

Christian Tunge
Artists' Publishing Lecture

Introduction: 10.00 - 10.40
Guest Speaker: 10.45 - 11.45

KUNSTHØGSKOLEN I OSLO
OSLO NATIONAL ACADEMY OF THE ARTS



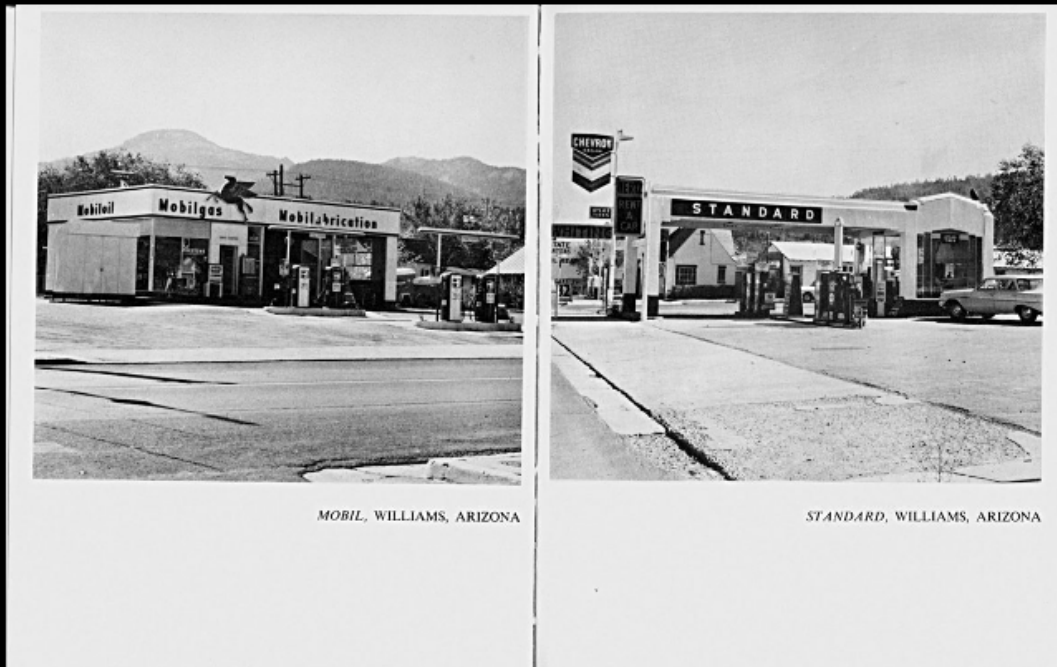
If I were to reflect on the choice of photobooks presented to you today, the underlying thematics would be authorship, the attention economy, the manipulation of truth and tools of our time. I have selected six artists, that can be divided into two distinct categories; those artists who work conceptually with photography as a media and those artists who work photographically with self-publishing media. The selection is not categorized as an historical overview, or necessarily supported by national institutions of cultural authority. My intention is to look at artists' approaches to the photobook, with concepts that remain prescient to an audience today. So perhaps, what is equally as important, is to ask who is the audience, was this considered during the initial development of the publication and how has the artists' work been received or perhaps shifted over time?

So let us start at the beginning. Not at the beginning of time, but at the start of the Anthropocene Epoch. This unofficial unit of geologic time is used to describe the most recent period in Earth's history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems. And depending on which academic you read, arguably, this began in 1964.

Ed Ruscha

TWENTYSIX
GASOLINE
STATIONS

Only a year earlier in 1963 American pop artist **Ed Ruscha** began integrating collections into his practice with his first publication, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. As a deadpan look at the roadside of Route 66, this artist's book simply contains its namesake, photographs of twenty-six gasoline stations, each captioned with its location and brand.



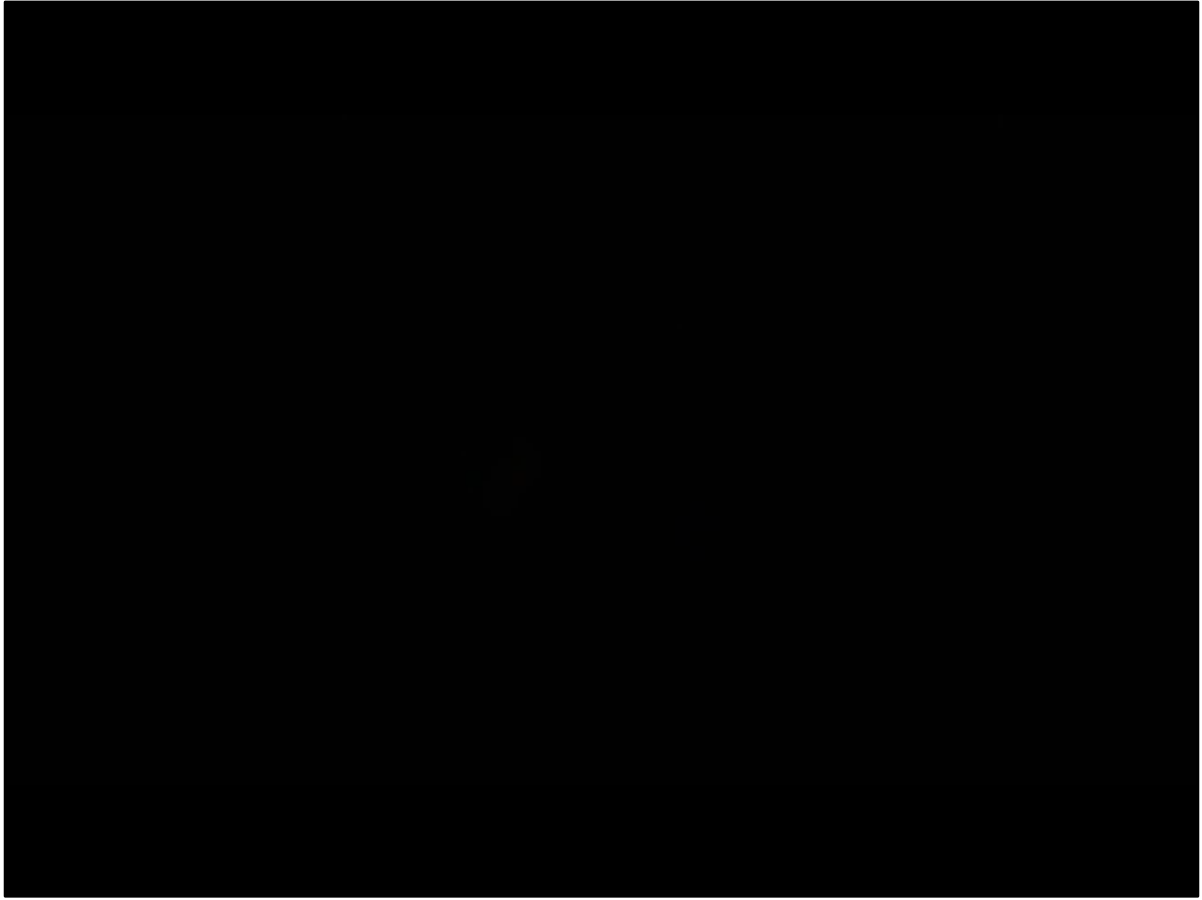
Inspired by road trips home from Los Angeles to Oklahoma City, Ruscha states that he began photographing his gas refills along the way in an effort to “bring in the news to the city” of the mostly unknown patch of southwest America. Although there is a consistent style and strategy in the photographs of stations, Ruscha’s main interest in creating this work had less to do with the content and the photography than with the book itself as a physical, sculptural object of information.

Ruscha did not necessarily view his pocketbook as contemporary art, preferring to refer to it as a “time capsule.” He sold the publication for 3 dollars and fifty cents a piece, in an attempt to by-pass the gallery system. Originally printed in a numbered edition of 400, a second edition of 500 was published in 1967 and a third of 3000 in 1969.



Ruscha's book titles dictate the content and quantity of the images collected. He often first chose the title word combinations that appealed to him most; both in their graphic and auditory states, then went about collecting the images to fulfill the book's namesake. The actual photography of the content was not of particular interest to Ruscha, who often employed others to take the photographs for him.

Though Ruscha has continued to use motifs of the ordinary American landscape, with a specific focus on Los Angeles, throughout all of his work, he maintains that, "you don't necessarily learn anything from my books... I want absolutely neutral material. My pictures are not that interesting, nor the subject matter. They are simply a collection of 'facts'; my book is more like a collection of ready-mades."



Video 1: <https://youtu.be/0xboX5cylzw>

Sophie Calle



A controversial figure as well as one of France's leading conceptual artists, **Sophie Calle** explores her own psychological and emotional terrain in multimedia works, probing ideas of control, freedom, gender, intimacy, and distance in human relationships. Perhaps her most contentious work, *Address Book* (1983) was inspired by an address book that Calle found on the street in Paris, photographed, and returned it anonymously to its owner. She then embarked on a search to come to know this stranger by contacting listed individuals--in essence, following him through the map of his acquaintances.



Originally published as a serial in the newspaper *Libération* over the course of one month, her incisive written accounts with friends, family and colleagues, juxtaposed with photographs, yield vivid subjective impressions of the address book's owner, Pierre D., while also suggesting ever more complicated stories as information is parsed and withheld by the people she encounters. Beyond the recorded testimonials from her informants, the pages are filled with narratives that are coloured by Calle's own range of emotions, from anxiety to satisfaction about probing into this person's life.

However upon learning of Calle's work and its publication in the newspaper, Pierre D. expressed his anger, and Calle agreed not to republish the work until after his death.



Eventually in 2009 Calle elaborated on the project to assemble a collection of prints as artifacts documenting her account of finding a stranger's address book.



This second iteration *was* published by Gemini as a portfolio of prints; 28 pages, each with text and photographs in a screen-printed binder.





The first trade publication in English of *The Address Book* was published by Siglio Press in 2012. The book has the physical weight and feel of an actual address book with a new design of text and images which allows the narrative to unfold.



Video 2: <https://youtu.be/c-TuNcKA6aY>

Richard Prince

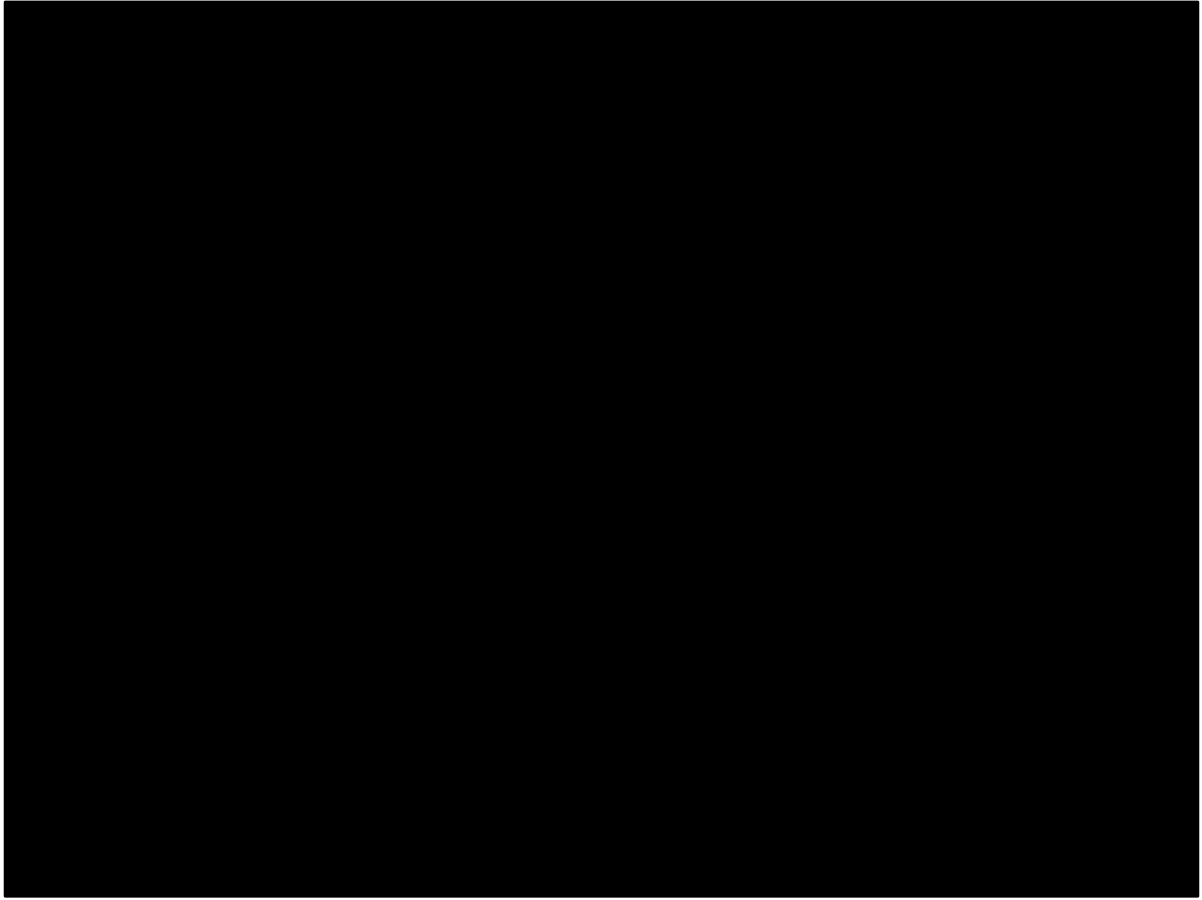


Mining images from mass media, advertising and entertainment since the late 1970s, **Richard Prince** has redefined the concepts of authorship, ownership, and aura. Applying his understanding of the complex transactions of representation to the making of art, he evolved a unique signature filled with echoes of other signatures yet that is unquestionably his own. An avid collector and perceptive chronicler of American subcultures and vernaculars and their role in the construction of American identity, he has probed the depths of racism, sexism, and psychosis in mainstream humour; the mythical status of cowboys, bikers, customized cars, and celebrities.



That pictures are made out of pictures, however, is a given and beside the point. The audacity of Prince's appropriations was not the act itself. After all, artists had been repurposing printed matter made by others and collaging it since at least the Victorian era. The brazenness derived from his *means*: Prince not only re-photographed cigarette ads, about as "low," politically reviled, and commercialized a subject as one could imagine, but he also refused to disguise the pilfering or to pretend that he needed any photographic talent whatsoever to commit the robbery. He left intact the rips in the tear sheets and let us see the murky grain that resulted from blowing up a magazine photo taken with a 35 mm. Prince described his process in a 2003 interview for *Artforum*. "I had limited technical skills regarding the camera. Actually I had no skills. I played the camera. I used a cheap commercial lab to blow up the pictures. I made editions of two. I never went into a darkroom."

Like certain punk and new wave musicians at the time who were proud to show off their lack of instrumental skills— Prince displayed no interest in training or technique. Richard Prince, by Richard Prince published by Whitney/Abrams 1989



Video 3: <https://youtu.be/bxySP5R-IWs>



Cristine de Middel spent ten years as a photojournalist before producing the acclaimed series 'The Afronauts' in 2012. Self-published as an edition of 1000. It was finalist of Paris Photo Aperture First book award in 2012, finalist of the Deutsche Börse award and obtained the Infinity award from the ICP in NYC in the same year. In 2017 the photobook was published and distributed as a second edition of twenty-five signed copies by This Book Is True publishing house, followed by a third edition of 1000 unsigned copies and another 1000 signed copies in 2019. The publication is listed as 18th of the Greatest Photobooks of All Time for Source Magazine, one below Ed Ruscha's Twentysix Gasoline Stations. Christine de Middel is now an elected member of Magnum photographers.

Consider the size of the format, the shifting page, the generated anticipation in turning the page, the ability to maintain the audience attention and her sensibility to the choice of papers and printing ink. But there are problems with cultural appropriation, thematics and authorship.



The self-published photobook documents the little-known Zambian attempt to reach space in 1964. Still living the dream of their recently gained independence, Zambia started a space program that would put the first African on the moon catching up the US and the Soviet Union in the space race. Only a few optimists supported the project by Edward Makuka, a schoolteacher in charge of presenting the ambitious program and getting the necessary funding. But the financial aid never came, as the United Nations declined their support and one of the astronauts, a 16-year-old girl, became pregnant and had to quit. This is how the heroic initiative turned into a curious episode in African history, surrounded by wars, violence, droughts and hunger.



By combining her original photographs with both found and created documents and drawings, the Spanish-born photographer focuses on the story telling of an unbelievable fact, while questioning the documentary value of photography. Her approach is closer to filmmaking than documentary or classic photography, adopting reality to her own fictional needs.



The exhibition includes her photographs, drawings, sculptures, as well as the original artist-made costumes and props used during the initial photoshoot.



Video 4: <https://youtu.be/-9Pp2ir5Mcl>

Video 5: <https://vimeo.com/311187645>

Nicolò Degiorgis



Nicolo Degiorgis is an Italian photographer and in 2014 he self-published *Hidden Islam*; an evocative, multi-layered book that contrasts the reverent peacefulness of makeshift mosques located in North East Italy with the often tense politics that surrounds them.



In Italy, Islam remains hidden. Despite being home to more than a million Muslims, Italy has put stringent limits on the number of government-approved mosques available to worshippers: in fact, there are just seven in the entire country, in Rome, Florence, Palermo, Turin, Ravenna, Milan and Genoa.

In lieu of mosques, Italy's Muslims have been forced to transform warehouses, parking lots, stadiums and supermarkets into places of prayer. In [Hidden Islam](#), features pictures Degiorgis made between 2009 to 2013, to document these improvised houses of worship.



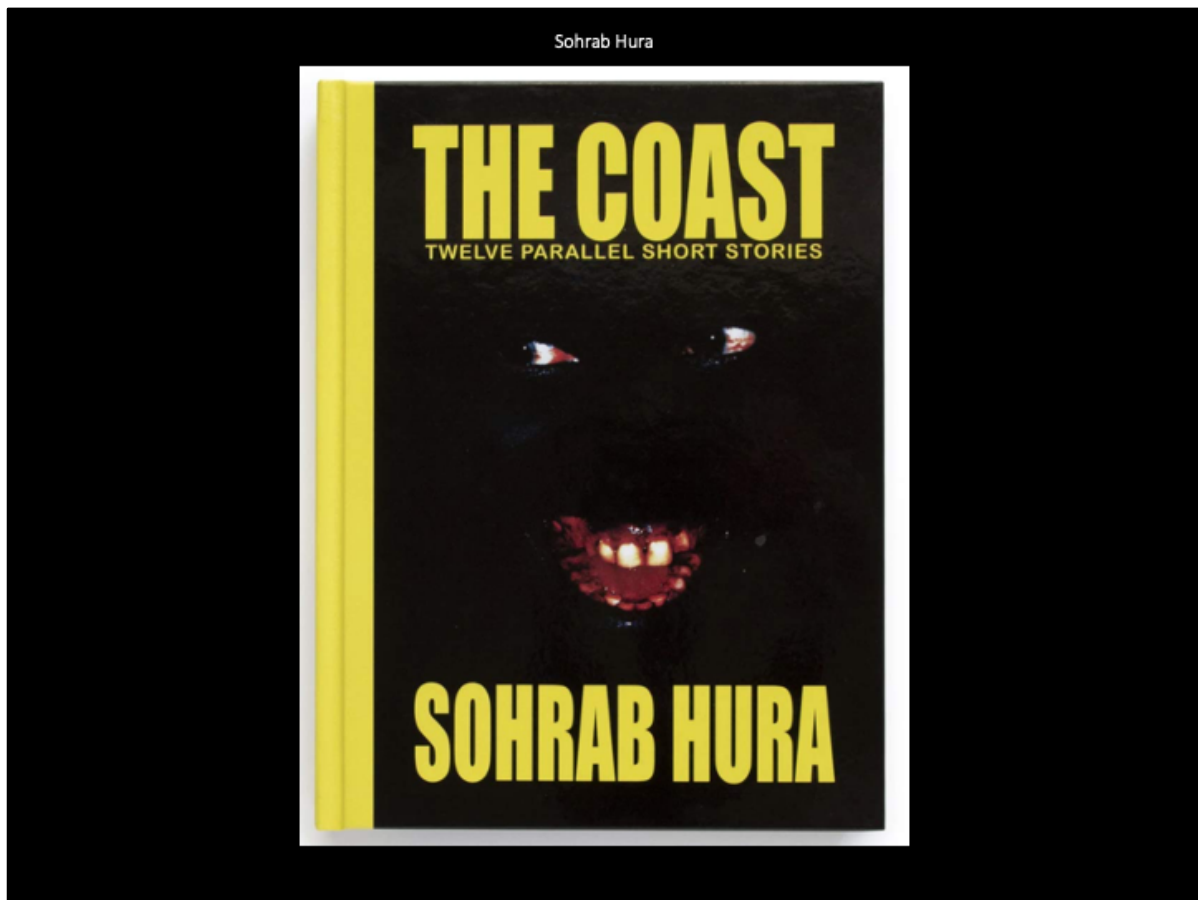
Degiorgis faced months of negotiations in order to gain access. “Certain communities accepted me over time, some didn’t. I followed them over the years, living with them and exploring their activities.” The self-financed book has received support from British photographer and photobook collector Martin Parr, virtually guaranteeing its success in the art world.

In 2014 it was awarded [Gold Award – Deutscher Fotobuchpreis](#), [First Book Award – Paris Photo/Aperture Foundation](#) and [Author Book Award – Les Rencontres des Arles](#). The publication is currently in its third edition of three thousand copies

PVF 2016

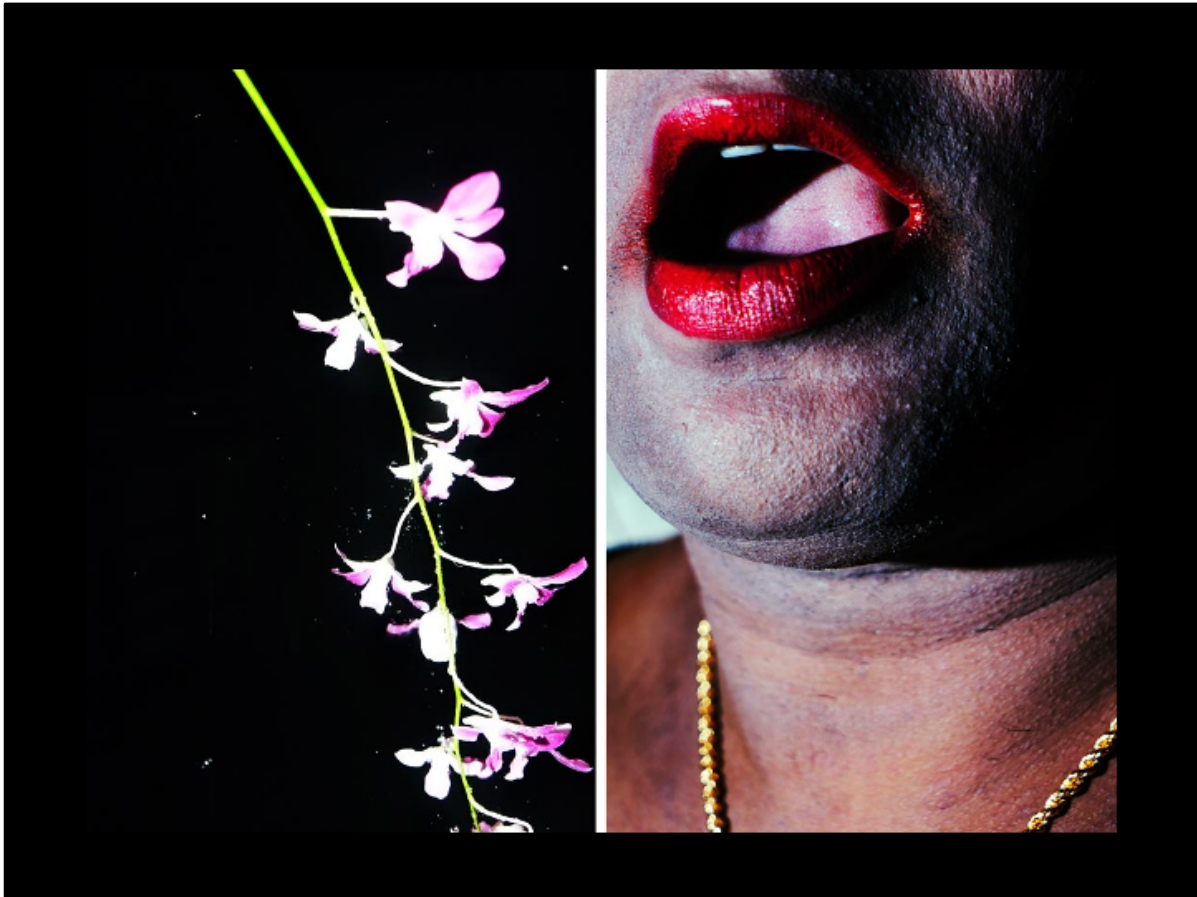
Nicoló Degiorgis

Video 6: <https://youtu.be/Y80k5AtpB5c>



Magnum photographer **Sohrab Hura's** new book 'The Coast' is the latest formation of his long-term project The Lost Head and the Bird, which explores the undercurrents of violence – religious, sexual, and caste related – in contemporary India through photos taken along the country's coastline. While the project has previously been realised as a short film, which utilized at times brutal found-footage alongside Hura's photographs – building toward a frantic crescendo, The Coast sees the photographer focus upon his own images and his slowly morphing text to convey these undercurrents.

The short story repeats itself throughout the book in 12 different iterations; each version different from the preceding story in only a few words. The changes create a shift in empathy to demonstrate how a set of facts, and what we mould around these facts, ends up as constructed reality.



But the book and the film are different works that are bound together. For example, there is no found imagery in the book. But the purpose of the found material in the film is to lead the audience into the real world, which is far more immediate.

"There is a sort of new language of photography coming into existence because of the looseness of social media. If I were to merely reproduce the film in a book, it would strait jacket the work into a single meaning but for me the beauty of photography lies in its malleability and multiplicity of existences and meanings."

Hura's artistic approach focuses on the interconnection between his different works and their corresponding forms. He relies on YouTube to be self-taught in page layout design, sound engineering and video editing. His photobooks are printed and disseminated in Asia and his father acting as his global distributor.



“There are some works of mine that have only lived as video works, for which a book doesn’t make sense. There are other works where prints on a wall can help create the most efficient pauses. There are also works that I feel run risk of feeling a bit too precious as prints, or as a book, which I’d rather just let exist online. Intent helps me find the form, but if a work has a large enough range of tones then for sure I’ll experiment with as many forms as possible.” The Coast was awarded photobook of the year 2019 by Aperture Foundation at Paris Photo.

So rather than finish on a summary, here is a segment of Hura’s film which is 5 minutes long. The images in the sea have been made over a long period of time, documenting a specific beach in Tamil Nadu, where every year – during a religious festival – people masquerade as different characters depending on what they have prayed for. They get into a trancelike frenzy in worship until they are finally carried to the sea to wash themselves of their masquerade, much like cleansing themselves of their sins.

WARNING Warning of loud noise and some fast-paced images.



Video 7: <https://vimeo.com/426531399>

Video 8: <https://vimeo.com/372211431>

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Christian Tunge works with photography, printmaking and artists' books. He is the founder of Heavy Books, a publishing project and exhibition platform established in Oslo, 2014. Tunge is an active member of the artist-run gallery space MELK Oslo, a leading initiative for new Scandinavian photography and he represents contemporary photobooks on an international platform including LA Art Book Fair, Offprint Paris, Bergen Art Book Fair, NY Art Book Fair, Copeland Book Market and Tokyo Art Book Fair.

In 2020 Christian Tunge and Behzad Farazollahi collaborated with Susanne Østby Sæther, the curator of *New Visions* at the Henie Onstad, to launch a new triennial for photography and new media in Oslo. In conjunction with the exhibition, Tunge also co-edited *Why Photography?*, an anthology of interviews with the triennial's selected artists; exploring their relationship with photography as a technical apparatus and process.