HOW TO WIN

AT PHOTOGRAPHY

IMAGE-MAKING AS PLAY

This exhibition explores the relationship between photography and play. It invites visitors to focus on the game-like aspects of visual culture. Across five chapters, *How to Win at Photography* draws unexpected connections between the history of photography and contemporary practices of image-making with and within computer games to investigate different notions of image play.

Contents:

GAME TRAVEL — PLAYING TOURIST

Screenshotting – literally instructing a computer to take an image of what's on its screen – has become commonplace within video game culture. Players now explore online environments like tourists, mapping them out and collecting souvenirs of their journeys with virtual cameras. Often disregarding the game's intended goals, they choose instead to visually document what they encounter.

Artists and photographers focus their attention on the specific properties of the digital image, modify the original code or create new tools to deconstruct these spaces. In some cases, their activity is a form of resistance – a refusal to accept the rules. In others, rather than *playing* a video game, artists *play with* the video game, introducing a different kind of engagement. Here, image-making becomes a form of metaplay, like a game within a game.

CORY ARCANGEL

Cory Arcangel
(b. 1978, USA)

Super Landscape 1 (2005) comprises Cory Arcangel's works *Super Mario Clouds* and *F1 Racer Mod*. By manipulating the hardware and software on the cartridges of iconic console games, the artist removes all characters, obstacles, sounds, playable elements and game mechanics, leaving only the landscape animations running on the screen. Through an artistic form of 'modding' – the practice of hacking software to change its appearance and performance – Arcangel deconstructs the game and turns the act of play into one of contemplation. Freed from the game's purpose of navigating Mario through his quest or winning the race, *Super Landscape 1* is simultaneously a refusal to play the game, an act of reappropriation of the game object as a creative tool, and a study of the elements – the clouds and roads – that make up the landscapes of computer games.

ARAM BARTHOLL

Aram Bartholl
(b. 1972, Germany)

The installation *de_dust* (2004) is part of a larger project in which Bartholl attempts to rebuild the entire bomb defusal map, called 'Dust', from the computer game *Counter Strike*. Initially released in 1999 as a modification (or 'mod') of another first-person shooter game, *Counter Strike* quickly spread to become a global sensation. Its community not only joined from all over the world, flooding internet cafes and meeting on-screen through the online multiplayer game, but was also active in designing textures and customising game maps.

By materialising the game's iconic crates – rendered in life-size in the physical space – the artist blurs the boundaries between the game space and the world outside the screen to remind us of the social spaces we can actively shape as a community. Through the original pixelated graphics that appear obvious as we approach the installation, *de_dust* simultaneously comments on the aesthetics of 1990s digital environments and the increasingly indivisible relationship between the virtual and physical spaces of socialisation and exchange.

Justin Berry
(b. 1980, USA)

Justin Berry creates hyper-realistic images of the virtual landscapes found in popular video games such as *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and *Medal of Honor*. Berry's focus, however, is not on the games' narratives, rules or mechanics. Rather, he is fascinated by the environments he encounters. The two artworks here, selected from his 2018 project *Road Trips*, are mementos of a journey that took place on-screen. *Mojo Coyo* depicts a two-lane road that makes a sharp turn near the ocean. We see a flock of birds, a small settlement, some crops and a cross. *Monte Puncu* shows a country road passing through hilly forests. They are named after real and fictional locations in a simulacrum of Bolivia that happens to be the setting for an episode of *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* – a game Berry played extensively. The experience felt real. To the artist, that's all that matters.

Alan Butler
(b. 1981, Ireland)

In this ongoing project, Alan Butler abandons the objective of winning a game in order to shift his attention to extracting texture files of trees and plants from game software. Photorealistic leaves and pixelated cacti become part of a botanical archive documenting the specimens of virtual flora that inhabit game landscapes populated by millions of players.

Reminiscent of the 1843 *Cyanotypes of British Algae* by the botanist and photographer Anne Atkins, *Virtual Botany Cyanotypes* (2016 – present) documents our contemporary screen landscapes and the ambiguous relationship between nature and its simulation. Through Butler's quasi-scientific investigation, the work also shows the evolution of computer graphics over the last decades including attempts by the game industry to achieve seamless photorealism and the simulation of reality in its every detail.

Gloria López Cleries & Sive Hamilton Helle
(b. 1988, Spain; b. 1989, Norway)

Romanticised and dystopian at turns, *The Unreal* (2019 – present, 13:50 mins) navigates the viewer through a game landscape that stretches out endlessly before our eyes, uncoupled from space and time. Initially, individual freedom is seemingly liberated from exploitation and colonial power structures. Then, suddenly, we find ourselves in the middle of a mining landscape. The work confronts the fact that we are bleeding the physical world dry in order to drive technological progress. It also alerts us to the accompanying narrative of progress propagated by Big Tech companies that ends up colonising our consciousness. In this way, the artists make it clear that *The Unreal* is by no means free of power structures. Instead, these are manifested in new forms of techno-colonialism.

Joan Pamboukes
(b. 1977, USA)

Joan Pamboukes makes work at the intersection of gaming and photography. Her pictures, which bring to mind coloured skies and abstract cloud formations, are landscape images derived from video games that she photographs off the screen with her camera.

The series *Videogame Color Fields* (2006) takes as its starting point games like *Grand Theft Auto, Kill Zone* and *Metal Gear*, which are all characterised by gameplay that glorifies violence and is often misogynistic. The sense of calm and harmony that the photographs radiate contrasts with the brutal context from which they are drawn. By opting out of the actual game and focusing instead on the aesthetic quality of the settings for the individual scenes, Pamboukes ultimately makes a conscious stand against the replication of violence and misogyny.

Tabor Robak
(b. 1986, USA)

Tabor Robak creates imagined worlds that address our increasingly overflowing digital realities. He works with software-based tools traditionally employed in the production of video games, special effects and motion graphics. In his work *Rocks* (2011), the artist singles out 198 stones, painstakingly created using the cutting-edge computer graphics of that time. Rendered in 3D, the rocks appear both imaginary and realistic, abstract and naturalistic, thus creating an ambiguous space in which the natural world and its artificial simulation in virtual game environments coexist in a state of tension. Robak's collection of impossible minerals presents a new kind of artificial nature – one that appears familiar yet can only exist in digital worlds.

TABOR ROBAK

GAMEPLAY
—
HOW TO WIN AT PHOTOGRA-PHY

Both the production and circulation of images are increasingly shaped by game mechanics. Quantifiable values such as views, likes, shares, followers and reposts have now been actively promoting the gamification – the application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts – of visual culture for over a decade.

Today, score systems for images have become normalised. Data extracted from the images we share online is harvested by corporations and governments for opaque purposes. With their aura of objectivity, they legitimise the so-called 'attention economy', clearly demarcating 'winners' from 'losers'. As a result, these kinds of reward systems are changing the way digital photographs are created, evaluated and shared. This spawns a new aesthetic that has become standard for a generation of online influencers. In this context, content producers can either conform to the status quo by creating 'successful' images or they can try to subvert the prevailing logics to challenge, reject or sabotage gamified labour.

Constant Dullaart
(b. 1979, The Netherlands)

In his 2014 online performance *High Retention, Slow Delivery,* Constant Dullaart purchased 2.5 million fake Instagram followers. He distributed these among selected artists, curators and figures in the art world until they all reached 100,000 followers. Attempting to reset the social value that is generated on the platform using metrics that quantify attention, Dullaart's assembled 'army' shows how these artificial systems of value can be subverted, reclaimed and manipulated.

The work became a prescient warning of the role that similar orchestrations would play in affecting public opinion in the 2016 US elections and the Brexit referendum. It also reveals the hidden workforce tied to the system of validation on social media platforms. Here, 'click factories' – low-paid workers hired solely to click on advertising links – and automated bots add millions of likes to any image or social media account they are ordered to.

CONSTANT DULLAART

John Yuyi
(b. 1991, Taiwan)

In the age of social media, the value of an image is determined by the number of likes and shares it gets: they transform the fleeting attention that the images are given into measurable units. John Yuyi gives visual expression to this trend by affixing relevant icons to her skin as temporary tattoos.

Attention as a form of currency is also illustrated by the artist's cooperation with prestige brands, whose logos she temporarily pastes onto her skin before posting her self-portraits on Instagram as promotion. Here, the body has become the vehicle of media attention on social networks. At the same time, she also demonstrates how our bodies are occupied by these very platforms. They have an influence on how we present and perceive ourselves – and determine the value that we give to ourselves.

JOHN YUYI

Emma Agnes Sheffer
(b. 1991, USA)

It is not only games that are governed by certain rules: photography is also subject to them. This is particularly evident on the social media platform Instagram, as illustrated by Emma Agnes Sheffer on her profile @insta_repeat. Each of her posts is a collage of virtually identical motifs that she found on the profiles of different influencers. The artist presents this juxtaposition to demonstrate how users with large numbers of followers define what a 'successful' image should look like. The more likes, clicks and shares a picture gets, the more influence it has on visual idioms. This pictorial language becomes an unwritten aesthetic rule, imitated by others in a process of standardisation. In playing the 'attention' game, it is not originality that counts so much as how well it can be staked out and marketed.

Coralie Vogelaar
(b. 1981, The Netherlands)

Algorithms can analyse human emotions by subdividing faces into 'action units'. These units are assigned, in differing combinations, to six basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear and disgust. If the corners of the mouth are pulled up, for example, and the eyes are narrowed, this is read as happiness. Coralie Vogelaar's *Random String of Emotions* (2018, 5:23 mins) takes this procedure into the realms of the absurd. For her video work, the artist had an algorithm combine these action units at random. She then asked an actress to imitate the movements, getting her to contract her muscles without attempting to express a specific emotion. Meanwhile, software analysis was performed on her face and a corresponding emotion assigned. Vogelaar's approach exposes the perils of machine learning and the extent to which the complexity of human feelings and behavioural forms can be meaningfully grasped by computer systems.

A selection of video games simulating photography as a core element of game mechanics

This selection of gameplay video excerpts has been edited in the chronological order of their release. It demonstrates the ways in which the act of taking photographs has literally been turned into a game. Here, players' in-game pictures are evaluated by software, and aesthetic scores are accorded to the images through algorithms that analyse pose, composition and technique.

This process of gamifying photography allows only certain types of images to be successful. If the players want to win the game, they need to conform to its rules. In order to 'win at photography', we must therefore submit ourselves to a unified form of image and vision. Simulating photo safaris, paparazzi or street photography, these games create a standardised and normative idea of 'good photography'. They often place the photographer-player in the role of the hunter uncritically, with the subject as their prey.

The Instagram Egg
(b. 2019, online)

On 4 January 2019, an unremarkable photograph of an egg on a white background was uploaded to the Instagram account @world_record_egg. The image was created with the explicit intention of generating a new record as the most liked picture on the platform. The Instagram Egg, as it was nicknamed, quickly became a viral phenomenon, and it has now accumulated more than 55 million likes to date.

While the egg was later revealed to be part of an advertising campaign, its success story can be read as a symbol of how the value of a networked image is determined by its circulation. The Instagram Egg demonstrates how traditional ways of interpreting a photograph through semiotic analysis and aesthetic evaluation have been superseded by the quantified attention an image gets online. Its relevance and success is measured by how effectively the picture circulates.

* Vernacular material refers to images that have been produced outside an artistic context. These are utilitarian shots taken in everyday life and include amateur snapshots and screenshots that circulate online.

REPLAY
—
RE-STAGE

RE-ENACT

RE-CREATE

By re-photographing, re-enacting or re-contextualising an image, artists can change its original meaning. The replica photograph plays with notions of memory, history, authorship and truth. It can expose images as constructions, bringing to light their underlying power structures. By re-enacting historical events, alternative meanings are introduced and subsequently shared through social media platforms.

As games become more 'realistic' and reality takes an increasingly gamified turn, the very notions of 'original' and 'copy' are blurred. Unsurprisingly, video game screenshots have been used by political organisations to fabricate photographic evidence of events that never took place. Is disinformation the 'new normal'? Is cheating just another name for propaganda? Not necessarily. Image play can become a tactic used to challenge truth and fiction, reality and representation. By appropriating and re-contextualising images, artists and photographers question dominant authorities by generating counter-narratives that can shape reality.

JON HADDOCK

Jon Haddock
(b. 1960, USA)

Jon Haddock reinterprets both historical and fictional events in the style of a video game. In this selection from his series *Isometric Screenshots* (2000), the artist depicts scenes from popular movies such as *Mary Poppins* and *Twelve Angry Men*. A variety of crime scenes and murder settings, such as the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado are also included. Although the iconography may be ludicrous, the effects on the viewer are far from it. The conflation of footage is both jarring and illuminating. It suggests that the power of media – video games included – consists in turning lived reality into something that has been called a 'media event' (Daniel Boorstin), a 'spectacle' (Guy Debord) and a 'simulacrum' (Jean Baudrillard).

ROC HERMS

Roc Herms
(b. 1978, Spain)

Can you subvert a joke? Roc Herms appropriates and hijacks artist Ai Weiwei's *Study of Perspective* – itself an irreverent take on the process of image-making. Herms replicates Ai Weiwei's work within the virtual world of San Andreas, the exaggerated, grotesque replica of California created by the developers of the massively popular game *Grand Theft Auto V*. Using a first-person view and the in-game camera, the artist photographs his raised middle finger against a variety of backgrounds including government buildings, car parks, billboards, and even factories. Herms' artistic gesture prompts the questions: did he do it for the lulz? If so, who is laughing now?

SHERRIE LEVINE

Sherrie Levine
(b. 1947, USA)

Edward Weston, Walker Evans and Alexander Rodchenko are all part of the male canon that continues to shape art history and the history of photography to this day. Sherrie Levine pulls apart this tradition by appropriating the works of such celebrated male artists. *After Alexander Rodchenko* (1985), for example, consists of images by the eponymous Russian artist that Levine re-photographed, claiming authorship for the pictures by passing them off as her own. Levine's strategy can be read as a feminist critique of the art historical canon. For a long time only the idealised male artistic 'genius' was ascribed creativity and originality. Women were mostly relegated to the roles of object or muse. The value system within art is also challenged inasmuch as it has imposed the categories of 'original' and 'copy' on photography. This notion is at odds with the technical reproducibility of the image.

LORNA RUTH GALLONAY

Lorna Ruth Galloway
(b. 1984, USA)

Lorna Ruth Galloway creates artworks situated between the analogue and the digital, between lived life and simulation, produced through a laborious process of appropriation and reconfiguration. Galloway takes screenshots of petrol stations located in the world of *Grand Theft Auto V*. She uses a photo-editing software to create halftone separations for each screenshot. The resulting images are then turned into charcoal silk screens. The series refers to the tradition of photographic reproduction in printmaking and to the American artist Ed Ruscha's seminal photobook *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963). Additionally, the polluting effects of both carbon (charcoal) and fossil fuels (gasoline) reminds us that, to paraphrase communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, '*the medium* is the message'.

ED RUSCHA

Ed Ruscha
(b. 1937, USA)

The series *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* appeared in a book of the same title published in the early 1960s. Ed Ruscha photographed various petrol stations along Route 66 across the USA. The series presents a matter-of-fact chronicle of deserted landscapes in black-and-white photographs. These generate a desolate atmosphere while also conveying a sense of repetition: the 26 filling stations were all photographed from a similar point of view. The fact that the pictures have been used by other artists or even adapted as backdrops in video games is indicative of the iconic status that Ruscha's images have attained over the years. While the American photographer's work in the 1960s tackled the homogeneity of people's everyday experience, the adaptation and recontextualisation of the images brings up new questions.

AI WEIWEI

Ai Weiwei
(b. 1957, China)

In *Study of Perspective* (1995–2011), artist and activist Ai Weiwei shows his middle finger to historical buildings, familiar landmarks and public spaces that were long ago turned into symbols of power. His middle finger can be seen in front of the federal parliament building in Switzerland's capital city Bern, New York's Trump Tower, the Eiffel Tower in Paris and Beijing's Forbidden City. *Study of Perspective* is intended as a provocation and expression of mistrust towards the socio-economic systems of power represented by these buildings and spaces. The perspective is always the same, similar to the one adopted by players in first-person-shooter video games. This enables the viewer to identify with the action, in turn pushing them into the role of accomplice. At the same time, Ai's anti-authoritarian gesture is also reinforced by the enlarged scale of the artist's arm, hand and finger, out of perspective with the seemingly smaller sites in the background.

Tweet by Russian Ministry of Defence

On 14 November 2017, the Russian Ministry of Defence posted pictures on their official Facebook and Twitter accounts that were supposed to show 'irrefutable evidence' of US forces aiding the terrorist organisation ISIS. The alleged photographic proof was soon discovered to be a series of screenshots taken in the smartphone game *AC-130 Gunship Simulator: Special Ops Squadron,* only cropped to hide the game interface. The incident reveals how the ambiguity between photography and simulation, as well as between war-based video games and military tools of image capture can be weaponised for political manipulation. By blurring the boundaries between first-person shooters and simulations to train soldiers, as well as between war game players and remote drone operators, the example reveals the intertwined relationship between computer games and the military.

A selection of re-enactments of the Tank Man photograph in computer games

The iconic photograph, taken by Jeff Widener in 1989 and depicting an unidentified man standing in front of a row of tanks became, in the western world, a symbol of the Chinese oppression of the student protests happening that year in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. Today, players around the world continue to use war simulation games to re-enact the same scene and distribute it across different online forums and platforms. At the same time, photographs of the Tank Man are blocked from image search results in China and routinely censored by the authorities.

By circulating game screenshots and increasing the visibility and iconicity of the Tank Man, the images can be read as a means to fight back against the politics of erasure. The act of re-enactment within computer games thus becomes a strategy to reclaim a collective memory that is being silenced. It enables voices, ideas and movements rendered invisible through censorship to resurface.

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Harun Farocki
(1944–2014, Germany)

Harun Farocki is known for his relentless inquiry into the nature and effects of image-making technologies. Towards the end of his life, he turned his attention to the digital image, best exemplified by video games. The four-part cycle *Parallel* (2012–2014) focuses on the development, aesthetics and inherent rules of computer-animated worlds.

Situating video games within a broader tradition – the history of representation – the film-maker illustrates the rise of the computational over the photographic. At once analytical and poetic, these video essays deconstruct the notions of truth and fantasy. They highlight the artificial nature of 'realistic' simulations and simultaneously bring to the fore the embedded ideologies of an allegedly 'neutral' technology.

HARUN FAROCKI

CAMERA PLAY
—
PLAYING WITH THE APPARATUS

The camera is generally understood as a photographer's tool. However, since its inception, artists have challenged both the rules and the ways in which the apparatus 'sees' the world. By playing with the camera – sometimes against its prescribed functions – photographers bring to light the ideologies informing the production, circulation and consumption of images. By deliberately misusing, modifying, challenging and reinventing the camera, new ways of seeing emerge.

Artists have also looked to play with the tools of virtual reality. Computer games are now equipped with powerful photo modes that combine a simulated camera with a versatile editing software, and players are encouraged to share their images on social media. In short, both avant-garde and vernacular practices have redefined the meaning of play.

However, as the vast majority of images are increasingly generated, 'seen' and evaluated by machines, the players in this 'game' are changing. The consequences will be far-reaching. What happens when the human perspective meets the machine gaze?

Dorothée Elisa Baumann
(b. 1972, Switzerland)

The camera is not a neutral object for Dorothée Elisa Baumann. As soon as a camera is present in an encounter between people and their gazes, the playing field tilts further. Baumann goes one step further by likening the camera to a weapon that creates hierarchies between subject and object. The resulting power structures are reinforced by technological advances. The faster or more easily a picture can be taken, the less time there is to deal with the reality of life on the other side of the lens. In her video work *Take a Better Picture* (2018), Baumann uses a hammer to hit the shutter release of a camera. The work represents an appeal for photography to play by new rules that will break up the hierarchy between the photographing subject and the photographed 'object'.

Dries Depoorter & Max Pinckers
(b. 1991, Belgium; b. 1988, Belgium)

Trophy Camera v0.9 (2017) is a camera powered by artificial intelligence. It is programmed to only take 'winning photos'. The camera is trained with machine-learning algorithms and a data set of images that were awarded the World Press Photo of the Year from 1955 to present. Its software compares the live image with the archive from which it has 'learned' to define a winning picture. If the match is 90% or above, the image is saved on the dedicated website trophy camera; anything less is instantly deleted.

The work envisions a world in which photographic 'success' has been automated and outsourced to machines. Yet it also raises the question of whether a certain 'automation' of visual tropes is not already embedded in our current photojournalistic practices. These ways of looking at the world rely on the relentless use of exploitative images – the innocent child, the mourning woman – and this can lead to complex themes of conflict and violence being translated into simplistic and catchy symbols.

Visitors are invited to interact with *Trophy Camera v0.95* (2021).

CHRISTOPHER GRAVES

Christopher Graves
(b. 1981, USA)

Christopher Graves combines a DIY, punk attitude with a playful approach to photography to improve the original Game Boy Camera from 1998. This lo-fi image-making machine was an official add-on for Nintendo's popular handheld console. To expand the 'poor image-making machine' – the 'photographs' were displayed in 2-bit resolution (128 × 112 pixels) in four shades of grey – Graves upgraded the original camera with a lens adapter attached to a Game Boy Advance, featuring a Pentax 110 lens mount, a wooden grip, a 1455 mAh lithium-ion rechargeable battery via USB-C and a dedicated shutter button. Graves' impossible project is an anachronistic device that looks both vintage and futuristic.

JOHN HILLIARD

John Hilliard
(b. 1945, UK)

In the 1960s and 1970s, photography was increasingly viewed as the product of an automated process. This is evident in the work of John Hilliard. For his series *Camera Recording Its Own Condition* (1971), the English artist set up his 35mm camera in front of a mirror and shot the same image 70 times, changing the aperture and exposure time for each photo. Although the photographer's hand can be seen in some frames, Hilliard's involvement seems to be restricted to operating the shutter release. The focus here is on automatism rather than authorship, as is made clear by the grid-like configuration of the images. We may play with the camera all we like, exhausting the limits of what it can do, but, as Hilliard suggests, there is no getting around the question of whether photography can ever do anything except record its own condition.

Steven Pippin
(b. 1960, UK)

In the early 1990s, Steven Pippin repurposed the facilities of a train toilet over the course of an hour to produce and develop a series of photographs on a journey from London to Brighton. He used the semi-circular toilet bowl as a simple pinhole camera, which lead to perspectival distortions in the images. The developing and fixing of the negatives was also far from perfect – stains, splashes and other intentional flaws in the images render the original motive of the bathroom only vaguely intelligible. Pippin places focus on the machine-based photographic process and the performative nature of his experimental image-making methods. His video documentation is crucial to understanding the work and enables the viewer to make sense of the absurd and playful way in which these almost abstract photographs are created.

STEVEN PIPPIN

Ria Patricia Röder
(b.1983, Germany)

Ria Patricia Röder creates her motifs by capturing images with a scanner. In addition to found objects, the artist also scans fragments of images she has already scanned and printed as well as paper shapes and 3D materials. Accordingly, the motifs she selects appear several times in different variations. Röder understands them as 'declinations' of the real object. In her carefully composed *scanograms* (2015-2020), she also does not make use of digital processing or image reproduction. The analogue arrangement allows for a narrative quality to emerge. A narrative quality emerges solely from the analogue arrangement and the dynamic relationship between razor-sharp and out-of-focus elements, caused by the shallow depth of field in the scanning process.-Röder's 'scanograms' are an experiment with a medium that has similarities with the conventional photo camera – namely, the presence of a lens and the process of exposure – yet also enables other forms of imaging.

RIA PATRICIA RÖDER

Akihiko Taniguchi
(b. 1983, Japan)

In his playable 3D environments, Akihiko Taniguchi experiments with translating photographic processes into digital spaces. Employing game mechanics and CGI aesthetics, the artist explores the possibilities of rethinking the act of taking pictures within the logic of computer games.

Through a game-like interaction, the viewer not only experiences photographic capture as a form of play but is further confronted with many issues that lie at the heart of transforming the image in its computational and networked forms. From virtual self(ies) to image search engine filters, and green screens to multiplied screenshots flying through surreal spaces, the work immerses the player within the machinic processes that regulate contemporary image-making. It highlights the way these processes affect the relationship between the photographer and the apparatus.

A series of tutorials on photo modes

In recent years several popular computer games have introduced a new function called 'photo mode'. This enables players to stop the game, frame the scene and save an in-game image. On one hand, photo modes remediate the photographic act of capture, allowing the player to freely move the virtual camera within a frozen scene where all the game characters and vehicles stand still as if time had stopped. On the other, photo modes simulate the traditional analogue apparatus, through a camera interface that presents parameters like aperture, depth of field and other functions that form part of the optical and mechanical workings of the camera. Through this simulation, photo modes reinforce a nostalgic view of traditional photography while hiding the computational processes that regulate them.

Visitors are invited to use the game controller and play the artwork.

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ROLE PLAY

—

PLAYING WITH IDENTITY

From photographic portraits to selfies, video game avatars to cinema stars, role-playing has been one of the few constants in the ever-changing history of representation. The construction and reconstruction of identity is, for some, a full-time job on social media. Our pictorial alter egos embody the idea of success, beauty and wealth. Far from being neutral or objective, visual culture actively constructs the subject, either legitimising or delegitimising certain roles, standards and categories. Artists and photographers have always challenged normative notions of sex, gender, ethnicity and class.

The performative play with one's self can become an empowering act as well as a critique of traditions of representation that exclude minorities and impose non-negotiable rules, labels and boundaries on what is considered socially 'normal' and 'acceptable'.

CLAUDE CAHUN

Claude Cahun
(1894-1954, France)

Artist Claude Cahun undermines the social gaze by deliberately blurring the binary boundaries between the sexes with her performative, surrealist self-portraits. Consequently, the depicted personae, into whose shoes she briefly slips, cannot be clearly read as female or male. Whether with the help of a barbell or by using accentuated lips, Cahun reinforces this gender-fluid game by integrating elements into her photographs that inevitably evoked binary connotations during her lifetime. Through exaggerated staging, Cahun exposes gender as a constructed, socio-cultural masquerade. Her photographs were taken at a time when anti-Semitism and homophobia were prevalent, making the images seem all the more significant today. They also point to an early anticipation of playing with one's identity that can now be explored and expressed more fluidly.

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CIBELLE CAVALLI BASTOS

Cibelle Cavalli Bastos
(b. 1978, Brazil)

Artist and musician Cibelle Cavalli Bastos uses their Instagram account @aevtarperform to create a continuous durational performance. The work challenges dominant narratives and normative ideas of gender and beauty reproduced and reinforced by the social media platform. Using Augmented Reality face filters that promote an understanding of non-binary identity, and sharing critical content that supports trans-activist and anti-racist movements, the artist engages in a game with the platform. They embrace the rules of networked image sharing while at the same time exposing the social construction of gender. Cavalli Bastos also takes advantage of this platform by allowing users to 'wear' the artist's filter which overlays the pronouns 'They/Them' on their face. Users can also infiltrate their selfies into the social space of Instagram. Cavalli Bastos' work reveals the fluid way in which identity is shaped and represented. It opens up possibilities for reclaiming corporate social media platforms as a space to investigate and shape the self.

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Aneta Grzeszykowska
(b. 1974, Poland)

How is the 'female' body imagined? With full lips and shapely breasts? Aneta Grzeszykowska confronts us with these questions, instantly bringing us face to face with our normative definition of gender, often linked to physical features. The *Selfie* series (2014) consists of simulated body parts made of pigskin, with Grzeszykowska using her own body as a model. In this series, she controls how her body is represented by sculpting the different forms herself, at times deforming it or even giving it a grotesque appearance. Grzeszykowska's self-images manifest as an active process: as a form of objectification that reinforces clichés, and as a practice that can deconstruct these very clichés in all their absurdity.

ANETA GRZESZYKOWSKA

Andy Kassier
(b. 1989, Germany)

We stage ourselves for the camera and post selfies on social media. But what is the underlying logic behind the self-images we curate? Andy Kassier carries this question to extremes in his online performances. On Instagram, @andykassier slips into the role of a rich and successful man, serving up all the different stereotypes that go along with this image and exposing it as an arbitrarily reproducible construct in the process. This also comes out in his installation *Stairways (Time)* (2018/2021). Here he presents the backdrop to his staged photographs – the set for his repetitive poses of happiness, beauty and wealth. Self-presentation on social media is thus not some expression of individual personality. Instead, it degenerates into a form of self-marketing that is oriented towards clicks and likes. The output therefore becomes ever more standardised in visual terms.

ANDY KASSIER

CINDY SHERMAN

Cindy Sherman
(b. 1954, USA)

In her artistic practice, Cindy Sherman forges a kaleidoscope of different female identities. In her self-portraits, she slips into different personalities and roles, capturing entire stories in single images. The images, which are appropriately generic, degenerate into clichés of femininity whose one-dimensionality Sherman exposes and scrutinises. Her work reads like a catalogue of female stereotypes that demonstrates the construction and appropriation of identity through media. Sherman's ambivalent re-enactments therefore challenge normative images that are solidified through performances for the camera, their instrumentalisation and marketing.

PETRA SZEMÁN

Petra Szemán
(b. 1994, Hungary)

Whether we're reading a book or watching a film, we often put ourselves in the place of the protagonists. This identification with the characters enables us to insert and remove ourselves in and out of fictional scenarios at any given moment. For Petra Szemán, virtual spaces have a similarly immersive potential inherent in them.

In her video work *Monomyth: Gaiden* (2018–2020), she explores variants of her own identity. She slips into the skin of an avatar and tries out different scenarios in a game-like landscape. In the virtual space, it becomes possible to play with identities that are not accepted, become the targets of discrimination, or lie outside the realm of heteronormative ideas in the real world. *Monomyth: Gaiden* presents digital space as an arena in which the relationship to one's own avatar, and ultimately oneself, can be explored. Szemán's work also prompts us to question the boundaries between real and virtual space.

Danielle Udogaranya
(b. 1991, UK)

Even if avatars give the impression of projecting very different identities, the range of virtual proxy characters can be quickly exhausted. Characters often amount to little more than conventional roles and clichéd renderings. Danielle Udogaranya a.k.a. 'Ebonix' addresses the inadequacy of available options to represent certain groups. She designs avatars for people whose appearance and skin colour are often not considered when a game is being developed or only acknowledged in the form of stereotyped templates. For the video game *The Sims 4*, for example, she designed avatars with different skin tones. These include options for applying make-up and different hairstyles, which operate outside the realm of racialised and racist ideas. Udogaranya's project draws attention to the discrimination that continues to exist and is perpetuated in virtual spaces. At the same time, her work plays an active role in making representation more diverse.

DANIELLE UDOGARANYA

TALKS
&
TOURS

JUNE

Date	Time	Type	Description	Price
Fri 24 Jun	18.30	Artist Talk	John Hilliard and Justin Berry	£8/5

JULY

Date	Time	Type	Description	Price
Fri 1 Jul	18.30	Exhibition Tour	Senior Curator, Anna Dannemann	Free, booking essential
Wed 20 Jul	18.30	Artist Talk	Max Pinckers and John Yuyi	£5/3

AUGUST

Date	Time	Type	Description	Price
Sat 6 Aug	15.00	Teen Tour	A young person offers a fresh perspective	Free with general admission
Sat 27 Aug	15.00	Teen Tour	A young person offers a fresh perspective	Free with general admission

SEPTEMBER

Date	Time	Type	Description	Price
Fri 9 Sep	18.30	Exhibition Tour	Curator of the Digital Programme, Jon Uriarte	Free, booking essential
Sat 10 Sep	15.00	Teen Tour	A young person offers a fresh perspective	Free with general admission
Wed 14 Sep	18.30	Artist Talk	Danielle Udogaranya and Gloria López Cleries	£5/3
Thu 15 Sep	18.30	BSL Tour	An exhibition tour in British Sign Language	Free, booking essential

Scan the QR code below for the full programme of events:

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY

The exhibition originated at the Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland curated by Marco De Mutiis and Matteo Bittanti, adapted in collaboration with Anna Dannemann for The Photographers' Gallery.

In collaboration with the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image at London South Bank University.

Graphic design: Sarah Boris Studio
Printing: Pureprint, UK

This exhibition is kindly supported by:
Antigone Theodorou and Stefan R Bollinger
The Swiss Embassy in the United Kingdom

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Please keep or return this booklet at the end of the exhibition or pass it on to a friend.

FEATURED ARTISTS

—

GAME TRAVEL – PLAYING TOURIST

Cory Arcangel
Aram Bartholl
Justin Berry
Alan Butler
Gloria López Cleries &
Sive Hamilton Helle
Joan Pamboukes
Tabor Robak

—

GAMEPLAY – HOW TO WIN AT PHOTOGRAPHY

Constant Dullaart
John Yuyi
Emma Agnes Sheffer
Coralie Vogelaar
The Instagram Egg

—

REPLAY – RE-STAGE, RE-ENACT, RE-CREATE

Jon Haddock
Roc Herms
Sherrie Levine

Lorna Ruth Galloway
Ed Ruscha
Ai Weiwei
Harun Farocki

—

CAMERA PLAY – PLAYING WITH THE APPARATUS

Dorothée Elisa Baumann
Dries Depoorter & Max
Pinckers
Christopher Graves
John Hilliard
Steven Pippin
Ria Patricia Röder
Akihiko Taniguchi

—

ROLE PLAY – PLAYING WITH IDENTITY

Claude Cahun
Cibelle Cavalli Bastos
Aneta Grzeszykowska
Andy Kassier
Cindy Sherman
Petra Szemán

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