



Press Release (Berlin, 30.03.2023)

Photography competition of the FU Berlin supported by Kulturprojekte Berlin

Re:Touch. Expanded Surfaces in Smartphone Photography

The winners

We would like to thank the diverse submissions to the **Re:Touch. Expanded Surfaces in Smartphone Photography** photo competition. In over 270 submissions, artists from all over the world critically examined **digital smartphone photography**, the process of digital image processing and its impact on society and (virtual) realities.

The expert jury, consisting of Anna Ehrenstein, Lotte Reimann, Sarah Strassmann, Roc Herms and Wolfgang Ullrich, selected 3 winners and 5 special mentions. The first place was endowed with 1.500€, the second place with 700€ and the third place with 300€.

All information about the winners and special mentions can be found on the website **re-touch-photocontest.com**.

The winners

1st Place: "Character Coding" by Gabriella Achadinha

The work "Character Coding" by Gabriella Achadinha stood out to the jury because it deals accurately and formally aesthetically with the current usage of smartphone photography in the context of the internet and social media. Within a single long strip of images, the artist arranges diverse visual material into a collage and thus already

determines the mode of reception: scrolling is encouraged. Screenshots of smartphone lock screens or WhatsApp conversations are superimposed with text and digital drawings. Crudely cut-out found images from the web are juxtaposed with personal photographs, fragments of advertisements appear, interrupted by news headlines and Google search entries. The work employs various methods of citing, copying, and repeating, symptomatic of our digital sharing culture in both the artistic and pop cultural spheres.

Thematically, "Character Coding" deals with female stereotypes, toxic masculinity, and the harassment of individuals perceived as female in online spaces. The work therefore also questions so-called internet phenomena such as hate speech and comments, as well as the current state of net feminism and the male gaze in general.

2nd Place: "Sedimentary Clouds" by Maryam Ghasemi

Maryam Ghasemi's series "Sedimentary Clouds" impressed the jury in its simple and effective use of glitching and its generative potential. Her works show assembled collages of fragmented interiors. They deal with the condition of being part of the Iranian diaspora and the ubiquitous screen-glitch that lays the foundation of familial and relational love for everybody loving long distance in the 21st century. In assembling these, at first gaze, bland and fragmented interiors through screenshots of video calls, Ghasemi emphasizes the mundanity and the deexceptionalization of displacement. Displacement is an increasingly ubiquitous experience – hyperobjects like global warming and fossil resource scarcity will ever increase this condition throughout the upcoming nomad century. While movement worldwide is still framed as exceptional, displacement emerging from crisis after crisis—environmental disasters to political instability, economic insecurity to outright war, global pandemic to the uneven effects of climate catastrophe—it is clear that, just as “crisis” is becoming the norm, so too is displacement. Maryam Ghasemi's works have given a visual language to this and monumentalize the poetics of polarity – the simultaneous presence and absence through online connections – without tapping into pathetic self-exotification or auto-orientalism. Three months into the anti-government protests after the murder of Mahsa Amini and 40 years into the dictatorship in Iran, Ghasemi's work avoids sensationalism and instead shows the subtleties and ordinariness of displacement in a world of ongoing crises.

3rd Place: "The Wooden Beaver Archive" by Michael Borowski

The series "The Wooden Beaver Archive" by US artist Michael Borowski convinced the jury as an unusual as well as subtle and formally independent contribution to dealing with imaging AI programmes. Borowski used prompts to generate images of bathhouses, saunas and spas that were built in the USA in the late 19th century in places with mineral springs. These facilities offered not least the opportunity to act out (unaccepted) homoerotic or queer desire. The images generated by the AI programme often show people in fragmented or distorted form, sometimes individual

body parts cannot be clearly assigned. But these image errors provide their own aesthetic quality, and in this case it looks as if several people are embracing or literally intertwining with each other. Borowski produced negatives of these digital images, which then became the basis for salt prints. This is a photographic process from the early days of photography – popular precisely at the time when those bathhouses were also booming. Borowski has thus recreated historical images that do not exist in this form, in fact he has created a fictitious archive. With salt printing, he has chosen a process which, if not used perfectly, also results in distortions of the motifs. In this way, he has historicised the effects of the AI as well.

Special Mentions:

"My Head is Too Heavy" by Amy Giese

"2019-2022" by Deep Pool

"Flowers in a Field of Terror" by Faylita Hicks

"Invisible Ink" by Pat Blocher

"Rooted Resurgence" by Vanessa A. Opoku

About the project

The photography competition Re:Touch takes place on the occasion of EMOP Berlin - European Month of Photography 2023 and in cooperation between the Seminar for Culture and Media Management, metaLAB (at) FU Berlin and Kulturprojekte Berlin.

It is a project of the Seminar for Culture and Media Management, Freie Universität Berlin. The close linking of research, teaching and practice is part of our program. The seminar Culture and Media Management offers a systematic combination of research in art and cultural studies with their concrete application in various professional fields of art, culture and media. The aim is to achieve a reciprocal transfer of research and knowledge between this university course and various formats of international art and cultural practice. The master's program provides a practice-oriented cross-section of interdisciplinary research questions, especially from theater, dance and film studies, with a common focus on visual culture and performative arts. Individual components at the intersections of cultural and media management, cultural policy and law are reflected upon with regard to their concrete applicability for cultural production and for specific practical projects. Part of our seminar is metaLAB (at) FU, Freie Universität Berlin, an international research

initiative with metaLAB (at) Harvard, Harvard University. metaLAB (at) FU functions as a transdisciplinary laboratory and experimental platform for exploring new digital and creative knowledge practices in scientific, cultural and social space.

Kulturprojekte Berlin

The photo competition is supported by Kulturprojekte Berlin, a state-owned company with the goal of strengthening and networking Berlin's culture. For about 15 years, they have been cooperating with almost all of Berlin's museums, theaters and memorial sites. In addition, they support various associations, the independent scene, politics and educational institutions, such as in this case the accompaniment of the Re:Touch photo competition in the context of a mentoring of the masters program Culture and Media Management with a focus on the project EMOP Berlin.

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