resulting in analyses, opinion pieces, gossip, and disinformation. With this video essay, which also precedes the forthcoming edited volume *Images and Objects: Russia's War against Ukraine* (2024), we contribute to the mediation of the war in a way that respects situated critical knowledge with a series of commentaries by Ukrainian and Eastern European scholars. We argue for a continued engagement with scholars from the region and a responsible mediation of the ongoing war in the ephemeral economies of attention.

The video essay *Images and Objects: Russia's War against Ukraine* explores the possibilities and boundaries of an empathic gaze, while providing a personal engagement with various forms of visual representation in the context of multi-sensory warfare. Using art and documentation by Ukrainian practitioners, the video explores the participants' personal or academic relationship to images, monuments, museums, advertisements, and places in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This video is made in collaboration with Mykola Homanyuk, Svitlana Matviyenko, Gintautas Mažeikis, Denys Shatalov, and Bohdan Shumylovych and also features artworks by Kateryna Lisovenko, Mykyta Lyskov, and Danylo Movchan.



Collage by Natasha Klimenko, featuring photographs and paintings by Kateryna Lisovenko, Danylo Movchan, Mykola Homanyuk, and Denys Shatalov

**Miglė Bareikytė** holds the Chair for Digital Studies at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), where she is a dual member of the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences and the European New School of Digital Studies (ENS). Bareikytė was previously a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Siegen, in the Digital Media and Methods Team led by professor Carolin Gerlitz, where she worked on digital war sensing, media and data practices, media geopolitics, and algorithmic accountability. For many years, she has been researching digitalisation with a special focus on Central and Eastern Europe.

**Natasha Klimenko** is a PhD researcher at the Graduate School Global Intellectual History at the Freie Universität Berlin and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research looks at the transregional artist networks operating in Soviet Central Asia in the first half of the twentieth century, with a focus on the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic.

## 12 A FILM JAR, 2023

Ira A. Goryainova ca. 20'



Ira A. Goryainova, *A Film Jar*, 2023,  
video still

The video work *A Film Jar* is a material trace of the eponymous lecture performance, presented in the framework of the conference on November 16–18. While the latter focuses on decomposing a film essay, by laying bare the filmmaking process and inviting the audience to witness how it was made, the video is the final result of this process. Starting with the premise that any documentary portrayal has something dominating and destructive in its nature, it tackles the relationship between the director and her protagonist, the construction and consequences of the gaze, as well as the vacuum of a film, which takes a real-life person hostage, engulfs and seals them in forever.

**Ira A. Goryainova** is a film director, audiovisual artist, and researcher based in Brussels. The relationship between body, camera, screen, and spectator is her main area of interest, which she explores in essay- and montage films, video installations, and performances. Thematically her focus is on the body under extreme conditions—such as illness, death, and suffering—and how they can be read as political metaphors while still conveying explicit bodily, non-narrative meanings. Goryainova's work has been shown at IDFA, Hot Docs, Visions du Réel, Thessaloniki Film Festival, Artdocfest, Argos, Halle für Kunst Steiermark, ISELP, RIDM, Imagine Science Film Festival, Deutsches Theater Berlin, among others. Currently she is a postdoctoral researcher, as well as a hybrid and documentary film teacher at the Royal Institute for Theatre, Cinema and Sound (RITCS), Brussels.

## 13 6 MINUTES OF YOUR TIME, 2023

Emilie Flower & Ana Bilbao 6'43"

*For clarity and efficiency, many lawyers use 6-minute intervals to invoice their clients.*

*A home care agency in the UK made care visits lasting 'as little as six minutes.' They became the subject of an investigation following a patient's death.*

*6 minutes of your time* is a short film that invites viewers to practise empathy. The film's primary source is a series of photographs taken by artist and researcher Emilie Flower that depict the testimony of a care worker in Edinburgh who sought to counteract small acts of unkindness he encountered in his work environment. The photograph at the centre of the film shows a young man in the act of washing an elderly woman who had agreed for the first time in years to be washed. He said, 'I tried to wash her as though she was my own mother.' These images reorient patriarchal narratives of women being the primary agents of care and suggest its centrality regardless of gender. Slow filming can mirror key aspects of care often unavailable to non-participants, such as physicality and ceaselessness. Instead of relying on art's disruptive powers, this film suggests that repetitive and persistent actions generate reliability, a precondition in the practice of care. The work highlights interdependence as a value that is as important as autonomy, which currently underpins more traditional human-rights frameworks.



Emilie Flower & Ana Bilbao, *6 minutes of your time*, 2023, video still

**Emilie Flower** is an artist and filmmaker based at Pica studios in York. Since 2016 she has been a resident artist and coordinator of the international AHRC-funded research network exploring art, archives, and political imagination at the University of York. She is currently researching arts-based contributions to human rights and the art of political hope. Her most recent projects include *Arctivism*, *Pushing Back*, *Development Alternatives*, and *Creative Activism*. Flower also works in film design for theatre, art installations, and rights-based projects.

**Ana Bilbao** is a lecturer in modern and contemporary art in the history of art department at the University of York. Her research explores histories of exhibition-making and contemporary art, mainly from Southeast Asia and Latin America. She is currently interested in the intersection between art, human, and environmental rights from a decolonial perspective.

Bilbao and Flower are members of **Art Rights Truth (ART)**, a three-year interdisciplinary research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK and hosted by the Centre of Applied Human Rights at the University of York.

## 14 PUEBLOS INDÍGENAS TAGAERI Y TAROMENANE VS ECUADOR – A NEGOTIATION PROCESS OF TERRITORIAL ISOLATION

Nina Valerie Kolowratnik ca. 4'



Johannes Pointl, Burning of petrol extraction side products in the Ecuadorian Amazon

The Tagaeri and Taromenane represent the last uncontacted indigenous tribes in Ecuador. Since 2006 their territorial isolation is at the same time being defined, protected, and put at risk by a series of parallel processes: a legal case in the Inter-American System, Ecuador's protection obligations and measures, and a rapidly advancing natural resource extraction industry operated by both private and state-owned companies. While remaining in isolation, a series of violent clashes which lead to numerous deaths are both a sign of fierce territorial protection and acute endangerment of the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples.

**Nina Valerie Kolowratnik** is an architect and a PhD candidate in law at the Human Rights Centre, Faculty of Law and Criminology at Ghent University. Her research focuses on Indigenous peoples' knowledge in human-rights courts and the impact of the evidentiary regime on access to justice and knowledge representation. She is part of the larger ERC-funded project DISSECT: Evidence in International Human Rights Adjudication. She holds an MSc in Critical, Curatorial, and Conceptual Practices in Architecture from Columbia University and a BSc and MSc in architecture from Graz University of Technology. Following her postgraduate studies, she founded a research and advocacy practice that develops spatial visualisation systems that operate as translational tools in the context of forced migration, cultural claims to territory, and Indigenous rights. She is the author of the book *The Language of Secret Proof: Indigenous Truth and Representation* (Sternberg Press, 2019) and she is currently in Ecuador for a year to conduct fieldwork for her PhD.

## 15 EYES THE EARTH WILL SWALLOW, 2023

Dámaso Randulfe ca. 16'

Ever stranger geological forces animate an improbable cast of compulsive diggers: exhumation machines, guerrilla archaeologists, a ruinous empire, and a nameless skeleton with a glass eye. Blending autonecrography, synthetic media, and documentary footage, *Eyes the Earth Will Swallow* delves into a tempestuous present intruded by fossilised resistances emerging from the deep.



Dámaso Randulfe, *Eyes the Earth Will Swallow*, 2023, video stills

**Dámaso Randulfe** is an architect and artist based in London. Their work investigates the technologies, ecologies, and mythologies shaping contemporary ways of seeing and inhabiting the earth. They are an editor of *Migrant Journal*, a publication series on the spatial politics of more-than-human migrations, and a faculty member at the School of Architecture, Royal College of Art and the School of Art, Architecture, and Design, London Metropolitan University. Their work and various collaborative projects have been presented at the Oslo Architecture Triennale, Triennale de Milano, Index Biennial of Art and Technology, Design Museum, Tate Modern, and The Showroom. They are currently an AHRC-funded PhD candidate at the School of Architecture, Royal College of Art.

## 16 RETREAT, 2020

Joeri Verbesselt 15'52"

Something is in the air.

Dusk. Wind. Rising temperatures.

Protest chanting, batons ready, waiting for tear gas.

A post-apocalyptic montage of existing and staged images evokes our planet on the brink of ecological collapse. In this world shrouded in smog and tear gas, a revolutionary collective expresses their rebellion through a performance that takes place on the ground they have gathered to defend. The bits of recognisable sound that seep into this otherwise dialogue-free and abstract work attest to the fact that its basis in real protests—in many different languages—is also its greatest power. As a piece of performative cli-fi (climate fiction), *retreat* aims to be an alarming call for social and environmental change.

**Joeri Verbesselt** is an artist and researcher interested in ecological imagination and grounding the human-animal relationship. He works with many media including writing, films, and performances. Verbesselt published several essays and one short story. His short film *retreat* (2020) premiered at CPH:DOX, Copenhagen International Documentary Festival, and was shown internationally. Since 2019, his artistic research has been supported by a PhD in the arts with a bursary from the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO). Verbesselt is a member of the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture (KU Leuven) and the artistic research collective 'deep histories fragile memories' (LUCA School of Arts). He is currently working between Belgium and Indigenous communities on the Pacific islands of Taiwan and Pongso no Tao.



Joeri Verbesselt, *retreat*,  
2020, video stills

# EXHIBITION II

NOVEMBER 26, 2023–  
JANUARY 28, 2024

CULTUURCENTRUM  
HASSELT (CCHA)  
KUNSTLAAN 5  
3500 HASSELT

EXHIBITION OPENING:  
SUNDAY NOVEMBER 26, 15:00

VISITING HOURS:  
TUESDAY–SUNDAY, 13:00–17:00  
AND DURING EVENING PERFORMANCES

BERTE & HARMEY, JEROEN BOCKEN, DIRK  
BRAECKMAN, TOM CALLEMIN, ANNELIES DE MEY,  
BIEKE DEPOORTER, GEERT GOIRIS, TINE GUNS,  
ROBIN HOMBROUCK, CLARISSE M, VINCENT  
MEESSEN, MAX PINCKERS, LISA SCHELKENS,  
DOMINIQUE SOMERS, LORE STESEL, GUUS  
VANDEWEERD, STEPHAN VANFLETEREN, SINE VAN  
MENXEL, SYBREN VANOVERBERGHE, CHANTAL VAN  
RIJT, BRAM VAN STAPPEN, JOSELITO VERSCHAEVE,  
ALINE VERSTRATEN, AND KRISTOF VRANCKEN.

*Agents of Concern — Exhibition II*, curated by Patrick Ceyskens and Dominique Somers, specifically focuses upon the photographic framework in which empathy can arise. When stillness engenders movement, the compassionate gaze of the maker is manifested within the image, and empathy ignites during the encounter with an art piece. This group show presents a wide array of contemporary image-makers and lens-based works, proving that the concept of empathy has many nuances and agents of concern can take on characteristic forms. Within the spaces of the CCHA are featured, among others, digitally generated landscapes (Joselito Verschaeve); 'portraits' of cloned human bodies (Tom Callemin); hyper-realistic renders based on optical or virtual interventions (Jeroen Bocken, Guus Vandeweerd); personal stories told by alternating still and moving images (Bieke Depoorter); photographic re-enactments of traumatic events (Max Pinckers); animations of iconic photographs (Vincent Meessen); sublime

vistas (Geert Goiris, Sybren Vanoverberghe); fragments of generic snapshots (Bram Van Stappen); contemporary takes on historical forensic imagery (Dominique Somers); works that return our gaze (Stephan Vanfleteren); or prefer to ignore it (Dirk Braeckman).

What unites these seemingly disparate works is the fact that every single one of them, in their own way, enables or questions the viewer's affective relationship with what is depicted. When physically interacting with exhibited images, other mental pictures and stories start to emerge. Reactions are unleashed in an unexpected manner. Looking fades into touching, feeling. The viewer's desires are simultaneously activated and frustrated. For time and again, we are confronted with the clouded line between fact and fiction, between the perspective of the self and the other, between what is revealed and remains hidden. A striking power that is not always visible or tangible surrounds the images. In that sense, the selected works fit into what David Company calls 'the limbo of photography.' In the encounter with the photographic limbo—with the unspoken possibilities of the image—new things happen. Reconsideration. Rethinking. Re-seeing.

Each piece presented here strongly appeals to the imagination of the spectator, to the mind's unique ability to trade places and to think from a perspective we physically do not have access to. This mental dislocation towards the image and what it depicts is made possible only by our inner eye. Reorienting our outlook, we depart from the realms of the sensational and the instant reflexes it provokes. Here, reflection can occur. Overtly distressing or demanding images are therefore not included in the exhibition. Unlike emotional experiences such as the shock or the kick – fast and traumatic, the spectacular shot—empathy requires time, stillness, and slowness to make an impression; images 'that stick' to the silent underlayer of the spectator's conscience. It explains why so many artists turn to visual strategies that tone down or slow down the experience of looking. In the exhibited works, empathy precisely depends upon states of hesitation or confusion. The longer we gaze at the image, the stronger is its impact. Pictures that strike over time desire ways of seeing that involve duration:

attentiveness, reflection, thoughtfulness. What do I see? What effect does the image have on me? Why does it activate something that no other artwork has done before? In what way does it 'hit' me? The works in *Agents of Concern — Exhibition II* are filled with visual triggers but how these affect us hinges upon the way we perceive and experience them. Attentive looking can stimulate unforeseen connections and resonances. We can point at the enigma but are unable to grasp it. It only presents itself.

The exhibition at CCHA also addresses to what extent we 'feel' for the image as such rather than for what it depicts. Tactile qualities of the photograph, in terms of an object with a particular materiality and sensitivity, can arouse strong empathic reactions. Medium-specific factors such as depth of field, shutter speed, optical laws, and framing have a profound effect on the appearance of all things pictured. The apparatus is never an objective recorder of reality; it co-creates the phenomena it registers. In addition to the perspective chosen by whoever handles the camera, the photograph is always the result of a technically induced way of looking that does not require our gaze. This consciousness also infiltrates the image as re-presentation. It marks the difference between what we perceive *in front* and *through* the lens. The cut in time and space, a frame within reality, the surprising power of the optical hyper-real and the photographic detail, composition and light effects turn representation itself into a form of empathy, an act of animation we only partially control. Photographed subjects thus obtain an autonomy, an identity, a life that does not differ much from our own. At times perceived as magical and poetic, at others as impersonal and machine-like, the inherent technicality of the lens-based image prompts both sympathy and apathy. This ambivalent appreciation of the photographic condition can force our ways of looking at and thinking about images into complex contortions. Ratio and emotion collide when confronted with a medium that already has a difficult relationship with reality. These ambiguous foundations make it even more interesting to investigate aspects of empathy from a photographic perspective.

Dominique Somers



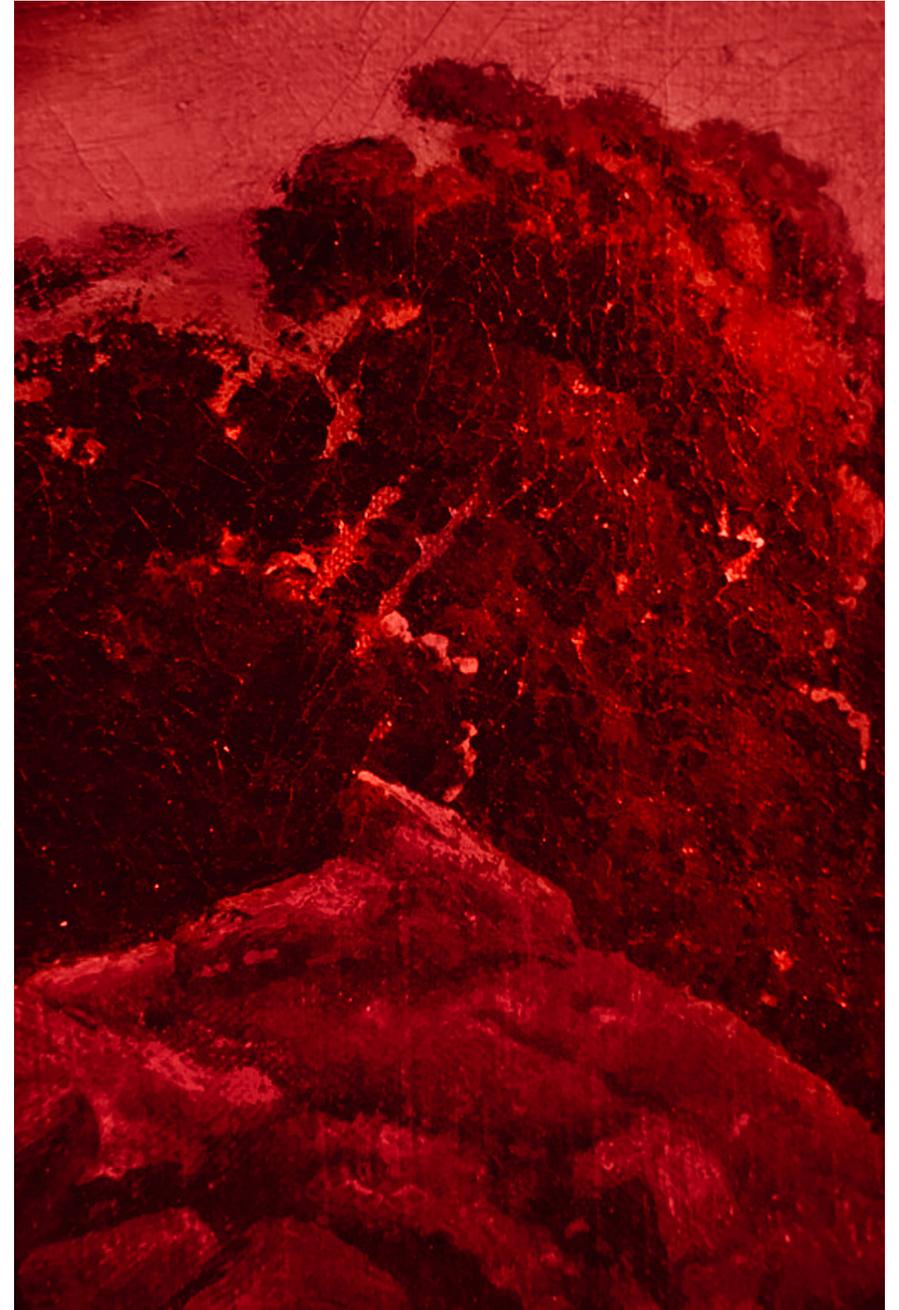
Geert Goiris, *Whiteout #22 (Ganzfeld)*, 2008.  
Courtesy of Geert Goiris and Galerie Art:Concept, Paris



Tom Callemin, *Starling (tonic immobility)*, 2022.  
Courtesy of Tom Callemin and tegenboschvanvreden, Amsterdam



Max Pinckers, *As in a Dark Mirror*, from the series *Margins of Excess*, 2018. Courtesy of Max Pinckers and Gallery Sofie Van de Velde



Dirk Braeckman, *T.H.-R.P.-23*.  
Courtesy of Dirk Braeckman, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp,  
GRIMM Amsterdam | New York and Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin

## Colophon

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**KRIEG?**

