



H(a)unting Images: Anatomy of a Shot

COMISART
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE
"LA CAIXA" COLLECTION

"LA CAIXA" FOUNDATION. THE SPIRIT OF "LA CAIXA"

Exhibition

H(a)unting Images: Anatomy of a Shot

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Previous page: Étienne-Jules Marey's photographic gun.
Illustration from *La Nature*, Vol. 18, No. 464, 22 April 1882.
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The analogy between camera and firearm, between shots through a lens and shots down the barrel of a gun, between taking pictures and stalking prey, is as old as photography itself. The curators of this exhibition, Ada Sbriccoli and Arola Valls, begin their account in this catalogue talking about Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904), a French physiologist obsessed with images and time who captured the different phases of movement in birds, horses and humans. To do so, in 1882 he invented a photographic gun that could take 12 photographs a second and record them in the same frame. Marey's classic experiments have a seminal place in the history of photography and film. His chronophotographic device was very similar to a rifle or shotgun, with a wooden butt, barrel and trigger. And a drum—containing the film—like the one on a machine gun. Marey basically machine-gunned the visible world.

With this reference in mind, *H(a)unting Images: Anatomy of a Shot* brings together 23 pieces from the "la Caixa" Collection of Contemporary Art and the MACBA Collection which analyse the relationship that hunting, war and firearms have with violence and photography. The show features a wide range of perspectives, including installations, video installations and paintings. Some works, such as Jeff Wall's *A Hunting Scene*, explore the artist's dimension as a hunter of images; others, such as Javier Peñafiel's *Maltrato*, present the act of filming or taking a photograph as an act of violence against the reality being portrayed. Bleda y Rosa travel to the sites of historic battles and show them as they are today: serene landscapes with nothing that might make us think of the tragedies that once took place there. Referencing photojournalism, Simeón Saiz Ruiz's

paintings show the victims of massacres in Sarajevo. There is a constant game of shifting associations between forms, genres and motifs. The result is a new, stimulating insight into a set of pieces presented alongside one another for the first time and woven together by a powerful conceptual thread.

This is one of the great achievements of Comisart, which every two years gives young curators with an international grounding in the field of art the opportunity to put together a project from works in the "la Caixa" Collection of Contemporary Art and the MACBA Collection. The aim is to encourage new visions and fresh readings that enrich both collections and spark audiences' interest in the pieces they contain. In 2016, the winners of the third edition of Comisart were Ángel Calvo, Alexandra Laudo, and the duo of Arola Valls and Ada Sbriccoli. Ángel Calvo works on the idea of the body, Alexandra Laudo exposes the hidden, and Arola Valls and Ada Sbriccoli analyse violence. Their respective exhibitions will be on at CaixaForum in Barcelona in 2017 and 2018.

The "la Caixa" Banking Foundation is delighted with the keen interest that audiences, the art world, young curators and artists have shown in the Comisart project. Central to a project like this is the idea of community, which forges stronger ties with people interested in art who see the world afresh through the eyes of contemporary creation. Finally, we would like to thank Arola Valls and Ada Sbriccoli for their highly original approach to putting together such a cogent, visually engaging project.

H(a)unting Images: Anatomy of a Shot

Ada Sbriccoli
Arola Valls

J'ai un fusil photographique qui n'a rien de meurtrier, et qui prend l'image d'un oiseau qui vole ou d'un animal qui court en un temps moindre de 1/500 de seconde. Je ne sais si tu te représentes bien cette rapidité, mais c'est quelque chose de surprenant.¹

"I have a photographic gun that has nothing murderous about it and that takes a picture of a flying bird or running animal in less than 1/500 of a second. I don't know if you can picture such speed, but it is something astonishing."² In these words, written in a letter to his mother dated 3 February 1882, French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey announced the invention of a photographic device that looked and worked like a gun but which served to capture the image of birds in flight. His invention followed in the same line as other chronophotographic devices made in France and the United States that sought to analyse the different phases of moving bodies by taking pictures of them, and in doing so expanded the possibilities for representing reality. The urge to freeze dynamic actions became a real possibility after 1880 with the development of gelatin-bromide emulsion, which then gave way to the snapshot and led to an array of practical applications in the fields of scientific experimentation and the arts, and also foreshadowed the appearance of cinema.

In this context, Marey's gun was only one in a series of photographic devices he had specifically designed for taking pictures of moving subjects, tailoring each design to the animal in question. His new invention gave him a camera in a form already adapted to the human hand and let him fine-tune the synchrony between observation and shot, which determined the

1. Michel Frizot, *Étienne-Jules Marey : Chronophotographe* (Paris: Nathan/Delpire, 2001), 48.

2. Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne-Jules Marey* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 57.

3. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 37.

degree of precision required to effectively visualise the invisible: that infinitesimal instant which the human eye is unable to isolate and which Walter Benjamin would later call the “optical unconscious”.³

Although Marey’s letter downplayed any possible murderous connotations triggered by his new invention’s similar appearance and mechanism to a firearm, this analogy revealed the potentially predatory nature of the photographic shot. This exhibition takes Marey’s photographic gun as the starting point for revisiting these parallels and analysing a series of contemporary artistic practices that let us explore the predatory nature of the process of taking a picture and which try out new approaches to recording modern conflicts.



Étienne-Jules Marey's photographic gun, 1882.

H(a)unting Images: Anatomy of a Shot

Throughout the history of photography, the relationship between camera and firearm has moved beyond the purely technological dimension and turned the dark power of photography’s destructive gaze into a *topos* that still runs through art and literature today. Parallels between the photographic shot and the act of hunting have been drawn in a wide range of areas—including photography, image theory and contemporary art—and many different readings have been offered to confirm the existence of a shared space between the acts of stalking prey and taking pictures.

A deeper examination of this analogy might lead us to uncover further connections in the lexicon of photography as it was taking shape in the 19th century, when the term *snapshot* was claimed for photography from the word used by hunters to designate a shot taken hastily from the hip, without careful aim.⁴ And it is precisely that capturing of an instant—the essential pursuit of amateur and professional photography aficionados from the late 19th century onwards—which would bring about the consummation of this metaphorical capture.

Snapshots thus became a key chapter in the race towards “conquering the world as picture”,⁵ a quest that had been central to the development of the camera since its invention. This conquest took off in force and became a mass phenomenon in the 1880s, thanks to simpler and more affordable devices. And with the appearance of illustrated magazines and the introduction of 35 mm still cameras in the 1920s, photography became the ideal tool for freezing,

4. Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present* (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 129.

5. This expression, by Martin Heidegger, is quoted by Ariella Azoulay in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2008), 145.

6. Interview with Henri Cartier-Bresson in the “Cultura” supplement to *La Nación* (12 August 1998).

7. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 33.

disseminating and commentating on a world of events made moments.

Within the practice of photography, French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson elevated the essential link between image, moment and capture to a true dogma. In a 1998 interview with Pierre Assouline for the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación*, he said: “I’m like a hunter who loves bagging his prey but doesn’t want to eat it. The only thing I’m interested in is the shot.”⁶ In this sense, the 20th century is filled with images conceived as hunting trophies by hordes of believers in the “decisive moment”, and many practices in photojournalism and street photography owed their success to photography’s ability to seize unsuspecting subjects as plunder. In the field of photojournalism, the archetypal photographer ready for action—equipped with cameras and dressed in camouflage attire, complete with jacket and boots—had a clear parallel in the figure of the hunter.

In the field of theory, the correlation between the acts of taking photographs and stalking prey has been the subject of much critical analysis, as exemplified in the words of philosopher Vilém Flusser in his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*: “If one observes the movements of a human being in possession of a camera (or of a camera in possession of a human being), the impression given is of someone lying in wait. This is the ancient act of stalking which goes back to the Palaeolithic hunter in the tundra. Yet photographers are not pursuing their game in the open savanna but in the jungle of cultural objects.”⁷ As the 20th century progressed, a new reading gained ground that went beyond the initial analogy between photographer and hunter and recognised the inherently

violent nature of the act of photography at the heart of the device: from the very moment it was invented, photography had meant imposition and appropriation. In her essay “In Plato’s Cave”, Susan Sontag made the following observation: “There is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them [...]; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.”⁸ From this perspective, observing, controlling and capturing a subject turns the process of photography into a metaphorical operation of treating people as objects and then appropriating them.

As an apparatus of power, in all its applications and in all the actions it encompasses (from the production through to the distribution and consumption of photographic images), photography always entails a certain degree of violence, capable of turning every encounter between camera, photographer and subject into an exploitative act. The camera produces a shot charged with not only predatory but also—*pace* Marey, who had sought to downplay the murderous scope to his device—symbolically violent potentialities: hunting the image of someone is in itself an imposition that puts the subject under the domination of the gaze for its own purposes. First and foremost, this imposition obeys an unwavering code for representing the subject, a “single-focus gaze”⁹ characterised by the dominant position of whoever is behind the camera, imposing their point of view on an object in the world that is now shifted to inhabit the two-dimensional space of the image.

However, above and beyond the imposition of a gaze—which we could also relate to an eye looking down the sight of a gun—photography also imposes

8. Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave”, in *On Photography* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 10.

9. Ariella Azoulay, “Cameras in Dark Times”, in *Aim Deüelle Lüski. Residual Images. Documentary Photography in Dark Times* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2012), 86.



Étienne-Jules Marey, *Flight of a Seagull*. Chronophotograph on glass plate, n/d.

10. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1977).

a new regime on the subject by stripping them of any kind of control over, and right to, their own image, which has been appropriated by the photographer holding the camera and taking aim at the world.

Continuing in this same vein, the processes of capturing and appropriating the “other” that lie at the heart of each and every photographic hunting trip can also be framed in terms of the relationship linking the gaze to knowledge and the structures and exercise of power, as described by Michel Foucault in his analysis of Panopticism¹⁰ and still highly relevant today in the postwar mindset following the 1991 Gulf War. This age has been defined by Ariella Azoulay,



Étienne-Jules Marey, *Flying Seagull and Bull's-Eye*. Chronophotograph on glass plate, 1882.

borrowing Susan Sontag's phrase, as one of *sanitised techno-war* in which the use of images produced by weapons themselves or by embedded reporters is symptomatic of state authorities' current interest in regulating the visual modes of participation in war by controlling its forms of representation.¹¹ In this context, the technical image is not merely a document waiting to be received, but becomes an active, and sometimes even coercive, interpretation. In modern conflicts, psychological and media components make up a key front that crosses the borders between reality and how we narrate it. In this new scenario, devices for capturing and disseminating pictures become a key part of an army's arsenal.

11. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2008), 187.

From this perspective, Marey’s research—pushed further by chronophotographic experiments by Eadweard Muybridge and Albert Londe, as well as the painter Thomas Eakins’ stroboscopic photography—formed a crucial episode in the technological history of photography, propelled by the same urge to expand the field of vision that had driven progress ever since the very first photographic device was invented. These devices marked start of a progressive path in the technological race to expand the scope of sight beyond the range of the human eye, an evolution that brought about the materialisation of the ocularcentric paradigm proclaimed by René Descartes in 1637 in his treaty on optics *La Dioptrique*: “The entire conduct of our life depends upon our senses, of which sight is the noblest and most universal, so that those inventions which serve to increase its power are the most useful there can be.” This same progression—now encompassing, in parallel, the fields of military technology and photography—would lead to the development of modern appliances for the production, dissemination and mass consumption of images, exemplified today by satellite technologies for controlling the terrain and photographs produced by smart weapons that turn cameras into precise and deadly instruments.

However, the camera has another connection with death besides the metaphorical shot: the photographic image certifies the definite end of the captured moment. Christian Metz observed that, like death, the snapshot is an instantaneous abduction of the object from this world into another and that, from this perspective, photography maintains the memory of the dead as being dead.¹² Thanks to its privileged relationship with death, the action of taking a snapshot

becomes an accomplice in executing an unrepeatable time interval, a moment that is “dead for having been seen”.¹³ As in the myth of Actaeon—ripped to death by his own hounds after being unable to avert his eyes from the naked goddess Artemis as she bathed—the urge to capture an image comes at a price. The trace left by this death echoes Roland Barthes’s *ça a été* (“it has been”), but far from leaving the image trapped in that mere assertion, it becomes the stage from which photography can rise up in a kind of rebirth that leaves a new discourse in the hands of the spectator. Indeed, the very immobility and silence identified by Metz as the main symbols of death can offer, in exchange, a new discursive space for the photographic image. As a result, the spectator has to accept joint responsibility for an image whose centre of gravity has shifted, following Ariella Azoulay, pushing the photographer and their vision of the world into the background in order to expand the image’s potential as a mediating tool in the collective terrain.

How do contemporary artistic practices respond to the range of questions posed by the analogy between camera and firearm? The selection of pieces that make up *H(a)unting Images: Anatomy of a Shot* are very different in form—ranging from traditional media such as painting, photography and documentary register to sound installations, video art and performance—but they all share contemporary art’s growing interest in new ways of exploring and representing conflict and can help us explore the parallels drawn by Marey. How has the relationship between image-capture systems and military devices evolved? Can we subject images to a critical analysis of violence that goes beyond their literal nature as

records and evidence? How can contemporary artistic practices offer alternative forms of representing conflict outside the sphere of the media? This exhibition sets out to tackle these and other questions raised by the discursive implications of the shot and calls on spectators to play an active role in seeing the gaze as a predatory strategy.

Works

This show seeks to metaphorically dissect the photographic image and act into three parts: **device**, **capture** and **trace**. These concepts offer a cogent analysis of photography, which always entails a camera, an act of capture and a materialisation (or coding) of the trace left by light rays; however, they also designate three intrinsic aspects of the act of hunting. As a result, the works in this show overlap both discursive spaces mapped out by the concept of the shot.

Jeff Wall
Harun Farocki
Dara Birnbaum
Walid Raad /
The Atlas Group
Kristin Oppenheim
Javier Peñafiel
Bleda y Rosa
Sophie Ristelhueber
Simeón Saiz Ruiz
Gabriel Orozco

Jeff Wall

A Hunting Scene (1994)

1. Jeff Wall, *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 275.

Jeff Wall's *A Hunting Scene*, which opens the show, takes spectators on a double hunt: a camera has captured the image of two hunting rifles in anonymous hands and placed them at the centre of the picture's narrative tension. Breaking with traditional paintings of hunting scenes set in the countryside, Wall shifts the setting to the outskirts of Vancouver, where "old behaviours flow across a new landscape".¹ In doing so, he reveals his interest in striking up a dialogue with pictorial tradition, in this case focused on hunting scenes. However, in this updated version of familiar references, Wall blurs the boundaries of a natural setting that has ceased to be a mythical place and is now an indeterminate space where debris mixes with the organised structure of a housing estate. This formulation of the outskirts is projected onto the subjects themselves, who have forsaken the heroic gestures favoured in paintings and instead express their own marginalisation. Inspired by Carlos Saura's 1965 film *La caza* [The Hunt]—in which a group of friends get together to hunt rabbits on the site of a Spanish Civil War battlefield but soon descend into emotional and psychological slaughter—*A Hunting Scene* leaves its prey out of the picture; our references might well lead us to suppose it is an animal being hunted, but its invisible nature also hints at man's violence against man. Since the scene offers no succinct image that might explain the facts and tie up the narrative loose ends, the artist puts us in a state of sustained expectation, caught up in an unresolved story whose tension is reinforced by the presence of an imposing, expansive sky which



somehow manages to completely smother the scene. But above and beyond showing two armed men, Jeff Wall also brings the spectator in through the camera lens to become an active witness: by looking at the image, we cover a flank and set up a triangle with the two protagonists, visually closing off the space and cornering the prey. The protagonists' attitude chimes with our own ideas of violence and reinforces the perception of a tacit conflict, burdening the act of looking with a sense of responsibility. In this way, and by manoeuvring the capturing device towards an expression of violence in which we are ourselves complicit, Wall's image leads us into the territory that *H(a)unting Images* aims to explore.

Harun Farocki

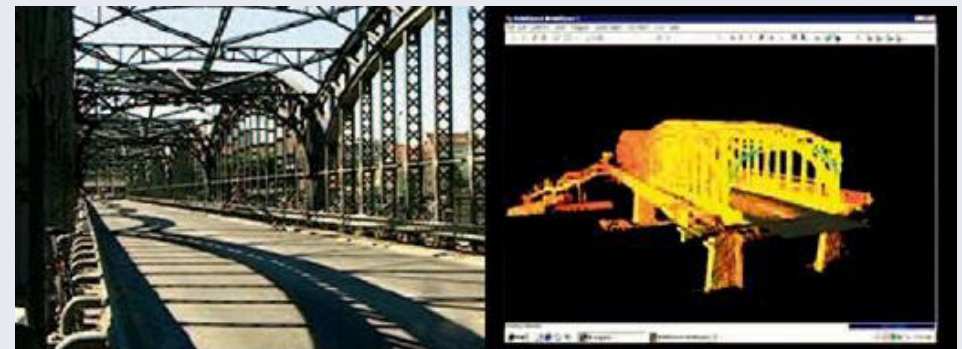
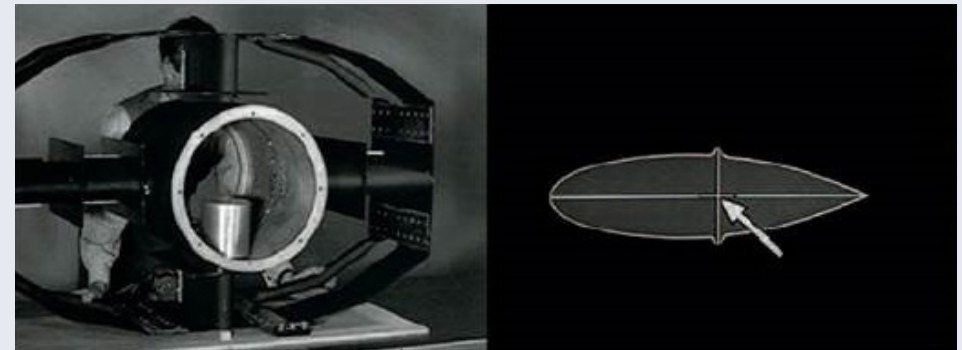
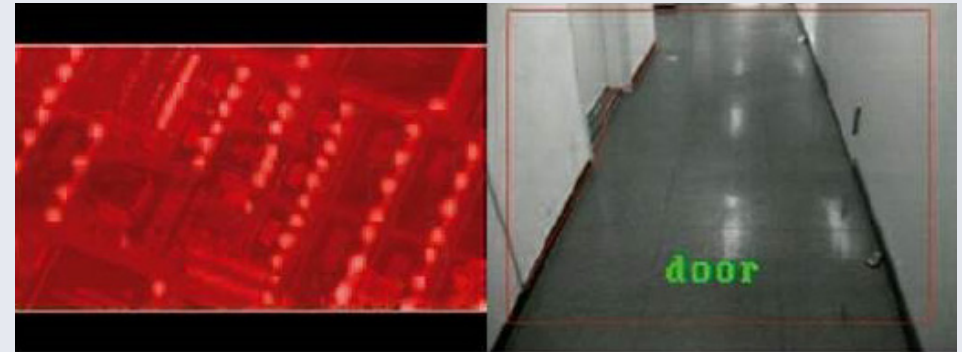
Eye/Machine I (2001)

DEVICE

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, "How to Open Your Eyes", in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. Antje Ehmman and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig Books, 2009), 46.

2. Elizabeth Collingwood-Selby, "Reconocer y perseguir de Harun Farocki: El dominio de la imagen operativa", in *Sobre Harun Farocki. La continuidad de la guerra a través de las imágenes*, ed. Diego Fernández H. (Santiago de Chile: ediciones / metales pesados, 2014).

In *Eye/Machine I*, Harun Farocki appropriates images from the 1991 Gulf War taken by cameras fitted to missiles to be fired at military targets. These smart-weapon recordings were broadcast by the media and quickly caught the public's imagination: fascinated viewers were shown a new kind of conflict narrative expressed in pictures that had the style and feel of a videogame. The result was a single account of the facts, erasing the line between the act of committing violence and the act of recording it. If, as Georges Didi-Huberman suggests, Harun Farocki's work relentlessly asks the same terrible question—"Why, in which way and how does the production of images take part in the destruction of human beings?"¹—*Eye/Machine I* is the first piece in which the artist investigates "operative images", ones which don't serve to represent or inform but are simply cogs in a machine. In this new state of affairs, pictures form part of the processes of recognition and tracking,² two characteristic hunting operations which, in increasingly abstract and automated fashion, still shape the systems for the production, circulation and consumption of images. *Eye/Machine I* reveals the final stage of documenting the predatory act: the technological eye embedded in the very missile itself does away with any subjective photographer's gaze and produces an image created by a device whose lethal consequences leave no trace in the footage, which breaks off at the moment of impact.



Dara Birnbaum

Attack Piece (1975)

Attack Piece, by Dara Birnbaum, explores the formal analogy between camera and firearm by extending the metaphor to the cine camera. Spectators are trapped between two monitors on facing walls showing images of a performative clash. On one screen, Dara Birnbaum, armed with a 35 mm still camera, tries to defend her territory from invasion by a group of male actors (including artist Dan Graham) with Super 8 camera in hand. The two monitors show the pictures taken by the two image-capture systems: the slideshow of Birnbaum's photographs opposite the footage shot by the invaders' cine camera. The battle takes place in an everyday space that becomes the site for a clash not only between two different technologies but also, implicitly, between two genders. The invading men attack the practically immobile Dara Birnbaum, who focuses on defending herself. In this way, *Attack Piece* forms part of the artist's lengthy reflection on how the media reproduces gender stereotypes. However, above and beyond this first dialectic reading, Birnbaum's installation also offers a visual enunciation of a capture that pits two devices designed to appropriate the "other" in opposite corners: one governed by movement and the other by the frozen image; one accompanied by the sharp click of the camera shutter, the other by the incessant whirl of the Super 8 camera. Caught in the crossfire, spectators have to take a position by picking a side: attack or defence, hunter or prey.



Walid Raad / The Atlas Group
Missing Lebanese Wars
(Notebook Volume 72)
‘Fakhouri File’ Series (1989–1998)

Missing Lebanese Wars (Notebook Volume 72) documents the unusual pastime of a group of Lebanese Civil War historians who meet at the racecourse every Sunday to place their wagers. However, rather than betting on the winning horse, they try to predict the exact distance between the winner and the finishing line as shown in the photograph published in the following day's newspaper. Each of the 21 pieces in this series reproduces a page from the notebook of a certain Dr Fakhouri, who purportedly put together its contents from various documents: the photograph of the horse, notes on the length of the race, the historians' initials and respective bets, the distance between the winning horse and the finishing line at the photo finish and a description of the winning historian. Shifts in space and time run through the whole series: none of the photographs manages to capture the exact moment when the horse crosses the finishing line and no historian actually guesses the correct distance. Representation of the facts becomes an approximation that is always too early or too late, and not only reveals the limits of photography as a document, but also offers a metaphor of the inexorable gap between facts and the historical record. The snapshots of moving horses in this series also echo the pictures taken by another photographer from the same period as Marey, Eadweard Muybridge, who managed to capture all the phases of movement of a galloping horse in a series of photographs that revealed to the world what the human eye couldn't see: the exact positions of its legs. In Muybridge's experiments, photography operated as a tool at the service of a scientific vision that believed in the possibility of describing the facts of nature through technique. In contrast, the pictures in *Notebook Volume 72* not only expose the failure to capture an image, but also question the very notion of independent "facts" in existence before we set about documenting them. In this way, this series raises another voice challenging the concept of history as a discipline and reminds us that any account of the past will always contain a dose of fiction.

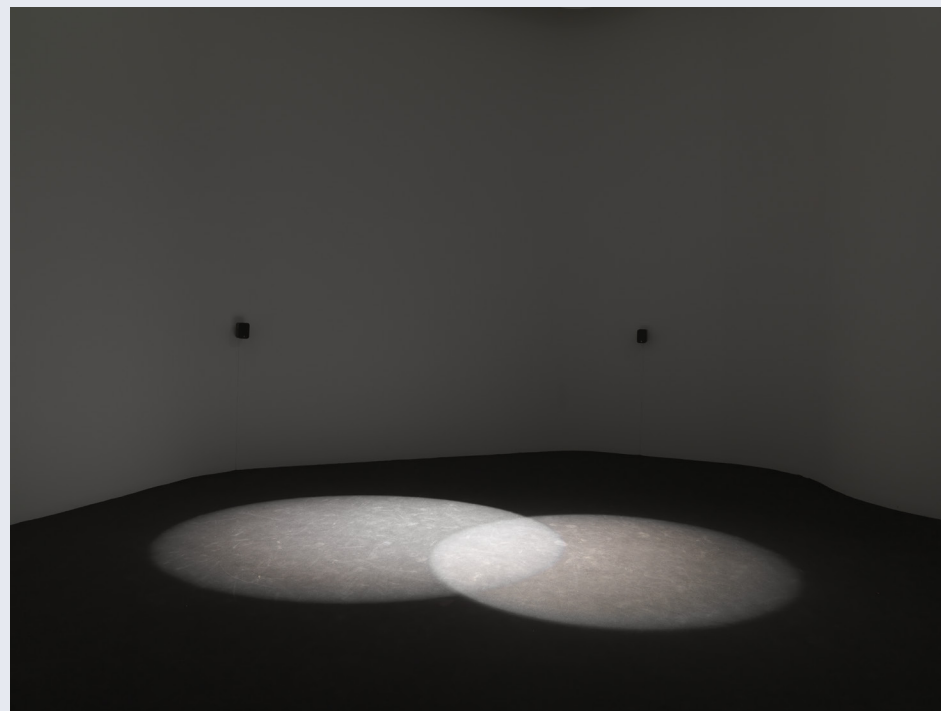


Kristin Oppenheim

Hey Joe (1996)

CAPTURE

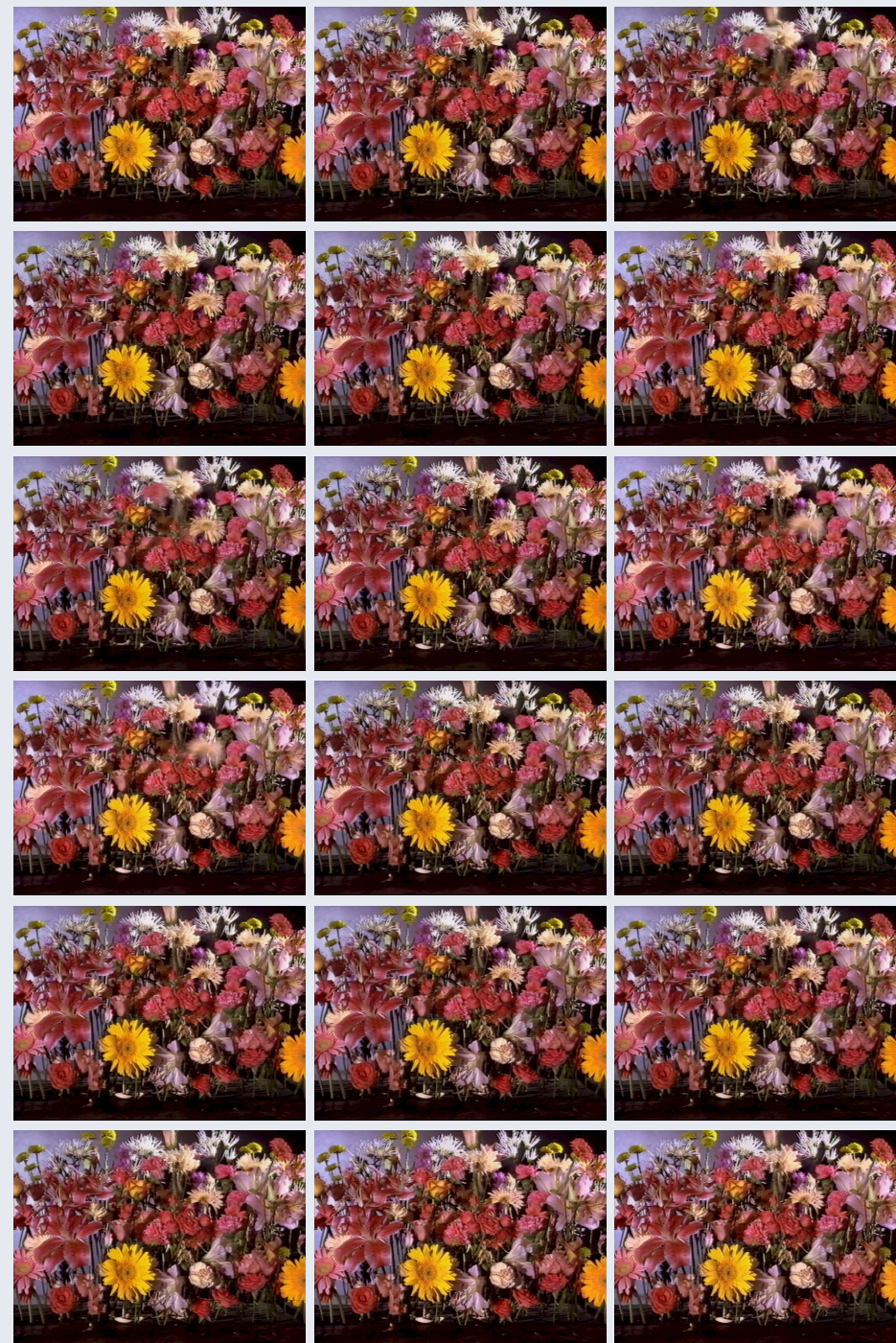
Hey Joe, by Kristin Oppenheim, sets up a panoptic regime that gives spectators the feeling of being in prison, caught in an ambiguous spatial field where violence might break out at any time. As two spotlights project beams of light into the empty space, we hear a hypnotic, melancholic voice repeating the same question over and over again—"Hey Joe, where you goin' with that gun in your hand?"—the first line of a music track popularised by Jimi Hendrix during the years of the Vietnam War. As in many of Oppenheim's visual and sound installations since the early 1990s, the ever-present voice is the artist's own. Meanwhile, the two wandering spotlights draw us into the space of capture, an embodied metaphor of a search, escape or pursuit which ensnares us physically and emotionally. While the narrative tension in the song lyrics suggests something about to happen, the hypnotic reiteration of the same line beats out the cyclical rhythm of time in a lullaby or fairytale, repeatedly bringing us back to the start of the story. And in contrast to the dreamlike atmosphere woven by the haunting voice, the beams of light from the spotlights, together with the minimalist installation and the total absence of any images, give the impression of entering an enclosed space such as a prison courtyard, where we are always visible but at the same time also have the chance to flee.



Javier Peñafiel

Maltrato (1999)

In *Maltrato* [Mistreatment], Javier Peñafiel offers up a lush flower arrangement as a giant floral wall. However, this rich variety of colours and petals is then shot to pieces in a violent act that is both seen and heard: the accompanying soundtrack stresses the cadence of the shots and reiterates the cynical, methodical mistreatment being meted out. In a similar way to the chronophotography performed by Marey's gun, Peñafiel's piece records, shot by shot, a succession of stills that create the illusion of movement. In this way, each captured photograph is likened to a shot, and the succession of stages chronicling the destruction of the flowers reveals in the rich detail of each and every impact. Spectators become passive witnesses to the violence our society inflicts on beauty, embodied by a recurring symbol in the history of art: flowers. But at the same time, and in the opposite sense, *Maltrato* also confronts us with the aestheticisation of violence implicit in our consumption of certain images: no-holds-barred violence we simply cannot tear our eyes away from.



Bleda y Rosa

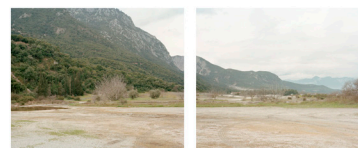
Campos de batalla (2010–2012)

In *Campos de batalla* [Battlefields], María Bleda and José María Rosa document the sites of some of the most dramatic battles in the history of Europe. However, these landscapes contain not a single trace of the hundreds of humans who fought one another there in violent clashes. All we can see are spaces devoid of any historical evidence, their apparent immobility keeping past events out of sight. The passage of time—present here in the form of the gap between the two parts of each diptych in this series of landscape photographs—has erased the aftermath of events from the surface of the land, and from the surface of the photograph as well. These still, quiet scenes also recall the origins of war photography and the first pictures of 19th-century battlefields, such as the deserted landscapes absent of all activity captured by English photographer Roger Fenton, who took the first war photographs during the Crimean War in 1855. Despite the lack of concrete symptoms, the encounter with history is recorded in each and every one of these sites, which trace out a map of European conflicts imprinted on the collective memory of its nations. Taking the pictorial representation of battles as an aesthetic and conceptual starting point, these diptychs offer a counterpoint to conventions centred on the explicit shots we usually associate with the notion of a battlefield and invite us to reflect on the passing of time and the traces of memory. In contrast to the visual rhetoric of the frontline shaped by the language of photojournalism, this series explores the multiple facets through which war etches itself into the landscape, life and memory of man.



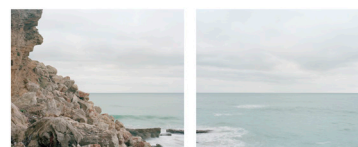
Batallas de Marston, 28 de junio de 1213

1



Puerto de Navarrete, verano del año 980 d.C.

3



Costa de Gállego, 21 de octubre de 1808

5



Golfo de Lepanto, 7 de septiembre de 1571

7



Torres, 26 de septiembre de 1936

9



Campos de batalla, 15 de octubre de 1944

2



Ruta de la Victoria, 15 de octubre de 1944

4



Campos de batalla, 15 de octubre de 1944

6



Campos de batalla, septiembre de 1944 d.C.

8

Sophie Ristelhueber

Fait (1992)

1. David Company, "Safety in Numbness: Some Remarks on the Problems of 'Late Photography' ", in *Where Is the Photograph?*, ed. David Green (Brighton: Photoworks/Photoforum, 2003), 130.

Sophie Ristelhueber's *Fait* [Done/Fact] looks at scenes of war through the prism of the scars it leaves behind. Shot in the Kuwaiti desert six months after the 1991 Gulf War, this series can be seen as an example of "late photography", a genre that encompasses several contemporary artistic approaches that explore conflict through its aftermath. In contrast to the dramatic, noisy rhetoric of traditional photojournalism, this use of still images as mute, static places opens photography up to new ways of relating to time and memory, as well as forging ties with other media. Within the context of a war characterised by the absence of any independent media coverage, these photographs were taken after the event; and instead of seeking to freeze the moment, they document the scars in the landscape and describe the stillness that pervades the scene once the action is over. As critic David Company has observed, in this conflict "photography was struggling to find a way to reconcile itself with a new position beyond the event. And it was discovering that sombre melancholia was a seductive mode for the still image."¹ By following a Surrealist-inspired strategy of shifted perspectives and heightened strangeness in the form of high aerial shots of objects of uncertain scale, these pictures of the pitted terrain document the scars we inflict on the earth through war. The opaque, fragmented nature of this series brings home the impossibility of documenting the event as a whole and reveals the paradoxical nature of a world in which the avalanche of data and images from satellites and surveillance systems seems to have blinded



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us to what is going on. Like an anatomical dissection, these photographs present the landscape as a body, a territory damaged and scarred by the ravages of war.

Simeón Saiz Ruiz

J'est un je (1996–2008)

TRACE

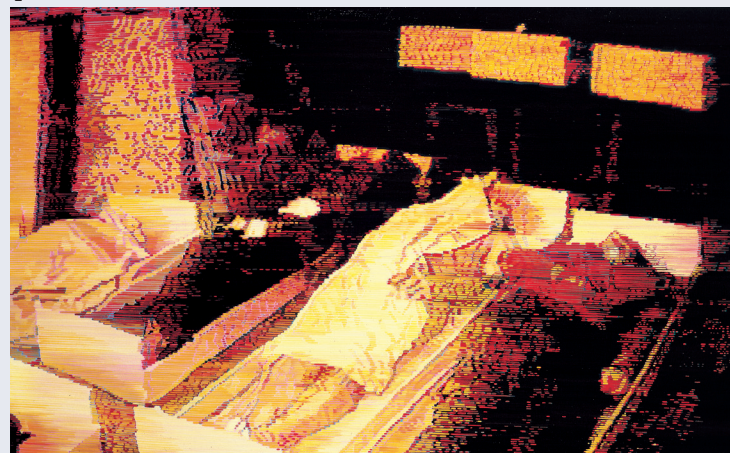
Simeón Saiz Ruiz's three paintings in the series *J'est un je* [I Is an I] offer a representation of the most direct consequences of a shot: civilian casualties. By producing paintings of photographs of the Yugoslav Wars taken from the press or television news, Saiz Ruiz strips these images of the logic of media economics and mass consumption that would usually mean we give such pictures no more than a passing glance. For how many of the pictures we see in the media can we actually remember? In contrast, here the artist reclaims painting as a space where we can tackle conflict and examine how we represent the past, as history painting traditionally did. The sheer size of Saiz Ruiz's pieces forces spectators to face up to the scars of conflict on the scale of their own body: instead of the cursory glance we usually afford images of violence, we now find our whole body is involved. Spectators also have to take on the challenge of decoding paintings that reproduce every detail of the original material, right down to the individual pixels of photographs and the lines on television pictures. Whereas the press strives to delineate and monopolise the meaning of images, Saiz Ruiz leaves inscrutable traces that reveal the gap between reality and the form in which we represent it. The volatile media images are frozen, leaving the information contained in the headline as the only layer of evidence. The visual paradox created by the artist, who calls the transparency of sharply defined media images into question, becomes a mechanism for presenting us with a shot turned into a death sentence.



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Gabriel Orozco

Altar de parabrisas con balazo (2009)

Altar de parabrisas con balazo [Shot Windscreen Altar], by Gabriel Orozco, brings the show to a close by inviting spectators to read a small image that forces us into a personal encounter with the trace of an anonymous death. The photograph shows a windscreen with a single bullet hole resting against an abandoned TV set to form a kind of improvised altar. The object, found by the artist by the roadside in the San Luis Potosí desert in Mexico, is shown to us against an arid landscape that also works as a metaphor of forgetting. In this context, the photographic image enacts a twofold exercise in counter-memory. Set up as an anonymous object, this altar works as a vestige and a tomb, a mark in the land, while also signalling the place of a death, etching its presence on memory. In addition, this *objet trouvé* has also left its mark on Orozco's photographic material, since it is not only evidence of an individual monument, but also becomes a memorial that gives a voice to the increasing number of victims of violence across Mexico. Here, in this exhibition, this ultimate scar of conflict—without any literal representation of the victim—becomes a form of debris that closes the circle and brings us back to a firearm, a sight through which we can once again observe and shoot.



List of Works

Dara Birnbaum

Attack Piece

1975

Two-channel video, b/w, sound,

7 min 45 sec

Varies in size

MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation

Bleda y Rosa

Campos de batalla. Europa

['Battlefields: Europe' Series]

1. *Alrededores de Waterloo,*

18 de junio de 1815

[Area around Waterloo, 18 June 1815]

2. *Campo de Atila, Châlons-en-*

Champagne, junio del año 451

[Catalaunian Plains, Châlons-

en-Champagne, June 451]

3. *Paso de las Termópilas,*

verano del año 480 a. C.

[Pass of Thermopylae, summer 480 BC]

4. *Entre Tours y Poitiers,*

10 de octubre del 732

[Between Tours and Poitiers,

10 October 732]

5. *Cabo de Trafalgar,*

21 de octubre de 1805

[Cape Trafalgar, 21 October 1805]

6. *Austerlitz, 2 de diciembre de 1805*

[Austerlitz, 2 December 1805]

7. *Golfo de Lepanto,*

7 de octubre de 1571

[Gulf of Lepanto, 7 October 1571]

8. *Llano de Maratón,*

septiembre del 490 a. C.

[Plain of Marathon, September 490 BC]

9. *Valmy, 20 de septiembre de 1792*

[Valmy, 20 September 1792]

2010–2012

Colour photographs

Pigmented ink prints on Hahnemühle

Photo Rag® paper

85 cm x 150 cm (each)

"la Caixa" Collection

of Contemporary Art

Harun Farocki

Eye/Machine I

2001

Two-channel video, colour, sound,

25 min

Varies in size

MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation

Kristin Oppenheim

Hey Joe

1996

Multimedia installation: spotlights,

loudspeakers, computer and sound

recording, 2 min 15 sec

Varies in size

MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium

Gabriel Orozco

Altar de parabrisas con balazo [Shot Windscreen Altar]

2009
Colour photograph
Fuji Crystal print
30.7 cm × 46.5 cm
"la Caixa" Collection
of Contemporary Art

Javier Peñafiel

Maltrato [Mistreatment]

1999
Video projection: DVD, colour, sound,
16 min
"la Caixa" Collection
of Contemporary Art

Walid Raad / The Atlas Group

Missing Lebanese Wars (*Notebook Volume 72*) 'Fakhouri File' Series

1996–2001
Series of 21 photographs
Inkjet print on paper
33.2 cm × 24.2 cm each
Edition/serial number: 4/7
Colección Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Sophie Ristelhueber

1. *Fait #07* [Done/Fact No. 7]

2. *Fait #28* [Done/Fact No. 28]

3. *Fait #43* [Done/Fact No. 43]

4. *Fait #60* [Done/Fact No. 60]

1992
Colour photographs in a golden frame
100 cm × 126 cm × 5 cm
"la Caixa" Collection
of Contemporary Art

Simeón Saiz Ruiz

1. *Víctimas de matanza en el mercado de Sarajevo, sábado 5 de febrero de 1994 (a partir de imagen aparecida en TVE-1)*

[Victims of a Massacre in a Sarajevo Market, Saturday 5 February 1994 (from Pictures Shown on TVE-1)]
'J'est un je' Series

2008
Oil on linen
243 cm × 393 cm
"la Caixa" Collection
of Contemporary Art

2. *Víctima del bombardeo serbio al centro de Sarajevo, el domingo 28 de noviembre de 1993. Segunda versión* [Victim of a Serb Bombardment of the Centre of Sarajevo, Sunday 28 November 1993. Second Version]

'J'est un je' Series

1996
Oil on canvas
126 cm × 204 cm
"la Caixa" Collection
of Contemporary Art

3. *Víctimas de la matanza en el mercado de Sarajevo, el sábado 5 de febrero de 1994, día más sangriento desde el inicio de la guerra* [Victims of a Massacre in a Sarajevo Market, Saturday 5 February 1994, the Bloodiest Day Since the Start of the War]

'J'est un je' Series

1998
Oil on canvas
111.5 cm × 180 cm
"la Caixa" Collection
of Contemporary Art

Jeff Wall

A Hunting Scene

1994
Colour photograph
Cibachrome transparency in fluorescent lightbox with aluminium frame
183 cm × 253 cm
"la Caixa" Collection
of Contemporary Art

Biographies

Ada Sbriccoli

45

Ada Sbriccoli graduated in philosophy, specialising in aesthetics, from the University of Milan. She also holds a Master's Degree in Advanced Studies in Art History from the University of Barcelona. As a research associate, she has worked with the group Arte, Globalización, Interculturalidad (AGI) at the Department of Art History at the University of Barcelona. She cofounded CFD Barcelona as a centre for photography and documentary media and curated the Focus On series of events exploring contemporary photography organised in collaboration with La Virreina Image Centre. She currently combines her research work with teaching, curating and coordinating contemporary photography projects.

Arola Valls Bofill

Arola Valls Bofill graduated in fine art, specialising in images, from the University of Barcelona. She also holds a Master's Degree in Advanced Studies in Art History from the same university, where she now lectures for the Bachelor's Degree in Audiovisual Communication and in the Department of Education, as well as in private centres for photography. She cofounded positivo-directo as a space for creation, research and teaching in the fields of photography, contemporary art and digital media. She works with the "la Caixa" Banking Foundation on designing visitor-experience projects linked to contemporary art exhibitions at CaixaForum. As a researcher and curator, she focuses on the relationships between the history of photography and contemporary art practices.

