

Ultimate Questions of Life, the Universe, and Everything

Moritz Biele

Franziska Bulgrin

Meller Ehlert

Cathleen Falckenhayn

Simon Grunert

Lukas Heibges

Christian Hemmer

Ines Könitz

Wiebke Leister

Corinna Mehl

Katrin Ribbe



Ultimate Questions of Life, the Universe, and Everything

“Every photograph is a portrait in the sense that every situation shows itself to be ‘aware’ of being photographed.”
(Vilém Flusser: The Gesture of Photographing, 1991)

“They’re dumping computers. They’re installing human beings. They want to bring back human error because that’s the way you get new ideas, by making mistakes. Back to man and his imagination.”
(David Bowie: The Man Who Fell to Earth, 1976)

The ‘pro-photographic’ refers to acts that are occurring in the slice of the world that is placed in front of the camera before it becomes ‘image’. Its *mise en scene*. This practically refers to everything that appears before an apparatus and how it is arranged, including composition, set, props, actors, costumes, lighting. Protagonists and their actions constitute a pro-photographic event in front of the camera in a pro-photographic space that can be seen from the camera, while the position and angle of the apparatus determine the perspective and point of view of the audience of what eventually appears as an image. While placing people or things in order to be photographed constitutes a performative act, the camera alters how we perceive the photographed scene, turning the model into a visual character by splitting the image from its former referent in the world.

Vilém Flusser observed three agencies that are part of this continuously changing pro-photographic situation, from which he analyses the nature of the photographic medium: the photographer, the photographed, and an observer who watches the movements of photographer and photographed in order to observe the photographic act of production taking place. Not interested in interpreting actual photographs, Flusser was looking at the

self-reflexive gesture of photographing and compared it to the gesture of philosophizing that becomes available to us by way of the apparatus: the search for a position, the manipulating of the scene to be illuminated, and an aspect of self-reflection (Flusser 2011, 77–78).

This search for a critical position as an unfolding of methodical doubt not only reveals the photographic gesture of seeing as a philosophical gesture, but also formulates a philosophy of photography (Flusser 2011, 82–83). As the photographer’s presence changes the perceived situation, the situation also affects the photographer while trying to take up a position, which expands the above-quoted sense of portraying that is embedded in every photograph as an element of camera-awareness. For Flusser, gestures are the stuff of communication passing between people: from model, to photographer, to observer, to both model and photographer, and so forth, thus inviting different levels of performative encounters.

“Thinking expresses itself in a whole range of gestures,” so Flusser. But today “we need to think in video, in analogue and digital models and programs, in multidimensional codes” (Flusser 2011, 24–25). He proposed that

experimental photographers are critical functionaries who make playful use of apparatuses and the programs embedded in them in order to produce meaning, whilst stressing their own intentions that counter the ones programmed within the apparatus. In extension, one could therefore ask how these pro-photographic gestures could be expanded to a viewer looking at an image of the photographic scene, how this might constitute the gesture of a piece of work, how this gesture of the work might constitute its agency, and how this agency might provide a point of entry into the work.

As part of the one year MA seminar ‘Photography as Artistic Research’ at Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences, we asked after the cornerstones of what it means to be human today. These processual gestures of searching for different modes of being were brought together in an exhibition to provoke and reach out to further ultimate questions about our various medial and inter-medial gestures of researching life, the universe, and everything as a way of being in the world.

Vilém Flusser: Gestures. Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2011.
text Dr Wiebke Leister

Ultimate Questions of Life, the Universe, and Everything

— an artistic research project, FH Bielefeld @ Artists Unlimited

exhibition @ Artists Unlimited
Opening: Wed 26 June 2019, 19.00
Finissage: Sat 13 July 2019,
14.00-17.00; 15.00 talk & tour
Exhibition: 28. June - 13. July 2019,
Fri 16.00-19.00, Sat + Sun 14.00-17.00
Artists Unlimited, August-Schroeder-Straße 1, 33602 Bielefeld
www.artists-unlimited.de

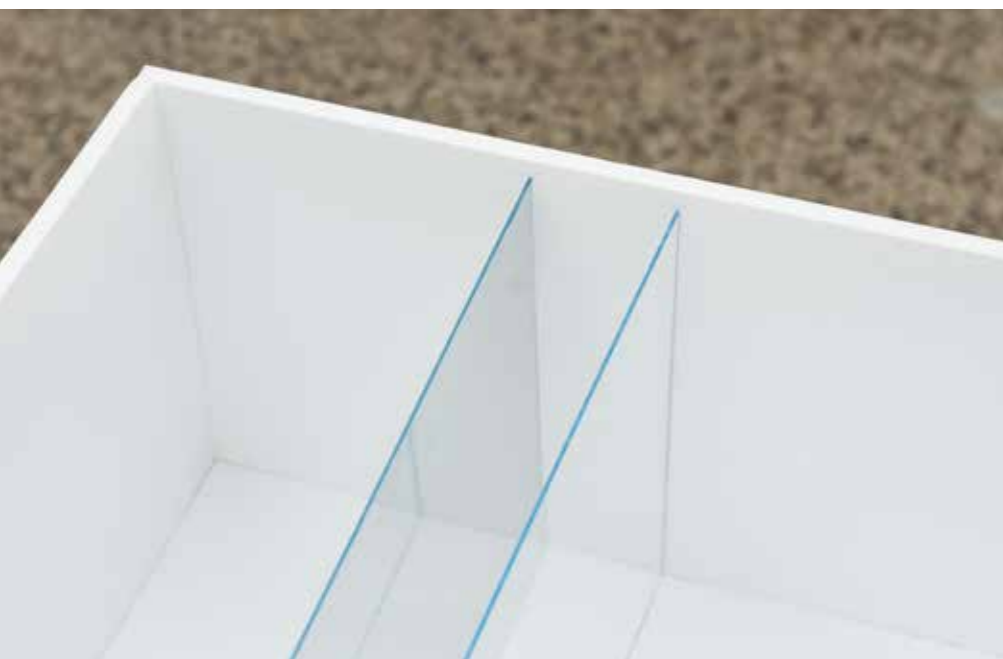
Screening: Fri 28 June, 14.00-17.00: short films
20.30 OFFKINO:
Alexander Kluge ‚Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos‘
Filmhaus Bielefeld, August-Bebel-Straße 94, 33602 Bielefeld
www.filmhaus-bielefeld.de
www.offkino.de

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Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences
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Installation views Felix Hüffelmann
Catalogue design Christian Hemmer, Corinna Mehl

DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service





www.mellerehlert.com

Interference

Meller Ehlert

Artist statement

Meller Ehlert's artistic practice includes photography and film. It is concerned with social and geopolitical issues of past and present of certain regions. Her recent installation work seizes the phenomenon of the border as a place of power and plays with the possibilities of permeability and overcoming – for instance by separating two consecutive rooms from each other by setting a transparent physical barrier. This segregation with two sheets of glass creates an interstice that remains indefinite, belonging to neither side. The visitor is required to reach the room on the other side of the glass through a different entrance. The work consists of a spatial experience that examines processes of inclusion and exclusion by asking questions about national and cultural affiliations and allegiances.

CV

Meller Ehlert studied photography in the BA at the University of Applied Sciences Bielefeld and at the Bezalel Academy of Arts Jerusalem in Israel. She is currently doing her Master degree at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen.





Herr M.

Lukas Heibges



www.lukasheibges.com
www.theworldlibrary.eu

Artist statement

"I am looking out of the window, seeing the same for too many days already..."

As part of the larger project *Herr M.*, the video work examines the personality of a forger during his imprisonment. Based on fragmentary shots, the film depicts the police observations before his arrest, which are part of the legal case and the story about Herr M., to show different levels of the controversy between human being and juridical system, asking questions about associated justice and morale. The whole story of the forger is going to be published with Spector Books in September 2019, shedding light on both the chronological development of his personality and the court proceedings against him.

CV

Lukas Heibges (b. 1985) studied in Holland and Berlin and is currently doing a degree in photography and media in Bielefeld. He lives and works as an artist, shuttling between Berlin and Amsterdam. As a co-founder of a photography and a film collective in the Netherlands he understands both photography and film as central tools to visualize social topics from an artistic point of view. He considers these media as the starting point of a wider expression, which combines theoretical considerations with societal debates. The result is a transfer of his artistic expression back to the intersection of theory and practice to question not only the subjects he is working on, but also the medium itself.





Entity

“I like superheroes and arms”

Moritz Biele



www.geistigerbrandstifter.de

Artist statement

„Geschichte des selbst
 Geschichte des Selbstporträts
 Geschichte des Selbstmords
 Geschichte des Selbstporträts in der Kunst
 Geschichte des Selbstbildnisses
 Geschichte des Selbst
 Geschichte des Selbstbewusstseins
 Geschichte des selbstfahrenden Autos
 Geschichte des Selbstportraits Omar Calabrese
 Geschichte Selbstvertrauen
 Geschichte Selbstliebe“

The idea that all the selfies on Tinder, Grindr, etc. could and may compare with the artistic self-staging in self-portraits. This is wrong for sure. However, Moritz Biele searched for a way to use these as material for his art, and show a sarcastic and subjective portrait of the modern self-portrait. Maybe he found a way to make these irrelevant masses of self-portraits, in the internet valuable and give them a reason to be art.

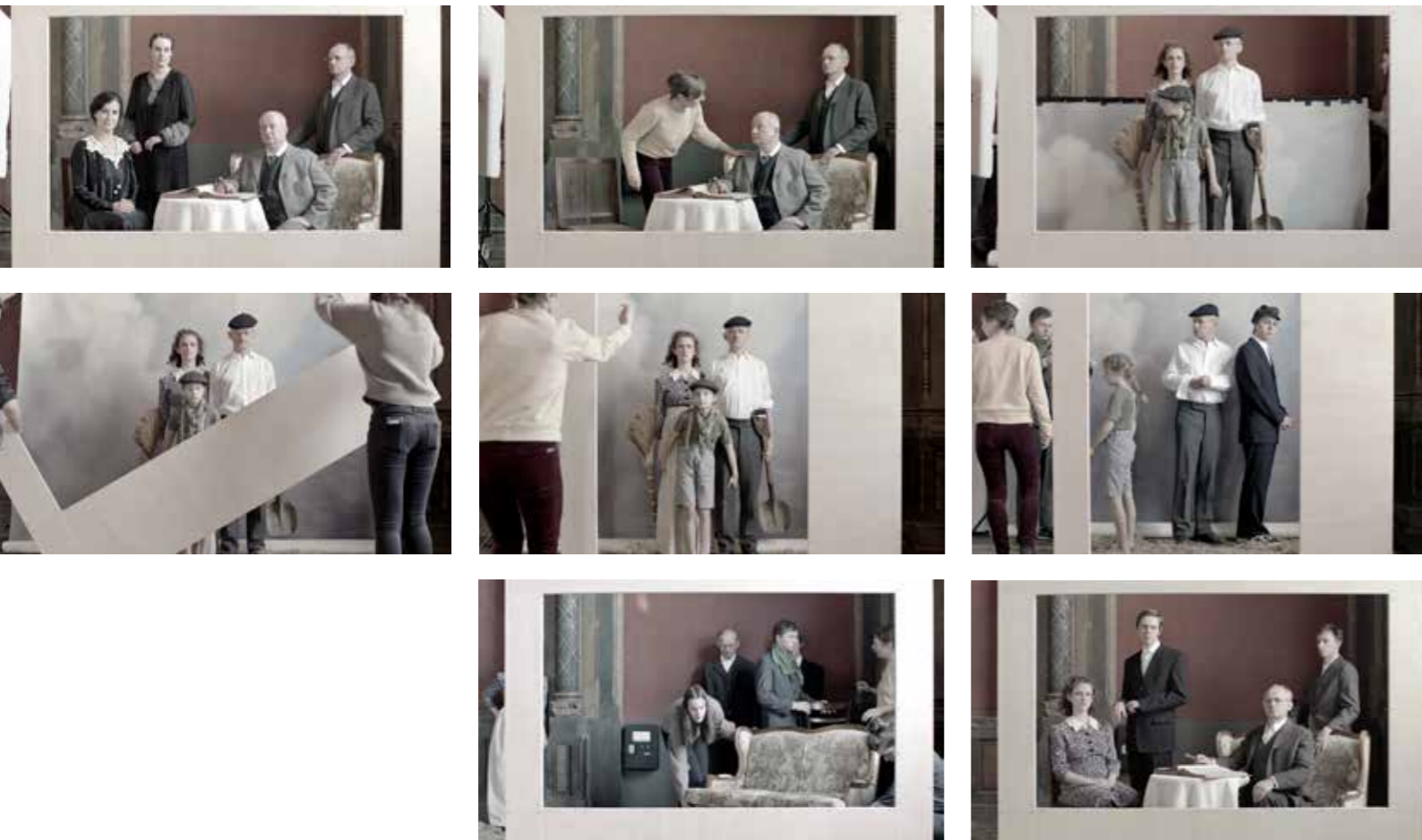
CV

Moritz Biele studies photography at Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences since 2010. His work in general is intermedia, trying to build or destroy the exhibit room to leave a feeling the audience.



Entity - "I like superheroes and arms" ————— Moritz Biele

Moritz Biele ————— Entity "I like superheroes and arms"



www.katrinribbe.com

legacy (part I)

Katrin Ribbe

Artist statement

"It took your father half a lifetime to complete his own expropriation," a close friend once commented on my father's bankruptcy that he compared to my grandfather's expropriation. Katrin's film installation *legacy (part I)* is a journey into her own family history: the grandfather – a farmer – was expropriated by the Soviet Army. The father – a lawyer and notary – got involved in fraudulent activities, lost his licence and was given a five-year imprisonment. In her film *legacy (part I)*, Katrin tries to resuscitate events from this complex family narrative – mixing authentic material from her family album with art historical and fictional images. Professional and amateur performers act as substitutes for the family members, waiting to be positioned within the rectangle of the camera frame.

CV

Originally trained as a photographer at State Theatre Hamburg, Katrin studied photography and animation at London College of Communication. She subsequently worked for the puppet animation Peter and the Wolf (dir. Suzie Templeton, GB 2006). Katrin is a freelance photographer, focusing on portrait and theatre photography. She has been an Associate Lecturer at the University of Applied Arts, Hannover, since 2011. In 2014, she was one of the three founding members of the performing arts collective Aufstand aus der Küche (Revolt from within the Kitchen) that deals with gender politics and identity issues through installation, live performance, video and photography works. In her work *legacy (part I)*, Katrin lays bare both the practice and the very process of creating a photographic image – long before it becomes an emotionally charged and culturally owned image. The project will move on to examine the similarities between photographic processes and systemic therapy.

MY GRANDFATHER was no educated or smart man. He preferred to drift off if conversation moved into the realms of complex thought. On Tuesday nights he used to fill in the lottery ticket
seemed to be an endless procedure while he was sitting by his desk, his index finger searching the lottery ticket for the same numbers each week: each year, for more than 40 years. As
found the number on the ticket he shouted with great relief: "Yes, right here!" and continued patiently: 9, 18, 24, 27, 36, 39



or four times a week. It seemed to be on the road at all times. These days MY FATHER is driving my mother's car. He still loves to drive and takes any opportunity to see the world in color.

the background there is a group of figures. They are almost not moving. The figures are just standing and watching what is going on in the foreground, in two, sometimes in three rows.



synonym

Cathleen Falckenhayn



www.cathleenfalckenhayn.com

Artist statement

The starting point for the work *synonym* is the question: how do photography and audio influence our perception of a distinct and distinguishable identity? The work reflects on historic modes of using photography as an anthropometric identification system based on depicting a potential criminal 'en face' and 'en profil'. The work employs a similar method by photographing front, side and three-quarter views of the same person in different character roles with costumes and make-up, presented as two tableaus of the same characters in differing poses on opposing walls. The visuals are combined with an audiotape with different personal descriptions, inviting the viewer to look for a match between the photographed and the described person. The work involves the viewer into a charged relationship between recognition and delusion through employing different types of media that give conflicting hints on how any identity might be uncovered.

CV

Cathleen Falckenhayn (*1985 in Berlin) studied photography at Bielefeld University of Applied Science and Bezalel Academy of Arts Jerusalem. Since 2016, she now studies in the Master programme at Bielefeld University of Applied Science.





Jenga II

Simon Grunert



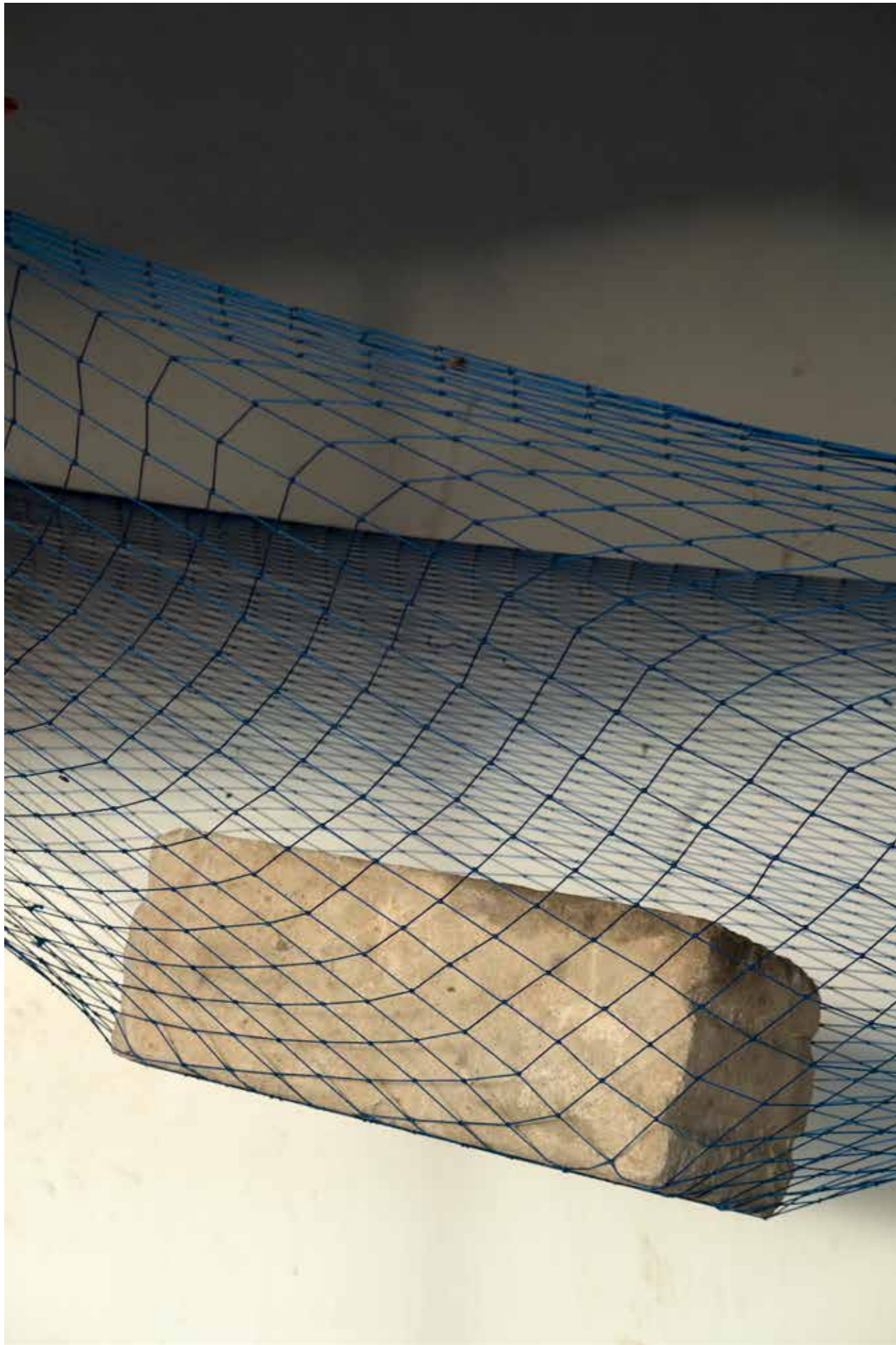
www.simongrunert.com

Artist statement

Simon Grunert's photographic practice has its roots in a documentary approach, yet plays with its limitations. Often using certain geographic features as the foundation for the stories he wants to tell, Grunert adds pseudo-scientific or fictional elements, thereby reducing his initial intent to convey a sense of place to absurdity. *Jenga II*, too, follows this methodology in that its imagery were made along a specific route in Tanzania. However, rather than engaging with the country and its people, the photographs investigate Tanzanian culture by means of a materialist perspective. In isolating textures, forms and colours that originate from building sites, Grunert attempts to analyse how post-colonial ideas of progress are reflected in Tanzania's building culture. Some of the objects depicted are trivial, others discarded. They constitute the 'rubble' that, in Walter Benjamin's understanding, is the by-product of progress. Mostly overlooked, they attain sculptural character and tell a story of identity and growth that transcends the mere object.

CV

Simon Grunert (*1990 in Stuttgart) is a photographer based in Bielefeld. After earning a bachelor's degree in North American Studies and History at the Free University of Berlin he went on to study photography at the University of Applied Sciences Bielefeld, where he is currently enrolled in the master's program. Having studied and worked abroad extensively, his current long-term project is a semi-fictionalised investigation of rural Germany.



Jenga II — Simon Grunert



Simon Grunert — Jenga II



www.franziskabulgrin.de

Drive-In

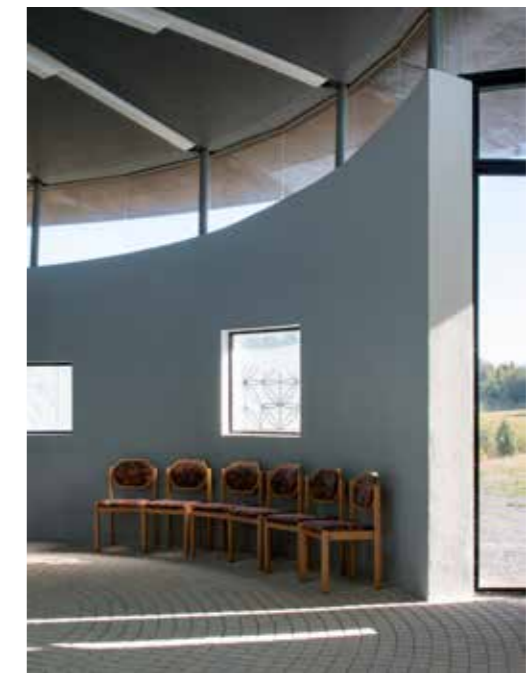
Franziska Bulgrin

Artist statement

Driven by an ongoing fascination for specific micro-cosms, the photographic series *Drive-In* addresses the clash between the secular motorway and its rest areas with the religious architecture of highway churches. Using documentary elements, the work combines standardized road signs and structures of the profane non-place with religious symbols and ecclesiastical architecture. Larger photographs of minimalist interiors capture the absence of opulent sacral equipment, thus pointing out the lack of a spiritual atmosphere. Smaller prints add further aspects to the scene: the footpath from the parking lot to the church, the sign of a wayside chapel, gestures of cleaning, sorting and tidying up. *Drive-In* deals with questions about the modern and fast way of faith: Has the highway church replaced the parish church, moved from village to motorway? How much economy and efficiency does religiosity tolerate? Can devotional experience and silence be experienced next to the motorway?

CV

Franziska Bulgrin (*1994 in Freiberg) discovered her preference for photography during her Bachelor degree at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. A source of inspiration for her artistic work is the everyday life that causes her to enter into a research process during which she reflect on things she happened upon in order to develop ideas for conceptual photographs. She is currently studying in the Master programme at Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences.





life as a film

Ines Könitz



www.ineskoenitz.de

Artist statement

In her work *life as a film*, Ines Könitz explores the bodily gestures that connect our eyes with the screens we use on a daily basis. The film follows a woman, who uses social media platforms to remember, reflect and construct her own history through making reference to movies, role models and personal experiences – all recorded in countless images, texts and video clips. The work experiments with gestures of touching and reconstructing in order to overcome their digital distance by way of making her identity more tangible through approximating single images. As collaging hand and swiping finger both generate and obstruct the face of the person in question, Ines Könitz transmits information from the digital realm into the material world and back again into the two-dimensional plane. From these fragments, viewers are continuously asked to create their own – inherently incomplete – face from the digital image flood, raising questions of identity, perception and self-representation.

CV

Ines Könitz is currently a master student of photography at Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences. Before, she studied photography in Hamburg and Budapest. Since 2017, she lives and works at the art housing project Artists Unlimited in Bielefeld. Her work revolves around questions of biography and representation of self.





*Joanna the Mad,
my Great Grandfather
and I*

Christian Hemmer



wildfaenge@gmail.com

Artist statement

My grandfather's death had a big impact on me and made me question my roots and my identity. With his passing, a living storage medium of our family history had faded away. In the following years, I did a lot of research about my ancestors and collected all remaining memorabilia. Even when I thought that most stories and details had vanished, there were still moments during my amateur genealogy that felt like opening Tutankhamun's tomb. I have since embarked on a photographic search for traces from the past in order to decipher visual information through a series of comparative tableaus as an attempt to depart not only from the normative discourse of historical research and fill the gaps in transition, but also a way to sensitize the viewer to a deeper understanding of historic trajectories.

CV

Christian Hemmer (*1987) has been studying graphic design at FH Bielefeld since 2010. As a trained graphic designer, the searching for traces and the collecting of pictures make up his core interest. He dedicates most of his studies to investigate theoretical questions about the image, which he disassembles or compares in collages or tableaus.





Motion Studies (no. 1–3)

Corinna Mehl



www.corinnamehl.de

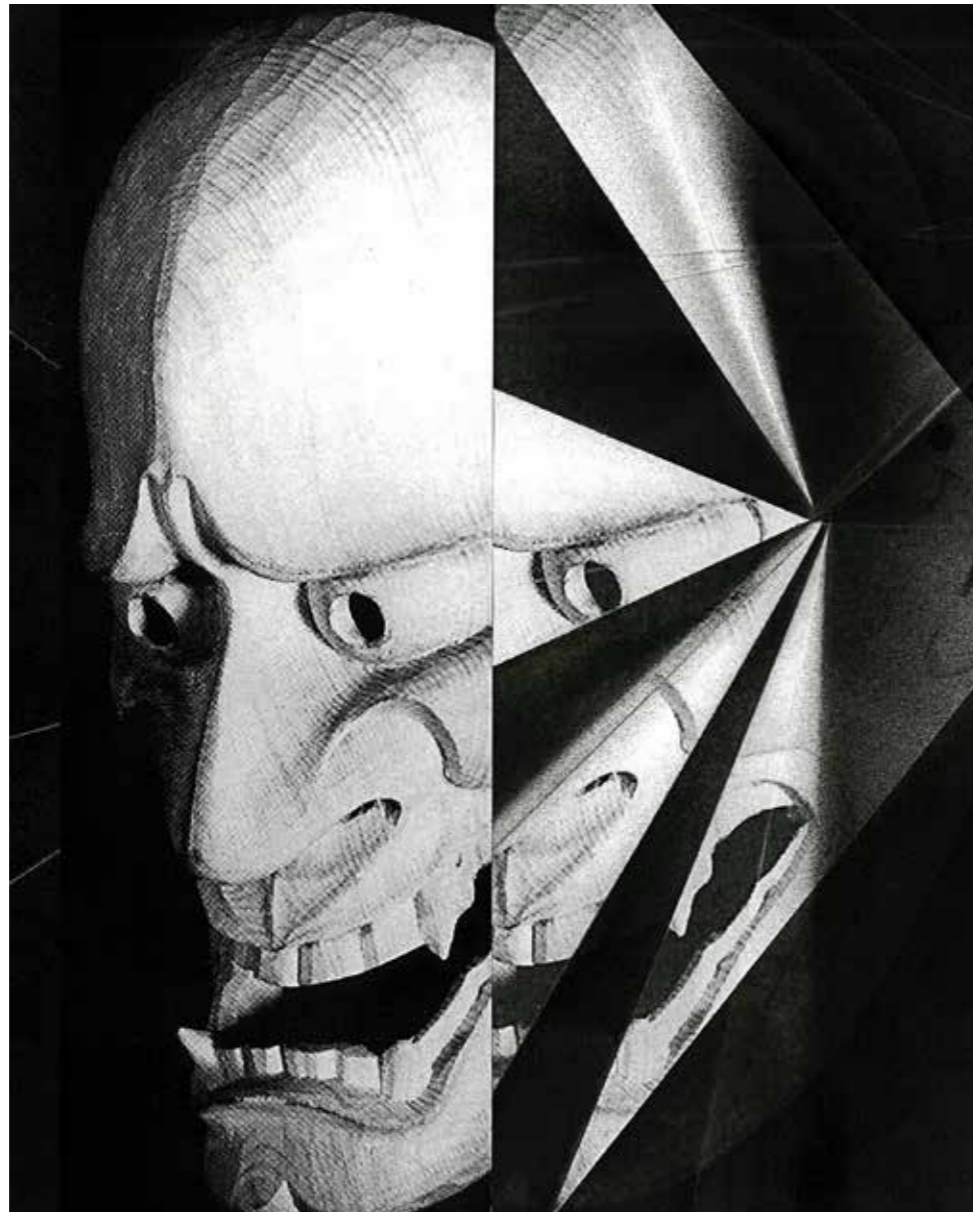
Artist statement

Corinna Mehl's practice as a photographer and visual researcher shifts between documentary and conceptual modes, including interviews, testimonies and film sequences into her working process. She is interested in the interrelation between people and their environment, focussing on the potential impact of one's surroundings on self-perception and identity. Her latest project questions the changing perspectives on the human body within a technologically evolving world. Trying to get a closer understanding of the different possibilities of living and perceiving is one of the main incentives for her work. *Motion Studies (no. 1–3)* deals with repetitive motion sequences and movement patterns of everyday labour in long-time exposures in order to show the monotonous movements of hands, feet and head of a supermarket cashier, a truck driver and an office worker. Even though her pictures resemble early motion studies from the 20th century, which sought to understand and optimise human work routines, Corinna's images seek to question not only today's working conditions and the resulting usage of the human body but also the outcome of these optimisation processes that generate specific interactions between human and machine.

CV

Corinna Mehl completed her diploma studies in photography/video in 2016 with the works *Grinding the Water* and *I see People as Colours* at Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, both dealing with the current situation of Native Americans in Québec/Canada. After studying and working in Canada, Hungary and Georgia, she now lives and works in Bielefeld, where she has been studying photography and media since 2017. Her current work deals with the shifting perspectives on the human body in the course of advancing technological developments.





Echoes and Callings

Wiebke Leister



w.leister@lcc.arts.ac.uk

Artist statement

Photographs from collaboration with Japanese Noh mask maker Hideta Kitazawa at his Tokyo studio in April 2018, documenting the process of carving a Namanari mask. With small horns, clenched teeth and glowing eyes, the mask has a terrifying but also terrified appearance that reminds of the woman she once was, overflowing with emotions when being deserted, now looking for revenge. The images were first used during the live performance *Echoes and Callings* at Kings Place in London on 30 June 2018. The performance maps the transformation process of an angry woman into a fierce demoness by manipulating photographs of masks and facial expressions through folding, layering and cutting to conjure up her expressive range through still images. The collages combine views onto different sides of the mask at different stages during the making process. Combining the gestures of making the mask with those of collaging the images, the work maintains a somewhat provisional and searching agency.

CV

Wiebke Leister is a German artist and researcher living in London. She studied at the University in Essen (Folkwang) and gained a PhD from the Royal College of Art in London. Course leader for MA Photography at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, she exhibits and publishes her research internationally. Her work challenges the limitations of photographic representation and individual likeness, often focusing on the human face as a canvas, a medium or an agent. During the academic year 2018-19, she is DAAD Visiting Professor of Photography at Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences.

