

Emmanuel Van der Auwera: Fire and Forget

13 October – 17 December 2022

Opening reception | Thursday 13 October 6-8pm



I like others are tired of this caravan ploy. What we are seeing are simply paid crisis actors and the left are falling for it like BREAKING NEWS on @CNN. When reviewing the videos ask yourself why is the camera man wearing a helmet and gas mask? This is a production!

“Just Jeff”, Twitter feed, 2018

Edel Assanti is pleased to present Emmanuel Van der Auwera: *Fire and Forget*, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery and in the UK. Immediately following the artist's solo exhibition at House of Electronic Arts (HEK), Basel, the show brings together a selection of recent works: light-responsive photographic plates, an immersive video installation and a film.

Fire and Forget explores the dehumanisation of the human gaze through a series of recent works that hijack the technologies of media. Van der Auwera's work explores what it means to be an autonomous citizen in a digital era defined by internet conspiracy, surveillance technology and AI identity-altering algorithms. His practice is fuelled by a stream of found material salvaged from the everyday news cycle, the rampant image production of a global screen culture and dark recesses of the internet and social media.

The exhibition's point of departure is two new works from the ongoing *Memento* series. Each work strips an aluminium printing plate directly from a newspaper's production line, isolating a singular, charged image in a method combining photographic, printing and painting techniques. The resulting image appears as a “negative” until it is exposed to raking light, at which point it is seen as a more legible “positive”, requiring the viewer to move around the work to discover its content. Beginning as a luminous blue monochrome as a result of the chemical process of production, the image is thinly veiled by red paint

applied via mechanical rollers.

The first *Memento* depicts a panoramic photographic image of Las Vegas produced by a thermal imaging camera, designed for surveillance use by the military and security companies in the specific contexts of wars and border crises. The second work employs an annotated photograph that was virally disseminated by both sides of the political spectrum during the 2018 US border migrant crisis, featuring a mother attempting to flee with her children. Typifying the validity of conspiracy-led views in the post-truth era, the photograph was deemed too convincing to be real by many right-wing factions; the annotated version used in Van der Auwera's *Memento* began to recirculate, accusing the protagonists of being “crisis actors” in a staged propaganda scene.

The exhibition centres on *VideoSculpture XX (The World's 6th Sense)*, a video installation comprising six wall-mounted LCD screens, each dissected with a knife to prise the screens apart from their polarising layers. Once removed, the screens become imperceptible and the naked eye only sees a bright white light. In order to view their content, the viewer must observe the screens through one of eight rectangular polarising filters distributed around the room on tripods, with a mesmerising sensory effect. Echoing the exhibition's opening works, the footage indifferently probes the streets of Las Vegas, alternating between wide perspectives and invasively zoomed close-ups. Produced by the same thermal imaging camera, the seemingly banal content was created to market the technology to governments and military contractors. By compelling us to physically navigate the installation in order to ingest its content, *VideoSculpture XX (The World's 6th Sense)* not only makes visible the apparatus of surveillance society, but equally forces us to acknowledge our own complicity in the application of these tools of population control.

The lower ground floor gallery presents Van der Auwera's 2019 film *The Death of K-9 Cigo*. Combining citizens' voices, the film presents an unnerving portrayal of Americans coping with gun crime. The footage, excavated from time-sensitive livestreams from the app Periscope, builds out from the Miami Parkland school shooting. Bridging documentary, reconstruction and fiction, the film splices the funeral of a police dog, K-9 Cigo, with reportage of anti-gun rallies and personal outbursts of grief and defiance. One individual advocates the right to murder whilst another makes a declaration ahead of embarking on a massacre, followed swiftly by a choir singing prayers. Throwing the viewer into this loop of self-expression, the film holds up the technological landscape as a realm that has shifted mechanisms of comprehension and expression, encouraging extremity in the chronicling of our own lives.

Van der Auwera is a 2015 Laureate of the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK) post-academic course in Ghent and a 2015 Langui Award recipient of the Young Belgian Art Prize. Recent solo exhibitions include *Seeing is Revealing* at HEK, Switzerland (2022); *FULL A.L.I.C.E.* at Photoforum Pasquart, Switzerland (2022); *The Sky is on Fire* at Botanique, Belgium (2019); *Blue Water White Death* at Mu.zee, Belgium (2018). His work was also recently exhibited at the First Jinan International Biennial (Shandong, China), the Pinakothek der Moderne (Munich, Germany), WIELS (Brussels, Belgium), The Centre Pompidou (Paris, France), Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France), Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci (Prato, Italy), Ars Electronica (Linz, Austria), Casino Luxembourg - Forum d'art contemporain (Luxembourg City, Luxembourg) among others. His work features in the collections of the Dallas Museum of Art, KANAL - Centre Pompidou, Mu.ZEE, Collection de la Province de Hainaut - BPS22, the National Bank of Belgium, and the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. Van der Auwera lives and works in Brussels, Belgium.

This exhibition is part of an ongoing dialogue between the programmes of Harlan Levey Projects and Edel Assanti, highlighting our shared interest in artistic practices that engage with contemporary political discourse, seeking to unravel emerging historical narratives.