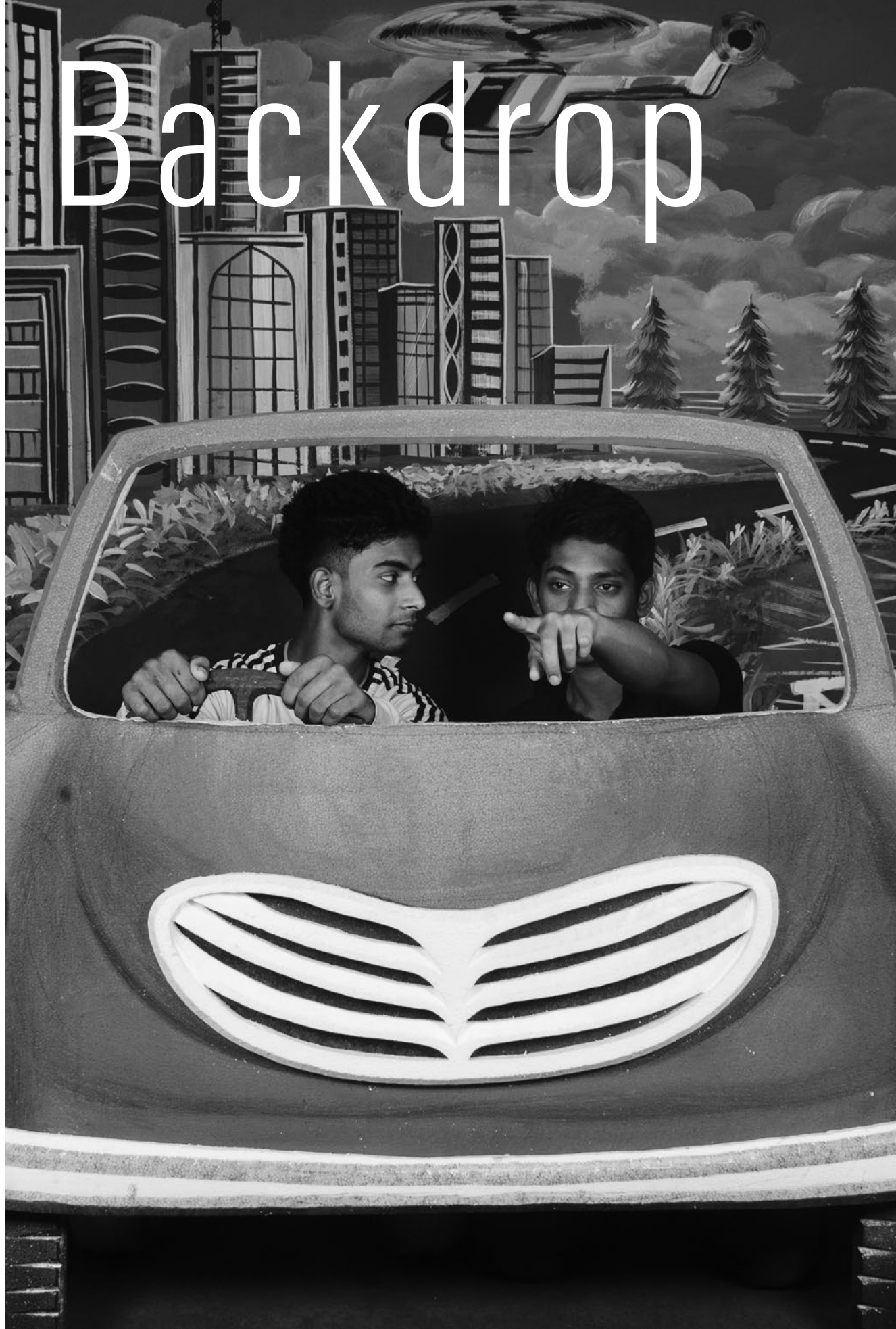


Iza Pevec / Emina Djukić / Ana Peraica / Christopher Pinney / Paolo S.H. Fevéro / Urška Savič /  
Noemie Goudal / Deasung Lee / Ojja Triška Stefanović / Jasna Jernejšek / Lenart Kučić / Caroline  
Molloy / Karin Becker / Helena Brečević / Helena Vogelsang / Janaki Somaiya / Ketaki Sheth /  
Bind / Hrair Sarkissian / Samsul Alam Helal /

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# Backdrop







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# More Than a Portrait

## Framing the Photograph as Sculpture and Video Animation

Karin Becker and Geska Helena Brečević

*“All the more shall this become a memory of the time you and your mother stood on a countryside road amid the agave fields and with the mountain range of Oaxaca in the background on one of countless journeys ...”*

*You are the image of a man standing on a countryside road.  
In the background there is the sea, a small bay, an old monastery and a wood.  
You were born one evening in August as a video recording.  
You were saved digitally, as zeros and ones on various hard drives and memory cards.  
The shapes, the colours, the background — all your components — were then put onto paper.  
You became a photograph.  
You are the image of a man standing on a countryside road in Croatia and you have been traced onto a block of wood in a workshop in southern Mexico.  
Contours have been jigsawed and a relief carved by hand, the sharp chisels gouging the soft cedar wood.  
You are the image of a man wearing worn-out jeans, a faded shirt with cut-off sleeves and a belt from the now disbanded People’s Army of Yugoslavia.  
Your shoes are guarachas, sandals of leather and latex from the mountains of Oaxaca.  
They are the only item connecting the content of the image with the place where it is being recreated.<sup>1</sup>*

In this essay we invoke the resurrection of the *fotoescultura*, a three-dimensional photographic portrait popular in rural Mexico in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it has been re-interpreted by Performing

<sup>1</sup> This quotation and others in this format throughout the text are from the film poem, *Dreaming the Memories of Now* (2018).

Pictures, a contemporary Swedish artist duo. The text unfolds through four narratives. There is, first, the history of the *fotoescultura* itself, telling of the rise and fall of this popular vernacular art. Second, the narrative of *Men that Fall*, an account of how this suite of works evolved prior to Performing Pictures’ encounter with the *fotoescultura*. Third is the story of the meeting between the two, and how a group of artisans in rural Mexico contributed to the ways that the *fotoescultura* and *Men that Fall* merged to become a distinct form of photographic portrait. The fourth narrative is a theoretical exploration into this intersection. Between the material aspects of a “traditional” vernacular art form and “new” media art, we identify a photographic aesthetic that shifts from seeing to physical engagement, and discuss how the frame and its *parergon* augment the photographic gaze, inspiring new incarnations of *Men that Fall*.



Artist Unknown. Fotoescultura c. 1930–1950, found in the thrift store Tingladography, in Oaxaca, 2013. Photo: Performing Pictures.

### The Rise and Fall of the Fotoescultura

The *fotoescultura* emerged as an augmented form of portraiture, commissioned by family members who supplied photographs that artisans in Mexico City converted into framed sculptural portraits for display on family altars. Beginning in the 1930s, these vernacular images were extremely popular in Mexico. The sculptures were often based on a frontal or three-quarter view photograph subtly coloured by hand. The face was then cut out and glued to a relief of the head and shoulders that had been carved from a single piece of red cedar or mahogany. Ornamentation was added—cloth, buttons, or bits of costume jewellery—and then panes of bevelled glass were mounted in an ornate frame. The art lay in the carving and embellishment of the portrait with its suggestion of volume and movement, the attention to minute details of dress and the execution of the frame.

*Fotoesculturas* were commissioned to celebrate life’s big events: a baptism, a first communion, a daughter’s fifteenth birthday (*quinceañera*), a son lost in war, weddings and funerals. On the family altar, together with the *santos* and other devotional objects,

and alongside the flowers and candles that accumulated there, the *fotoescultura* was more than a photograph. It was a tangible shrine to memory and testimony to the ongoing presence of the person in the lives of loved ones. Monica Garza describes how the *fotoescultura* recalls the visual imagery found within vernacular Mexican Catholicism (*religiosidad popular*), a more literal form of representation than found in Protestant religious practice. “The actual physical presence of spiritual figures is emphasized whenever possible in order to confirm the devotee’s faithful and personal relationship with these sacred beings.” (2002) Placed alongside the figures of saints and other icons, the *fotoescultura*, became a “secular santo” witnessing to the connection between the secular and the sacred in the home. (Garza, 2002)



Artist(s) Unknown. Fotoesculturas c. 1930–1950, on a shelf in the thrift store Tingladography, in Oaxaca, 2013. Photo: Performing Pictures.

As its popularity grew, the *fotoescultura* gave rise to a small industry, with production broken down into a series of steps carried out by a team of artisans. As with many vernacular forms, the *fotoescultura*’s spread led to its diversification beyond the sphere of the private and the domestic. The craze for films and dance bands created new idols, and *fotoescultura* production followed suit with relief-portraits of popular stars.

Yet tastes changed, and the imported paints and papers used in the process became unavailable or costly. Skilled carvers died or turned to carpentry. During the final years of the *fotoescultura*, most clients were recent immigrants who had moved from the pueblos. They usually ordered memorial portraits, as honouring the dead justified the expense. Their desire for these three-dimensional vernacular images had brought the *fotoescultura* back to its origins as a testimony to the life of a loved one.

The last *fotescultura* workshops, in the area of Donceles 99 in Mexico City, were severely damaged in the 1985 earthquake and



stopped production soon after. With them, the knowledge of how to make these sculptural photographic portraits died out.

The *fotoescultura* is missing from most histories of photography. Geoffrey Batchen, one of the few historians who mention this Mexican photographic tradition, refers to several factors to account for this exclusion from the museum and the academy: These portraits appealed primarily to the working class, the artisans who made them were anonymous and therefore “amateur,” and their production was collective and commercial. In Batchen’s words, the *fotoescultura* is a “parergon” of photography, the absent presence that determines the medium’s historical and physical identity. (Batchen, 2001, p. 59)

## Falling Men

Performing Pictures started creating portraits of men as full-figure responsive video installations in 2004, and over the years the two artists, Geska and Robert Brečević, have been developing an ever-growing catalogue of character depictions. The works have been exhibited in art galleries, shopping malls, libraries, commuter transit terminals, and in windows on pedestrian streets. In their earliest form, the *Men that Fall* bore the attributes of their professions, and appeared on large plasma screens, their movement and reflection shaped by sensors and micro-controllers.



Performing Pictures *Men that Fall (The Architect)* 2006.

The man on the screen is looking down, his gaze fixed at an empty spot in front of his feet. He remains still until approached by a random viewer. Alerted by this presence, the man slowly raises his gaze. As long as the spectator keeps a »safe« distance, the man retains eye contact, indefinitely. If the viewer walks away, the man reverts to his downcast gaze. One senses a certain melancholia in this relapse of a reaction.

If, on the other hand, the spectator moves closer—out of simple curiosity or in expectation that something else might happen—the previously static camera performs a swift inward movement, into

the image, towards the man. The hastily accelerated tracking shot conjures the impression of an intangible collision, an invisible force that pushes the man on the screen backwards. Without bending a single joint, without any sign of instinctive motion to fend off impact, he falls backward, stiff as a board. He remains on the ground, prone and stationary, until the viewer moves on. At which point another man appears on the screen, to repeat this ritual with the next spectator.

*Men that Fall* enacts the traditional man, standing proud and straight, and his response to the social and economic upheaval that challenges everything he thought was important to who he was, and what it meant to be a man. These are the men who, in Susan Faludi’s (1999) term and in these responsive video installations, have been *stiffed*.

## Resurrecting the Fotoescultura in Santa Ana Zegache

By 2013, Performing Pictures had been working off and on in southern Mexico for several years, often in collaboration with a group of artisans in rural Oaxaca – the *Talleres Comunitarios de Santa Ana, Zegache*. Moving freely from film or video to photography and sculpture, Geska and Robert were razing borders between the fixed and the fluid, botanizing amid the sacred arts of the rural Baroque and pursuing the tradition of Mexican *arte popular*. They had also been invited to do a retrospective of their decade-long work with *Men that Fall* at the Centro Fotográfico Manuel Álvarez Bravo (CFMAB) in Oaxaca. For this solo show, *Los Hombres Que Se Caen*, Geska and Robert returned to their falling men and decided to expand their numbers.

A couple of years earlier, on a visit to a small thrift store in Oaxaca, an odd photographic object had caught their eye. The object, a discoloured *fotoescultura*, captured their interest and set them on a search for its origins and histories. Geoffrey Batchen’s reference (initially all they could find) to the *fotoescultura*’s outsider non-history further triggered the artists’ fascination. The history of this tradition was difficult to trace given that it is usually regarded as inconsequential, popular “only” among the working class of Mexico. The exception were a few texts by Monica Garza (1998, 2000, 2002) and Pamela Scheinman (1996, 2000), based on their own investigations, interviews and an exhibit of these artefacts. Performing Pictures followed these accounts to archives and sources at Centro de Imagen, Museo del Estanquillo and elsewhere and gradually tracked down more examples. They added their own empirical studies of materials and methods, trying out different papers and techniques for hand-colouring the photographs.

They returned with this information and examples of the *fotoesculturas* to Talleres Comunitarios in Santa Ana to ask if they were interested in collaborating on the reconstruction of

this extinct form of popular art. The artisans were positive, and their skills made an excellent fit with the techniques involved in the work. They were experts in making frames and altarpieces, carving and repairing wooden religious sculptures while applying the traditional techniques of gilding and *al fresco* painting.



Fotoesculturas in production in Santa Ana, Zegache. Photo: Performing Pictures.

The production process in Santa Ana was quite similar to that of the old workshops in Mexico City, with work divided among those who had the required skills. The Zegache artisans carved the frames and chiselled and painted the figures, and Performing Pictures provided the photographs, printed on paper that Robert and Geska then cut and moulded to fit onto the sculptures. Nine full-figure portraits were produced, based on new video material shot of friends in Croatia, Iceland and Mexico. Parallel with the *fotoesculturas*, Performing Pictures gathered material for *Dreaming the Memories of Now*, a poetic documentary film with fictional elements depicting in detail the process of cutting the photographs and outlining the figures onto the wood, then carving each one before fitting the photograph over the figure and painting it.



Erick, one of the artisans, carves his own portrait, a “metaportrait” from the film, transforming himself into one of the Men that Falls. Photo: Performing Pictures.

The resulting suite of *Men that Fall* is a collection of photographic objects, including *fotoesculturas*, still images and responsive video works spanning 12 years of artistic work. The *fotoesculturas* are spawned from photographic fragments of a specific movement: that of falling to the ground as stiffly as possible. The video works on the other hand, are the opposite of stasis, restating the old saws: *panta rei*, what comes down must have once gone up. The reverberation between static objects and film defines a canonization of revelation and fall, a choreography bridging the sanctified and the vernacular, juxtaposing movement and stasis and combining it with a sculptural technique that gives rise to a sensation of the uncanny.





*You are the image of a man standing amid piles of sand at a dump.  
 ...  
 The fronts of your feet are angled up to 45 degrees.  
 You are the figure of a man standing on his heels.  
 Particular attention is paid to the toes. They stick out as if the sandals  
 were too small.  
 ...  
 Edges of a frame keep you from overflowing into the surrounding  
 reality.  
 You are the image of a person interrupted in a fall. Aren't you...?  
 Interrupted is the wrong word.  
 You are a frozen image reproducing an ongoing state of falling.  
 For this to be conceivable, there **must** be another side of reality.  
 One where the fall is accomplished.*

## The Photograph and its Frames

We begin with the frame, as defining both the original *fotoescultura* and the new series of *Men that Fall*. Like early altarpieces, “the frame and the portrait are totally integrated with one another and inseparable.” (Day, 1998, p. 84) Many of the original *fotoesculturas* were carved from a single piece of wood, like the frames appearing on panel paintings from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Day, 1998, p. 82) The importance of the frame as part of the artwork continued into the Renaissance, when “there was little difference in status between artists and frame-makers,” and frame designs were commissioned from successful sculptors and architects. (Day, 1998, p. 84) The frame becomes part of the context that defines the work, the border between what the work is and what it is not. It thus supports the work and protects it, suggesting at the same time its vulnerability.

The frame also preserves the work’s autonomy, guaranteeing it as “art.” Derrida uses the Kantian concept of the parergon – that which is beside the work – to question the relation of art to various discourses. (Derrida, 1987) Batchen in turn draws a parallel to the historical discourse of art photography and its parergon, the vernacular forms that the discourse has “framed out.” Looking at these other photographies—the *fotoescultura* is one of Batchen’s examples—we find again, “the absent presence that determines the medium’s historical and physical identity.” (Batchen, 2001, p. 59)

There is, however, a context that has been carved away in the *fotoescultura* – between the frame and the subject. This is repeated in the *Men that Fall* series. This internal, “empty” space leaves the figures free-standing in their frames. Or are they? In the *fotoesculturas*, the figures appear as busts, following the conventions of traditional portraiture. Placed on the family altar, where they were most commonly displayed, they would be seen against a background of flowers, candles, other *santos* and mementoes placed there by family members. This colourful background could then be seen through – or within – the frame, filling the space around the subject. These glimpses of context caught within the *fotoescultura* frame would have anchored its subjects to the intimate sphere of the family altar and its personal histories.



*You are the image of mother and daughter.  
 Each photographed on separate occasions.  
 At some time they had their own backgrounds.  
 The backgrounds have been cropped. Any trace as to where the photos  
 were taken  
 ... is forever lost.*

The *Men that Fall*, in contrast, appear full figure, tipping backward onto their heels in the empty space of their frames. Displayed against a plain background, they are caught in the act of falling into the emptiness around them. This apparent lack of context – also historically – pushes them toward free fall. Unlike their predecessors in the *fotoesculturas* where the subject is surrounded by a past that is visible through the frame, the *Men that Fall* have been deprived of the support history would provide. It has been pulled out from under them, leaving them to fall flat on their backs. In these new works a dynamism is created between the flat, two-dimensional photograph and the three-dimensionality of the sculpted surface on which it is overlaid, amplifying the impression that the frozen moment of the image stands outside of time, even as it is anchored in place. The interplay between two- and three-dimensionality simultaneously vibrates between stillness and movement, accentuated as the frozen figures are caught in the act of falling.

Turning now to consider the production of these works, we cannot make a claim for *Men that Fall* as “vernacular” in the same sense as their early predecessors. Referring again to the conditions that Batchen claims shaped the value of the Mexican *fotoescultura*—their working class appeal, the anonymity of their “amateur” creators, and their collective and commercial production—it is only the collaborative process that the new *Men that Fall* shares with the older form. This raises questions of authenticity and value when resurrecting a prior form of creative expression: Can the new embodiment of the *fotoescultura* retain any of the power and knowledge of its cultural origins?

From their histories, we learn that the early *fotoescultura* evoked what Raymond Williams would have called a “structure of feeling.” (1961) Williams coined the term to characterize the lived experience at a particular time and place, an experience that could be traced—if not fully articulated—through artistic forms and expressions. The *fotoesculturas* were part of the “structure of feeling” of the meaning and values as expressed in the particular time and place of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico City with its bonds to rural village life in Mexico and in the southwestern US. Over time, the cultural ties that supported the *fotoescultura* had faded, surviving only in fragments on the shelves of thrift shops. Can these remnants support the recovery of the cultural knowledge that had once made these objects popular and valuable, sought after by those who commissioned them? Or does this recovery remain at the level of mere technique, rendering the new photographs in their sculptural form less meaningful or authentic? Are *Men that Fall* mere replications of a by-gone practice?



Ofelia working on details in Talleres Comunitarios in Santa Ana, Zegache, 2013. Photo: Performing Pictures.

Several factors suggest that Performing Pictures’ work in southern Mexico embraced more than a replication of technique. While *Men that Fall* clearly retained the signature of the initiating artists, aspects of its production added layers of meaning that extended beyond the skills and ideas that Robert and Geska had brought to the project. These layers of meaning arose as the work was carried out in Santa Ana, a village where the links between secular and sacred remain vibrant in daily life. There was, as mentioned above, the genuine exchange of knowledge and skills, and which also included a mutual respect for the aesthetic demands and sensibilities that the Swedish artists and the Oaxacan artisans each brought to the work. The artisans’ pride of their indigenous heritage and their interest in maintaining and renewing that heritage through contact with artists from elsewhere were critical to the quality of the work they produced together.



Fotoescultura of Mexican painter Francisco Toledo “El Maestro” in progress, Santa Ana, Zegache, 2013. Photo: Performing Pictures.



Secondly, the *Men that Fall* produced during this time were no longer the abstract representatives of particular (primarily male) professions that Performing Pictures had initially developed. Parallel with their work in southern Mexico, they began to include in the series men who were friends and family members. In this sense, they were closer to the traditional *fotoescultura* with its ties to family. They had a personal bond with the individual in the frame.

There is, thirdly, the three-dimensionality of these “photographs.” Both the original and the new incarnation of the *fotoesculturas* challenge the flat surface of the photograph through the face and figure that add an uncanny sense of reality to the image. The tactility of these photographs prods our relationship to the photograph as a cultural object from the visual toward the tactile. This is enhanced by the treatment of the subject with its traces of being made by hand: the delicate application of paint, carefully carved frames and the panes of glass that hold the figure in place, like an icon contained in a small portable shrine.

Whether or not Williams intended his “structure of feeling” to include “feeling” in this double sense as both experiential *and* tactile, we can see how the *fotoescultura’s* tactility augments these photographic representations, making them seem “real.” We not only look at them; they invite physical engagement and response, then and now. In other projects, Performing Pictures have explored how the handling of photos, the tactile dimension, adds a more physically embracing experience and enhances the authenticity of the object. Its meaning *becomes* through the work of handling it. Here, again, the addition of other (non-photographic) materials adds layers that create tangible threads between individuals, families, and communities.

## Coda



Men that Fall lined up, Oaxaca 2013. Photo: Performing Pictures.

These figures are the descendants of the original *Men that Fall*. Yet they have moved, shifted media and form—from responsive videos, to still photographs to three-dimensional framed *fotoculturas*. Like the physicality of the responsive images of men that fall, these *fotoculturas* interact with their viewers; they assert their physical and conceptual presence, in Batchen’s words again, “as sensual and creative artefacts but also as thoughtful, even provocative meditations on the nature of photography.” (2001, p. 60)

As suggested through these narratives, the *Men that Fall* continued to migrate through Performing Pictures’ work. Several of them reappear in *Dreaming the Memories of Now* (2018), this time tipping backward into a landscape they would each call “home,” and with their individual histories restored by the poetic voice of the narrator. Or perhaps they are falling backward in the face of a vision that suddenly appears to them during their wanderings.

In the meantime, another *fotocultura* has emerged, one even more closely tied to the spirit of the original secular *santos* and the vernacular rituals that inspired Robert and Geska’s journeys through rural Mexico. Like the earliest *fotoculturas*, this is a family portrait—or is it? Is it a mother and daughter—Geska and little Katja, who has participated in virtually all of Performing Pictures’ work and travels, and who, in the film is dreaming her own memories of now? Or is it two mythical animals? A rabbit with a woman’s body holding a bird wearing a child’s dress?

Like the originals, this one shimmers between different times, places and realities. A photograph that is not a photograph; an icon depicting the secular, yet treating it like a sacred presence. A revelation on a countryside road.



*A last fotocultura remains.*

*The one of you and your mother;  
Or, more precisely, of a rabbit and a bird.*

*It is not an item in an exhibition, merely a family portrait.  
Nothing that replicates—nothing that recurs.*

*Your faces are concealed behind masks.  
The background is cropped.  
A portrait without persons. Without a setting.*

*All the more shall this become a memory  
of the time you and your mother stood on a countryside road  
amid the agave fields and with the mountain range of Oaxaca in the  
background  
on one of countless journeys ....*

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**More Than a Portrait:  
Framing the Photograph as Sculpture and  
Video Animation**

Karin Becker and Geska Helena Brečević

This essay traces the resurrection of the *fotoescultura*, a three-dimensional photographic portrait popular in rural Mexico in the early 20th century, as interpreted in recent works by Performing Pictures, a contemporary Swedish artist duo. The early *fotoesculturas* were an augmented form of portraiture, commissioned by family members who supplied photographs that artisans in Mexico City converted into framed sculptural portraits for display on family altars. We compare these »traditional« photographic objects with “new” digital forms of video animation on screen and in the public space that characterize Performing Pictures work, and explore how the *fotoescultura* inspired new incarnations of their series *Men that Fall*. At the intersection between the material aspects of a “traditional” vernacular art form and “new” media art, we identify a photographic aesthetic that shifts from seeing and perceiving to physical engagement, and discuss how the frame and its *parergon* augment the photographic gaze. The essay is accompanied by photos and video stills from Performing Pictures’ film poem *Dreaming the Memories of Now* (2018), depicting their work with the *fotoesculturas*.

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Keywords: fotoescultura, parergon, frame, vernacular photography, video art.

**Keeping a Story Alive:  
Interview with Lukas Birk**

Iza Pevec

The work of an Austrian artist Lukas Birk can be connected to some dilemmas of documentary photography. If the critique of the classical documentary photography stresses the responsibility towards the

photographed subject and the problem of the exoticization for the western view, Birk’s work is often developed, displayed and distributed in the place where his projects are created. Therefore, the first audience of his projects are locals and are, in that way, maybe more closely connected to the project itself. He co-founded the *Austro Sino Arts Program* in China and founded a residency program *SewonArtSpace* in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The project *Afghan Box Camera*, which he developed with the ethnographer Sean Folley, focuses on the photographic praxis in Afghanistan, mainly on the type of a simple instant camera, which was traditionally used there but its use is now in decline. They investigated the origins, techniques and the many personal stories of the photographers using or having used this type of camera and also made instructional videos on how to build or use one. Attention to the overlooked photographic practices, history and contexts marks also his current project *The Myanmar Photo Archive*, a growing collection of Myanmar photographs that were created during and after the colonial period – the work of local photographers from that period has namely remained unknown until today.

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Keywords: Myanmar photography, photographic backdrop, western view, local history

**Backdrops:  
Conversation with Chris Pinney**

Paolo S. H. Favéro

The conversation between the two researches revolves around the central question of backdrop, its meaning, position inside the studio practices. It delves into the performative aspect of backdrop photography putting it in proximity with theatre and cinema, question its nature as a prop in the process of staging an image. The question seem to be how can photography as a general practice can be understood and its theoretical notions enriched through

research into rich backdrop practices (in case of Pinney and Fevero mostly in India and surrounding region) and how can we explain those practice via the established theoretical canons. The conversation negotiates main notions of authors such as Michael Fried, John Tagg and Martin Jay, illuminates on usually neglected nuances of Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* to finally elaborate the profilmic nature of backdrop photography and its representative role of the society in which it functions. What kind of politics of space does it represent; is it transformative or representative? What is the meaning of the notion of the prophetic nature of photography?

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Keywords: backdrop photography, profilmic, prophetic nature of photography, politics of space, photographic event

**Photography Is the Only Art Form That We  
All Do:**

**Interview with Martin Parr**

Jasna Jernejšek

Martin Parr (1952), who is considered to be one of the most iconic and influential photographers of his generation, managed to make his breakthrough to the global photography scene (and market) in 80s. At that time, impressed by American colour photography, he took on photographing on colour film himself. He made *The Last Resort* (1983–1985), a series of British working class while spending holidays in a coastal resort in New Brighton, which remains one of his most recognizable work to this day. After its first presentation in the Serpentine Gallery in London in 1986, the project triggered turbulence and division of opinions of both professionals and general public. Polarization of opinions became a constant in Parr’s photography career. His proponents view Parr as a chronicler of our age, an insightful observer and commentator of modern society, as a satirist with a dry sense of humour, that

scrutinizes the eccentricity of everyday life. Focusing on the absurdity of everyday life and on details which loquaciously testify about status and taste, strong, saturated colours and photographing with macro lenses and built-in flash became his *modus operandi*. In this manner, he created series, such as *The Cost of Living* (1987–1989), *Small World* (1987–1994), *Common Sense* (1995–1999), *Autoportrait* (1995–2000 / 1995–2015), *Life’s A Beach* (2013) and *Real Food* (2016).

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Keywords: photography backdrop, Martin Parr, photobook, photo-studios, portrait

**The Studio Photograph as a Conceptual  
Framework**

Caroline Molloy

In her essay, Caroline’s draws from her PhD thesis that looks the visual habitus of transcultural photography. She concentrates her writing on the genre of studio photography, specifically early English studio photography and argues that the conceptual framework established in early photographic studio practices still has its legacy in contemporary digital photographic studio practices. To illustrate this argument, she draws from a contemporary case-study in her local, digital photographic studio in North London and discusses a selection of photographs in relation to early photographic studio practices. She suggests that rather than a radical break caused by digital technologies, digital photography has opened up imaginative ways in which to make studio portraits that blur boundaries between the real and symbolic.

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Keywords: studio photography, digital photography, photography and anthropology

**Studio Portraiture as a Construct:  
Interview with Ana Peraica**

Emina Djukić

Dr. Ana Peraica was born into a family of photographers. Her grandfather, as well as her father after him, run a family photo studio Atelier Perajica on the main square of Diocletian’s palace in Split, Croatia. The studio went into Ana’s hands, and she still works there herself today. Besides running the business, her main focus is photographic theory, more precise the field of contemporary arts, visual culture studies and media theory. It is very thought-provoking to see how her background and studio practice influenced her research and vice versa. In her writings she focuses on networked society, strategies of anonymity and pseudonymity, parallel hyper-narratives etc. She currently works on her new book *Postdigital Arcadia* in which she focuses on changes in the post digital photography (eg. aerial images and 360 images), and reflects upon the changes brought about by new visual language on our perception of reality. We spoke also about her last published book *The Culture of the Selfie*, an important survey on this particular contemporary phenomenon.

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Keywords: selfie, photography, background, backdrop, studio photography

**Travel Images, Capitalism and the Ideology  
of Enjoyment**

Janaki Somaiya

A commonly held assumption about social media is that because users create their own content such as images, videos and so on, and thereby their own representations, social media are largely free from any ideological dispositions imposed from above. Creating images is a discursive practice, mediated by a myriad of social and cultural influences that we encounter in our everyday lives. Like in any other form of communication,

certain image sharing practices become more dominant, where they intersect with a range of connotative meanings and their ideological dimensions. Within our current conjuncture of global consumerist capitalism, the dominant cultural order is that of maximizing enjoyment through consumption. This essay puts forth a semiotic reading of a cross-section of travel images shared by users on Instagram to explicate the relationship between travel photography, enjoyment as an ideology and capitalism. It is argued that to travel is not just an activity but it is a commodity that is consumed by us and sold to us by the tourism industry. Contradictions of life under global capitalism remain, with growing inequalities, precarious working conditions, casual job contracts and meagre pays. Material enjoyment remains illusory for many, while the ideological inducements to enjoy finds its outlet in the images we share. When shared on social media for the gaze and ‘likes’ of the viewers, our travel images are not just memoirs of a journey undertaken but also an affirmation of our enjoyment. For the viewers of these images, the enjoyment of others pertaining to consumption is to be envied or held up to an ideal against which the viewers may imagine their own enjoyment. Capitalism demands enjoyment in the form of consumption, and those who cannot enjoy, are ‘free’ to fantasize about such enjoyment in the future. While ‘free’ is the buzzword under neoliberal global capitalism, enjoyment is that kernel that underpins and sustains its ideology.

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Keywords: social media, travel, enjoyment, ideology, capitalism

**A Nostalgic Longing for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Past and Present Backdrops and Scenes in the Skylight Studio of Josip Pelikan**

Helena Vogelsang (professional caretaker of Pelikan's collection)

Taking a visual stroll down the backdrops and sceneries of the master photographer Josip Pelikan is accompanied by commentary supplied by the Celje Museum of Recent History's senior educator and carer of Pelikan's collection, Helena Vogelsang. Painted backgrounds with various motifs used by Pelikan in both portraying and in his everyday work in the studio represent a key part of the photographer's heritage and are part of a permanent exhibition in a skylight studio. It is the only preserved example of a skylight photo studio from the end of the 19th century in Slovenia. Various backdrops enabled the portrayed person to be presented in a way that suited him or her best; e.g. raising their social status, being placed in a specific environment or in a different position than the person occupied in real life. This surely influenced the popularity of portraits made in the wet collodion technique by contemporary photographer Borut Peterlin. In this way, the photographer revitalised the importance of Pelikan's backgrounds and renewed the interest in old analogue photography techniques as well as a comprehensive studio portrait experience, which today no longer holds a prominent place among photographic practices.

Keywords: 20<sup>th</sup> century studio photography, skylight studio, backdrop photography, portraiture, Slovenian photography

**Karin Becker** is professor emerita of media studies at Stockholm University. Originally based in the US, her early research focused on documentary photography and photojournalism in the US and its European influences. She has investigated a broad range of visual media forms and practices, and has led major research projects on global media events and art installations as mediated through the public space. Visual ethnography has been central to her methodological approach. Since 2008, her research has included an ongoing study of Performing Pictures' work in Sweden and southern Mexico. Becker is currently engaged in the research project Screening Protest (www.screeningprotest.com), where she is analysing the visual coverage of protests as mediated in transnational television news broadcasts.

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**Geska Helena Brečević** is an artist and independent researcher working mainly in Sweden, Mexico and Croatia. In 2004, she and Robert Brečević formed Performing Pictures (www.performingpictures.art). Together they make film and video installations that blur the lines between still and motion media. Their work, supported by numerous national and international grants, has resulted in more than 20 solo and 50 group shows as well as commissions for several permanent public art installations. Her artistic research has been carried out with the support of The National Arts Grants Committee, the Royal Institute of Arts and the National Swedish Research Committee. Geska is currently the artistic director of the Film Capital Stockholm's project Smart Kreativ Stad (www.smartkreativstad.com) investigating new perspectives on moving images in the public space.

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**Lukas Birk** is an artist, a storyteller and a conservator. His multi-disciplinary projects have been turned into films, chronicles and books. A large part of Lukas' work deals with archival material he collects while traveling or while delving into his own background. His research consists of careful investigations and explorations of imagery, very often in areas that have been affected by conflict and have not yet had the chance to present existing material in an artistic form. His narratives tackle recorded history by creating alternate storylines and fictional elements, alongside commonly accepted facts. His created "archival artworks" have little to do with institutional processes but rather revolve around personal stories, the desire to preserve their place in history, and Lukas' own emotional attachment to them.

**Iza Pevec** (1987) finished the studies of art history and comparative literature. She has been writing about art and culture for some time, she was writing for Radio Student and since 2014 she is also working for Radio Slovenia – programme Ars. As a young curator she was part of the project Zagon of Gallery Škuc and in programme of the Centre and Gallery P74 Incubator for young curators. Since 2013 she is also writing for the Fotografija and Membrana magazines.

**Christopher Pinney** is Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London. His chief interests are in commercial print culture and photography in South Asia and popular Hinduism in central India. He is currently leading the European Research Council funded project "Photodemos/Citizens of

Photography." His publications combine contemporary ethnography with the historical archaeology of particular media (see eg. *Camera Indica* and *Photos of the Gods*). *The Coming of Photography in India*, based on the Panizzi Lectures was published by the British Library in October 2008. Other recent work includes *Photography and Anthropology* (Reaktion, 2011) and (together with Suresh Punjabi) *Artisan Camera: Studio Photography from Central India* (Tara, 2013).

**Paolo Silvio Harald Favéro** is a visual anthropologist presently Associate Professor in Film Studies and Visual Culture at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp. A member of at the Visual and Digital Cultures Research Center (ViDi) he is also the Chair of the MA in Film Studies and Visual Culture. Paolo has devoted the core of his recent career to the study of visual culture in India (and partly also Italy). Ethnographically involved today in research on emerging image-making practices and politics in contemporary India, he was recently awarded funding by the Flemish government for a project on the introduction of digital technologies in Cuba. He has a number of publications on the meaning of images in contemporary digitized habitats of the world but also more broadly on the meaning of images in human life across space and time. Paolo is the author of *The Present Image: Visible Stories in a Digital Habitat* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) and of *Dentro ed Oltre l'Immagine: saggi sulla cultura politica e visive nell'Italia contemporanea* (Meltemi, 2017). He is presently working on a new book entitled Image-Making-India (Bloomsbury).

**Jasna Jernejšek** (1982) is an independent curator, project manager, writer and reviewer in the field of contemporary visual arts. She focuses in particularly on the field of contemporary copyright practices, the theory and history of photography, and visual



communications which she interdisciplinarily interconnects with social sciences. She graduated in Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana in 2007, where she also completed her Master of Science degree in Communication in 2013. In addition to managing the institute Sector for Connecting, Researching and Promotion of Media Art, she also collaborates with various exhibition centres and non-governmental cultural organizations, such as SCCA-Ljubljana, Membrane Institute, Fokus Institute, and others.

**Martin Parr** (1952) is a British documentary photographer, photojournalist and photobook collector. Since 1994, he has been a member of Magnum Photos. He is considered a chronicler of our age, known for his photographic projects such as *The Cost of Living* (1987–1989), *Small World* (1987–1994), *Common Sense* (1995–1999), *Autoportrait* (1995–2000 / 1995–2015), *Life's A Beach* (2013) and *Real Food* (2016) that take an intimate, satirical and anthropological look at aspects of modern life, leisure, consumption and wealth of the Western world. He has had around 100 photobooks published, and has featured in numerous exhibitions worldwide. The Martin Parr Foundation, founded in 2014, opened premises in his hometown of Bristol in 2017. It houses his own work and archive, a collection of other British and Irish photographers, and a gallery.

**Caroline Molloy** is a PhD art and humanities student at Birkbeck, Centre of Photographic History and Theory at the University of London, alongside of which she a Senior Lecturer in Photography at Coventry University. She has an MA from the Royal College of Art in photography, an MA in visual anthropology from Goldsmiths, and has been trained in oral histories by the British Library. She regularly writes about photography for *Photomonitor*, and New West-Midland Arts. She has delivered a number of national and international conference papers around her research, including in Nicosia, Cyprus and Lisbon, Portugal. Her work was exhibited in the

*Family of No-Man*, Arles Photography Festival (2018), JAIPUR photo (2017), and Doh Mix Me Up (2014), as part of Leverhulme Arts event with Oxford University. Further infor can be found on [www.carolinemolloy.media](http://www.carolinemolloy.media).

**Ana Peraica** is the author of *Fotografija kao Dokaz* (Multimedijalni institut, Zagreb, 2018), *Culture of the Selfie* (Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2017) and *Sub/versions* (Revolver, Berlin, 2009). She is also the editor of *Smuggling Anthologies* (MMSU, Rijeka, 2015), *Victims Symptom* (Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2009), and *Žena na raskrižju ideologija* (HULU, Split, 2007). Her chapters are on anthologies published by Afterall/MIT Press, Loecker Verlaag, Samarah Institute of Cultural Studies and others. She is the author of entries in encyclopaedia editions published by Sage. Her articles were published by scholarly journals like Leonardo, Afterimage, as well as magazines such as Springerin, Flash Art, Fotografija and many others. She is currently working on the book *Postdigital Arcadia* and coedits *Intelligent Agent Reader* with Patrick Lichty. She teaches at MA Media Art Histories program at the University of Danube in Krems, as well as at the MA Media Art Cultures (ERASMUS MUNDUS) program at the University of Danube, Aalborg, Poznan and Singapore. Peraica lives and works in Diocletian's palace, in Split (Croatia), where she runs a family photo shop Atelier Perajica and actively engages in the preservation of life inside this inhabited Roman monument on the WH list.

**Emina Djukić** (1982) is a visual artist and pedagogue. She completed her master's degree in photography at the VŠVU in Bratislava, and currently she is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, photography department. From 2005 to 2010 she collaborated with the Medvode Youth Cultural Center, where she was also a program director for some time. For several years as a mentor she participated in the Celje Fokus summer workshop and was her artistic director in 2013. Since 2015 she

has been a member of the editorial board of *Fotografija* magazine. She is researching the media of photography for a long time; Currently she is mainly concerned with the narrative possibilities of photography and its relation to the past.

**Janaki Somaiya** is writing her Ph.D. thesis in Sociology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her research focuses on an analysis of images shared by users on social media utilizing a psychoanalytic-semiotic method. It intends to situate the phenomenon of social media within an account of late capitalism and its ideological delineations. Her previous research was centred on *Decolonizing Sociology and Sociological Practices in India Using a Foucauldian Theoretical Lens*. She is also an activist and has been involved in building a growing extra-parliamentary Left movement in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Her praxis often extends to the classroom where she teaches Sociology to undergraduate students at the University of Auckland. Her research interests include Critical Pedagogy, Marxist Critical theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusser and ideology critique, semiotics, visual culture analysis and Social media studies.

**Helena Vogelsang Novak** (1962) graduated from the Faculty of Education at the University of Maribor, Department of History in 1984. Following her studies, she gained pedagogical experience by working with different target groups for several years. Since 1998, she has been employed at the Celje Museum of Recent History, where she works as senior museum educator. In 1999, she passed a professional examination for a museum worker at the Ministry of Culture (Directorate for Cultural Heritage). For many years now, she has been dedicated to reviving the only glass photo studio in Slovenia, which is a valuable example of our cultural heritage and the rich photographic legacy of the master photographer Josip Pelikan.

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ISSN 2463-8501 14 € <sup>12 GB</sup>/<sub>18 USD</sub>



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