The Lure
of the Image

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Exhibition Texts
English

VIKTORIA BINSCHTOK
Digital Semiotics (Rice Bunny / Mi Tu), 2025
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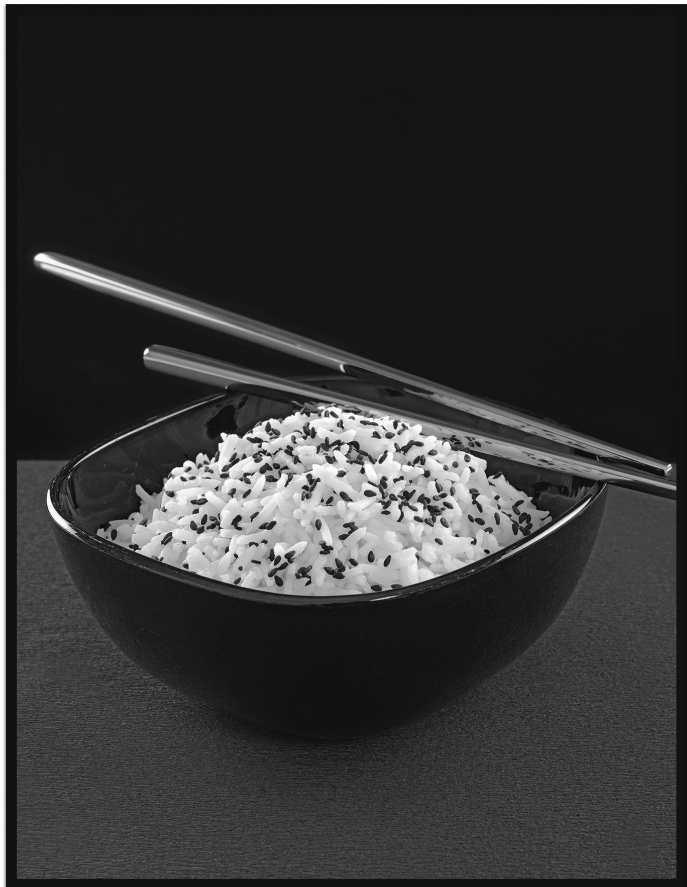
The Lure of the Image explores contemporary digital forms of photography and their seductive powers: How do images bait or beguile us as they circulate online? How do they compel, capture or control us? The fourteen artistic positions presented here engage with visual phenomena that serve as vehicles for online communication, criticism and humour, highlighting the crucial role images play in shaping our social, cultural and political landscapes.

The exhibition invites you to explore the visual worlds of social media feeds, dating app profiles, face filters, memes, ASMR videos, 'cute' and 'cursed' images, emoji, computer-generated imagery and low-resolution screenshots used for conspiracy or protest. The artistic positions track the complex mechanisms of the lure, shedding light on how images and their underlying structures – from ALGORITHMS [→P.7] to DATASETS [→P.7] – direct our attention, provoke emotions and influence opinions. As such, the works offer contemporary investigations into how NETWORKED IMAGES [→P.7] are both embedded within, and actively contribute to, an attention-driven economy – one that fuels our desires and thrives on our affective reactions.

With works by: Zoé Aubry, Sara Bezovšek, Viktoria Binschtok, Sara Cwynar, Éamonn Freel × Lynski, Dina Kelberman, Michael Mandiberg, Joiri Minaya, Simone C Niquille, Jon Rafman, Jenny Rova, Hito Steyerl, Noura Tafeche and Ellie Wyatt.

SARA CWYNAR
■ *Scroll 1*, 2020
In this video essay by Sara Cwynar (b. 1985), eclectic objects and images from art history, advertising, fashion, design and news photography glide past us in a continuous, almost hypnotic flow – as if on a conveyer belt. The assemblage was arranged on translucent planes stacked on top of each other. Shot from above, the camera collapses it into the flatness of a screen. The monotonous motion is at times interrupted by the artist's hands attempting to navigate the flood of seemingly disconnected visual materials by touching or slightly rearranging them. As the camera zooms in, it draws attention to single images that are subsequently brought to life through short film sequences. Through its dense imagery, *Scroll 1* mimics the 'INFINITE SCROLL' [→P.7] of our social media feeds, conveying both the COLLAPSE OF CONTEXT [→P.7] as well as a sense of overwhelm and disorientation caused by the visual abundance online.

VIKTORIA BINSCHTOK
■ *Digital Semiotics*, 2024–2025
Digital Semiotics, a series of precisely arranged still-life photographs by Viktoria Binschtok (b. 1972), investigates the ubiquitous role of emoji in digital communication. Focusing on their ever-evolving meanings, cultural and socio-political implications, Binschtok traces how digital symbols such as emoji enhance messages, shape public discourse or circumvent political censorship. The series highlights the simplistic, easy-to-use charm of emoji, all the while emphasising how they shape and nurture complex conversations through sharing, sequencing and context and so potentially foster solidarity and activism. An example is the watermelon emoji, which emerged as a symbol of solidarity with Palestine. Similarly, the grape bunch emoji subtly facilitates conversations about sexual violence, bypassing algorithmic, PLATFORM-specific [→P.7] settings that restrict the use of certain expressions.

JENNY ROVA
■ *A MILF DREAM – My Matches on Tinder*, 2024
In these hand-crafted photocollages, Jenny Rova (b. 1972) continues her ongoing practice of drawing on her personal relationships to navigate the intersections of intimacy, self-representation and the photographic gaze. Finding herself single after a long-term relationship had ended, the artist took to the dating PLATFORM [→P.7] Tinder to find her 'perfect match'. She soon discovered that her 'sexual status' in the online dating pool was that of a MILF ('Mother I'd Like to Fuck') – a vulgar slang used to designate aging women desired by younger men (and meanwhile a highly popular porn genre). Finding her own desires reflected within this status, Rova tailored her profile to specifically attract men seeking this kind of sexual transaction. For her collages, she weaves together photographic elements from her resulting Tinder matches, transforming them into projections of potential physical and romantic connections. The collages reveal, humorously at times, the tension between the artist's personal preferences and the increasingly standardised forms of curating one's self-presentation to maximise desirability and social appeal.

ÉAMONN FREEL X LYNSKI
■ *In the Future, Everything Will Be a Trend for 15 Seconds*, 2024
In the Future, Everything Will Be a Trend for 15 Seconds by visual artist Éamonn Freel (b. 1987) and makeup artist Lynski (b. 1991) explores the fleeting nature of digital beauty trends. Ethereal faces with glittering highlights and intricate 3D elements morph in rapid succession, creating an alluring yet unsettling viewing experience. The video work mirrors the accelerated trend cycles of the digital age, whose aesthetics emerge and fade within weeks, driven by ALGORITHMS [→P.7] and a continuous need of global online communities for novelty. At the heart of the work lies performative belonging through shared image material. Digital beauty culture is caught between the desire to conform to globalised ideals and the simultaneous urge to stand out through niche trends. Freel and Lynski envision a dystopian loop where individuals endlessly adopt and discard trends, performing them in real-time through AUGMENTED REALITY (AR) FILTERS [→P.7]. Their work comments on the blurring of the boundaries between identity, performance and the capitalist systems that perpetuate this cycle.

JOIRI MINAYA
■ *#dominicanwomengooglesearch*, 2016
▲ Please do not touch the installation

In *#dominicanwomengooglesearch*, Joiri Minaya (b. 1990) deepens her ongoing exploration of Caribbean identity, stereotypes and body politics. The installation features cutout fragments of body parts read as female, with stylised tropical fabrics collaged on their verso. Sourced from a Google search for 'Dominican women', the images reveal clichéd depictions aligned with fantasies of the foreign – a BIAS [→P.6] perpetuated and reinforced by the algorithms of online search engines. Fragmented, enlarged and suspended from the ceiling, the low-resolution images appear both playful and unsettling as they remind us that identity is never fixed, but defined by perspective and positions of social power. By reappropriating tropical patterns, Minaya's works expose how such motifs are tailored to Western colonial fantasies that exoticise and objectify Caribbean women. The artist challenges the colonial legacy that persists within our gaze and our technological systems – and that continues to this day to stigmatise the Black female body.

JOIRI MINAYA

■ *Divergences*, 2020–2022 and
  A Marooned Picturesque, 2020

In *Divergences*, Joiri Minaya continues her critical investigation into the external construction of Caribbean identity narratives, particularly those imposed on women. The photographs depict female figures physically grappling with tropical-print bodysuits that cover, bind and encase their bodies. The recurring presence of the mass-produced patterns underscores the artist's ongoing reflection on 'tropicality', marketed globally as something readily available and disposable – hence easily appropriable, consumable and exploitable. The work deliberately renders the bodies indecipherable, shielding them from objectification, voyeurism and commodification – those disguised forces lurking in databases and search engines. Attempting to break free from the oppressive constraints that burden their bodies, the figures regain agency over their representation.

The four prints are installed on the top of a wallpaper titled *A Marooned Picturesque*, a work inspired by Minaya's visit to the Quindaro Townsite in Kansas City, USA. By digitally manipulating a landscape wallpaper that originally stems from the postwar era, Minaya equally liberates the landscape from the restrictive strategies of representation and challenges the idealised vision of nature as a carefree space of escape.

MICHAEL MANDIBERG

■ *Taking Stock*, 2024–
▲ TRIGGER WARNING: The videos contain flashes which may affect sensitive viewers.

In *Taking Stock,* Michael Mandiberg (b. 1977) examines millions of stock photographs using MACHINE LEARNING [→P.7]. These commercial and generic images, commonly used in advertising and marketing, perpetuate societal BIASES [→P.6] through stereotypical representations. As these images predominantly form the foundation of the DATASETS [→P.7] used to train ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IMAGE GENERATORS [→P.7], their embedded biases are inherited by the AI systems. Using custom machine learning software and keyword analysis to dissect over 130 million stock images, Mandiberg creates hypnotic video sequences and multi-layered photographs that reveal patterns of visual uniformity in the datasets: endless variations of smiling young *white* women, confident businessmen in suits and grossly overstated yet pervasive poses for the camera. As these images flicker past, they form a ghostly portrait, evoking how visual culture is haunted by a capitalist ideology that shapes our perceptions of normality, perpetuates bias and contributes to amplifying and reinforcing systemic social inequalities.

SIMONE C NIQUILLE

■ *Chair Motion Studies*, 2025

Chair Motion Studies takes inspiration from the Bertil chair, an IKEA product that marked the shift from photography to COMPUTER-GENERATED IMAGERY (CGI) [→P.7] in the company's catalogue. Silently introduced in 2006, its synthetic image blended seamlessly with photographs taken with cameras, signalling a quiet yet pivotal transformation. By 2014, 75 per cent of IKEA's imagery had become CGI. The Bertil chair's power lies not in spectacle but in its ability to remain unnoticed – exposing the allure of photorealistic mundanity as it is reconfigured below the threshold of the visible. Simone C Niquille (*1987) imagines a speculative evolution of the virtual chair, trained to move via machine learning processes driving ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) [→P.6] in commercial contexts. Her computer-generated images echo the motion studies of Lillian and Frank Gilbreth, pioneers of efficiency and standardisation in industrial management who developed a technique for recording a body's movement through long-exposure photography in the early 1900s. Here, the chair becomes a meditation on technology, labour and the invisible forces shaping both virtual and physical production.

LURE LOUNGE

This room offers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the curatorial research process behind *The Lure of the Image*. A map arranging key terms and concepts as well as vernacular neologisms gives an impression of how the topic of the 'lure' was navigated in its relationship with networked images and contemporary social and political realities. We welcome you to actively engage with our research and contribute to its contents: The books include marginalia that visualise some thought processes of the curatorial team – highlight and add your inputs, comments or critique to them. Contribute to the map on the wall by adding your own terminologies and phenomena to the available Post-it notes. The lounge can also be used to sit and relax, perhaps while listening to the 'Cheated by an Image' podcast. Share your own stories of deceit with us by writing them on the designated wall space, or record your story with your smartphone and send your file to cheated@fotomuseum.ch.

ZOÉ AUBRY

■ *#Ingrid*, 2022
▲ TRIGGER WARNING: This work contains themes of femicide and gender-based violence.

Pristine landscapes and lavender sunsets, radiant flowers and aurora unfolding across a dreamlike sky – as enchanting and innocent as these images appear on the surface, they cover up the gruesome reality of systemic violence against women.

#Ingrid refers to Ingrid Escamilla Vargas, a young Mexican woman who was brutally murdered by her husband in 2020. Collective outrage broke out after corrupt authorities leaked photographs of the victim's mutilated body to the local press, which ran them as front-page news under headlines such as 'It was cupid's fault'. Activists took to the streets to protest this voyeuristic and sensationalist media coverage – for it trapped the victim within an objectifying gaze while concealing the systemic and structural issues of femicide. The solidarity movement continued on social media, where the hashtag initiative #IngridEscamillaVargas set out to rid the internet of the leaked photos, connecting any online search for Ingrid to beautiful images she should be remembered by. Like an archivist, Zoé Aubry (b. 1993) collected, compiled and preserved this fleeting moment of online resistance – at once a gut-wrenching homage as well as a powerful, collectively voiced wake-up call for a much-needed discussion around femicide.

HITO STEYERL

■ *Strike*, 2010

In her video installation *Strike*, Hito Steyerl (b. 1966) appears before a monitor, armed with a hammer and chisel. With a single, deliberate strike to the screen's bottom centre, she shatters its surface, causing a burst of multicoloured pixels to emerge. The monitor is left broken, disabled by the artist's simple yet potent gesture of resistance against the systems of (self-)representation, surveillance and broadcasting. The work subtly reveals the material and political infrastructures behind the blank screen, serving as a powerful reminder of our ability as viewers to resist the image systems that command our TV monitors and computer screens. As the piece concludes, the screen briefly fades to black before looping again. At this moment, the physicality of the monitor in the exhibition space seems to merge with the digital imagery, inviting the viewers to recognise the hidden structures of visual representation before us. Steyerl metaphorically passes the hammer and chisel to the audience, transforming the short video into a perpetual call for action, urging us to reclaim agency and push back against the powers of images.

DINA KELBERMAN

■ *The Wave*, 2025

For *The Wave*, Dina Kelberman (b. 1979) has collected thousands of ASMR sponge videos from the social media platform Instagram. A growing online phenomenon, ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) can best be described as a tingling, relaxing sensation triggered by soft sounds, gentle touches or soothing visuals. Kelberman narrowed her search down to POV shots (from the point of view of the subject in a video) of gloved hands performing intimate acts with foamy sponges – squishing, lathering and tearing them apart. Kelberman transforms these videos into an immersive installation, organising them from 'soothing' to 'abrasive' and projecting them at large scale on opposing walls. The resulting cacophony of sounds and visuals amplifies the original ASMR experience, revealing the paradoxical nature of this content – simultaneously intimate and invasive, personal yet public. Through this presentation, Kelberman exposes the complex tensions lurking within this audiovisual phenomenon that captivates our senses through its aesthetic allure, sonic landscapes and hypnotic repetition.

SARA BEZOVŠEK

■ *A Life of Its Own: American Psycho*, 2024

A Life of Its Own is a series of experimental web-based works, large-scale wallpapers and installations by Sara Bezovšek (b. 1993), exploring how popular movies transform online into memes, GIFs and remixes. Focusing on culturally significant films like *The Matrix*, *American Psycho* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Bezovšek tracks how scenes are transformed into memetic fragments that gain a life of their own as they leave their source context and circulate online. Driven by free creative labour and network dynamics, images not only take on new meanings, but are easily repurposed for various social and political agendas. While memes from *American Psycho* equally critique and celebrate toxic masculinity, *The Lord of the Rings* is appropriated to support both right-wing and left-wing ideologies, for example. By organising the material collected from social media platforms and obscure online forums according to the films' original plot, Bezovšek accentuates the spread of memetic content and its ability to seamlessly blend entertainment, ideologies and politics.

Experience the web-based works here:
permanentbeta.network/episode/153

JON RAFMAN

■ *Egregore I, II and III*, 2021
▲ TRIGGER WARNING: This video installation contains disturbing content, including references to and depictions of physical and sexual violence, weapons, psychological and physical distress, suicide and self-harm, blood and other bodily fluids, gore and death, involving human beings of all ages and animals.

The video triptych *Egregore* by Jon Rafman (b. 1981) taps into the web's collective anxieties and desires to reveal disturbing scenes of surreal, mundane discomfort. In esoteric traditions, an egregore represents a shared spiritual entity. It

embodies the collective psyche of a group and is shaped by their desires, beliefs and actions. Rafman explores this concept by animating appropriated photographs from the internet through digital tools, referencing and expanding the hidden world of so-called 'cursed images'. These authorless images show ordinary objects in unsettling, even unthinkable contexts, or depict displaced and masked human bodies. Distorted perspectives, digital glitches and optical errors contribute to their eerie effect. 'Cursed images' simultaneously attract and repel, luring the viewer into an unsuccessful search for meaning and context. No longer just reflections of the collective unconscious that Rafman summons, they transcend their representational status and become realities in and of themselves.

ELLIE WYATT
■ *cherrypicker*, 2021

In her video work *cherrypicker*, Ellie Wyatt (b. 1992) explores how photographic images shape belief systems. Through a rapid sequence of low-resolution images accompanied by red circles and arrows appropriated from online news sites or discussion forums – from UFO sightings and hazy appearances of monsters to moon landing photos – Wyatt examines the foundations of conspiracy theories, apocalypse myths and celebrity cults. The work shows how blurry, manipulated images direct viewers' attention through seemingly scientific graphic elements, creating spaces for 'alternative truths' through their poor quality and unstable interpretation. *cherrypicker* takes viewers on a hypnotic journey through the bizarre realms of illuminati theories, ghost sightings, Google Street View anomalies and alien civilisations. By bringing these images together, Wyatt reveals how NETWORKED IMAGES [→P.7] combined with traditional associations of supposed photographic truth can be exploited to spread and amplify false narratives.

NOURA TAFECHE
■ *Annihilation Core Inherited Lore ٩(๑•̀๑)۶*, 2023–

▲ TRIGGER WARNING: This installation contains sensitive material that is disturbing and distressing. The imagery includes depictions of weapons, nudity (including underage nudity), implied physical and sexual violence as well as references to self-harm.

In *Annihilation Core Inherited Lore ٩(๑•̀๑)۶*, Noura Tafeche (b. 1987) investigates how cuteness aesthetics are weaponised online to spread military propaganda and violence. Drawing on four years of research and an archive of over 30,000 files, Tafeche reveals how pastel-coloured plushies, manga fan art and doe eyes can become vehicles for war messaging, sexualised aggression, weapons fetishisation and alt-right ideologies. Tafeche maps aesthetic forms from 'kawaii' (a Japanese cultural phenomenon which emphasises cuteness and innocence) to gaming, TikTok and fan art, illustrating how viral content like memes or online dance challenges can promote misogyny, supremacism and racism. The installation combines an immersive environment with interactive access to the artist's research archive, exposing how the seemingly most innocent forms of mainstream visual culture can be infiltrated by harmful propaganda.

GLOSSARY

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) / AI IMAGE GENERATORS
Artificial intelligence (AI) is a branch of computer science focused on designing systems that seek to replicate human intelligence. These systems mimic cognitive functions, including language interpretation, speech production, problem-solving, decision-making and image creation. AI image generators use machine learning models, trained on large datasets, to generate digital images from scratch or modify existing ones, most often in response to text prompts.

BIAS
The standardisation of visual language online reinforces the gender, racial and socio-economic biases within our society. But bias is encoded not only within our visual language, but also within algorithmic

systems such as search engines, MACHINE LEARNING or AI. This means that these systems perpetuate the systemic discrimination of certain social groups and produce outcomes that can negatively affect them.

CONTEXT COLLAPSE
A communication phenomenon, whereby content intended for a specific audience circulates beyond its original context, reaching diverse and potentially conflicting groups. This can consolidate differing expectations among content consumers. The blending of various content types – for example on social media – can cause users to lose track of original sources, affecting how they perceive, consume and interpret content.

COMPUTER-GENERATED IMAGES (CGI)
Refers to all images that are not recorded with a film or photo camera but are created using computer software. They can be static two-dimensional or dynamic three-dimensional images (computer graphics), possibly set in motion (computer animation). CGI is used in films, video games, art and advertising, or areas such as medical imaging and scientific simulations. Recent advancements in ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) are transforming CGI by enabling the synthesis of images through MACHINE LEARNING.

FACE FILTERS / AUGMENTED REALITY (AR)
Face filters provided by PLATFORMS such as Instagram, TikTok or Snapchat are augmented reality (AR) applications that use facial recognition technology to insert virtual filters onto our face when we are taking a selfie or recording videos. AR is an interactive technology that enables users to visually connect the real world with virtual objects in real-time. As the technology advances, face filters become increasingly seamless, subtly reshaping our expectations of beauty.

INFINITE SCROLL
A web and app design technique that automatically loads more content as users scroll down. The feature is commonly employed on social media platforms, news or e-commerce sites. By providing a continuous flow of information, it is designed to keep users' curiosity and attention effortlessly engaged for a long time, through the illusion of endless content.

MACHINE LEARNING / DATASETS
Machine learning is a branch of ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) that relies on large amounts of data (datasets) to train computer systems. By analysing and interpreting these datasets, the computer system learns, adapts and improves autonomously. Machine learning models are the foundation of AI IMAGE GENERATORS, for example.

NETWORKED IMAGES
Images that circulate across online PLATFORMS, messaging apps and social media. They can be recorded digitally, for example with a smartphone, and are generally low in resolution for easier sharing. Other image formats include memes (humorous text-image creations), GIFs (short, highly compressed animated image files, also used as humorous commentaries) or emoji (digital symbols representing emotions, objects or ideas). Networked images are part of a visual economy driven by attention, consumption and operativity.

PLATFORM / ALGORITHM
A platform is an online application or website that provides a base from which a service is provided. Examples include social media networks (such as Instagram and TikTok), search engines (such as Google) and dating apps (such as Tinder). Platforms use algorithms – sets of rules for calculations and analysis which form the basis of computational systems – to process user data and behaviour, thereby personalising

and filtering content and information and significantly shaping online experiences.

STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY
Online platforms such as Shutterstock offer pre-shot photographs 'on stock' that serve as ready-made illustrations for advertising, marketing or media communication (news articles, social media, blogs, etc.). The images offer generic and generally stereotypical representations of people, behaviours, situations and environments. As such, they not only contribute to the standardisation of visual language online, but also to the perpetuation of BIAS.

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More terms are available in the Lure Lounge and online:
www.permanenbeta.network (QR left)
www.photographic-flux.ch (QR right)

EVENTS

The exhibition is accompanied by a varied programme of events. More information on all events: events.fotomuseum.ch

PUBLICATION

The publication accompanying the exhibition is available in the shop.

SUPPORT

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In 2026, the exhibition will be on show at C/O Berlin in Germany and at the Finnish Museum of Photography in Helsinki.

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