

IL FAIT BEAU, JE SORS



Lynne Cohen
John Hilliard
Douglas Huebler
Peter Hutchinson
Édouard Levé
Walter Pfeiffer
Paola Pivi
Pierre Reimer
Haim Steinbach
Taroop & Glabell
Shoji Ueda
Erwin Wurm

**AN EXHIBITION CURATED BY FOUR STUDENTS
AT THE ÉCOLE NATIONALE SUPÉRIEURE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE
BASED ON CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS PLASTIQUES COLLECTIONS**



IL FAIT BEAU, JE SORS

Alfredo Coloma, Apolline Lamoril, Agathe Mouchès and Pauline Wallerich, students at the ENSP and the exhibition’s curators

It’s sunny, I’m going out: it’s like an automatic reflex, a response to the call of the outdoors. Except that here, something is off-kilter. There’s an incongruity, and we cannot accept the image at face value.

An overturned lorry faces upwards, famous names make unfulfilled promises, and a print is pierced through the middle: in all cases, a certain immediate satisfaction is frustrated. Reality is distorted, twisted. The image alone is insufficient; you need to look behind or beyond it. Here, it coaxes us into taking things at face value, toying with our enthusiastic attachment to the world, our almost maniacal zeal. There, it forces us to keep our distance and observe with a cool, clinical eye.

Irreverent, deliberately uncouth, spiteful, gleefully obstructive, from one image to another, our conventional view is put in check. Photography no longer exists for its own sake; it is no longer a transparent, objective process for capturing a subject and giving an instant window into a world. It has become a material,

only making sense within a broader paradigm, coupled with other clues. It is the work itself, in the world of art, a world of paradox and ambiguity where you can pick up on the spaces in between, the background sounds, the white noise, the margins.

For this new edition of the partnership between the Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP) and the École nationale supérieure de la photographie (ENSP), we chose to show photos by artists whose work is rarely limited to just photography in order to branch out into multi-form works whose intentions are plural. By emphasising the deliberately instrumental and sometimes casual relationship with the image, this collection forces us to take a side-step. By assembling these pictures in one space, the aim was both to hear the intensity of each and to produce echoes, force fields—to establish new differences of potential.

The title of the exhibition is taken from the book *Il fait beau, je sors* by Pierre Reimer, published in 1998 by Firmin-Didot.

THE LIFE OF IMAGES

Pascal Beausse, head of the photography collections at the Centre national des arts plastiques

Let us consider images as living beings, organisms endowed with their own existence. We are used to seeing them as things, and all too often we ignore their vitality. They are the creation of artists and cultures, of course, but in return they have a profound effect on our dreams, our actions and the ways in which we transform the world each day. Images are not content with merely representing this world in which we live together. They offer us another aspect, a mirror, but more than that: images invent worlds. Each image is a world unto itself.

It’s sunny, I’m going out: I step out of my reality and into the one in the image. Inside each of the works chosen for this exhibition, a singular configuration is generated quite autonomously. The figures, the objects and the places portrayed seem easily recognisable and, at the very least, credible. That’s the strength of photography: its intrinsic relationship with reality, its primary function to document and encourage us to believe what it shows us—even though we know each picture is a thing constructed. Each artist, however, in his or her very personal relationship with this medium, produces another reality, one that only exists in and through the image.

The curators of the exhibition invite us to shift between these worlds, guided by our intuition and led by the open dimension of the images, their absolute absence of authority. Of course, they are very much determined by each of the artists in terms of form, thought and poetry, but their silence suggests that they are expecting us. They urge us to imagine ourselves within their space—a visual space that is purely in our minds.

Photographed from behind, in an indeterminate white space, a female figure seems to ignore our presence. This viewer has the role of go-between or intermediary: she echoes our experience of looking at a work. This meta-image produces its own discourse; it explores, in and of itself, the process of representation. By the principle of *mise en abîme*, we are invited to walk directly into the image.

There follow other figures just as enigmatic, even in their apparent face value: overturning, the overlay of reality, the hole, the screen, the filter. Ways to create worlds; faces and landscapes slip away. The artists have breached reality and invite us to pass from one side to the other, into the imaginary space produced by their images, because any image makes a hole—a hole in reality.

IN CONVERSATION

Interview by **Paul Pouvreau**, professor at the ENSP, transcribed by writer **Sylvain Prudhomme**

Agathe, Alfredo, Apolline and Pauline are the four students who, while managing their individual projects, have also joined forces for the past year as curators to bring you the *It’s sunny, I’m going out* exhibition. As a title, it conjures up a rather blithe, slightly offhand image of the paradox, or, as they like to put it, a “side-step”. If the exhibition takes us by

the hand and ostensibly confronts us with the familiar environment of photography—an open window into the world—it just as quickly invites us to leave it. Indeed, via the judicious choice and singular pertinence of the pieces on show here, all carefully selected, who wouldn’t understand that each one, in its own way, makes us notice that this

transparency is tinged with discord? As a professor, I have had the good fortune and pleasure to accompany them on this adventure, delving into the collections of the Centre national des arts plastiques, and so have closely witnessed and shared their curiosity, discussions and doubts—in short, their complete professionalism, and, above

all, the enthusiasm they have demonstrated at each stage of the process. This is why I wanted to conduct this interview with them: to give them an opportunity to speak so that they might share their words and feelings to describe this intimate and yet oh-so-communicative experience with us.

This exhibition has given you your first taste of what it is to be curators. What was your main motivation in agreeing to take on this project?
PAULINE WALLERICH To learn about curating, first of all. To have the opportunity to design and produce an exhibition and explore each stage of the process. **APOLLINE LAMORIL** Plus, from the very start I had this childlike desire to go and dig around in the CNAP storerooms and touch the artworks.

What determined your choices?
AGATHE MOUCHÈS It all came together pretty fast. It wasn’t long before we’d picked out our three “manifesto” pieces: the ones by Paola Pivi, Erwin Wurm and Édouard Levé. **ALFREDO COLOMA** It was our deliberate intention to not just work with art photographers, but also to open up and work with artists who use photography as a medium. **AL** What’s important, I think, is that we really used the works as our starting point. We didn’t try to find a theme and shoehorn the works we liked into it. Our goal from the start was to curate an exhibition in the manner we wish to see it done in the art world today.

Had you already started the research ahead of the project? Did you consult the CNAP’s database?
PW We must have looked at every page in the database.

Did you make a distinction between the public and private collections?
AC For me, the clearest distinction is that in the private collections there is a particular focus, be it economic or aesthetic. What we looked at in the CNAP database had great diversity, with some pieces that might not have been much influenced by market tastes or were relatively unknown, but which had nonetheless been acquired by the State. The choice seems to be based more on the artist’s corpus and/or process rather than their name or the market. **AL** Yes, this disinterest is quite wonderful. But then, playing devil’s advocate, you can feel the interests of the various

subsequent commissions or periods. There aren’t any personal or individual interests, of course, because the acquisitions were going to make up a public collection. This produces quite a fragmented collection that doesn’t really have a through-line, but that’s wonderful, too.

Did you make your choices based on the works in the collection or on the artists you wanted to show?
AC Speaking for myself, I tried to find images from artists I like. In the final selection, in any case, there are artists who are very important to me, such as Douglas Huebler, John Hilliard and Erwin Wurm. **AM** Some works by artists we like a great deal were very important. Being able to show, for example, the *Portraits d’homonymes* series by Édouard Levé led to the exhibition being what it is. And then there were pieces that drew us toward other artists we were less familiar with.

What did you feel the first time you stepped into the CNAP’s storerooms?
PW We were really excited and curious to check out the place. **AM** It looks like a bunker; you go down there and you come into these huge rooms that resemble aircraft hangars. **AL** We were surprised: the works were stored on shelves, like books, and not in boxes like you might imagine. So it felt really strange to see these incredible pieces just stowed away like that, on metal shelves. There was a sense of sacrilege that felt right and was good to see. **AM** The works are going out or being returned, and are in different rooms, depending on their status: returned, outbound, pending. There is a form attached to each one detailing all the places it’s been.

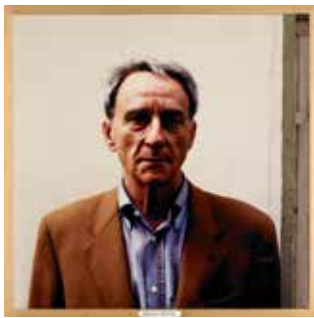
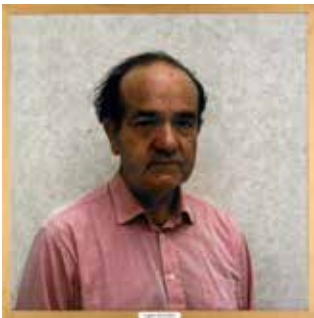
What did you feel coming into contact with such works?
AM It was emotional to see such beautiful works and to be able to get so close to them. It was interesting to see the flip side of the exhibition, the place where the works are mere objects. In principle, you only have this kind of tactile relationship with pieces

My Favorite Things



Mountains, swamps, cacti, snails, tulips, pines, arbutus, wildflowers, forget-me-nots, yuccas, snow, Bermuda, Paris, Giverny, Utah - these are a few of my favorite things.

Peter Kutschman
1992





PETER HUTCHINSON, *My Favorite Things*, 1992
Photo collage, oil pastel and text, 102 x 121.7 cm, FNAC 99058

ÉDOUARD LEVÉ, *Eugène Delacroix, Claude Lorrain, Yves Klein, Georges Bataille, Raymond Roussel, André Breton*, 1996
From the series *Portraits d'homonymes*, 1996-1998, printed in 1997, cibachrome prints, Each 49 x 49 cm, FNAC 2000-657, FNAC 2000-661 to FNAC 2000-665

JOHN HILLIARD, *Plundered / Dug / Prepared / Dry*, 1975
Set of four photographs, gelatin silver prints, 52 x 52 cm each, FNAC 32739





TAROOP & GLABEL, *Qui peut bien voler ainsi les portails?*, 2009
From the series *Les Belles Images de Taroop & Glabel*, 2009, colour print,
47 x 57 cm, FNAC 09-581

LYNNE COHEN, *Corporate Office*, 1977
Printed in 1988, gelatin silver print, 110 x 128 cm, FNAC 88292

HAIM STEINBACH, *Untitled (iron)*, 2009
Colour print, 85 x 61 cm, FNAC 10-093



Variable Piece #70 (In-Process)

Global

Throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner.

Editions of this work will be periodically issued in a variety of topical modes: '100,000 people', '1,000,000 people', '10,000,000 people', 'people personally known by the artist', 'look-alikes', 'over-laps', etc.

November, 1971

Douglas Huebler

In November, 1971 a number of photographs were made in New York City to document various aspects of "everyone alive"; from those one was selected to represent:

MORE THAN ONE PERSON WHO MAY NEVER KNOW THAT HIS,

OR HIS EXISTENCE HAS BEEN MADE THE SUBJECT OF ART

That photograph and a contact proof print, plus this statement to constitute the form of this work: 5/ Variable Piece #70: 1971.

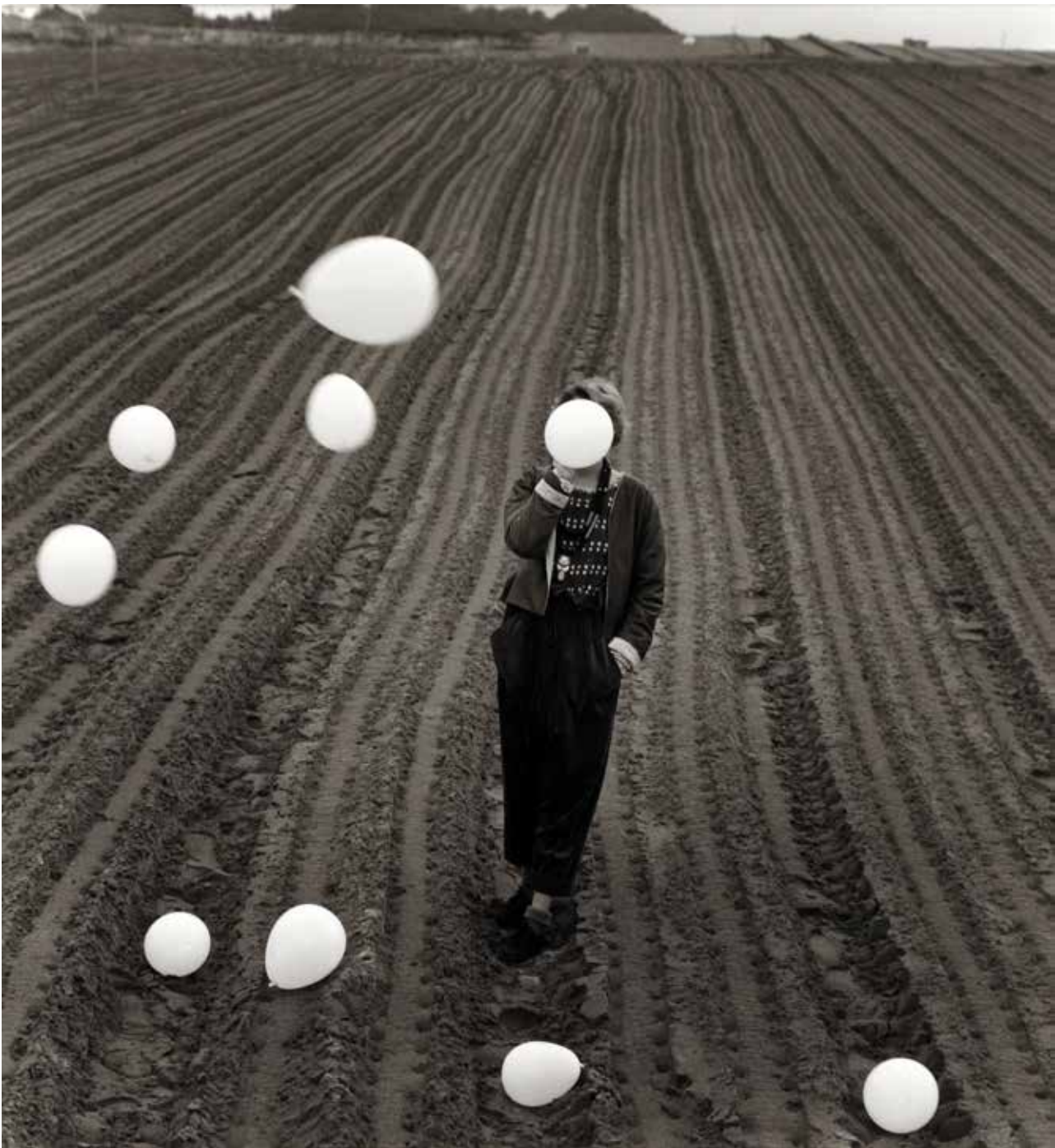
November, 1971.

Douglas Huebler





DOUGLAS HUEBLER, *Variable Piece #70 (In Process)*, 1971
Mixed techniques on paper, 68.5 x 61.5 x 2 cm, donated by Yvon Lambert
to the State, FNAC 2015-0264





SHOJI UEDA, *Mode pour Men's Bigi*, 1983
Gelatin silver print, 26 x 24 cm, FNAC 95214

PIERRE REIMER, *Untitled (bang)*, 1992
Cibachrome laminated on Dibond, 88.2 x 110 cm, FNAC 03-418

WALTER PFEIFFER, *Untitled*, 2000-2006
Printed in 2007, lambda print, 49 x 34 cm, FNAC 07-625

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3] when you know the artists or you’re working in the storerooms. The relationship with the art is more ordinary, less formal.

Were there any surprises when you first came into contact with these works?

PAULINE WALLERICH The formats, the prints, the quality of the prints, the frames. **APOLLINE LAMORIL** The Paola Pivi, for example, was already visually engaging, but seeing the real thing was something else! The format, the scale —the scale was truly impressive. The Hutchinson, too: the relationship with the material, the scale, the small adjustments, the scratches, the pastels. **ALFREDO COLOMA** We’d already seen some pieces first-hand, like the Hilliard. But apart from that, everything else came as a surprise.

Did that persuade you to change your initial list?

AC Let’s say it tightened it. **AGATHE MOUCHÈS** We had a longer list at the start, and then seeing the works up close changed everything. On our original list, the Hutchinson was given more of a secondary status, but when we took it out it was more imposing to us. And then there were things that we didn’t change. The Erwin Wurm, of which we’d only seen reproductions until then: we really wanted to include it, and we were searching for it right until the last second.

How did you go about deciding how to hang the pieces?

PW We created a mock-up pretty quickly. That helped us arrange the artworks. **AC** By giving each piece a little autonomy, you also give it a certain power: Paola Pivi at the back, portraits by Édouard Levé at the entrance. I think if you spend too much time trying to create associations between the pieces, you can destroy their power. We wanted to respect the work of each artist, not start a debate among them.

Were you feeling your way a lot, or did it come together quite quickly?

PW The Paola Pivi asserted itself immediately: it calls out from the back of the room, but is visible from the entrance. **AL** There were also size constraints, like with the Édouard Levé series, with several frames. We learned quite quickly that the only possible place was at the entrance if we didn’t want it to infect the rest. **PW** Precisely, even though we didn’t want the exhibition to open with this piece. And there was another thing: when we went to do the first simulations in the CNAP storerooms and placed the works side by side, things jumped out at us —Taroop & Glabel next to Paola Pivi, Shoji Ueda and Peter Hutchinson.

How would you describe the spirit of the exhibition?

Is there one word that springs to mind when describing it?

AL “Side-step.” **PW** That’s what I was going to say! **AM** I think we tried to be rigorous. All the works we’re exhibiting are strong; there aren’t any “weak” moments that create pauses during the exhibition. Jacques Rancière’s phrase, “poetic, witty remarks,” describes the spirit of the exhibition very well. There is a play on words, simple pleasure and working with the medium. And all of this together makes a strange mix of the scientific, a very objective relationship with the imagery and the completely unsteady, precarious, child-like and joyful. **AC** I think there are different lines that cross over. None of the artists exhibited use the image in the same way, which means that we can take different through-lines on the whole, according to the accents we want to place. There are more conceptual works, and others that are photographic in the true sense. I wonder if the term “side-step” isn’t actually as important in the final result. There is obviously that, but others might be interesting, too. Some works have a very formal aspect, while others are extremely direct.

Would you say the exhibition is more conceptual or thematic?

PW It’s certainly not thematic. **AL** I’d say there’s a “manifesto” dimension —not in the sense that we’re trying to claim something brand new, but in the sense of a personal manifesto. Maybe I’m going too far by saying that, but I get the feeling that there’s some kind of declaration. It’s not just an exhibition of all our favourite pieces, since there are several artists we didn’t know of before. Let’s just say that it’s an exhibition of works that, in the way in which they approach photography and imagery, raise questions and make implications that seem justified in relation to the way we see photography.

Why did you name the exhibition *Il fait beau, je sors* (It’s sunny, I’m going out)?

AC Personally, I was totally against this title! **AM** We’d read it right at the very beginning, next to the piece *Untitled (bang)* by Pierre Reimer, taken from the book *Il fait beau, je sors*. **PW** Yes, it was suggested really early on, and then we kind of let it rest at the backs of our minds while we went down other avenues to try and come up with something that everyone agreed on, which is never easy. **AL** Because the words sound lovely, first of all, but then also because it was a show planned in the middle of summer in the south of France. It’s sunny, I’m going out, whereas we’re putting the spectators in a closed room, without any windows —it kind of gives it the finger, which fits in with our mindset. It’s almost spiteful —a game not necessarily with the public, but with an imaginary

spectator. It plays with the rather hackneyed idea that photography is all about contemplation, the idea that “When it’s sunny, I go out, I’m going to take photos, it’s an automatic reflex.” Except that here something isn’t quite right. **AM** There’s this very down-to-earth aspect which speaks through certain works, a very simple relationship with reality, and, at the same time, there’s this idea of side-stepping that is both very visual and very simple. In the end, the title conjures up an image that toys with the works.

What are you hoping to share with the viewer?

AL In the field of photography in general, we’re quite dominated by the “photography and nothing but” contemplative dimension, and I sometimes feel frustrated with the idea of a certain kind of photography being represented. Here we wanted to show photographic works rather than just photographs. **AC** Works in which the image is not just for its own sake, but rather has a purpose. The Douglas Huebler, for example; I love this piece: it’s funny, you don’t know whether it’s real or fake. In many of the pieces we exhibit, there’s the same thing: it’s not a photographic image in the traditional sense, with the aesthetic expectations that go with it —the beautiful photographic image that you see almost everywhere these days. Here, that’s not what it’s all about.

What will you take away with you from your experience as curators?

AM We’ll take away the enthusiasm we felt right from the start, the dream of entering a contemporary art collection and doing what we wanted to do. But then, when the reality set in, it was also interesting, because it became very complicated and so you had to learn to let go of things, to abandon any personal agenda you had in mind. **PW** The difficulty was that it happened over a long period, with lots of steps. Justifying the project, choosing the pieces, writing the descriptions, planning the layout and creating a catalogue: it took almost a year, in fact. **AL** To me, that’s what the role of curator seems to be: trying to keep the initial idea intact while passing it through lots of people. And, at the same time, I’m not really one who believes in the idea that the curator’s job is to make obscure works accessible. They told us lots of times that we had to make our proposal intelligible to the majority. In my opinion, we have to be careful not to make everything deliberately transparent and easily digestible.

We wanted to show photographic works rather than just photographs. [...] Works in which the image is not just for its own sake, but rather has a purpose.

PORTRAITS D’HOMONYMES

For his *Portraits d’homonymes* (1996-1998) series, Levé used the telephone directory to contact strangers with the same name as the artists he admired. If several living namesakes existed, he always photographed the first one to answer, establishing a kind of “anti-casting-call”.

Édouard Levé

Born in Neuilly-sur-Seine in 1965; died in 2007. In 2001, he photographed the village of Angoisse, in Dordogne, and then in 2006 a series of American cities that are the namesakes of prominent European cities. Published in 2002 *Œuvres*, a volume comprising 533 descriptions of works for which he had had an idea that was never fulfilled. States on page 20 of *Autoportrait* (2005) that “I mistakenly studied difficult subjects that were no use to me when I might have studied the arts for pleasure, which would have smoothed my path.” Said in 2005, at a conference at the ENSP in Arles, that the painter “Eugène Delacroix,” photographed in his series *Portraits d’homonymes* (1996-1998), asked him the day they met if he had the right to sign his canvasses. Committed suicide in Paris two weeks after delivering his final manuscript, titled *Suicide*, to his publisher.

Excerpt from *Autoportrait*:

“I do not see what I lack. I have less desire to change things than to change my perception of them. I take pictures because I have no real desire to change things. I have no desire to change things because I am the youngest in my family.”



WE WATCH KARIN, SHE WATCHES SOMETHING ELSE

A woman with her back to us on a white background: as the title of the work suggests, *We Watch Karin, She Watches Something Else*, we, the “watchers,” watch Karin watching, in a similar position to ours, without ever knowing what she is watching. The title confirms, as if it were thumbing its nose at us, that what there is to see is elsewhere, in the distance or just beyond the image. This photo is used on the cover of the eponymous book, published by Onestar Press (2001), which comprises a photographic sequence where we see the same Karin watching something, still with her back to us, in an extended series of poses.

Erwin Wurm

Born in Bruck an der Mur, Austria, in 1954. Studied art history, languages and literature before sculpture at the Kunstakademie in Vienna. At the Biel Biennale in Switzerland in 2000, he placed a plinth in the middle of the road bearing the inscription. “Be a dog for one minute.” Created *One Minute Sculptures* from 1997 where volunteers were instructed to pose with everyday objects. In his *Instructions on How to Be Politically Incorrect* (2003), he placed his subjects in a series of photos that speak of etiquette and decorum and of breaking such rules, with the subjects carrying out incongruous acts in public. Speaking of his *One Minute Sculptures*, he said in 2012 that his three favourite everyday objects were “a pen, a knife, and an ear plug”.



IL FAIT BEAU, JE SORS

QUI PEUT BIEN VOLER AINSI LES PORTAILS ?

MODE POUR MEN’S BIGI



Qui peut bien voler ainsi les portails ? is a work taken from *Les Belles Images de Taroop & Glabel*, a series of images all composed identically: a photo and its caption cut out of a local newspaper, which was then scanned, blown up to 140% and framed. Among the other images in the series, we have, for example, *The couple hadn’t been living in harmony for quite some time*, *No photo can portray the beauty of this scene* and *Half a dozen plant pots had to suffer from Saturday Night Fever*. Each was guaranteed to be “without retouching or cropping”.

Taroop & Glabel react to the works selected for the exhibition.

Lynne Cohen: cold aspect; no figures.
John Hilliard: the fragment considered as a whole, the whole forming just an incomplete ensemble.
Peter Hutchinson: the collaging, retouching and mounting of photos (found?).

Édouard Levé: the result (statement) of an idea.
Walter Pfeiffer: reportage (ethnographic) within a group.
Paola Pivi et T & G: the (absurd) meaning given by the title, or the “blown up” appropriation.
Pierre Reimer: the physical trace of a photo retains an action or an event suggested by the title.
Haim Steinbach: a book of photos

(Object) seen as a sculpture (pierced parallelepiped).
Shoji Ueda: a fashion photo avoiding all the clichés. Creative, simple, fluky.
Erwin Wurm: the remains of an action or the foundation for a planned action. Our tuppence worth, where it isn't just a matter of framing and pressing the trigger.

Taroop & Glabel

Emerging in the early 1990s, Taroop & Glabel introduced themselves as an artists’ collective specialising in the “amused observation” of the world around them.

Have worked in several media, including collage, illustration, silkscreen posters, installations and works assembled from various objects: toys, McDonalds items, crucifixes and Disney figures. Exploit poor taste, preconceived ideas and news in the media.

Developed slogan art.

In 2002, the collective published an A-to-Z of tracts called *Textes pour mégaphones*.

In 2005, they produced a large silkscreen print that states: “lsm: Enslavement through stupidity.”

In 2013, they published a book with a garish green cover on which was printed the words, “Aucune photo ne peut rendre la beauté de ce décor” (No photo can portray the beauty of this scene). In it appeared the *Les Belles Images de Taroop & Glabel* series.

According to art critic François Coadou:

“Taroop & Glabel are the bad conscience of an era that brilliantly developed art to avoid reality.”

Shoji Ueda took photos that were used by the Japanese menswear label Men’s Bigi. As was his way, he incorporated unusual objects into the picture —here, balloons that mask the identity of the model.

Shoji Ueda

Born in 1913 in Sakaiminato, Japan, where he died in 2000.

After going to university, he developed a passion for photography, which he discovered and chose to pursue in 1928. At 20, he opened his own studio in his hometown.

Throughout his lifetime, he photographed the Tottori sand dunes, refusing right until his death to leave the countryside of Sanin, far from Tokyo.

In the 1930s, he first discovered the work of Man Ray, André Kertész, Jacques Henri Lartigue and René Magritte, whose aesthetic qualities are echoed in his photos: distorted scale, the absence of markers and inclusion of empty space.

His subjects in theatrical, minimally-decorated compositions included children, members of his family and even his assistant, plus miscellaneous accessories: an umbrella, a hat, balloons, a flower. “I like to introduce some artificial elements into natural landscapes.”

In 1960, participated in the major Japanese photography exhibition presented by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

In 1995, attended the inauguration of the Shoji Ueda Museum of Photography in Kishimoto-cho (now called Houki-cho) in his home prefecture of Tottori, which is devoted to his work.

Described his style as “directed photography”. Didn’t consider himself to be either “a reporter or an artist,” just someone who “takes the photographs I want to take”.



Pauline Wallerich contemplates Mode pour Men’s Bigi by Shoji Ueda :

In a field of snaking grooves that seem to almost heave, someone is standing. He too seems slightly off-balance; a hand in his pocket, he appears to be waiting for something. Balloons float in the air and are wafted by a breeze. As it is carried away, one balloon in particular hides the face, which is lost, obliterated.

I look at this hole and wonder: What is the missing element? Why is this “escape” taking place? What is this turmoil?

I don’t know anymore. I’ll never know. I’m reduced to an opaque silence. The white in the image is piercing; words are missing.

Underground lines and unspoken subtext.

PLUNDERED / DUG / PREPARED / DRY



Plundered/Dug/Prepared/Dry is composed of four black and white photographs arranged in a square, each with a caption. All show a hole in the ground. The recurrence of this element tells us that it is one and the same image, framed differently in each case. The piece revolves around this centre, the title offering four possible explanations: plundered/dug/prepared/dry. All are possible, hence the internal struggle. The mystery is never resolved.

John Hilliard

Born in Lancaster, UK, in 1945.

Studied at the Lancaster College of Art, and then at London’s St Martin’s School of Art.

Created 765 *Paper Balls* in 1969, the first of his works produced with the intention of photographing them.

From 1970 onward he has worked exclusively in photography.

Has stated that he plays with “the potential for manipulation within the boundaries of photography itself” (as in *Camera Recording its Own Condition*, 1971).

In 1974 he created *Cause of Death*, a series of photos in which he adjusted the cropping of each frame on the same subject, in this case a body, and explored the different ways each image could be interpreted: “It’s part of who I am; I always have to ask myself: Why does this have to be like this? Why couldn’t this be more like that?”

He has said that he is “interested in photography itself,” deeming the subject matter secondary.

Correspondence with John Hilliard, april 2015

Rather than asking your opinion about our curatorial intentions, what interests us is your reaction in relation to our selection of artworks. What are your thoughts about your presence in the exhibition (whether vis-à-vis a particular piece or on the whole)?

Looking through your selection I am, in part, a viewer like any other, and find certain images interesting regardless of any perceived connection to my own work. However, those which seem to overlap with some of my concerns are works with surprising juxtapositions (Lynne Cohen, Peter Hutchinson, Paola Pivi) and those where there is a wilful act of omission (Walter Pfeiffer, Pierre Reimer, Haim Steinbach, Shoji Ueda, Erwin Wurm). In fact, if we now include Édouard Levé (comparing and contrasting) and Taroop & Glabel (caption/image manipulation), I can see a link between certain aspects of my own work and everything else here.

What is your opinion on the flood of photographs with which we are confronted today? How has it affected the medium?

The deluge of photos facilitated by mobile-phone cameras and other digital devices, distributed primarily over the Internet, may be seen as both liberating and depressing. Seemingly, though, the majority remains in cyberspace and only a minority is generated as hard copy. Because I'm interested in the photograph as an object, if there is any "competition" then it is only from this minority output. As ever, then, it's important to contribute something original, considered and well-executed in order to receive a level of attention greater than that assigned to the outpourings of this mass production.

What are your thoughts on meta-photographic practices, such as those of artists shown at the New Positions in American Photography exhibition organized by Pioneer Works, Center for Arts and Innovation, in New York, and the Foam Museum in Amsterdam? Do you consider your own practice meta-photographic?

I was not aware of the exhibition you mentioned, but having looked at the website I see the relevance of the title: "Under Construction –New Positions in American Photography." Without seeing the works themselves it's not possible to

form a proper evaluation, but I can see that all the images shown are indeed constructed by either analogue or digital means. The term "constructed photography" could be applied to all the work I do (the construction occurring both before and after a shot is made). Equally, the term "meta-photography" is appropriate to describe my practice, which takes photography itself as a recurrent subject and entails taking a step back from the medium in order to address it.

Plundered/Dug/Prepared/Dry (1975) is "about" the process of editing picture information through cropping and captioning. Taking a similar view, one could consider my entire output in those terms: being "about" focusing, blurring, over-exposing, enlarging and so on, and so on.

What do you think will be the next step in the medium's evolution?

Not only do I still shoot everything on film, but I describe myself as having "analogue thoughts". Nevertheless, many of my images are scanned and processed in a digital form. As always, the next step in photography's evolution will be driven by technology (possibly to meet military, security or scientific needs). I can't predict what that development will be, but I'm always open to the idea of co-opting it for my own purposes. I first used large-scale digital printing in 1983, so despite those analogue thoughts I have no objection to digital assistance. As a late-modernist I might even see it as a duty to be open to photography's ongoing technical changes –without, of course, relinquishing any of the accumulated inheritance of the last 175 years.

UNTI- TLED



A guy is photographed from the front, on his knees, holding a bike helmet in his hands, his face hidden by a black shadow. Walter Pfeiffer remembers that it is the strap from his own camera: “I was in a rush as always, so I forgot to look if everything was okay. But I guess without this little detail it would be a rather uninteresting picture.”

Walter Pfeiffer

Born in Beggingen, Switzerland in 1946, he later moved to Zurich, where he studied fine arts. From the 1970s, he exhibited photos of his friends, lovers and everyday scenes as well as composed pieces with the deliberate intention of placing beauty and eroticism at the centre of the act of photography. Used Polaroids, first as a base for the drawings he made. Worked with compact cameras, often using a flash: “I always used flash, so it was always sharp. But that is why they hated my photographs in the beginning, because I came from a time when the real great photographers took really great black and white things.” In 1974, he produced a photo for the cover of the brochure for an exhibition organised by his mentor, Jean-Christophe Ammann: *Transformer* —*Aspects of Travesty*, at the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne. Published *Walter Pfeiffer (1970-1980)* in 1980, which acquired cult status in the 2000s and was republished, making him a major figure on the gay underground scene. In 2008, compiled his fashion photography in the catalogue *In Love with Beauty*. Doesn't consider photography as a way to document or capture reality, but as an “alchemist's instrument”.

VARIABLE PIECE #70 (IN PROCESS)



The most ambitious of Huebler’s works, *Variable Piece #70 (In Process)*, is presented as an attempt to make “a photographic record of everyone alive”. He worked at *Variable Piece #70* until his death, giving himself several extensions, including time to create the comic strip *Crocodile Tears* (1981-1984). With the utter futility of the task being liberating, the rigour of the form was a deliberate contrast to his failure to complete the project: “I’ve only ever just begun.”

Douglas Huebler

Born in Michigan, USA, in 1924; died in 1997. Served as a sergeant in the Marine Corps during WWII. Studied art at the Académie Julien in Paris as of 1948. Served as dean of the art school at the California Institute of Arts from 1976 to 1988, where he met John Baldessari and Mike Kelley. From the 1960s produced various series of works —*Location Pieces*, *Duration Pieces* and *Variable Pieces*— that made him a pioneer of conceptual art. In 1969, described himself as a “slow” artist. That same year, he took

Alfredo Coloma contemplates *Variable Piece #70* by Douglas Huebler :

Variable Piece #70 (In Process) comprises a series of black and white images with typewritten text, dated and signed. The images are on one side; the text is on the other. As in Huebler's other Variable Pieces, the images serve as a record of the process documented by the artist in the text.

Here, the text summarising Huebler's intention tells us that, “Throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner.” Is it truly possible to accomplish such a Herculean task? How many pictures

part in an exhibition, stating in the accompanying catalogue that: “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or place.”¹ For *Duration Piece #31*, a photo of a naked woman laughing and smoking a cigarette, he wrote:

“On December 31, 1973, a young woman was photographed at the exact instant in time determined to be precisely 1/8th of a second before midnight. Inasmuch as the aperture of the camera was set at ‘4’ (1/4th of a second), the image on the film became ‘complete’ 1/8th of a second past midnight: put another way, after the first 1/8th of a second of 1974 had elapsed. As the subject of the photograph faced towards the south, the left side of her body was oriented towards the west: as time ‘moves’ from east to west, the photograph represents the young woman during an instant when approximately half of her body existed within the old year, 1973, while the other half had entered the new year, 1974: indeed, consistent with the spirit of the season she wears the costume of the New Year’s Baby. One photograph joins this statement as the form of this piece. January, 1974.”

In the 1980s, he created a persona, the “Great Corrector,” and began incorporating painting into his conceptual art pieces, taking works by such masters as Bosch, Brueghel and Picasso and trying to “make them better”. According to the first monograph dedicated to him by an institution, “Douglas Huebler is a real artist.”²

1. Exhibition catalogue, January 5-31, 1969, New York, Seth Siegelau, 1969. 2. Catalogue of the Douglas Huebler exhibition, Andover (Massachusetts), Addison Gallery of American Art, 1970.

14 UNTITLED (BANG)

Correspondence with Pierre Reimer, April 2015

We sent Pierre Reimer the visuals of the works that we'd planned to put in the exhibition, printed on a Xerox machine, and a text by the writer Marcela Iacub, *Les pensées photographiques de Pierre Reimer telles qu'il aurait pu les écrire* from *Les Incoyables et les Meveilleuses* (published by MF, 2010), asking him what he thought.

A few comments off the top of my head regarding the images that I'm looking at on standard A4 colour photocopies with a slightly runny print quality.

- *Corporate Office* (1977) has all that is alluring: an ideal office, an ideal vista in an ideal showroom and, above all, an ideal year.
- I'm immensely curious about the original photography of Peter Hutchinson, whom I imagine to be a relentless inventor, perhaps the classifying kind whose creations would suit a cottage my granny might like. It reminds me of the "*Macintoshages*" by Raymond Hains, which I'd kind of forgotten about.
- On closer inspection, the iron is no longer covered over by a white circle, but a light shadow on the copy suggests the image has a hole in it, and Man Ray's "gift" appears.
- I realise that the tiny truck lying in a model garden is probably a huge truck lying in a park when I see Pivi's name.
- I'm told that it's the camera wrist strap that blocks the face of the topless model. This photo was taken during the last great image proliferation. I'm surprised at the rather anachronistic use of a camera with a wrist strap.
- I wonder how many Édouard Levés killed themselves after Édouard Levé released *Suicide* (published by POL, 2008).

Regarding the exhibition as a whole, if you haven't sent me your statement of intent even though you do have one and you're asking for my opinion, then you're inviting me to play a game. So I'll simply say that it's a choice that is trying to leave the photography by the window to get back in through a hidden door. The photograph(er)s are no longer behind their cameras and the subjects are no longer in front of them, although still they are here, somewhere...

The second question concerns my opinion about an excerpt from the text by Marcela Iacub:

"My photos are misleading. First because they are beautiful. Their beauty is the form that my caution or cowardice takes, as if I'd wanted to cover them in a sort of safety net to hide from the viewer the anguish that I imagined they'd feel if they were forced to face up to what they are."

This text is strange for me, Marcela Iacub having stolen my voice, saying what I thought and thinking that I might judge myself as severely as others might. You can understand it to mean that beauty is used as an excuse or a delusion to divert the possibly painful primary intentions of my photographs. It proposes the use of beauty like a charm, a medicine or a safe-conduct to mitigate the crimes or improprieties of what they really "are". And yet beauty can reveal itself in a million ways; the beauty Marcela saw in these photos was perhaps only in my discourse, which invited her to comprehend my concerns for those fragile intentions that form the essence of the effort one puts into the pictures, while scrupulously obeying my foremost request for a negative critical text for the prosecution.

I'm not the Lacenaire of photography and my photos are sometimes quite ugly, if that's of some comfort to you.

would you need? Not devoid of irony, the very concept raises the futility of the idea and the utopian character of the piece. Indeed, Variable Piece #70 (In Process) remains, in the words of Marcel Duchamp, “in a state of permanent incompleteness.” The overweening ambition of the statement contrasts sharply with the photographs selected to accompany it. Not only is the selection limited, but the images used carry no

particular aesthetic value. However, because of the stated intention, these ordinary images become precious, and each person portrayed important. Huebler creates “a tension between surface blandness and infinite meaning.” Mike Kelley, “Shall We Kill Daddy?,” from Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003, p. 181.



Untitled (bang) was published in 1998 in the book *Il fait beau, je sors*, by Firmin-Didot. Through the smooth surface of a window the shadows of a landscape are faintly visible. The centre is pierced by a hole through which a shallow sky can be seen. The parenthesis in the title informs the spectator of this silent image.

Pierre Reimer

Born in 1964, and lives in Paris. Started to show his photographs in 1988. Also moved into directing films and produced his first video in 1997. Made *Mi Casa Su Casa* (1997), *Week-End* (1998) and *Orange Exeroice* (2005). Frequently leaves Paris to make his films: in 2005-2006, he spent a year in the Czech Republic and produced *Modell*. In 2010 published *Les Incoyables et les Meveilleuses (The Unbelievables and the Marvellous Ones)*, whose title “is borrowed from the ephemeral style [...] that became popular among a sector of Directoire-era youth, who wanted, among other things, for the *inc(r)oyables* and *me(r)veilleuses* to go to the victims’ balls, dance in mourning, speak without pronouncing the letter ‘r’ —the ‘r’ in ‘revolution’.” In this book, he speaks of his “taste for artificial modifiers that can pervert the usual perception of an object and reinvent functions”.

MY FAVORITE THINGS

In *My Favorite Things*, Hutchinson adopted the attitude of the enthusiastic photographer, driven by a desire to photograph the things he liked and found beautiful. He methodically organised a kind of herbarium where he stuck images of his “favourite things”. The handwritten caption beneath the collage, which reads *Mountains, swamps, autumn crocuses, arabis, tulips, pansies, anemones, wallflowers, forget-me-nots, yuccas, snow, Bermuda, Paris, Giverny, Utah —these are a few of my favourite things*, mixes the names of plants and locations in an exhaustive list of elements contained within the collage.

Peter Hutchinson

Born in the UK in 1930. At 23, he moved to Providence, Massachusetts, though he never renounced his British heritage, insisting that his house be called a “cottage”. Started studying plant genetics, but abandoned that to study painting. In the early 1960s, he met fellow artist Robert Smithson, a “kindred alien spirit”. Enjoyed watching sci-fi and B movies. In 1969, he took part in the important *Ecological Art* exhibition at the John Gibson Gallery, New York, with other Land Art pioneers. That same year, he showed a series of temporary underwater installations for *Ocean Project* at the Museum

Peter Hutchinson describes the link between his writing and his visual art (March 2015) :

About my texts and writings, they sometimes exist in opposition to the visual and sometimes as an addition. I play with words, anagrams, palindromes and subtle references, but maybe not in this work as much.

of Modern Art (MoMA) with Dennis Oppenheim. Broke away at this point from his Land Art peers by using photography that went beyond the simple aim of recording ephemeral actions, which was the subject of Land Art artists, and turning his back on the production of small black-and-white pictures to produce large, coloured prints. From the 1970s onward, he frequently employed text in his work, both to document the actions he undertook (the *Foraging* project in 1971, during which he left for six days for the snowy Colorado mountains with a companion found via a personal ad) and to create a poetic echo of his pictures, as in *Narrative Pieces*. From the 1980s onward he produced collages using his photographs, which he coloured with paints and pastels. Published the book *Dissolving Clouds* in 1994. Robert Smithson described his writing as “marvellously inauthentic”¹.



Over all these years I may have used just images, but rarely, it is hard to be exact about this. I sometimes make sculpture without writing. Some will be shown in my retrospective in Rennes, in December. The sculptures are all accumulations of objects, some with a science fiction theme.

1. Quoted in Peter Hutchinson, *Dissolving Clouds*, Provincetown Arts Press, MA (2014).

CORPORATE OFFICE



Corporate Office is a photograph taken with a view camera. As always in Cohen’s work, the neutral style of the shot, the cold, strict environment comes into conflict with a feeling of strangeness. “Magritte passed through there, with a low budget,” she said. An imposing Formica frame, a material seemingly plucked from the photo location, frames the picture. Stressing the importance of frames and Marie-Louise mouldings in her works, Lynne Cohen said, “I’ve always made sculptures in my head.”

Lynne Cohen

Born in the USA in 1944, she lived and worked in Canada from 1973 until her death in 2014. Studied printmaking and sculpture in Wisconsin

Agathe Mouchès contemplates *Corporate Office* by Lynne Cohen and *My Favorite Things* by Peter Hutchinson :

Lynne Cohen’s photo first: the beauty of a perfect black and white print, the authority of a formal frame, the bureaucratic froideur of an overly orderly space. Cohen has created a precise record, but the exaggerated sense of reality pulls the space towards something strange. The velvety upholstery of the office chair seems to scream the absence of a director in a tie. Taking it all in —the room itself, the objects, the sense of order and (like a bureaucrat who seems too polite to be true) the space —it suddenly feels improbable, suspicious.

Of course, the wallpaper undoubtedly contributes to the strangeness of the place, providing a backdrop to the setting and, like trompe-l’œil, placing a cloud-filled sky behind the Formica desk. But its various pieces are peeling away in parts and the illusion is incomplete. It looks more like a puzzle whose pieces are on the verge of exploding into smithereens under the pressure of the space’s dominating rigidity. It’s as if, by virtue of the occupant being absent from the image, his or her things are feeling abandoned and beginning to take flight. Next, Peter Hutchinson’s picture: a landscape composed of 16 individual images of mountain tops, lurid flowers, stretches of sky and moss-covered rocks, stitched together with thick

pastel. The caption, in pencil right under the image, lists the plants and places that the artist likes, bringing the assemblage even further together. It’s as if the act of naming and grouping a list of favourite things in this rather childlike manner establishes some kind of coherence, cemented by the genius of the artist, who, in assembling the work, brings forth a beautiful world. His approach to organising chaos in his own inimitable way results in an image of a coherent place. Two opposing forces are at work. On the one hand, an icy reality slips into ambiguous, even fake territory; on the other, a hand-stitched space leaps off the page and imposes itself as reality.

UNTITLED (IRON)



Untitled (iron) is taken from a set of seven prints representing other objects, such as a stool, a sequinned hat, a dog turd and a Yoda mask, all with a hole precisely cut through the centre. He has also published a book, *Object*, which comprises 61 pictures with holes through them (the hole pierces the entire book). The clarity of the picture is breached, while, at the same time, the hole in the paper breaks the illusion of reality created by the photograph.

Haim Steinbach

Born in Rehovot, Israel, in 1944; has lived in New York since age 13. Began his artistic career in the 1970s. In 1979, he exhibited a selection of objects belonging to his friends, displayed on shelves, at the Artists Space in New York. Has regularly used shelves since then to display his work. An obsessive collector of everyday and mass-produced objects, he conceives installations, structures and framing devices to present these objects, which he arranges in different ways. Explores their aesthetic, cultural and ritualistic aspects and the way in which they appear in the context of an exhibition. In 1992, for Documenta IX (Kassel, Germany’s art festival), he transported the entire collection of objects that he found on the shelving in curator Jan Hoet’s office and rearranged it in a specifically conceived architectural structure for the work *Display #30 —An Offering (Collectibles of Jan Hoet)*. The art critic Paul Ardenne has said: “The force of Haim Steinbach’s work lies in this capacity to open our minds so wide to the point where we perceive the ordinariness of reality” and “He blurs the lines between the functional, the decorative and the artistic.”

Apolline Lamoril contemplates *Sans titre (bang)* by Pierre Reimer and *Untitled (iron)* by Haim Steinbach :

Two unnamed works, untitled, but with words in parentheses indicating that there is nonetheless something to see: the almost invisible, completely silent menace in the Pierre Reimer; the iron around the hole in the Haim Steinbach print. The hole appears in each piece, too — both central and essential. A landscape is perceptible behind

a translucent surface, a mysterious sfumato that transforms the details into shadows and solid blocks. Dead centre, a hole pierces the surface —from the impact of a bullet, as the word “bang” suggests? —and opens onto an opaque, shallow sky. *Untitled (bang)* by Pierre Reimer produces the unpleasant sensation of contemplating only opaqueness, the surface; of not seeing; of being kept removed from what is really happening behind the glass. Looking at Haim Steinbach’s *Untitled (Iron)*, this same sensation of not

being able to access the heart of the matter is more objective. The centre of the print has been removed, cleanly cut out in a perfect circle. The image of the iron is just about discernible. The thick white margins also remain. Here, we have the irony of Pierre Reimer, who makes a vain attempt to break the spectator out of his or her confinement behind the glass, as if to make it even more obvious. There, Steinbach’s meticulous glass-cutting seeks to break the illusion, but in fact manages to make it only more fascinating.

CAMION VERTICAL

For the photograph *Camion Vertical*, Paola Pivi physically overturned a truck onto its side. Far from being a simple record of this action, the photo extends the act itself. The truck is not just put on its side; Pivi then turns it up vertically. It is thus overturned twice.

Paola Pivi

Born in Milan in 1971, she later moved to Anchorage, Alaska. After studying nuclear engineering, she switched to visual arts and learned to draw. At 24, she enrolled at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Breara. At the Venice Biennale, she presented an upturned fighter plane, with the cockpit on the ground. In 2006, she put on an exhibition, *No problem, have a nice day*, at Galerie Perrotin in Paris. On that occasion, she was interviewed by art critic Jeff Rian: JR: What did you do first? PP: A shirt, in which I put knives, with the blades sticking out like a porcupine, which I wore. That was 10 years ago. That same year I did a little oil-stick on canvas on which I wrote the words cock, cunt, tits and ass in Italian, and then *Camion* (1997), which was a big semi-truck lying on its side. JR: How did you go from a shirt with knives to words on canvas to a truck on its side? PP: I was stuck in traffic and the idea came to me. [...] Contemporary art was a way to go beyond representational content into another way of thinking. JR: [...] Do these ideas just pop into your head? PP: To me, something happens in reality. It has to come from reality.



Cover photo: **PAOLA PIVI**, *Camion vertical*, 1997
Printed in 2001, colour print mounted on aluminium, 182 x 112 cm, FNAC 01-668

It's sunny, I'm going out
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Authors:
Pascal Beausse, Alfredo Coloma, Apolline Lamoril, Agathe Mouchès, Paul Pouvreau and Pauline Wallerich

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Director of the Centre national des arts plastiques:
Yves Robert

Director of the École nationale supérieure de la photographie:
Rémy Fenzy

Exhibiton curators:
Alfredo Coloma, Apolline Lamoril, Agathe Mouchès and Pauline Wallerich

Manager of the Photography Collections at the CNAP:
Pascal Beausse assisted by Sophie Gayerie

Photographer and teacher at the ENSP: Paul Pouvreau

Secretary General of the ENSP: Philippe Guignard

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