How to Win at Photography – Image-Making as Play 05.06.–10.10.2021 Fotomuseum Winterthur

How to Win at Photography – Image-Making as Play explores the relationship between photography and play and invites visitors to focus on the playful aspects of visual culture. It investigates the notion of image play, creating unexpected connections between the history of photography as well as practices of image making with and within computer games.

The group exhibition *How to Win at Photography* includes more than forty positions from contemporary and 20th century photography. Through an assemblage of multimedia artworks and vernacular images, the exhibition questions the very meaning and function of photography today. Photography is inherently playful. But it is not free play. There are rules to master. Skills to conquer. Expectations to fulfil.

Are we playing with the camera or is the camera ultimately playing us? Are we really in charge or are we mere pawns in larger technical, social, cultural and economic networks? What can a playful photographer achieve on a political and socio-cultural level? Who and what is performing the act of seeing and capturing – humans, machines or a combination of both? And finally, can this game be won? These are just some of the questions posed by *How to Win at Photography*.

Thematic Focuses

The exhibition is organised in five chapters: Game Travel – Playing Tourist, Gameplay – How to Win at Photography, Replay – Re-Stage, Re-Enact, Re-Create, Role Play – Playing with Identity and Camera Play – Playing with the Apparatus.

Game Travel examines the practice of screenshotting – capturing a section or the entirety of the screen – within video games, which has become commonplace. Rather than playing a video game, artists and photographers play *with* the game, therefore introducing a different kind of engagement. However, screenshots from video games are also used – especially by political bodies – for strategic disinformation, as in the case of the Russian Ministry of Defence, which in 2017 posted alleged 'irrefutable evidence' of US forces aiding

the terrorist organisation ISIS. The alleged photographic proof was soon discovered to be a series of screenshots taken in the smartphone game *AC-130 Gunship Simulator: Special Ops Squadron*.

Gameplay looks at the emergence of rules and point systems in contemporary photography. Quantifiable values such as views, likes, shares, followers, reposts and so on have actively been promoting the gamification of visual culture – the application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts. Today, score systems for images have become normalised, we all want to score points with our pictures. In this context, content producers can either conform to the status quo by creating 'successful' images or they can try to subvert the prevailing logics to challenge, reject or sabotage gamified labour.

Replay explores the themes of reenactment and restaging. As games become more 'realistic' and reality takes an increasingly gamified turn, the very notions of original and copy become blurred. For example, gamers around the world use war simulation games to re-enact the iconic photograph of an unidentified man standing in front of a row of tanks in Tiananmen Square. By circulating screenshots of the scene, they allow the event, which is partly rendered invisible through censorship, to resurface. By appropriating and re-contextualising images, artists and photographers question the dominant authorities by generating counter-narratives that can shape reality.

Role Play explores the play with identities. From photographic portraits to selfies, from video game avatars to cinema stars, role-playing has been one of the few constants in the ever-changing history of representation. The performative play with one's self can become an empowering act as well as a critique of traditions of representation that exclude minorities and impose non-negotiable rules, labels and boundaries on what is considered socially 'normal' and 'acceptable'.

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

> **"Following the rule of thirds, catching the decisive moment, mastering the shutter speed, playing against the camera, collecting likes and followers, breaking all the norms and conventions, questioning the apparatus, winning the game – this show explores the game as a language and photography as a way of seeing."**
> Marco De Mutiis, Digital Curator, Fotomuseum Winterthur

With works by: Cory Arcangel, Aram Bartholl, Dorothée Elisa Baumann, Justin Berry, Julius Brauckmann, Alan Butler, Claude Cahun, Cibelle Cavalli Bastos, Dries Depoorter & Max Pinckers, Philipp Dorl, Constant Dullaart, Harun Farocki, Christopher Graves, Aneta Grzeszykowska, Beate Gütschow, Jon Haddock, Emily Hadrich, Florence Henri, Roc Herms, John Hilliard, Yuyi John, Rindon Johnson, Andy Kassier, Sherrie Levine, Gloria López Cleries & Sive Hamilton Helle, René Mächler, Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs, Joan Pamboukes, Steven Pippin, Michael Reisch, Tabor Robak, Ria Patricia Röder, Lorna Ruth Galloway, Ed Ruscha, Emma Agnes Sheffer, Cindy Sherman, Guido Segni, Andrew Stine, Petra Szemán, Akihiko Taniguchi, Danielle Udogaranya, Coralie Vogelaar, Tamás Waliczky and Ai Weiwei.

Information on the Museum

Fotomuseum Winterthur is at the forefront of presenting and discussing photography and visual culture. As part of its repertoire of temporary exhibitions devoted to individual artists and group shows, the museum displays works by young photographers as well as those with an established reputation. In addition, it examines photographic phenomena in the context of new technologies and digital media, exposing them to critical scrutiny. A broad range of artistic, applied and cultural forms of photography are explored, with a primary focus on dialogue and the exchange of ideas. The institution is committed to the considered, autonomous and creative use of media. Its collection (which dates back to 1960) has helped to shape the history and narratives of photography as well as our understanding of it as a medium in all its different forms.

Fotomuseum Winterthur was founded in 1993. In 2002, it combined with Fotostiftung Schweiz to create the Fotozentrum – Switzerland's foremost centre for photographic expertise.

Contact

Julia Sumi
Press and Communications
sumi@fotomuseum.ch
T +41 52 234 10 74