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Eva & Franco Mattes / Human-in-the-loop

May 28th till August 8th, 2021

Every internet user consciously or unconsciously participates in the spread of ideologies. How, demonstrates the solo exhibition *Human-in-the-loop* by the artist duo Eva & Franco Mattes at the Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden. The Kunstverein is once again representing the Hessian state capital as a partner project of the international Triennial *RAY Fotografieprojekte Frankfurt/RheinMain*, which unites outstanding positions in contemporary photography.

Eva & Franco Mattes' installations grapple with the effects of technology on our daily lives. They examine the function and distribution of photographs that we regularly reveal on social networks, and that constantly inundate us online. What we see affects how we form our worldview, and the images we view are increasingly controlled by invisible mechanisms. On the basis that the Internet is not a free, utopian place, but a more and more centralized, corporatized and monitored system, the artists make visible the underlying infrastructure and the people who work within it. With a good dose of black humor, they sensitize our perception to these dynamics. The starting point of the works is an intensive personal exchange with the people who work for large Internet companies. Based on these individual feedbacks, political and ethical questions surface in the Mattes' practice with regard to the handling of media images. Due to the ambiguous separation of private and public, Internet users do not only receive media, but also broadcast data with a vast reach that disseminates systems of social norms right up to the strengthening of ideologies. The first solo show by the artist duo in Germany combines new productions with works from the last five years.

About the artists /

Eva & Franco Mattes (both *1976 in Italy, live and work in New York) have been working together since 1995. Past solo exhibition venues include Fotomuseum Winterthur (2021), Careof, Milan (2020), Fondation PHI, Montreal (2019), Team Gallery, Los Angeles (2019). Their works are held in the permanent collections of SFMOMA in San Francisco, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the X Museum in Beijing.

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About the works /

Can data ever really be deleted? From our hard drives? From the Internet? From our memories? The installation **What Has Been Seen** (2017) is based on the LOLcat meme *What Has Been Seen Cannot Be Unseen*, an Internet axiom that refers to the mental image that you can no longer erase from memory after having seen a horrifying or unsettling video or photo. By contrast, LOLcat memes – humorous cat images with short captions and messages – could not look more harmless or entertaining, and few things are as popular on social-media platforms as cat content.

A frequently asked question in online search engines is whether data on hard drives can be destroyed by putting them in a microwave. Many consider this a modern myth, as to date no scientific consensus has been achieved on this issue. In their installation, Eva & Franco Mattes therefore combine apparently different Internet phenomena that address the question of whether information can be irrevocably erased – be it from our hard drives or from our memories.

Today, our private photographs are in constant circulation – on social-media platforms, in messenger services, and on so-called data-clouds. An immense technical infrastructure is required for this and normally it remains just as invisible to us as the traces that we leave on the Internet each day. **Personal Photographs, September 2015** (2021) shows us what otherwise feels like an immaterial, not visibly manifest digital connection to the rest of the world: A network of cable trays fills the room, and the intertwined cables wind their way through the exhibition space showing data transfer and data management. Inside the colored cables, all the private photos that Eva & Franco Mattes took in September 2015 move back and forth between two microcomputers, invisible to us. These photographs remain hidden in the data flow and yet are always there, like the many millions of images on the Internet and on private devices which, once created, often remain unseen. Today, the vast majority of photographs no longer exists in the form of prints that have been hung on a wall or are reproduced in a book, but as omnipresent files that are transferred incessantly from one device to another, from one data center to another. In this sense, the installation is a representation of contemporary photography in its most common form.

My Little Big Data (2017) opens up a somehow dystopian and yet already existing world of surveillance. In the video installation, pop-cultural sci-fi references meld with a presentation of current methods for online data profiling and private photos with abstract graphs that, despite their alarming content, exert a strong visual and voyeuristic attraction. DIY data investigator Vladan Joler, whom Eva & Franco Mattes entrusted with their entire email archive of 13 years as well as several months of their browsing history, takes us into the very



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personal cosmos of the artist duo by reconstructing their digital portrait from their data and metadata. The 24-minute video essay highlights the immense wealth of information gathered, which offers us frequently intimate insights into the private life of the two. Office carpeting has been laid in front of the video projection; it consists of individual carpet tiles in 12 different grey tones and is a physical manifestation of one of the graphs in the video that uses grey squares to analyze the intensity of email communication by the artist duo over the course of a whole year.

Each day, a new immeasurable flood of images is uploaded and shared. They include much objectionable, violent or pornographic content. Which images we get shown on social media often depends on strict, albeit secret corporate guidelines. So-called content moderators work on behalf of major Internet platforms to decide on how appropriate the shared images are. In most cases, the moderators do not know on behalf of which company they are working. The series **Abuse Standards Violations** (2016-2021) presents corporate guidelines with training examples that were leaked to Eva & Franco Mattes. These guidelines form a kind of layer of insulation around the hermetically sealed social-media worlds, functioning as filters that only admit selected content. Moderators thus have to classify images using categories such as CLEAN and OK TO SHOW or INAPPROPRIATE. "Safe" content may be "art" or "celebrity gossip", whereas images are filtered out as "inappropriate" if they show "violence", "politics" or "controversial social issues". The work gives an insight into the world of moral criteria applied by Internet giants which, while remaining invisible to most Internet users, determines what is permitted and what is forbidden on their respective platforms.

In 2000, a popular website advertised DIY instructions to create so-called *Bonsai cats*. The idea was to constraint the animals for several months in tight glass jars until they take the shape of the container. Animal rights activists protested, petitions were submitted, and even the FBI launched an investigation into cruelty to animals. Although the website was quickly revealed to be a hoax by a group of students, who faked the photos of the cats in the glass containers, you can still find images and emails objecting to the cruelty online. Stories like this constantly circulate on the Net, often spreading virally without any filtering, however improbable they may seem to be. Masses of them are shared as urban legends, modern myths or fake news without being checked, and they develop a life of their own, as a result of which they can strongly influence private, social and political opinions and views. So-called cat content, which spread incredibly fast on the Internet, showed at an early point in time how information can go viral. It is the sweet, innocent and naïve gene that has mutated into all manner of different shapes, including the most recent use of memes by right-wing extremists for propaganda purposes.

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Eva & Franco Mattes take such Internet phenomena and transpose them into the object-based world of the exhibition space, where they immediately provide food for photographs that in turn become part of the virtual data network – like their installation **Bonsai Kitten** (2021) at the Nassauischer Kunstverein.

Nostalgia (2021) is a new, site-specific production which further advances Personal Photographs, forming a sounding board between Eva & Franco Mattes' and the simultaneous exhibition by David Horvitz, *Follow Fluxus* fellow in 2020 and, coincidentally, a long-standing friend of the Mattes. Directly beneath the exhibition spaces on the upper floor housing the David Horvitz show, his private photos of May 3, 2021 circulate in yellow cable trays running continuously through the circular sculpture. The photographs remain unseen in a double sense: On site, they remain inside the cabling and thus concealed from viewers' eyes, and David Horvitz himself deleted them from his private smartphone and his cloud account. They now only exist within this sculpture. The sulfur yellow is inspired by data centers, where the color is frequently associated with moving goods and data.

In spring 2020 Eva & Franco Mattes posted an online call for submissions, seeking a person who would sell them her or his private smartphone along with all the photos and videos contained therein. They thus linked up with young Briton Hannah, whose mobile they bought for 1,000 dollars, with the permission of using all of its content. The upshot is an uncensored, non-judgmental and intimate portrait. To make **Hannah Uncut**, all 1,276 photos, screenshots and videos from an eight-month period were turned into a 52-minute slideshow along with the soundtrack, which is made up of a single song (*Cosmic Dancer* by T. Rex). The different duration of each image emulates the speed at which we swipe through the image galleries on our smartphones. The images present Hannah's private life in chronological sequence, and are at the same time a mirror held up to the digital developments and trends of the last decade. The insight into Hannah's life invariably turns us viewers into voyeurs and encourages us to reflect on the public digital life we now lead on the Internet. The willingness of the owner of the mobile to sell the unprocessed documentation of her personal life cleverly reflects social media platforms' terms and conditions in which users assume all liability for the content of images they post but waive all rights to the shots.



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Program /

The events take place in accordance with the Covid-19 containment measures ordinance valid at that time. Current information can be found at www.kunstverein-wiesbaden.de.

SUNTALK /

Get off the couch!
Guided tour through the current exhibitions
Sundays, 3 pm

ESPRESSO /

Short and strong!
Short guided tour and espresso
Tuesdays, 12.45 am to 1.15 pm

SPRITZ /

Art, drinks and more!
Thursdays, 6 to 8 pm

KIDS INSIDE /

For all / with Titus Grab or Sarah Kottenbrink
Last Saturday of the month, 11 am to 1 pm
May 29th, 2021
June 26th, 2021

WILHELMS WANNE /

Interactive tour / From 8-88 years
Second Saturday of the month, 3 to 5 pm
June 12th, 2021
July 10th, 2021

CURATOR'S TOUR /

With Janine Drewes
27th of June, 2021, 3 pm

FINISSAGE /

Sunday, August 8th, 2021, 3 to 6 pm

Thank you for your interest. For further information, we are available by phone or e-mail.

Press contact /

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+49 611 301136 / presse@kunstverein-wiesbaden.de

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RAY 2021 /

The exhibition is a Partner Project of the international photography Triennial **RAY 2021**. All information and further exhibitions are available at www.ray2021.de

The opening ceremonies as well as the RAY Festival will be adapted to the current restrictions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and details are still to be announced.

RAY 2021 Exhibition Period

June 3rd to September 12th, 2021

RAY 2021 Opening Press Conference

Wednesday, June 2nd, 2021, 11 am

RAY 2021 is made possible by /



The exhibition is made possible by the Cultural Office of the State Capital of Wiesbaden, the Hessian Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and the Arts, the SV SparkassenVersicherung and the Nassauische Sparkasse.



The Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden is permanently institutionally supported by the Cultural Office of the Capital City of Wiesbaden.



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Press Images /

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Eva & Franco Mattes

Personal Photographs, September 2015
2021

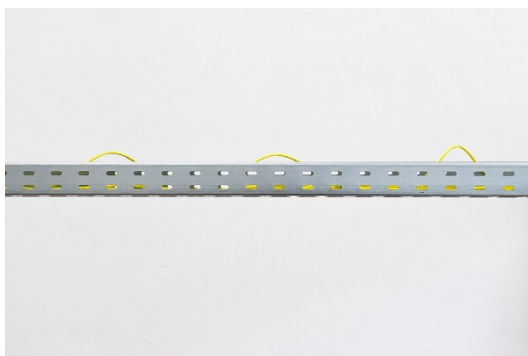
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Installation view Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden, 2021, photo: Janine Drewes



Eva & Franco Mattes

Personal Photographs, September 2015
2021

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Installation view Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden, 2021, photo: Janine Drewes



Eva & Franco Mattes

Personal Photographs, September 2015
2021

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Installation view Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden, 2021, photo: Janine Drewes

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Eva & Franco Mattes

What Has Been Seen
2017

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Installation view Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden, 2021, photo: Janine Drewes



Eva & Franco Mattes

Abuse Standards Violations
2016–2021

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Installation view Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden, 2021, photo: Janine Drewes



Eva & Franco Mattes

Bonsai Kitten
2021

© and Courtesy: Eva & Franco Mattes
Installation view Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden, 2021, photo: Janine Drewes

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**Eva & Franco Mattes
with David Horvitz**

Nostalgia, May 3, 2021

© and Courtesy: Eva & Franco Mattes
Installation view Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden, 2021, photo: Janine Drewes

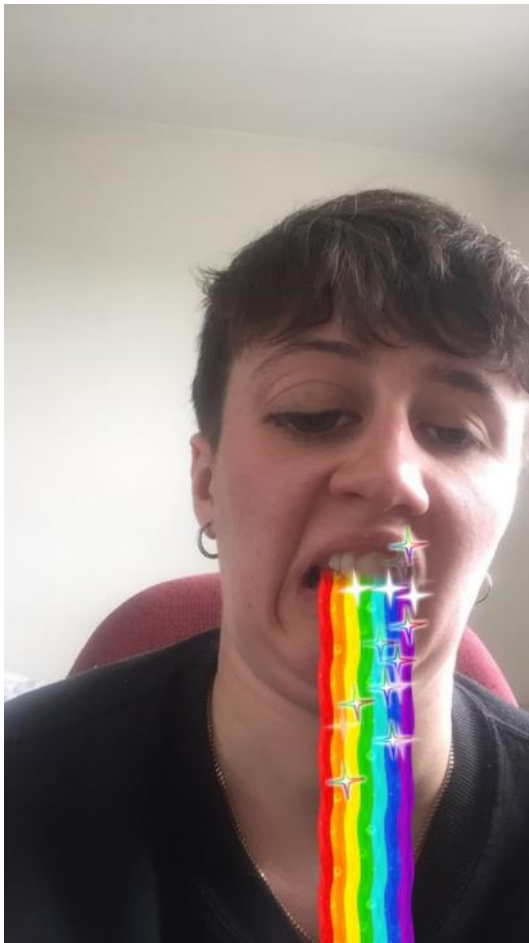


Eva & Franco Mattes

Hannah Uncut
2021

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Fotomuseum Winterthur

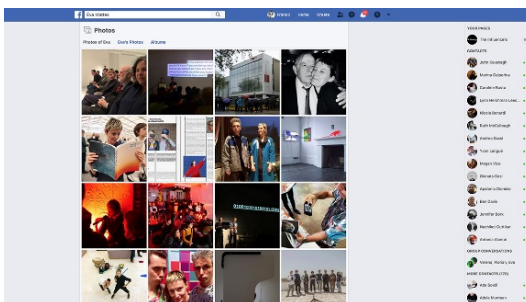
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Eva & Franco Mattes

Hannah Uncut
2021

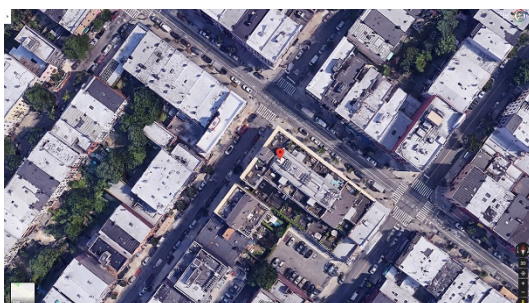
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Fotomuseum Winterthur



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My Little Big Data
2019, Screenshot

© and Courtesy: Eva & Franco Mattes



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My Little Big Data
2019, Screenshot

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