

***Punctum***

***Reflections on Photography***

26 July – 21 September 2014

**Press conference: Fr, 25 July 2014, 12.30 pm**

Opening: Fr, 25 July 2014, 8 pm

Curated by Séamus Kealy

*I was overcome with an 'ontological' desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was 'in itself' ...*  
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

*Punctum* is an exhibition exploring the nature of photography today. Consisting of fifty photographs and artworks chosen by artists, curators and writers, and including a series of lectures and a publication, *Punctum* takes its cue from the term “punctum” coined by Roland Barthes in his final book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Barthes uses this term as a linguistic device to examine the meaning of photography. The term refers, for example, to a striking detail in the photograph that captivates or “wounds” the viewer, and completes the photograph as an object of reflection. Barthes goes much further than this, and ascribes a number of phenomenological considerations within the sphere of meaning that is “punctum.”

This exhibition takes this concept and term of “punctum” as a starting point for invited participants to select photographs that, for each of them, are emblematic of “punctum,” given today’s context for photography and our constant grappling with aesthetics. Accompanying each chosen photograph is a short text to complement and elucidate their decision. The backdrop to this project are ongoing ontological considerations for photography, especially now, long after its digitization and further universalization. Photography has always been a problematic medium, as a so-called indexical form, as a replacer of memory, as a manipulated device, as an instrument of surveillance, control and militarism, and even as an often-disputed art form. With photography’s evolution into the digital age, these problematics have arguably multiplied. Author Geoff Dyer, for example, argues that digital photography “seems devoid of any qualities of past time,” that it itself no longer holds the qualities that Barthes would have ascribed to it. According to Barthes, the photograph is the “living image of a dead thing” and thus has something of “resurrection” to it. Would that sentiment hold today, when the photograph has become engulfed within the constant, ever-changing and unfixed flow of images? Would we today agree to refer to Barthes’ terms such as the “profound madness,” “shared hallucination,” or “the Intractable” as the elemental forms of a photograph? Today, we might ask, what is its ontological status?

Accompanying this exhibition is a lecture series on topical subjects of photography today. A publication co-produced with Fotohof *edition* is presented at the end of the exhibition. Lastly, a collaborative public response to *Punctum* is mounted during the exhibition’s duration. Visit [instagram.com/salzbuergerkunstverein](https://www.instagram.com/salzbuergerkunstverein) to participate.

**Lecture dates:**

Saturday, 26 July 2014, 4–6 pm

Boris Groys, Ruth Horak, Friedrich Tietjen

Saturday, 20 September 2014, 5–7 pm

Séamus Kealy, Francis McKee, Esther Ruelfs

& Catalog presentation *Punctum*

Participants/Authors & Artists/Photographers:

Hildegund Amanshauser (AT) – Ines Doujak (AT)

Kader Attia (F) – Kader Attia

Geoffrey Batchen (NZ) – Alison Rossiter (USA)

Sabine Bitter/Helmut Weber (AT) – Sabine Bitter/Helmut Weber

Marc De Blicq (BE) – Team of Albrecht Meydenbauer (DE)

Iñaki Bonillas (MX) – Iñaki Bonillas

Adam Budak (PL) – unknown

Duncan Campbell (IE) – Willie Doherty (IE)

Philippe van Cauteren (BE) – unknown

Vaari Claffey (IE) – Paul Allen (USA)

Moyra Davey (CA) – Moyra Davey

Geoff Dyer (GB) – Oscar de Marcos (E)

Antje Ehmann (DE) – Antje Ehmann

Silvia Eiblmayr (AT) – Francesca Woodman (USA)

Sabine Folie (AT) – Klaus Scherübel (AT)

Maria Fusco (GB) – unknown

Gauri Gill (IND) – Gauri Gill

Felix Gmelin (DE/SE) – Felix Gmelin

Barbad Golshiri (IR) – Barbad Golshiri

Boris Groys (RUS) – Natalia Nikitin (RUS)

Eva Grubinger (AT) – Ed van der Elsken (NL)

Karin Hanssen (BE) – unknown

Martin Herbert (GB) – August Sander (DE)

Matthias Herrmann (AT) – Matthias Herrmann

Antonia Hirsch (DE) – unknown

Martin Hochleitner (AT) – Rainer Iglar (AT)

Ruth Horak (AT) – Tatiana Lecomte (F)

Geoffrey James (CA) – Geoffrey James

Anna Jermolaewa (RUS/AT) – Anna Jermolaewa

Simone Kappeler (CH) – Simone Kappeler

Eva Kotátková (CS) – Eva Kotátková

Suzanne Lafont (F) – Suzanne Lafont

Wilfried Lentz (NL) – Carleton Watkins (USA)

Declan Long (IE) – Tom Wood (IE)

Ken Lum (CA) – Ken Lum

Anja Manfredi (AT) – Anja Manfredi  
Francis McKee (IE) – Pablo Guardiola (PR)  
Rabih Mroué (RL) – unknown  
Doina Popescu (CA) – Spring Hurlbut (CA)  
Barbara Probst (DE) – Andreas Wutz (DE)  
Meggy Rustamova (GE/BE) – unknown  
Mark Sealy (GB) – Robert Lebeck (DE)  
Corin Sworn (GB) – unknown  
Friedrich Tietjen (DE) – unknown  
Walker & Walker (IE) - Walker & Walker  
Scott Watson (CA) / Carlo Gentile (IT)  
Peter Weibel (AT) – Hiroshi Sugimoto (J)  
Louwrien Wijers (NL) – Cathrien van Ommen (NL)  
Paolo Woods (NL/CA) – Paolo Woods  
Tobias Zielony (DE) – Seiichi Furuya (J)

For further details & photo material please contact:

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**Salzburger Kunstverein**

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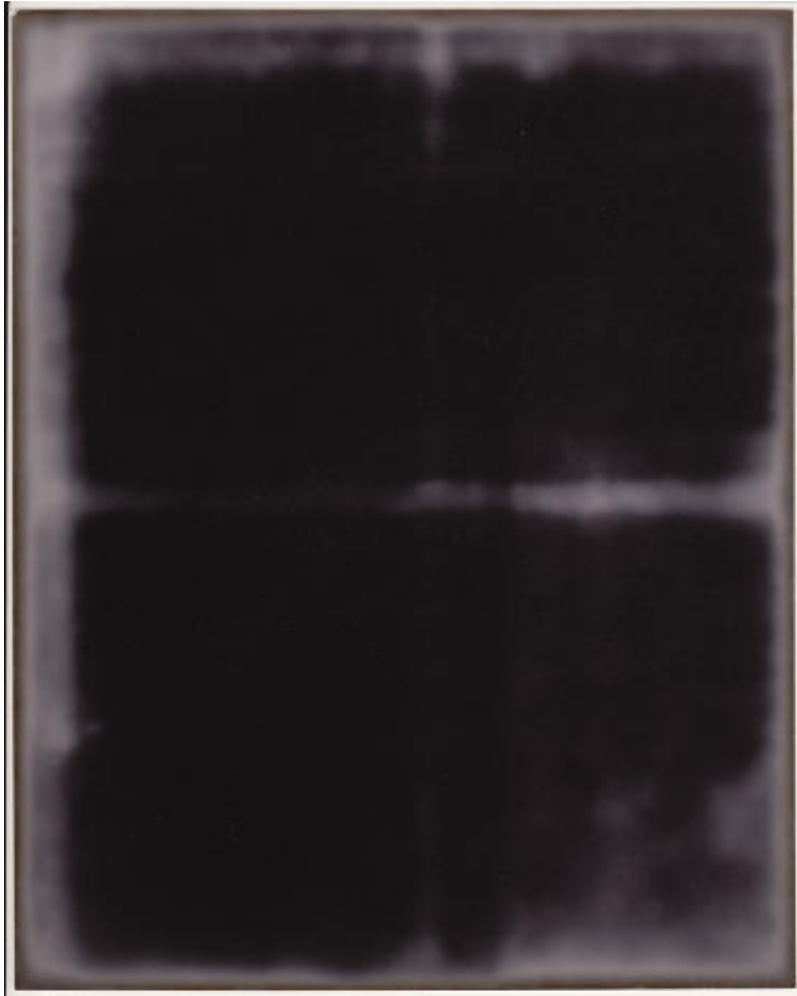
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Hours exhibition: Tue-Sun 12 – 7pm

Hours Café Cult: Mon-Fr 9 am – 11 pm



**Alison Rossiter**, *Velox T4, expiry date October 1, 1940*, 2008, unique photographic print, 25,3 x 20,2 cm, courtesy of Geoffrey Batchen, New Zealand (selected by Geoffrey Batchen)

### **Rossiter's Lament**

Geoffrey Batchen

*Punctum* is perhaps one of the most misunderstood words in the photographic lexicon. Every student of Barthes's writing can repeat on autopilot that *punctum* is a detail in a photograph that pricks or bruises the individual viewer, the very opposite of the dull, coded conventions of a photograph's *studium*. But many of those students overlook the complexity of the terms, and especially of the interdependent relationship between the two.

Barthes, for example, points out that the *punctum* obeys a supplementary logic; "it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*." The consequences of this exchange are played out in the second half of *Camera Lucida*, when Barthes describes the infamous Winter Garden Photograph of his mother as a little girl. He tells us that this is the photograph that most powerfully consumes him with grief, but then refuses to reproduce it—because for us it would be nothing but *studium*. It seems the same photograph can induce both *punctum* and *studium*; the two entities turn out to be interchangeable and indistinguishable.

Based on this insight, Barthes finds himself nominating another *punctum* that for him lies at the heart of every photograph—Time. He points to photography's activation of an anterior future tense peculiar to itself, a temporal laceration of our mortality enacted every time a photograph is taken or looked upon. For Barthes this everyday sublime represents a revolution in human consciousness. Offering a suspension of the distinction between life and death, photography is a phenomenon that pricks all of us.

How then to represent the multifaceted character of *punctum* in a single photograph, an exercise that would seem to be antithetical to Barthes's own project? I chose a photograph by the American artist Alison Rossiter under the series title *Lament*. A shiny rectangle of arbitrarily-induced monochrome tones on a two-dimensional surface, it is one of many such pictures this artist has produced by developing and then fixing a sheet of expired photographic paper. You might say that it is a photograph comprised of nothing, of nothing but its own *photographicness*. This particular one, inscribed *Velox T4, expiry date October 1, 1940*, displays a Rothko-like grid of pale impressions on a dark ground, these being the chemical traces left behind by the wrapping paper that once protected it from light.

All surface and no depth, this is an elemental kind of photograph, embodying a unique, volatile, unpredictable relationship of light and chemistry, without recourse to cameras or any outside referent. By mounting this object in a frame, Rossiter presents photography as something to be looked at, not through, and to be made, not taken. In the context of the digital disintegration of the photographic medium, this is a photograph, she insists, that is not *of* something; it *is* something. Placed thus within the inverted commas of historical distance and candid self-reflection, photography is here freed from its traditional subservient role as a realist mode of representation and allowed instead to become a searing index of itself, to become an art of the Real. Conjuring duration rather than an instant in the past, it no longer subjects me to the prick of an anterior future. It reflects, not on my own imminent death, but on the death of photography in general. It is *punctum's punctum*.



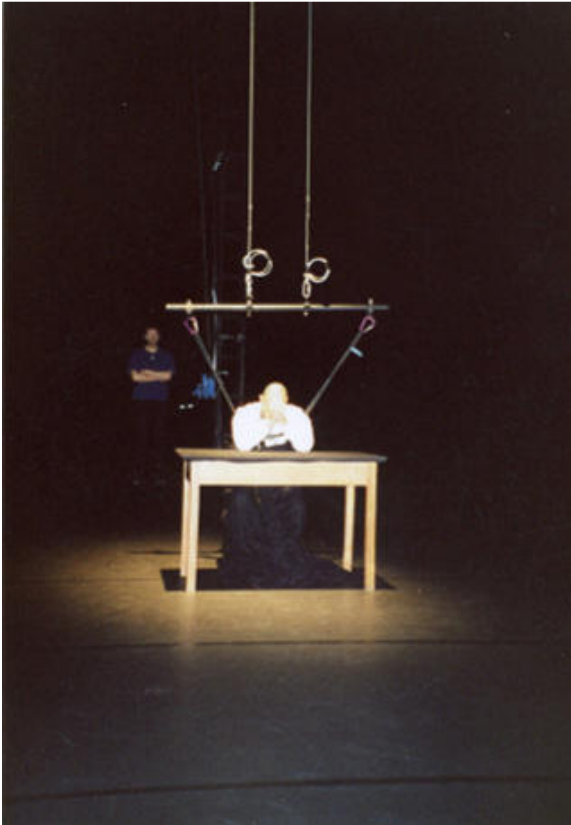
**Gauri Gill**, *Jogiyon ka Dera*, from the series „Notes from the Desert”, 1999-2010, baryt paper, 40 x 30 cm, © Gauri Gill, courtesy of Gauri Gill (selected by Gauri Gill)



**Anna Jermolaewa**, *Untitled*, 2010/2014, 40 x 62 cm, courtesy of the artist (selected by Anna Jermolaewa)



**Spring Hurlbut**, *Devil II: James # 5*, 2008, pigment print, 72,4 x 82,6 cm, courtesy of Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto (selected by Doina Popescu)



**Natalia Nikitin**, *Dimitry Prigov*, 2002, 90 x 60 cm, Fine Art Print, courtesy of the artist  
(Performance of the Russian artist and poet Dmitry Prigov, Tanzquartier Wien, 2002; selected by Boris Groys)

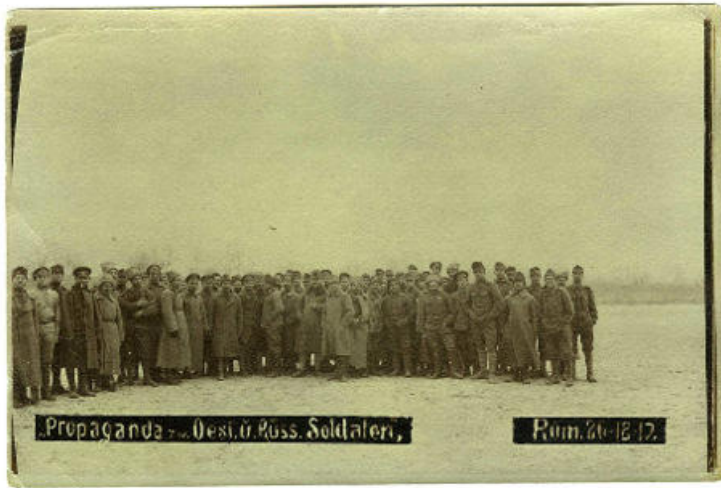


**Moyra Davey**, *Bella*, circa 1996-2014, collage, 30,2 x 30,4 cm, © Moyra Davey, courtesy of Moyra Davey and Murray Guy, New York (selected by Moyra Davey)



**Willi Doherty**, *Incident*, 1993, cibachrome on aluminum, 122 x 183 cm, courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (selected by Duncan Campbell)





**Anonym**, *Propaganda zw. Oest. u. Russ. Soldaten, Rum. 26-12-17*, 1917, 9,5 x 15 cm  
(selected by Friedrich Tietjen)



**Carleton Watkins**, *Section Grizzly Giant, Mariposa Grove, California*, 1861, albumen print, 19 x 11,5 cm,  
courtesy of private collection (selected by Wilfried Lentz)