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Portfolio (mid) 2020

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JOSEPH ATKINSON

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EDUCATION

2013–16

The Ventriloquist Summerschool (TVSS)
(Oslo, NO)

BA (Hons) Graphic Arts, University of Southampton (Winchester, GB)

2011–13

Interactive Media, New College Nottingham
(Nottingham, GB)

EXPERIENCE

2019–20

Partner / Designer, TBC.work
(London, GB)

Freelance Creative, www.joseph-atkinson.com
(London, GB)

Mid-Weight Designer / Animator, DICE
(London, GB)

2019

Freelance Designer / Animator, It's Nice That
(London, GB)

Freelance Designer / Animator / Asst. Art Director, Boiler Room (London, GB)

Freelance Designer, Wieden + Kennedy
(London, GB)

2018

Freelance Designer, Studio Praline
(London, GB)

2018 cont.

Freelance Designer, Fiorucci
(London, GB)

Freelance Designer, Wallpaper*
(London, GB)

Design Assistant, Zak Group
(London, GB)

Freelance Designer, Rogaland Kunstsenter
(Stavanger, NO)

2016–17

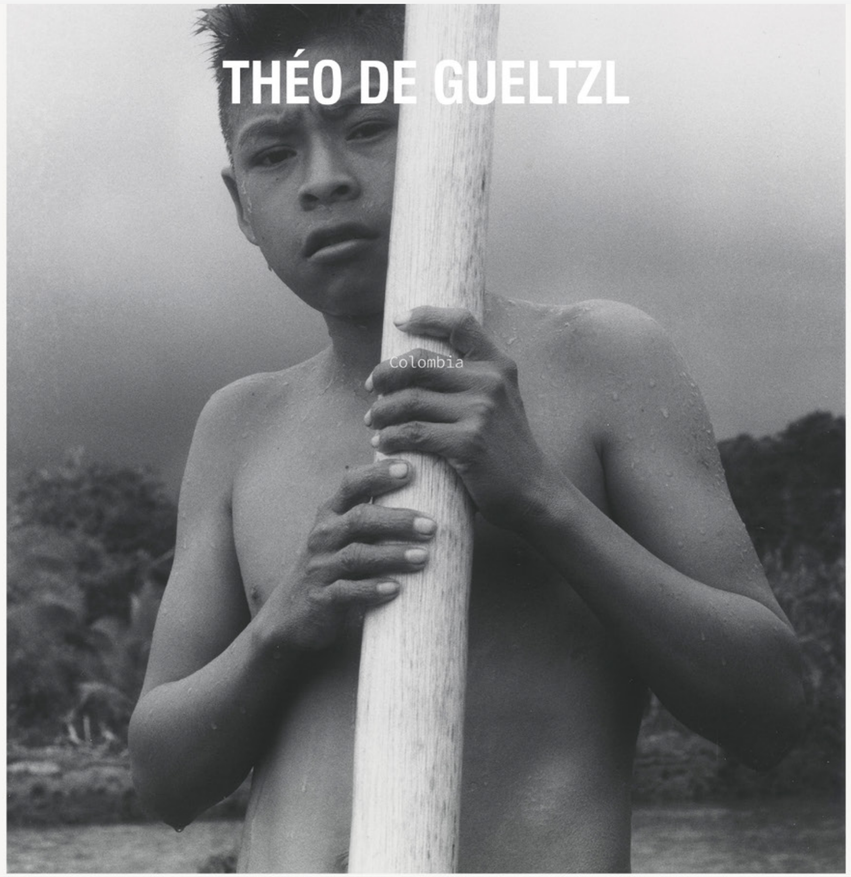
Designer, Black Dog Publishing
(London, GB)

Excellent knowledge of print production
Adobe Indesign, Photoshop, Illustrator and After Effects
Glyphs App / Fontlab
Figma

HTML & CSS knowledge
LiveSurface

THÉO DE GUELTZL

Le magazine du Monde
+ Rue de la Verrerie,
sur les traces
d'Azzedine Alaïa
M Le Monde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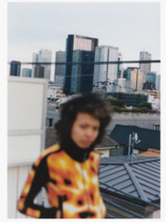
WEBSITE BY TBC

EIGHT
VISITS

EIGHT VISITS



EIGHT VISITS

"Eight visits" is a collection of eight personal encounters photographed in Tokyo, Japan during my stay there in March and April 2019. Each chapter shows one space that I visited. The starting point is coming to Tokyo as an alien and seeing it only from an outside perspective, when my view was still shaped by the imagery I associated with Japan. As time went on and I got to know more people living or working in Tokyo, I slowly developed a sense of home and with that my relationships evolved. I began to portray young adults around my age that I met and found through social media and photographed them in their homes.

Marcel, who is seen in many images, came along with me on most of the trips. He speaks German and learned Japanese in school. Regarding his identity, he describes himself as a queer creative in a male dominated world and as a German - but with two different cultural backgrounds, German and Asian-Filipino. The people and places I experienced with him led me to the subjects I photographed.

Visiting these different places around the broader area of Tokyo, we were provided with various angles on life in Japan. Consistently, we sensed the tensions between past and future. The preconceived notions existing around Japanese identity were overturned by the forward-pushing, rebellious energy of the young people we met along the way who will shape the future for what it means to be young in Japan. Despite the language barrier, we connected easily, were introduced to their friends, and gained a feeling of mutual understanding between each other.

When thinking back on the connection between all of the subjects, I realise that each has a fluid identity, albeit in different ways - whether that be home, nationality, or gender identity. I see the young people I got to know in Japan as part of a globalised generation, and these portraits document my experience with their expressions of identity.

The sections are not chronological, but rather references to the spaces themselves in an attempt to communicate the way I felt about each of the places documented.

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A CONVERSATION WITH TIA

SK What does home mean to you, is it a physical place or metaphorical space?

TH Home is where I can be comfortable without barriers and just be, without thought. A meditative space. My own body feels like home, when I am closing my eyes, when I am in bed, with my hand on my heart. Very close friends also feel like home.

SK What does Tokyo represent for you, what do you like about it?

TH Tokyo is the place where my parents met, so I guess the place that birthed me in a sense, so I've felt drawn to it since I was little. It is also the place of my first love, and many other firsts for me...

SK How do you identify in terms of gender? In which way is this connected to the space you are moving in? I remember us talking about how there is no "they" in Japanese.

TH In English, I identify as a non-binary femme. That is to say, I identify this way because that "gender expression" is what resonates the most currently with what English offers. I don't feel like my identity should be constricted or bound by language though, therefore I am not uncomfortable with Japanese not having "they/them" pronouns. I think the concept of having pronouns is weird anyway, and if English could do away without pronouns all together, that would be great. Pronouns don't exist in the same way in Japanese as they do in English. There are third person pronouns, but it is not used as frequently. More prominent in Japanese is the use of first person pronouns referring to yourself, which has gender nuances but is also used by both binary genders. Of course, it is not this simple and that just skims the surface. To be honest, I am not educated much on language, as I sort of despise it and I wish we all could just telepathically communicate.

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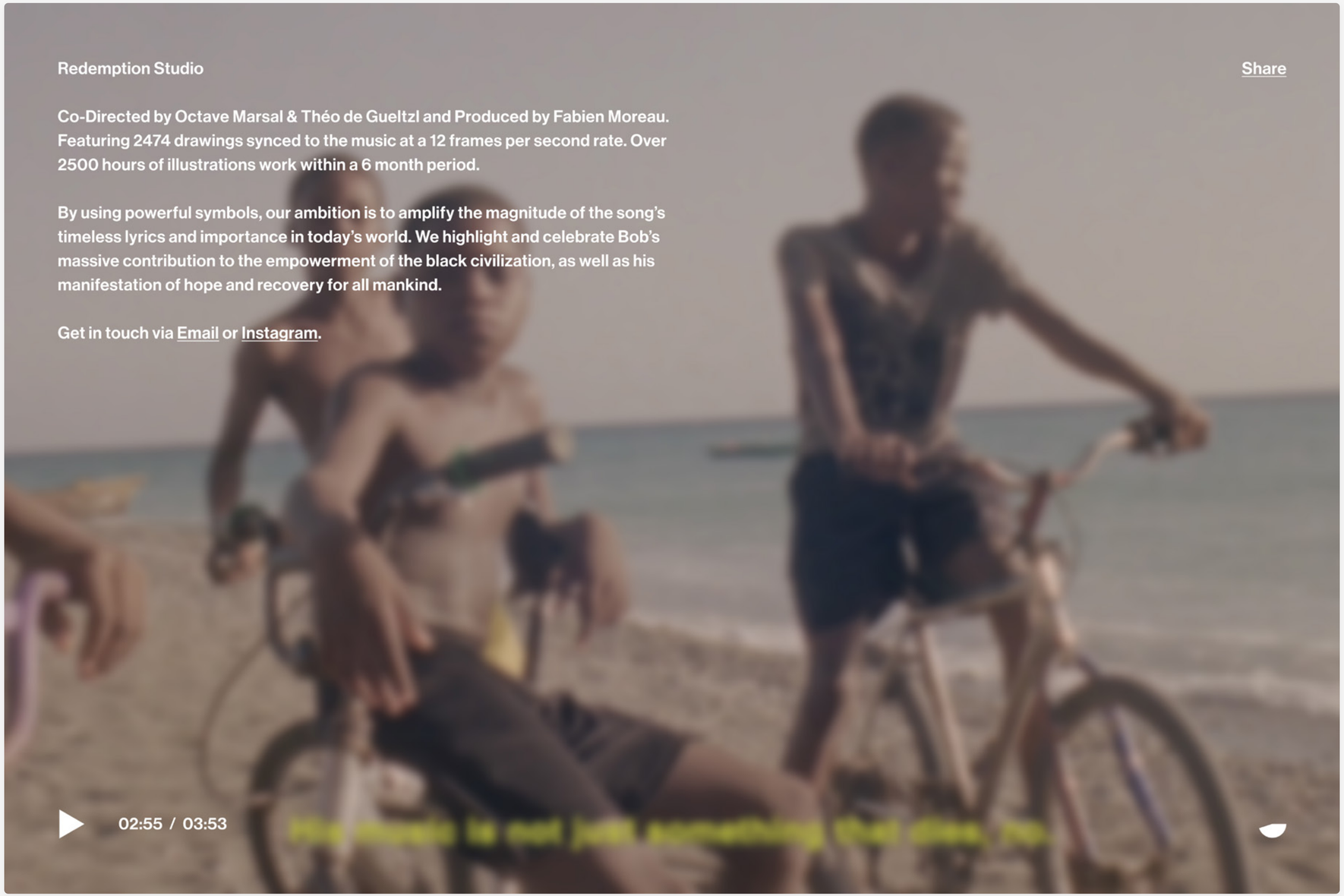
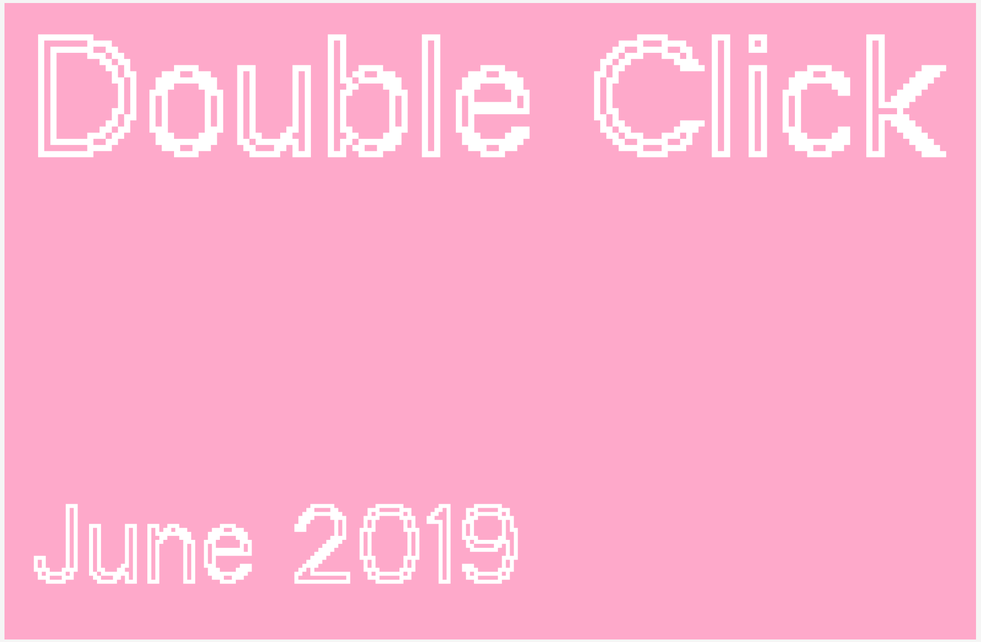
Behind the scenes


Redemption Studio
Share
Co-Directed by Octave Marsal & Théo de Gueltzl and Produced by Fabien Moreau. Featuring 2474 drawings synced to the music at a 12 frames per second rate. Over 2500 hours of illustrations work within a 6 month period.
By using powerful symbols, our ambition is to amplify the magnitude of the song's timeless lyrics and importance in today's world. We highlight and celebrate Bob's massive contribution to the empowerment of the black civilization, as well as his manifestation of hope and recovery for all mankind.
Get in touch via Email or Instagram.
02:55 / 03:53

Double Click

June 2019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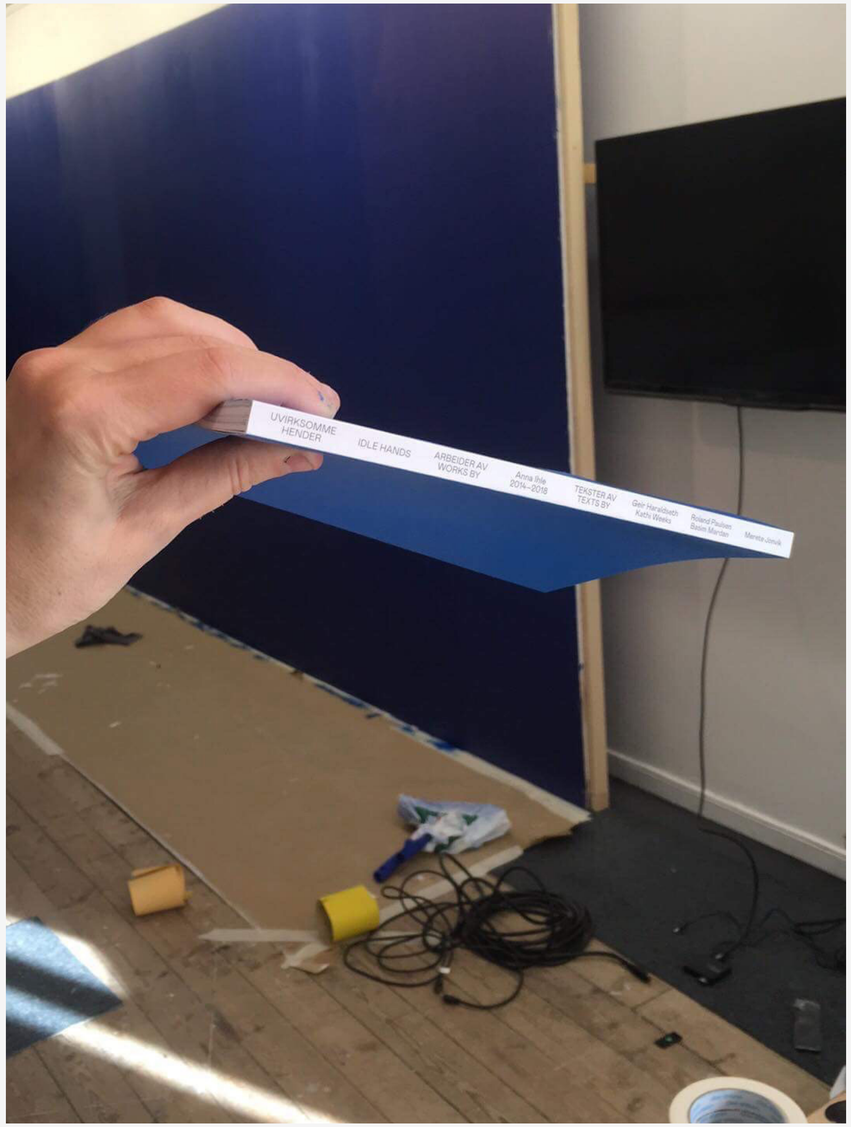
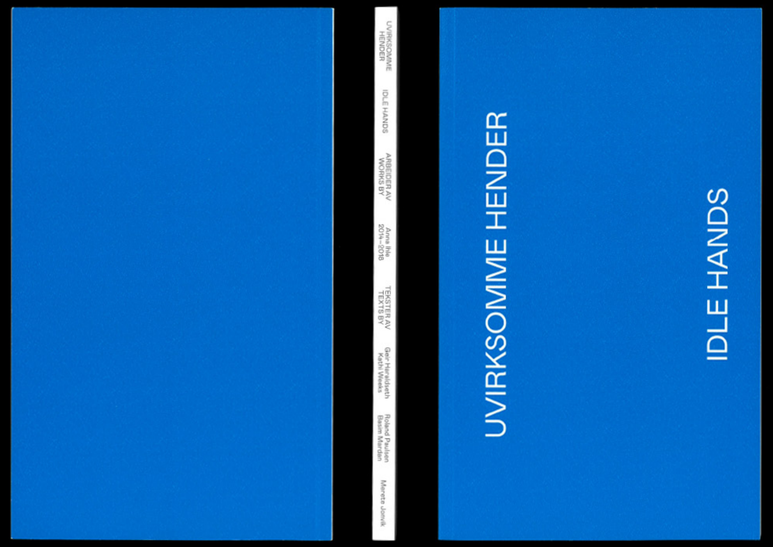
June 2019


UVIRKSOMME HENDER
IDLE HANDS
ARBEIDER AV
WORKS BY
Anna Ilde
2014–2018
TEKSTER AV
TEXTS BY
Geir Haraldsen
Kathi Weeks
Roland Paulsen
Basim Marzan
Marietta Janusik


UVIRKSOMME HENDER
IDLE HANDS
UVIRKSOMME HENDER
IDLE HANDS
ARBEIDER AV
WORKS BY
Anna Ihle
2004–2016
TEKSTER AV
TEXTS BY
Geir Neustadt
Kadim Mardan
Roland Pedersen
Basim Mardan
Åsmund Jorvik

Dette året, mandag til fredag, fra morgen til middagstid har Anna Ihle jobbet med kunst. I arbeidstiden har hun jobbet med tre i atelieret på Klosterøya og snakket med mennesker i skiensområdet om fisk/fordriv og arbeid. Etter jobb har hun hengt med Ida, Aleksi eller Omar, gått på tinderdatter, laget middag, vært på sykkel/ fisketur, sett på Netflix, hengt på balkongen til en kompis eller ikke noe spesielt.
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This year, from Monday to Friday, from morning to dinner time, Anna Ihle has been working with art. During working hours she has been wood-carving in her studio at Klosterøya and talking to people in the Skien area about pastime and work. After work she has been hanging out with Ida, Aleksi or Omar, going on tinder dates, cooked dinner, been biking/ fishing, watching Netflix, hanging out on a friends balcony or doing nothing in parttiouter.
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Publikasjonen DRIV/ إنشغل er et samarbeid mellom den irakiske poeten Basim Mardan og Anna Ihle. Den er er skrevet på norsk/ arabisk og handler om arbeid og arbeidsledighet i Skien. Mardan skrev dikt, Ihle snakket med folk, og sammen hjalp de hverandre å oversette til sine respektive språk. Publikasjonen er trykket på norskprodusert avispapir fra Norske Skog, et nasjonalt firma som tidligere drev den største fabrikken i Skien helt til nedleggelsen i 2007. Et av intervjuene i publikasjonen er hentet fra arkivet til lokalavisa Varden: "Papirarbeideren forteller hvordan papiret blir til" (1942). Publikasjonen var gratis tilgjengelig i utstillingen, og på internett.
Tekstene fra publikasjonen som er gjengitt her er to sider med dikt av Basim Mardan, en side på norsk, en side på arabisk, og en side med et intervju med Basim Mardan og hans kone Shaima Kalid av Anna Ihle. De snakker om skriving, fritid og hvordan det å inkludere mating av ender i den daglige rutinen er en måte å få tiden til å gå fortere på.
The publication DRIV/ إنشغل is a collaboration between Iraqi poet Basim Mardan and Anna Ihle. It's written in Norwegian/ Arabic and deals with work and unemployment in the Norwegian town Skien. Mardan wrote poems, Ihle talked with people, and together they helped each other translate to their respective languages. The paper is printed on Norwegian produced newspaper- paper from Norske Skog, a corporation once running the main industry in Skien. One of the interviews in the publication is taken from the archive of a local newspaper: "The paper worker tells how paper is being made" (1942). Publication was distributed for free at exhibition and online.
The texts from the publication reprinted here are two pages with poems by Basim Mardan—one in Norwegian, one in Arabic, and one page of an interview with Basim Mardan and his wife Shaima Kalid by Anna Ihle where they talk about writing, free time and how feeding ducks as a daily routine is a way to make time pass.
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ANTI-OVERSKRIDING
ANTI-TRANSGRESSION

Merete Jonvik

OM ANNA IHLE SITT KUNSTNARSKAP.

Kunst som sprenger grenser, er overskridande, og som pressar seg fram trass band og hindringar, vert løfta fram som ideal. Overskriding tyder «å gå ut over» og «vidare enn». Arbeidsmotivasjonen til yrkesgruppa kunstnarar vert gjerne tenkt å vera eit eige form for driv, sterk estetisk og ideologisk overtyding. Dei som ikkje gir seg, som ikkje let seg stoppa av motgang, som et linsesuppe til frukost, middag og kvelds, og gløymer å leggja seg fordi dei var i flytsona og mista omgrep om tid og stad, vert symbolsk oppvurdert. Det er ein idylliserande aura rundt dette kunstnaridealet, som ein og finn att i andre yrke, men som kan vera eit farleg ideal å setja opp. Både for kunstnarar og for andre yrkesgrupper.

Anna Ihle vender om på denne overskridinga i sitt kunstnarskap i det ho overskrid gjennom anti-overskriding. Eit sentralt grep for Ihle er å leggja band på produksjonen og skapinga si, å setja grenser for seg sjølv, sin eigen produksjon og si eiga arbeidstid, og å sjå kva kunst som kjem ut av dette. Spesielt set

ON ANNA IHLE'S OEUVRE.

Art which pushes boundaries, is transgressive and presses forward despite all hindrances, is idealized. Transgressive would suggest something is "violating social and moral norms" and "challenging norms". The working motivation of artists is often thought to be its own form of drive, strong aesthetic and ideological conviction. Those who do not give up, who do not yield to resistance, who eat quinoa for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and neglect sleeping because they were in the zone and lost track of time and space, are symbolically acclaimed. There is an idyllic reverence regarding this ideal, which can be found in other vocations, but can also be dangerous; both for artists and for other professions.

Anna Ihle turns this transgression around in her work by transgressing via anti-transgressing. A central point of Ihle's work is to restrict her own creativity, set limits for herself, her production and her working hours, and see what kind of art is born of this. Notably, she sets restrictions on the

I 2013 bygde Anna Ihle om atelieret til et treverksted, og bestemte seg for å skjære ut en engel i tre. Gjennom å hengi seg til treskjæring, ville hun underkaste seg verdier tilknyttet den norske protestantiske arbeidsmoralen. *Uvirksomme hender* består av en trebenk og treskulpturer som henger fra taket i hangrep. De mindre treskulpturene er deler av en engel, som er basert på en dåpefont fra Vangskyrkja på Voss hvor Ihle gikk på gudstjenester i sommerferien som barn.

Utgangspunktet for verket Idle *Uvirksomme Hender* er den religionshistoriske personen Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) og den protestantiske moralen som *preger* arbeidslivet i Norge. Gjennom å starte opp bedrifter og å oppmuntre til næringsliv, ville Hans Nielsen Hauge sette uvirksomme hender i arbeid. Ved å jobbe kan folk gi mening til sine liv, og gjennom å skaffe seg nye ferdigheter, kan et håndverk bli oversatt til faktiske inntekter. Denne utviklingen kunne hjelpe både individet og bidra til fellesskapet. Hauge forkynte selv om han ikke var en utdannet prest, noe som var ulovlig på den tiden, og ble derfor satt i fengsel. Da han satt i fengsel holdt han seg aktiv: Han strikket, broderte og holdt på med treskjæring.

In 2013, Anna Ihle turned her studio into a wood workshop, and committed herself to woodcarving an angel for a period of one year, taking on a work ethic inspired by protestant values: submission and control. *Idle Hands* consists of a wooden work bench and wood carved sculptures tied up in hemp ropes. The smaller wooden sculptures are parts of an angel, based on a baptismal font from Voss Church where Ihle would go to church during summer holidays as a child.

Haugeanism was a religious reform movement started by Hans Nielsen Hauge. Hauge (1771–1824) was a Norwegian protestant preacher from a farmers family which belonged to a pietist Lutheran religion. As a preacher, he formed his own movement, the Haugeans, which is claimed to have influenced Norwegian economy, as the networks of his followers became powerful and many. When Hans Nielsen Hauge was 25 years old, he had a powerful spiritual experience which sparked his career. He started up approximately 30 different businesses in Norway; publishing houses, breweries and paper factories. He was a banker, a merchant, an investor, a speculator, an educator, a writer and an opposition leader. More than 10 years of his life, he would spend in prison—at the time it was illegal to preach without the blessing of the bishop. By setting up businesses, Hauge facilitated so that idle hands could work, as he would put it. By working, people could put their minds to something useful, and the learning of a new skill/craft could be translated into hard cash. This would be of help to the individual as well as the community. While Hauge stayed in prison, he kept himself busy; he would knit, embroider and do woodcarving.

difference relied on and reproduced traditional gender stereotypes, it proved more limited in its capacity to generate a broader critical perspective on and framework for public dialogue about the quality and quantity of work in women's and men's lives. What may render a demand more appealing does not necessarily enhance it as a perspective.

So what might we want when we demand shorter hours and what might we want those hours for? The way the proposal is framed has consequences for its eventual success as both a persuasive demand and a provocative perspective. As a demand, it should be broadly appealing—that is, to more than a small minority of workers—and potentially effective as a means to better their lives. A feminist demand for shorter hours should include, moreover, a broader accounting of what is recognized as work and feminist analyses of its value. Beyond the assertion of a specific policy proposal, to demand is also, as I noted, to assert a particular discursive agenda. Considering it also as a perspective, I want to take into account the ways in which the demand for shorter hours could provide a vocabulary and a conceptual framework for new ways of thinking about the nature, value, and meaning of work relative to other practices. By and large, feminists who address questions of work today focus on the struggle for more and better work and tend to neglect the possibility of struggling also for less work. With this in mind, in the pages that follow I will build an argument about what a contemporary feminist movement for shorter hours in the United States could accomplish and how it might be most fruitfully conceived. The discussion will be organized around three different cases for shorter hours that have been recently advanced: one that demands shorter hours as a means to secure more time for family and two others that deemphasize the family as the primary rationale for work reduction, albeit in different ways. For each of these, a representative text will serve to illustrate some of the advantages and disadvantages of the approach.

LESS WORK AND MORE FAMILY

The most common rationale for shorter hours is that it *would make* more time for family. This approach is particularly powerful because the emphasis on the family resonates comfortably with mainstream political priorities, on both the Left and the Right. The family is, after all, frequently assumed by commentators across the ideological spectrum to be the source of popular political motivation and basis for political judgment. Tapping into this familiar discourse, furthermore, frames the demand for shorter hours in terms of the easily articulated issue of the "work-family" balance. Yet despite these advantages I find it the least compelling line of argument for work reduction. There are, as we will see, significant pitfalls to organizing a critical discourse about work and a struggle for shorter hours in the name of the family.

Arlie Russell Hochschild presents a particularly rich and insightful version of this family-centered approach in her 1997 *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. *The Time Bind* attempts to confront what is for Hochschild an important puzzle: why do so few of the employees of a Fortune 500, "family-friendly" company (which she names Amerco) take advantage of its various programs offering shorter hours for working parents even though they report feeling strained to the limit by the long hours they put in between work and home? Her answer, based on a study of company policies and interviews with employees, is that, because work is becoming more like home and home more like work, the people she interviewed tended to prefer to spend more time at work and less at home. She claims that Americans live in a culture that increasingly devalues the unpaid work of parenting while overvaluing paid work, thus reinforcing the relative attractions of work over family. This time bind imposes many obvious stresses and strains on parents but is, she argues, particularly harmful to children. What is needed, Hochschild concludes, is a time movement that centers on shorter and more flexible hours at work to create more time for family.[8]

Hochschild writes eloquently and sympathetically about people's struggles to reconcile the pleasures and

nøkkelmetaforar for arbeid, og at nye nøkkelmetaforar *som informasjon* og *meining*, er på veg inn. Han stiller spørsmålet om då ei «homogen, kontinuerlig og allmenn tidsforståelse kan fortsette å fungere som en gullstandard» (ibid.).

Ifølgje den britiske historikaren E.P. Thomson medførte industrikapitalismen ein overgang frå at *arbeidsoppgåver* var mål på tid, til at *tid* vart mål på arbeidsinnsats. Oppgåvaorienteringa i det førindustrielle, understrekar sosiolog Anne Lise Ellingsæter, innebar at tida vart organisert etter det som var naudsynt for å utføra bestemte oppgåver, medan arbeidet ved klokketidsorganisering vart regulert av koordinerande tidsdisiplin.[2] Så medan det førindustrielle arbeidslivet var forankra i naturen sine tidsrytmar, vart arbeidet med industrisamfunnet regulert etter klokketid. Med dagens arbeidsliv – «det nye arbeidslivet» eller «det moderne arbeidslivet» – rører vi uss altså vekk frå dette igjen. Sjølv om det er store variasjonar mellom ulike yrke og bransjar, er ikkje klokketid lenger ein gullstandard eller ein felles målbar standard alle

are on the way in. He questions if a "homogeneous, continual and conventional understanding of time can continue working as a gold standard" (ibid.).

According to the British historian E.P. Thomson, industrial capitalism caused a transition from *tasks* being a measurement of *time*, to time being a measurement of work effort. The task-based orientation of preindustrial work is specified by sociologist Anne Eline Ellingsæter as being adjusted to the necessary time needed to complete a task, while a time-based orientation was regulated by coordinating time management skills. In today's working life—"modern working life"—, we are yet again drifting away from this. Despite great disparity between vocations, time spent is no longer a gold standard or a general standard by which we comply. *Results* and *surplus* are becoming more prevalent.

In the modern work life—taking place in a society with a high standard of education and living, where people have a lot—, working hours are flexible. Flexibility is welcomed, but profit and surplus are nearly a doxic and indisputable focal point

rettar seg mot. *Resultat og overskot* tek stadig meir av plassen.

I det moderne arbeidslivet – som eksisterer innanfor eit høgutdanningssamfunn der relativt mange har god levestandard og eig mykje[3] – er arbeidstida ofte langt meir fleksibel. Det fleksible vert oppvurdert, og profitt og overskot er nærast doxiske og udiskutable utgangspunkt for mange verksemder, både private og offentlege.[4] Nettopp dette at *ut skal lønne seg* kallar Lilleaas og Widerberg den viktigaste føringa av alle i det moderne arbeidslivet. Ulike konsulentyrke med lause arbeidskontraktar står i ei form for særstilling i «det nye arbeidslivet», yrke som gjerne blir sett på som privilegerte fordi dei er frie. Her gjeld høge prestasjonskrav og lause arbeidsvilkår. Lilleaas og Widerberg viser at trass i denne fleksibiliteten og fridomen, så er det fleire innan det moderne og digitale arbeidslivet som opplev at dei har vanskar med å klara jobben, og at dei fleste arbeider meir og vert styrt av kortare og kortare tidsfristar. Forsking frå Sverige, frå såkalla fleksible organisasjonar der tilsette

in many fields, both in the private and public sector. Specifically that *everything should make a profit* is what sociologists Ulla-Britt Lilleaas and Karin Widerberg view as the most important shift in work life. Various consulting jobs with lax contractual obligations gain a form of special treatment in "modern working life", jobs which are viewed as privileged because of their freedom. What matters for them is a high standard of performance and slack working conditions. Lilleaas and Widerberg show that despite this flexibility and freedom, increasing numbers of people in modern and digital occupations experience difficulties with completing tasks, and that most people work more, but are trapped by shorter and shorter deadlines. Research done in Sweden, at so-called flexible organizations where workers have a high degree of freedom, has shown that a more flexibility in work leads to people struggling to take time off. Time is soon no longer a conceptual metaphor and standard of evaluation, and with this come distinct disadvantages.

A rather extreme example of flexible struc-

ANNA IHLE

Lysende Framtids-utsikter

Bright Future Horizons

Vernissage og bokslipp:
6. september 19:00

Opening and book launch:
September 6th, 19:00

www.rogalandkunstsenter.no
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6. September – 4. November 2018

Åpningstider:
torsdag–søndag
12:00–16:00

Opening hours:
Thursday–Sunday
12:00–16:00

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Norge

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STAVANGER KOMMUNE

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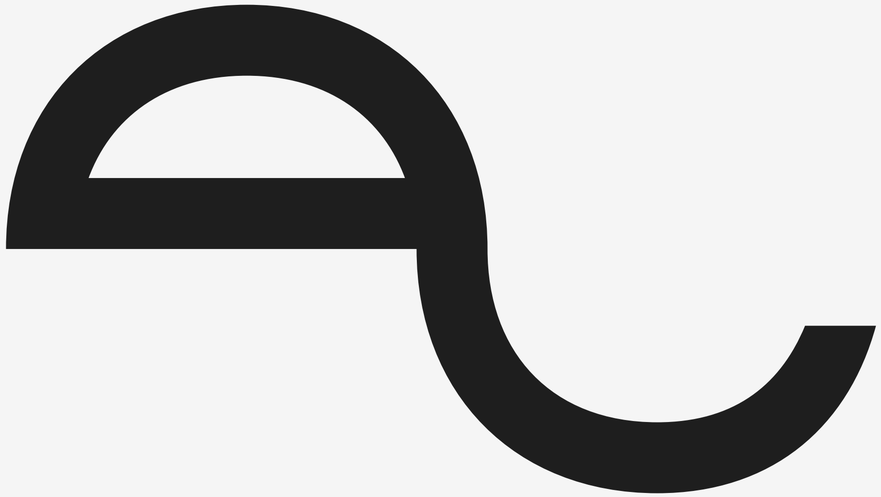
Shanti Bell



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Shanti Bell

Lennart Sydney Kofi

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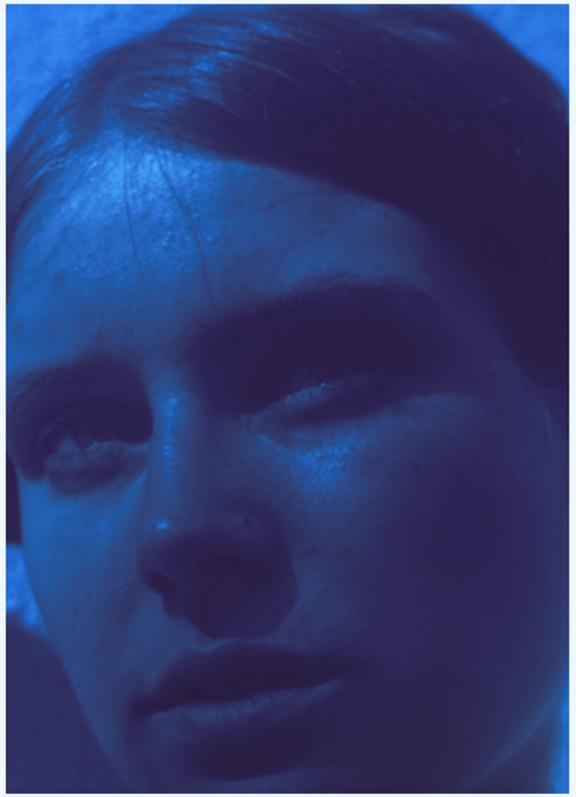


Eden
3 of 22

LSK

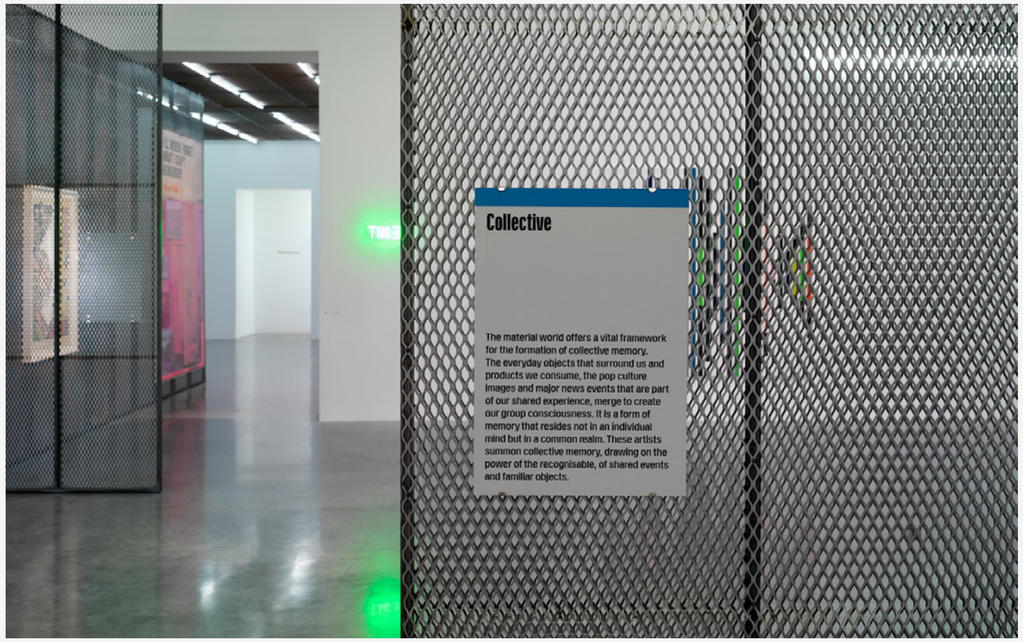
Information

Eden

LSK

Information

Some Kind of Stranger
1 of 9


Collective
The material world offers a vital framework for the formation of collective memory. The everyday objects that surround us and products we consume, the pop culture images and major news events that are part of our shared experience, merge to create our group consciousness. It is a form of memory that resides not in an individual mind but in a common realm. These artists summon collective memory, drawing on the power of the recognisable, of shared events and familiar objects.

Room 1: Historical
Room 5: Collective

employ a different kind of notation, recognisable from digital music editing. The image presents itself as the memory of a sound but the original experience is unreachable.

Cerith Wyn Evans' neon works function as a catalyst, a reservoir of potential meanings that unravel in multiple discursive journeys. In his text work *in which something happens again for the very first time* (2006), a partial sentence wracked by impossibility suggests a profound refiguration of personal ideas about how time and memory function.

Eddie Peake is also preoccupied with the gaps in language: the lapses between emotion or sensation and the words that incompletely express them. In his acid-coloured mirror paintings, sharp-lettered, cryptic words or phrases created with masking tape emerge through layers of spray paint to reveal the work's polished steel ground, mirroring the viewer.

Appropriating methods traditionally identified with 'feminine' pursuits, Jessica Rankin's work often takes the form of organdie 'embroidered paintings'. By its nature methodical and repetitive, needlework has the capacity to let the mind disengage while the hands are busy. Drawing on this, and combining text and image, her embroideries resemble mental maps (or 'brainscapes' as she often refers to them), working through recollections, impressions of places and immediate experience.

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Transcription

Bermondsey

Collective

The material world offers a vital framework for the formation of collective memory. The everyday objects that surround us and products we consume, the pop culture images and major news events that are part of our shared experience, merge to create our group consciousness. It is a form of memory that resides not in an individual mind but in a common realm. These artists summon collective memory, drawing on the power of the recognisable or shared events and familiar objects.

The shelf works of Haim Steinbach – such as *Untitled (kong, eagle, alien, skull)* (2016) – tap into the ways in which objects can trigger myriad memories and desires. Through simple arrangement and presentation, quotidian items such as a souvenir from a movie or a carved ornament are re-contextualised. When isolated, each object remains embedded with its own history, collectively they suggest alternative interpretations of meaning and hierarchy between fine art and vernacular commodities. Elad Lassry's images similarly mine multiple cultural sources to explore the perception of objects and how experience is shaped by our memory of them. Adapting the visual language of advertising and stock photography, Lassry's subjects range from domestic items to movie actors, linking the mundane and uncanny in concise pictures, framed in a way that suspends the work, in his words, 'between a sculpture and an image'.

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Bermondsey

Published by White Cube
to accompany the exhibition

Memory Palace

11 July–2 September 2018
White Cube Bermondsey

11 July–15 September 2018
White Cube Mason's Yard

Curated by Susanna Greeves
and Susan May

With Hannah Gray, Will Davies,
Capucine Perrot, Andrea Schlieker,
Susannah Hyman and
Elissa Goldstone

Coordinated by Chloe Jayne
and Elaine Tam

Designed by Zak Group

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Room 5: Collective
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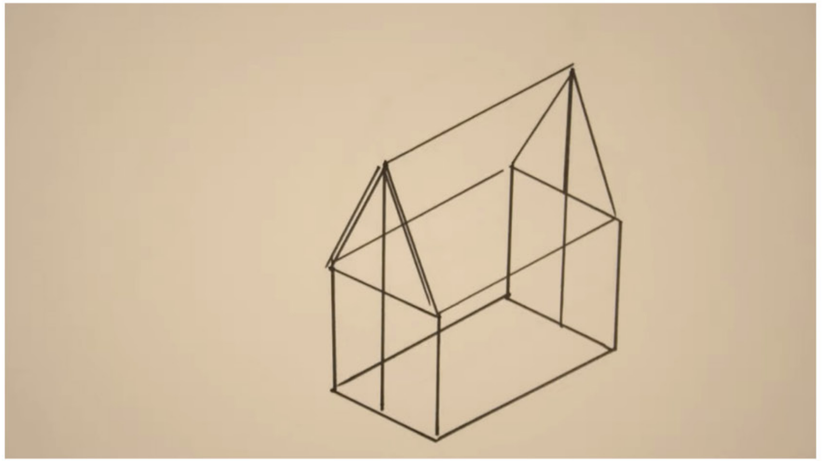
87

Octave Marsal
Drawings, Projects

Octave Marsal

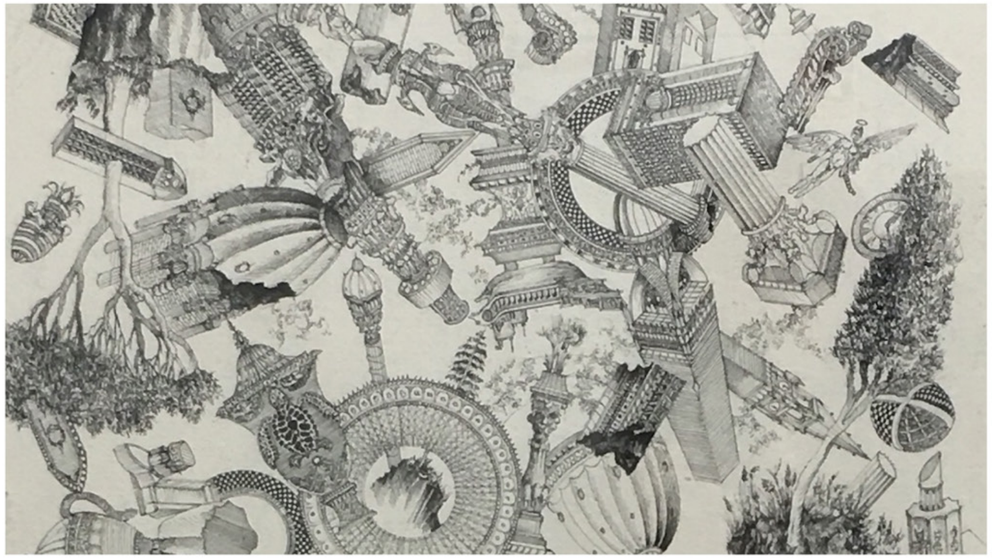
Drawings, Projects



39 Items

Baroque Perspective

(1 / 39)



←

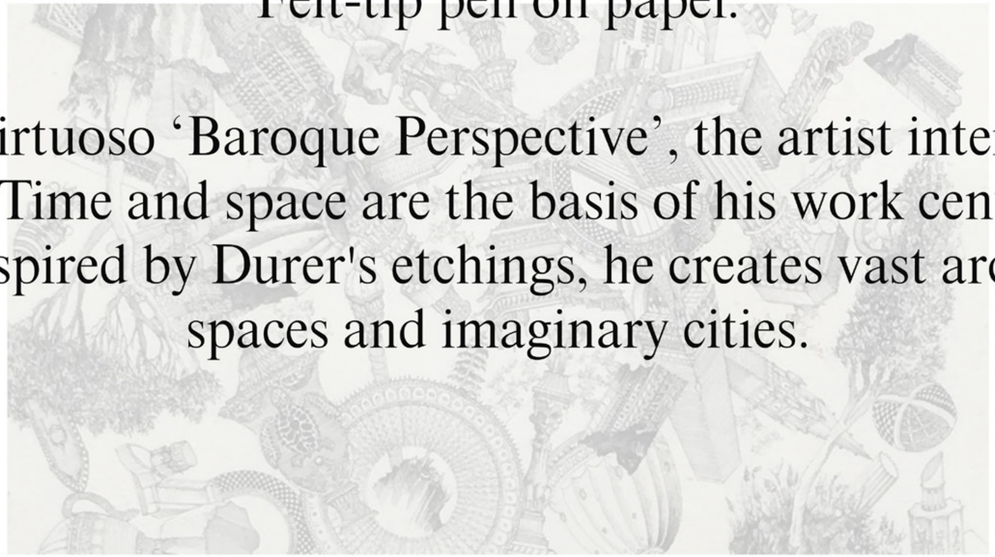
Esc

Baroque Perspective

(1 / 39)

42 × 29.7 × 3 cm

Felt-tip pen on paper.



In this virtuoso ‘Baroque Perspective’, the artist intermingles epochs. Time and space are the basis of his work centered on utopia. Inspired by Durer's etchings, he creates vast architectural spaces and imaginary cities.

Esc

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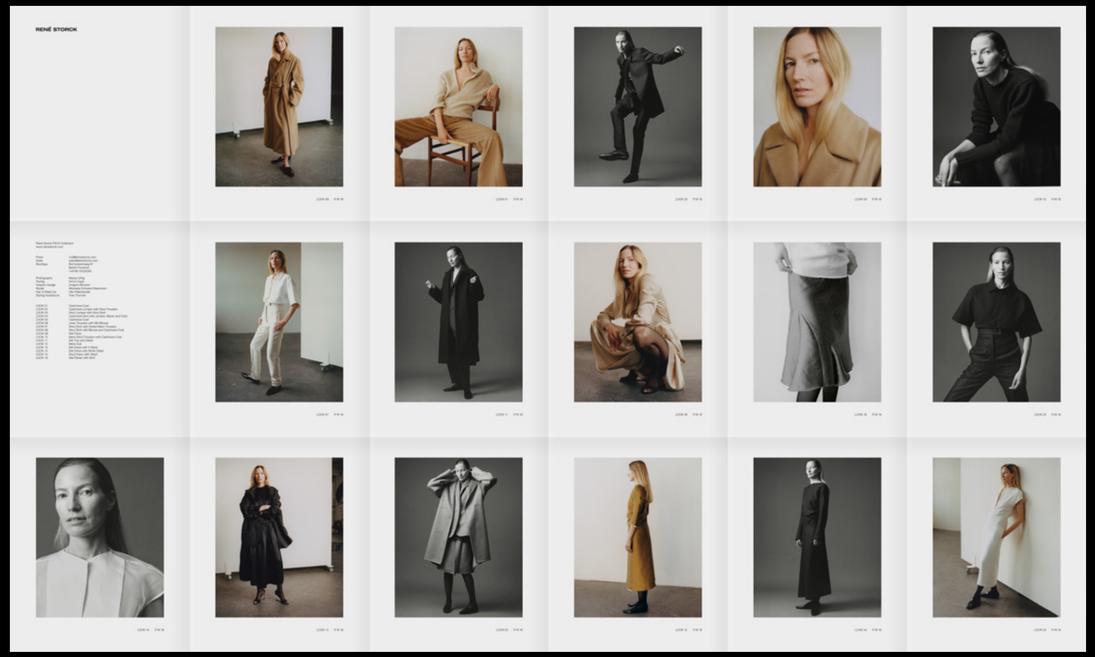

RENÉ STORCK

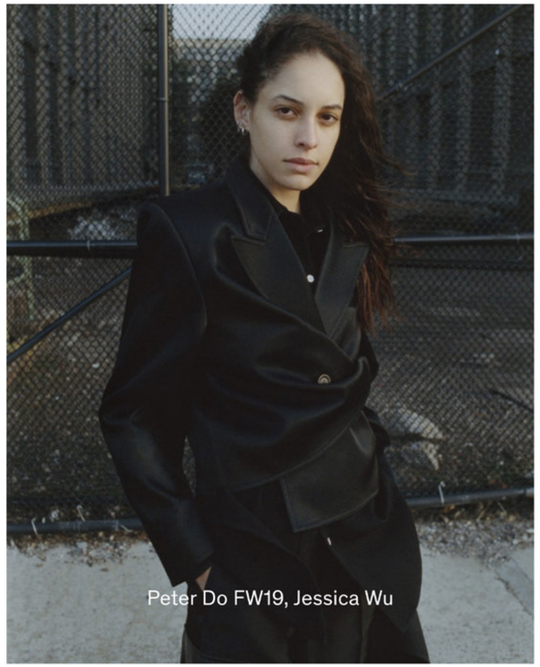
Marius Uhlig

Marius Uhlig

Information

Marius Uhlig

Information



Marius Uhlig

is a fashion photographer. After absolving his National Diploma in Photography at the Arts University Bournemouth and assisting various fashion photgraphers, he is now living and working in London.

For full portfolio requests, please contact me via email.

marius.uhlig@gmail.com
Find me on Instagram

Projects and Collaborators

Adidas × Stella McCartney
Daniel W Fletcher
COS
Closed
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Goop
Hien Le
ioannes
i-D Germany
Interview Magazine Germany
Jimmy Choo
Material Magazine
Matches Fashion
Mercedes Benz
Port Magazine
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René Storck
Soft Copy
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Adidas × Stella McCartney with Made Thought, 2017
Daniel W Fletcher
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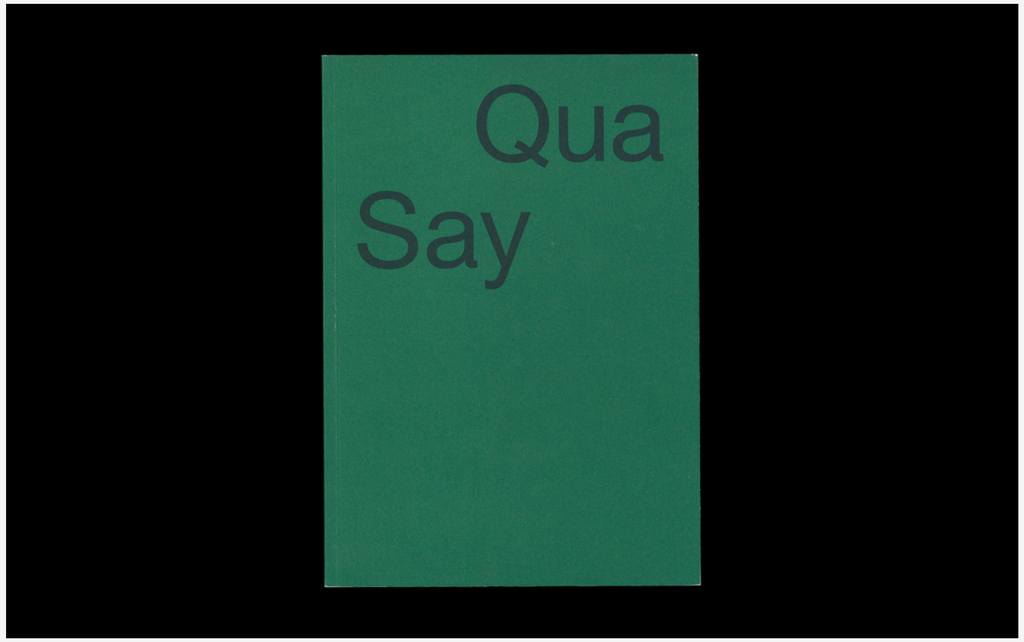

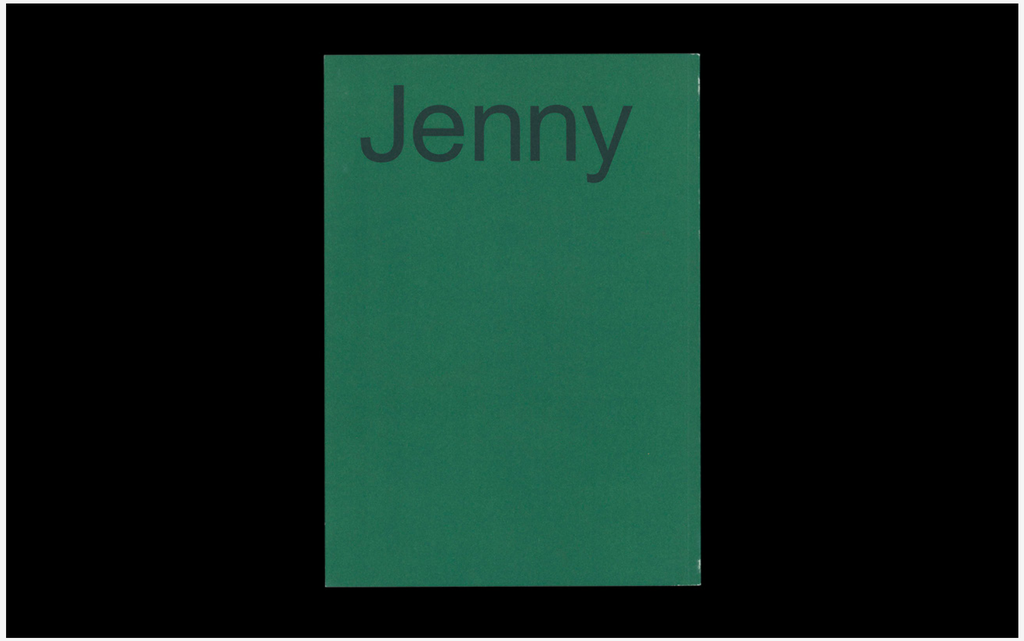

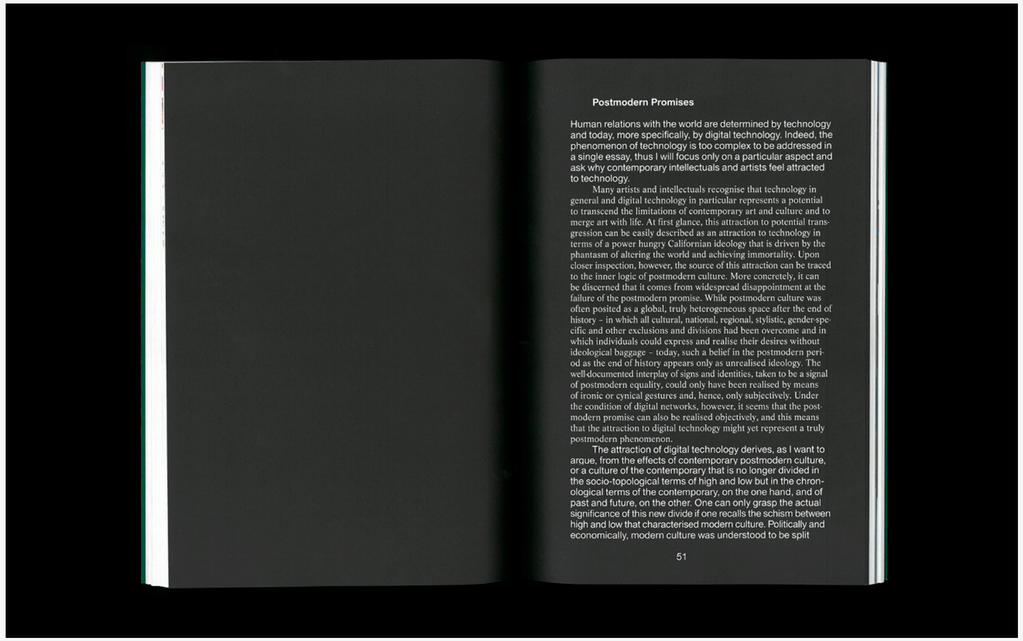

Postmodern Promises

Human relations with the world are determined by technology and today, more specifically, by digital technology. Indeed, the phenomenon of technology is too complex to be addressed in a single essay, thus I will focus only on a particular aspect and ask why contemporary intellectuals and artists feel attracted to technology.

Many artists and intellectuals recognise that technology in general and digital technology in particular represents a potential to transcend the limitations of contemporary art and culture and to merge art with life. At first glance, this attraction to potential transgression can be easily described as an attraction to technology in terms of a power hungry Californian ideology that is driven by the phantasm of altering the world and achieving immortality. Upon closer inspection, however, the source of this attraction can be traced to the inner logic of postmodern culture. More concretely, it can be discerned that it comes from widespread disappointment at the failure of the postmodern promise. While postmodern culture was often posited as a global, truly heterogeneous space after the end of history – in which all cultural, national, regional, stylistic, gender-specific and other exclusions and divisions had been overcome and in which individuals could express and realise their desires without ideological baggage – today, such a belief in the postmodern period as the end of history appears only as unrealised ideology. The well-documented interplay of signs and identities, taken to be a signal of postmodern equality, could only have been realised by means of ironic or cynical gestures and, hence, only subjectively. Under the condition of digital networks, however, it seems that the postmodern promise can also be realised objectively, and this means that the attraction to digital technology might yet represent a truly postmodern phenomenon.

The attraction of digital technology derives, as I want to argue, from the effects of contemporary postmodern culture, or a culture of the contemporary that is no longer divided in the socio-topological terms of high and low but in the chronological terms of the contemporary, on the one hand, and of past and future, on the other. One can only grasp the actual significance of this new divide if one recalls the schism between high and low that characterised modern culture. Politically and economically, modern culture was understood to be split

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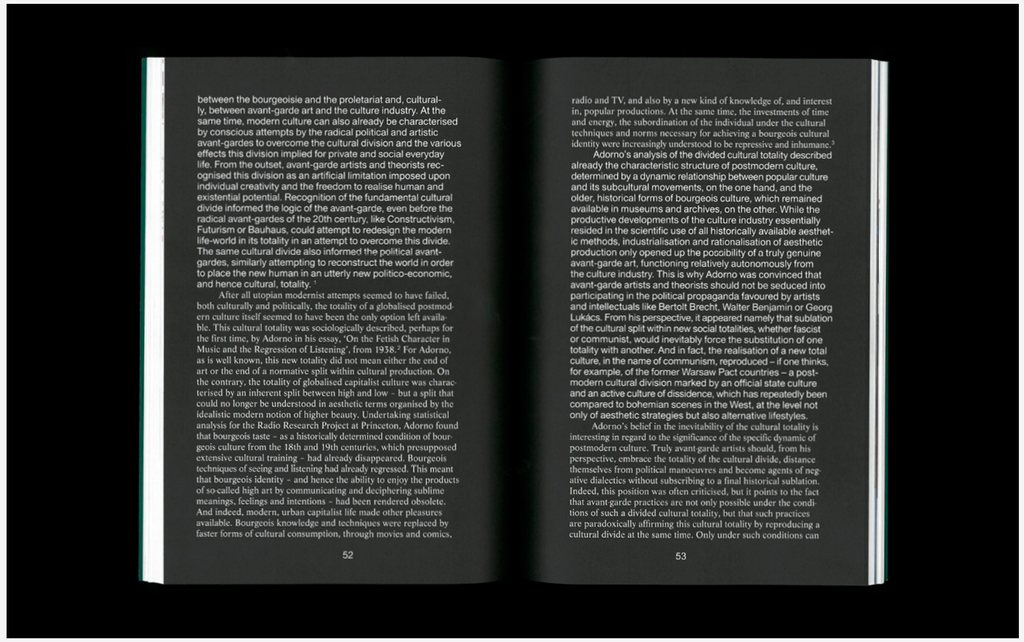

between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and, culturally, between avant-garde art and the culture industry. At the same time, modern culture can also already be characterised by conscious attempts by the radical political and artistic avant-gardes to overcome the cultural division and the various effects this division implied for private and social everyday life. From the outset, avant-garde artists and theorists recognised this division as an artificial limitation imposed upon individual creativity and the freedom to realise human and existential potential. Recognition of the fundamental cultural divide informed the logic of the avant-garde, even before the radical avant-gardes of the 20th century, like Constructivism, Futurism or Bauhaus, could attempt to redesign the modern life-world in its totality in an attempt to overcome this divide. The same cultural divide also informed the political avant-gardes, similarly attempting to reconstruct the world in order to place the new human in an utterly new politico-economic, and hence cultural, totality.[1]

After all utopian modernist attempts seemed to have failed, both culturally and politically, the totality of a globalised postmodern culture itself seemed to have been the only option left available. This cultural totality was sociologically described, perhaps for the first time, by Adorno in his essay, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', from 1938.[2] For Adorno, as is well known, this new totality did not mean either the end of art or the end of a normative split within cultural production. On the contrary, the totality of globalised capitalist culture was characterised by an inherent split between high and low – but a split that could no longer be understood in aesthetic terms organised by the idealistic modern notion of higher beauty. Undertaking statistical analysis for the Radio Research Project at Princeton, Adorno found that bourgeois taste – as a historically determined condition of bourgeois culture from the 18th and 19th centuries, which presupposed extensive cultural training – had already disappeared. Bourgeois techniques of seeing and listening had already regressed. This meant that bourgeois identity – and hence the ability to enjoy the products of so-called high art by communicating and deciphering sublime meanings, feelings and intentions – had been rendered obsolete. And indeed, modern, urban capitalist life made other pleasures available. Bourgeois knowledge and techniques were replaced by faster forms of cultural consumption, through movies and comics,

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radio and TV, and also by a new kind of knowledge of, and interest in, popular productions. At the same time, the investments of time and energy, the subordination of the individual under the cultural techniques and norms necessary for achieving a bourgeois cultural identity were increasingly understood to be repressive and inhumane.[3]

Adorno's analysis of the divided cultural totality described already the characteristic structure of postmodern culture, determined by a dynamic relationship between popular culture and its subcultural movements, on the one hand, and the older, historical forms of bourgeois culture, which remained available in museums and archives, on the other. While the productive developments of the culture industry essentially resided in the scientific use of all historically available aesthetic methods, industrialisation and rationalisation of aesthetic production only opened up the possibility of a truly genuine avant-garde art, functioning relatively autonomously from the culture industry. This is why Adorno was convinced that avant-garde artists and theorists should not be seduced into participating in the political propaganda favoured by artists and intellectuals like Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin or Georg Lukács. From his perspective, it appeared namely that sublation of the cultural split within new social totalities, whether fascist or communist, would inevitably force the substitution of one totality with another. And in fact, the realisation of a new total culture, in the name of communism, reproduced – if one thinks, for example, of the former Warsaw Pact countries – a post-modern cultural division marked by an official state culture and an active culture of dissidence, which has repeatedly been compared to bohemian scenes in the West, at the level not only of aesthetic strategies but also alternative lifestyles.

Adorno's belief in the inevitability of the cultural totality is interesting in regard to the significance of the specific dynamic of postmodern culture. Truly avant-garde artists should, from his perspective, embrace the totality of the cultural divide, distance themselves from political manoeuvres and become agents of negative dialectics without subscribing to a final historical sublation. Indeed, this position was often criticised, but it points to the fact that avant-garde practices are not only possible under the conditions of such a divided cultural totality, but that such practices are paradoxically affirming this cultural totality by reproducing a cultural divide at the same time. Only under such conditions can

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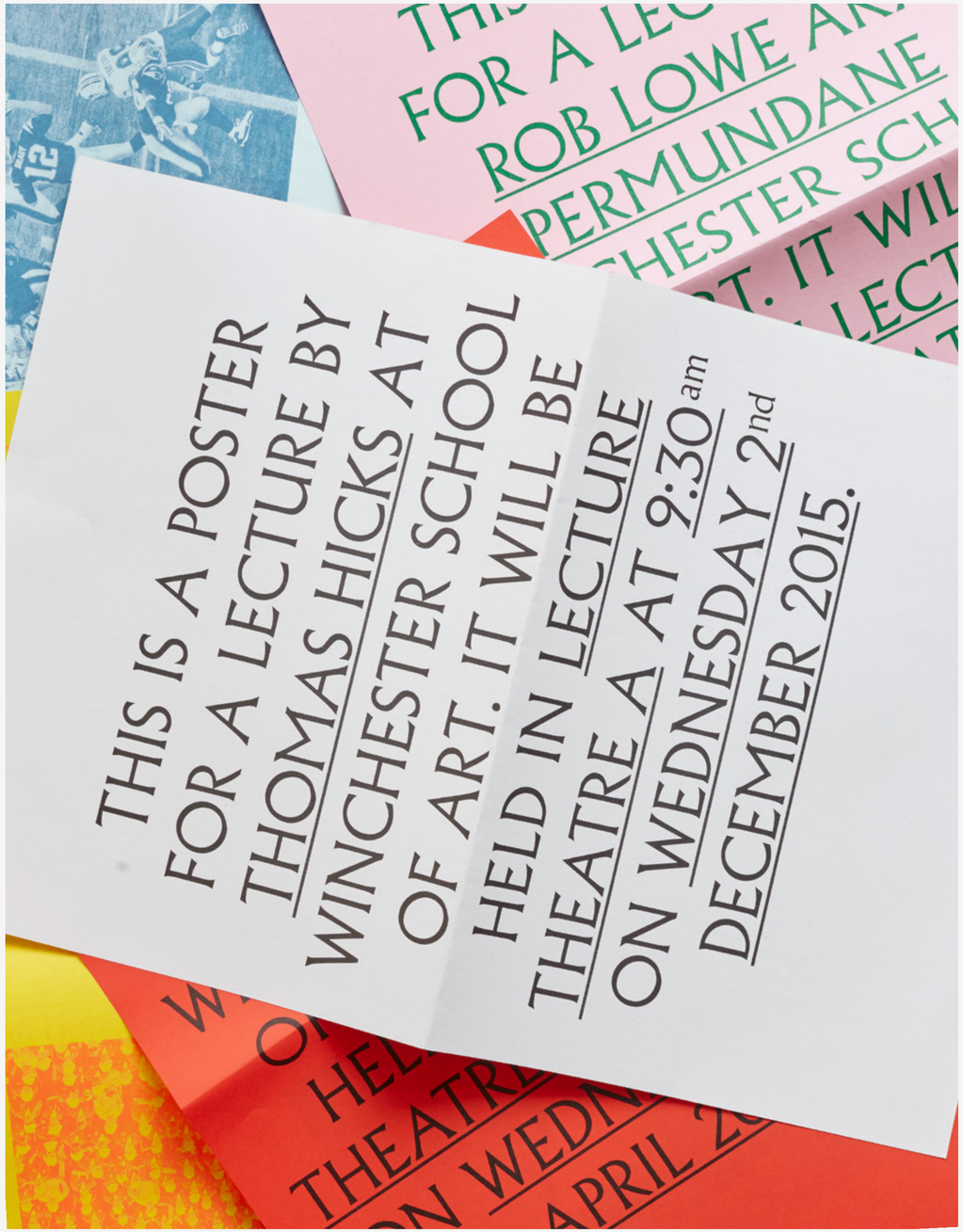
THIS IS A POSTER
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THOMAS HICKS AT
WINCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ART. IT WILL BE
HELD IN LECTURE
THEATRE A AT 9:30am
ON WEDNESDAY 2nd
DECEMBER 2015.

Thank you