Eva & Franco Mattes
Dear Imaginary Audience,
23.01.–24.05.2021

Fotomuseum Winterthur

Opening weekend with guided tours and an artist talk
Saturday and Sunday, 23. and 24.01.2021, from 11:00–18:00

Eva & Franco Mattes (both b. 1976) have been investigating the internet's effects on the ethics and politics of our daily lives since the 1990s, reflecting on how networked images increasingly interfere with and define our private and social behaviour. In the process, the artist duo dissects the opaque mechanisms of our networked society, its infrastructures and morally dubious forms of online behaviour.

From the controversial censorship mechanisms of internet giants and the questionable effects of the so-called gig economy to our own complicity as viewers – in *Dear Imaginary Audience,* Eva & Franco Mattes shed light on the networked image and its various processes of production, circulation and consumption, all the while holding up a mirror to the viewer in a manner that is at once unsparing and darkly humorous. Their first monographic exhibition in the museum context, including new works created for the purpose, reveals a profound change in our visual culture connected to the impact of digital networks on our habitual ways of communicating and of using photography.

Eva & Franco Mattes's tongue-in-cheek exploration of internet phenomena includes two taxidermic cat sculptures, one of them unobtrusively poking its tiny stuffed head out from the ceiling and the other appearing as a two-legged cat with no ears. Referring to the social practice of lolcat memes, their *Ceiling Cat* (2016) and *Half Cat* (2020) are based on two memes that circulated on the net under these names: one became a symbol for the internet that sees and monitors everything, while the other tracks and exposes the complex process of image manipulation. Shared and copied by millions of users, constantly on the move and constantly manipulated, these cat memes are metaphors par excellence for the internet. By immortalising them as rigidified sculptures, Eva & Franco Mattes interfere with the circulation process to highlight the repercussions of the networked image's reproductive feature.

Hannah Uncut (2021), a new work commissioned by Fotomuseum Winterthur for the exhibition and collection, demonstrates how our mobile devices have grown into private image archives. In the spring of 2020, Eva & Franco Mattes published an open call online, offering to pay US$ 1,000 to anyone willing to sell their smartphone complete with all the pictures on it, with the vendor, in turn, handing over an unedited slice of their life and opening it up to the interpretation of strangers. They selected Hannah, a British woman of about thirty, giving us the chance to get to know her and follow her personal development over the course of a decade. Ultimately, Hannah's pictures bring home to us the digital evolution of the last ten years and the photographic forms of communication and enactment associated with it: Hannah uses screenshots as a matter of course just as she applies face filters to her selfies. Her photographs, personal and yet tailored to an imaginary online audience, inevitably catapult us into the role of voyeurs.

BEFNOED (*B*y *E*veryone, *F*or *N*o One, *E*very *D*ay; 2014–) demonstrates how the circulation of images on social media not only influences our behaviour but also makes us complicit in the attention economy. For this screen-based installation, Eva & Franco Mattes outsourced various jobs to anonymous workers and provided them with detailed instructions directing them to perform absurd actions and document them with webcams. What is exposed here, first of all, is the capitalist sadism of the gig economy, in which minor, short-term jobs are outsourced to self-employed contractors or those in marginal employment, as is the case with services like Uber or food-delivery couriers. But the work goes further, putting our complicity as viewers in the spotlight and urging us to critically reflect on our own participation in the exploitative global (image) economy. This dimension of the work is further enhanced by the arrangement of the screens in the exhibition space: like the gig economy workers, visitors have to strain, stretch and bend to consume the videos.

The Bots (2020), a work that delves into the shadowy business of censorship in the form of content moderation, will also be on display for the first time. Content moderators are workers who are hired by internet service providers like Facebook or Twitter to clean all the violent, pornographic and morally dubious content off their platforms. These jobs are often contracted out to external companies in developing and emerging economies, where the operatives work for low wages. The installation comprises three videos that offer a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the curious routines of three content moderators working for Facebook in Berlin. To protect the identity of the informants and ensure that the sensitive insider content is not prey to censorship itself, the interviews are disguised as make-up tutorials.

Dear Imaginary Audience, addresses you and me – and all the viewers we imagine and envision beyond those who actually see the images we circulate online and appreciate them with a "like" or "share". But it also addresses the very real effects, both private and social, of our online image consumption, as well as our own complicity in an exploitative capitalist chain that we help feed through our participation as viewers. It is mechanisms and infrastructures that are largely hidden from sight that control the world of images today – and in which Eva & Franco Mattes critically intervene.

Artists' Biography

Eva & Franco Mattes (both b. 1976, Brescia, Italy) live and work in New York, USA. In 2016 they received the Creative Capital Award. Their recent solo and group shows include *What Has Been Seen,* Phi Foundation for Contemporary Art, Montreal, CAN (2020), *Snap and Share: Transmitting Photographs from Mail Art to Social Networks*, SFMOMA, San Francisco, USA (2019); *Happens or It Didn't Pic,* Blueproject Foundation, Barcelona, ES (2018/19); *I Was Raised on the Internet,* Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, USA (2018); Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie, Mannheim, DE (2017); *The World Without Us*, Hartware Medienkunstverein, Dortmund, DE (2016/17)*;* 20. Biennale of Sydney, AU (2016); *Electronic Superhighway*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, GB (2016).

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.

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