

## LIGHT MATTER

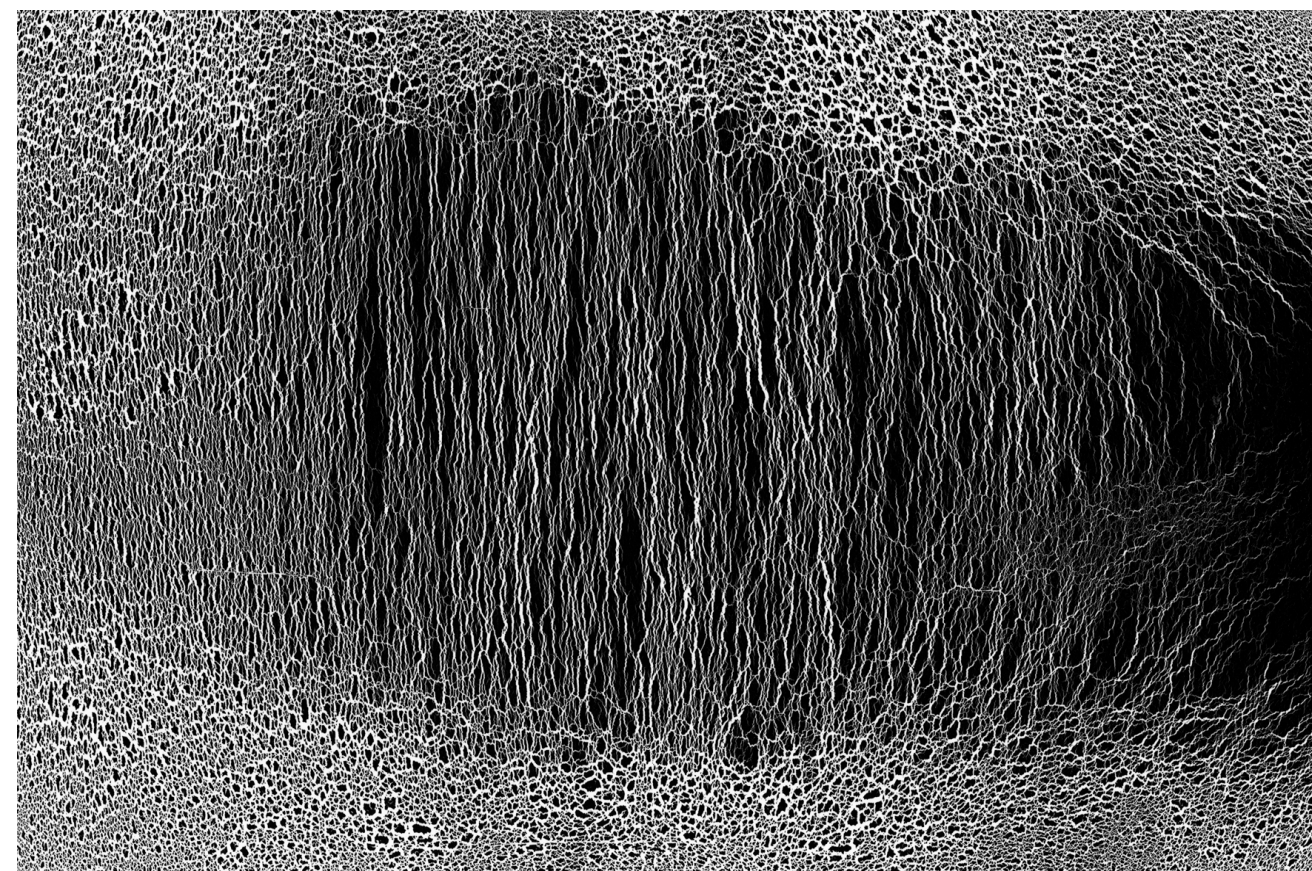
a symposium on contemporary photographic practice

### PROGRAM

- 9:30 Registration
- 10:10 Opening remarks: Dr Allison Holland, Curator ACP
- 10:30 *The first frame: foetal portraiture as a preliminary human encounter*  
Dr Cherine Fahd
- 10:50 Discussion led by Dr Sara Oscar
- 11:00 *Why 'Light matter' matters: on photographic presence*  
Professor Melissa Miles
- 11:20 Discussion led by Dr Kate Warren
- 11:30 *Light and matter: photography from the black hole*  
Yvette Hamilton
- 11:50 Discussion led by Dr Donna West Brett

### LUNCH

- 1:00 *Socially latent images: Eva and Franco Mattes' explorations of personal photography*  
Dr Kate Warren
- 1:20 Discussion led by Professor Melissa Miles
- 1:30 *On optics and algorithms: photography in the age of AI synthesized technology and the truth apocalypse*  
Dr Sara Oscar
- 1:50 Discussion led by Yvette Hamilton
- 2:00 *Lost images*  
Dr Donna West Brett
- 2:20 Discussion led by Dr Cherine Fahd
- 2:30 Artists' panel: Ellen Dahl, Yvette Hamilton, Elena Papanikolakis, Ioulia Terizis, Garry Trinh, and Amanda Williams  
Discussion led by Dr Izabela Pluta
- 3:00 Close



## LIGHT MATTER

a symposium on contemporary photographic practice

Saturday 24 August 2019

University of Technology, Sydney  
Design, Architecture and Building  
Building 6, Level 3, Room 022  
702 - 730 Harris St, Ultimo



**Lost images**  
**Dr Donna West Brett** University of Sydney

In our post-photographic era, the question of ‘what is a photograph?’ is central to discussions about the medium. Artists and scholars have questioned the ontological nature of photographs and where they exist in the realm of data, pixels and social media. This paper considers the life of the photograph, both analogue and digital, as an autonomous entity – what they do, what happens to them, and where they go. Within the deluge of images that travel the globe, trapped in our phones and computers, many are lost, misplaced or unseen, or remain as latent images in the repositories of data memory systems. Barthes’ premise of ‘the death of the author’ is a provocation to rethink the contemporary photograph and its afterlife.

Donna is a lecturer in Art History and Curatorial Studies at the University of Sydney, author of *Photography and place: seeing and not seeing Germany after 1945* (Routledge, 2016), and co-editor with Natalya Lusty, of *Photography and ontology: unsettling images* (Routledge, 2018). Donna is a recipient of the 2017 Australian Academy of the Humanities, Ernst and Rosemarie Keller Award; Research Leader for the Photographic Cultures Research Group; and Editorial Member for the *Visual Culture and German Contexts* Series, Bloomsbury.

**The first frame: foetal portraiture as a preliminary human encounter**  
**Dr Cherine Fahd** University of Technology Sydney

Ultrasound images of a foetus in utero mark the beginning of a person’s figurative presence. These diagnostic images contribute to the storytelling capacity of the family, from the traditional photograph album to the contemporary equivalent on social media. From the perspective of photographic portraiture, diagnostic portraits are intriguing objects of enquiry. They visualise the otherwise unseen, they provide an encounter with a hidden subject which in turn activates relational existence. They are an inadvertent portrait of the unborn offering a preliminary human encounter. The representation of the foetal face in utero as the ‘first frame’ from which an intersubjective meeting is generated and experienced between mother and unborn child. This paper embarks on an imaginative leap to consider this unknowable experience, the encounter between the unborn subject and its mother in terms of being photographed, being watched, being posed, and ultimately being loved.

Cherine is Senior Lecturer and Director of Photography at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). With an enduring focus on the everyday, Cherine’s research and practice has evolved from the familial experience, often to humorous effect, to enquiry on photographic portraiture, politics of appearance, concealment of the body, and the relations between self and other. Cherine’s has exhibited and been collected by major public institutions in Australia and globally. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including: Australia Council for the Arts (2018, 2016, 2014, 2007, 2004, 2002, 1999); NSW Women & Arts Fellowship (2005); Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award (2004); and National Photography Prize (2010). With two artist’s books published by M.33, Cherine is a regular contributor to *The Conversation* and has peer-reviewed articles in *Journal of Photography and Culture* and *Journal of Visual Arts Practice*. Her work and text have also gained the attention of the media, including Fairfax, ABC, and SBS.

**Light and matter: photography from the black hole**  
**Yvette Hamilton** University of Technology Sydney

In August 1835, William Henry Fox Talbot captured the light emanating from a lattice window at his home at Lacock Abbey using a ‘photogenic drawing’ technique. In April 2019, a team of scientists captured the absence of light of the supermassive black hole in the galaxy M87 using the Event Horizon Telescope. These two events are stationed at opposing ends of the medium’s history. From its very embryonic beginnings to the current state of the ‘post-photographic’, these polarities are speculatively drawn together to suggest that the star of photography has now turned into a black hole. The ‘matter’ and ‘mass’ of photography has been escalating at an alarming rate. Taking a speculative snapshot of what photographic practice looks like at the event horizon, this paper questions: Is the photographic medium now at the point of no return? Has the image reached such a supermassive weight that it has collapsed into a black hole and at risk of disappearing from view?

Yvette is an interdisciplinary artist who considers visuality and being, with particular reference to photography. Working with lens-based media, programming, installation and interactivity, her animated works explore the act of ‘seeing’ in a live and participatory manner. Yvette is currently a sessional academic at UTS in the Bachelor of Design (Photography) and holds a Master of Fine Arts (Research) at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. She has exhibited widely in Australia, and won awards and grants from Australia Council’s Artstart, Sydney College of the Arts and Dominik Mersch Gallery. Yvette has been a finalist in the Grace Cossington Smith Award, the Josephine Ulrick and Winn Schubert Award, the Fishers Ghost Art Prize, the Paramor Prize, the Meroogal Women’s Art Prize, and the Iris Award.

**Why ‘light matter’ matters: on photographic presence**  
**Professor Melissa Miles** Monash University

The invisible bridge of light connecting the photograph with its subject has historically underpinned the authority invested in photographs as evidence, and remains a source of wonder and fascination for photographers, viewers and historians alike. This paper focuses on a particularly compelling result of this meeting of light and matter in photography: presence. Photography’s dependence upon a subject being there, in front of the lens the moment the shutter is released ensures that photographs have long had an enduring claim on presence. Although photography’s connection to ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ have been thoroughly critiqued since the 1980s, concepts of photographic presence have persisted, seemingly as ingrained into photographs

as the light through which they are produced. This connection between light and matter in photography is far more than simply a photochemical, technical or philosophical concern. By taking a more expansive approach to photographic presence, it shows how light matter is also inextricably linked to the social and political value of photographs and photographic practices, and central to how we understand, use, interpret and connect to photographs emotionally. This paper will consider Lucila Quieto’s series “Arqueologías de la ausencia” (Archaeology of absence). Photographic presence is a significant part of public culture in Argentina, where its implications often diverge from popular Anglo-European photography theory. This case study also underscores how ‘light matter’ must be understood as the product of specific political and cultural contexts.

Melissa is the Associate Dean (Research) at Monash University’s Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture. Melissa’s research explores the interdisciplinary qualities of photography and its movement across the domains of art, law, politics and history. The role of photographs in cross-cultural relations is another key area of research interest. The author of *Photography, truth and reconciliation* (Bloomsbury, 2019); *Pacific exposures: photography and the Australia-Japan relationship* (with Robin Gester, ANU Press, 2018); *The language of light and dark: light and place in Australian photography* (McGill Queen’s UP and Power Publications, 2015); and *The burning mirror: photography in an ambivalent light* (ASP, 2008); and co-editor of *The culture of photography in public space* (with Anne Marsh and Daniel Palmer, Intellect and the University of Chicago Press, 2015); and *Photography and its publics* (with Edward Welch, Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

**On optics and algorithms: photography in the age of AI synthesized technology and the truth apocalypse**  
**Dr Sara Oscar** University of Technology Sydney

The ‘deep fake’ is a rising phenomenon in photographic practices, which uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) synthesis technology, or algorithms, to create images without the need for a lens or light. These ‘lens-less’ images have the capacity to create highly realistic simulations of everything from cats, or an ageing face, to a naked body. The media responses to such use of AI technology is cautionary, especially in regard to violence against women and geo-politics in an era of post-truth and fake news. What is at stake here is the relationship between seeing and believing. But these possibilities are not without their historical antecedents in photography’s 150-year history of image fabrication, from Henry Peach Robinson’s Victorian composite photographs, or the mainstream proliferation of fake spirit photographs in the 1920s to Frank Hurley’s World War I montage photographs of the battle field. Photography has consistently illustrated the tenuous connection between reality and fiction, as well as the investment culture has placed in vision as the dominant form of knowledge acquisition. This paper argues that the fear of losing sensorial certitude is misplaced. Instead it proposes a new language with which to discuss the counterfactual, conditional photograph and encounters with possibility, rather than plausibility.

Sara is lecturer in photography at the University of Technology, Sydney. She works in the medium of photography as a way of investigating the mediums complex relationship to the past and its narration. She takes the archive as a starting point for her practice, and employs strategies of appropriation and digital collage to play upon the subject of her works. Her research focuses on theories of prosthetic memory and recently, considers the impact of the non-human and extinction in photography. Sara has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions at museums and galleries around Australia including: State Library NSW; Monash Gallery of Art, Melbourne; Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne; the Palimpsest Biennial, Mildura; Sutton Projects, Melbourne; Next Wave Festival, Melbourne; and Artspace, Sydney. Her work is published in *Philosophy of Photography* and held in major institutions and collections. Sara holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts, Sydney College of the Arts, and doctorate in Visual Arts from University of Sydney.

**Socially latent images: Eva and Franco Mattes’ explorations of personal photography**  
**Dr Kate Warren** Australian National University

While the move from analogue to digital did not result in ‘the death of photography’ as predicted by many in the 1980s and 1990s, the contemporary ubiquity of digital, networked photographic devices has nonetheless changed many aspects of our daily relationships to photography. The instantaneousness and sheer ease of taking and sharing multitudes of photographs today has shifted our understanding of ideas around latency and the vernacular in photography. Along with other theorists, Sean Cubitt argues digital imaging creates a new phenomenon of latency. That is, “the time it takes a camera to migrate the image from chip to memory, the period when the camera is ‘latent’” (“The Latent Image”, *International Journal of the Image*, 2011). However, this camera-based latency is ever decreasing as algorithmic processing powers increase. Perhaps more significantly, the photographer’s lived experience of latency and its relationship to their personal photographs has been transformed. In the age of networked photo sharing, we might consider the phenomenon of the socially latent image, or in other words, the unshared photograph. This paper considers the work of Italian artists Eva and Franco Mattes (aka 0100101110101101.org), whose recent projects have pushed the aesthetic, legal and moral boundaries of working with other people’s personal photographs. Their highly disconcerting projects are conduits for understanding and reckoning with social media’s impact on perceptions of authenticity, authorship and privacy – in relation to photography and beyond.

Kate is a Lecturer in Art History and Curatorship in the Centre for Art History and Art Theory, Australian National University, Canberra. She is an art historian, writer and curator, with expertise in modern and contemporary Australian and international art. Kate received her doctorate in Art History from Monash University. Her research areas include: film; photography; video and new media art; creative research practices; and arts writing and criticism. Kate has published extensively in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*; *emaj: Online Journal of Art*; *Senses of Cinema*; *Persona Studies*; *History of Photography*; *Discipline*; and *Objektiv*; and is co-editor of *Peephole Journal*, an online journal dedicated to creative film criticism. Kate has curated exhibitions for the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and Channels Video Art Festival.