

GROUP EXHIBITION

LIFE CAPTURED STILL

LONDON ELY HOUSE

06 Feb 2020 - 31 Mar 2020



The first major posthumous exhibition of Harun Farocki's work in the UK will show his seminal video and new media art installations alongside the work of Hito Steyerl.

Harun Farocki and Hito Steyerl are bound by a special form of collaboration, beyond any space-time framework. Though they belong to quite different generations they share a stubborn critical attitude that dismantles the pervasive biopolitical regimes of late capitalism. When there is no hope for a better world their images open up a crack in the system of art, no matter how discredited it might be. Call it the pragmatism of the hopeless.

Their production unfolds in a world that accepts war and inequalities as basic conditions for a life style heavily dependent on asymmetrical realities. By bringing them together we get a unique opportunity to transcend their thematic obsessions and look into the details of a sounding critique. – Carles Guerra, 2020

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac's upcoming London exhibition will bring together formative video installations by the artists Harun Farocki and Hito Steyerl, curated by Antje Ehmman and Carles Guerra, with exhibition architecture by Luis Feduchi.

We invite the audience to immerse themselves in the works of Harun Farocki and Hito Steyerl ... To spend time with and to explore the artists' questions and doubts, their curiosities and anxieties; their investigations into the worlds between the analogue and the digital, between human labour and the labour of machines, between the worlds of capitalist exploitation and financial accumulation. – Antje Ehmman, 2020

The first major UK exhibition of Harun Farocki's work in over a decade, *Life Captured Still* will explore the natural and multidimensional convergences his practice shares with the illuminating and provocative work of Hito Steyerl, who has been described by ArtReview as 'the world's most powerful voice of conscience'. Presented together for the first time, the exhibition will highlight the thematic similarities and contextual differences that resonate across both artists' oeuvres.

Revered as pioneers in the fields of documentary video and new media art across two generations, the artists' expansive films interrogate organisational power structures, divisions of labour and the inescapable and shifting roles of the images that permeate contemporary society.

Harun Farocki and Hito Steyerl share an art practice that is characterised by both writing and media work. They both deal obsessively with image regimes and politics ... And while addressing gravely serious topics, there remains an underlying humour to their games ... Considering the natural affinity between the two artists, a show of this nature is long overdue. – Antje Ehmman, 2020

The exhibition will present Steyerl's renowned films, *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007), examining the ways in which images circulate

beyond their original purposes, accumulating fictional meanings and becoming lost to their original subjects. Amassing an eclectic array of sources, Steyerl's films combine unlikely findings from her ongoing research practice with fragments of found footage to highlight and build upon the central themes and narratives. Both *November* and *Lovely Andrea* are linked to the artist's teenage friend, Andrea Wolf. Having joined the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), Wolf was killed by Turkish police following her arrest in northern Iraq in 1998, and her body disappeared without a trace. Wolf's image has since become an icon of martyrdom, displayed on posters at Kurdish protests, posters which Steyerl draws upon in her film to consider the ongoing transformation(s) of both Wolf the person, and Wolf the image: the fictional image of a character that circulates and transforms amongst the masses.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, Farocki's early video work, *Two Paths* (1966) also uses the camera as a tool for the dissection of an image: roaming close-up shots of a drawing deconstruct the scene it presents – a religious allegory for 'right' and 'wrong' – alluding to the subjective, perspective-reliant nature of meaning and the instructional power of the image. Underscored by rhymes, Farocki's methodological approach to the camera in this short video functions as a precursor to his later essay films and highlights the enduring themes at the heart of the artist's practice.

Life Captured Still will also include the installation and ongoing workshop, *Labour in a Single Shot* (2011–), a collaboration between the late Farocki and his partner, curator Antje Ehmann. Working as a team of like-minded producers, Farocki and Ehmann have collaborated on a number of artistic and curatorial projects since the late 1990s. For this last collaboration, the pair returned to the beginning of film history. Adopting the straightforward objectivity of early cinema, with reference to the Lumière brothers', *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* (1895), a single-take film that features workers leaving a factory in Lyon, the extensive project uses the methodology of the single camera shot to explore the subject of labour. Over the course of four years, they travelled to fifteen major cities where they produced over four hundred short films with local video artists and filmmakers. The project recently resumed, producing more than one hundred additional films over the past three years. These films show forms of work that are paid and unpaid, material and immaterial, traditional and brand-new, industrial and pre-industrial. They visualise work in the 21st century from a double perspective: as an individual act, but set in the midst of collective constraints. Conceived as a symbolic editing table, the project invites the spectator to contribute their own personal film, creating a surprising montage of social histories, a highly organised, global encyclopaedia, and a condensed reading of reality. Read more about the project [here](#).

Further delving into the notion of labour, and in direct homage to the Lumière brothers, Farocki's 2006 installation, *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* will be presented as an immersive and totalising experience alongside *Comparison via a Third* (2007), *The Silver and the Cross* (2010) and the large installation *Re-Pouring* (2010). In cinematography, perception and concept diverge; Farocki plays on this by offering multiple beginnings, ranging from a single screen to a twelve-monitor work that simultaneously presents scenes of workers leaving a factory drawn from different periods of twentieth-century film history. Farocki multiplies the exits and, in turn, the worlds of labour, transforming the workers into actors who play themselves. Utilising the tools and methodologies of cinema to explore the limits and possibilities of the medium itself, *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* highlights and exemplifies the concerns shared by both artists with the potential to simultaneously identify, examine and resist the frameworks of the modern political terrain and structural organisation that governs everyday life.

The work structure synchronizes the workers, the factory gates group them, and this process of compression produces the image of a work force. As may be realized or brought to mind by the portrayal, the people passing through the gates evidently have something fundamental in common. Images are closely related to concepts, thus this film has become a rhetorical figure. – **Harun Farocki, 2002**

A perfect grammar of cinema's spatial turn ... the staging of labour precedes commodity infatuation. – **Hito Steyerl, 2014**

Steyerl's immersive three-channel installation, *The Tower* (2015/2016) extends Farocki's concerns with the portrayal of labour-as-image to explore the role of digital technologies in the dissemination of information itself. Taking over and transforming one of the upstairs exhibition spaces, the work plunges visitors into a sea of red walls and carpet, confronting them with works in which the movement of digital information forms an intrinsic part of the subject matter and making of the videos themselves. Loosely centered on a Ukrainian video company – whose studio is based on a border rife with conflict and who once designed a shooting game set in the Tower of Babel – the work considers the company's physical and technological position amidst a worldwide network of similar organisations. Oscillating between region and subject-matter (both real and virtual), Steyerl's work exists at the intersection between the digitally-constructed image and the image of lived experience and considers the apparent accessibility of immaterial concepts in contemporary society.

In a future, better life, we will sit together at some beach and will observe the irregularity of the seas' swell. – **Antje Ehmann, 2020**