

Interview by Jonathan Pouthier
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DAVID
CLAERBOUT

THE
SILENCE
OF THE
LENS

06	MANTOVA PIGEON
14	THE CLOSE
46	AIRCRAFT (F.A.L.)
72	WILDFIRE <small>(meditation on fire)</small>
106	THE CONFETTI PIECE
134	THE PURE NECESSITY
160	OLYMPIA <small>(The real time disintegration into ruins of the Berlin Olympic stadium over the course of a thousand years)</small>

- 182 KING (after Alfred Wertheimer's 1956 picture
of a young man named Elvis Presley)
- 206 RADIO PIECE
(HONG KONG)
- 226 HIGHWAY WRECK
- 246 OIL WORKERS (from the Shell company in Nigeria) returning
home from work, caught in torrential rain
- 268 TRAVEL
- 292 BREATHING BIRD

In the video work *Mantova Pigeon*, a travelling shot in a constant zoom-in zoom-out movement focuses on a pigeon resting on the balcony's balustrade on the façade of the Torre dell'Orologio on the Piazza delle Erbe in Mantua, Northern Italy.



MANTOVA PIGEON

Mantova Pigeon, 2021, single channel video, colour, stereo audio, 5 mins





The Close – meaning a residential street without through access – brings together a reconstruction of amateur footage, made around 1920, and a digital 3D rendering of that footage. The 1920s was the era of the so-called city symphonies which marked the beginning of the penetration of film cameras into everyday life.

The silent scene, which shows barefooted children amongst hurried passers-by, opens against the Sun, on a wet morning. A few stop to have their portrait taken. As the film progresses, two children emerge into the foreground, until the film apparatus briefly gets stuck during the portrayal of one of them. The smaller child is then brought in front of the camera to have their portrait taken. They deliver a rare smile.

Moments pass until a very slow zoom-in begins on the grainy still frame. Imperceptibly, the ill-defined celluloid has transitioned into a highly detailed quasi-technical portrait, objectifying face, eyes and body. Discreetly, without any obvious formal changes, we move from the familiar to the estranged and fragmented, until a group of voices (singers) restores some sense of cohesion ‘elsewhere’ in the space, that is, not in the visual but in the auditive space of Arvo Pärt’s 2004 vocal composition. This specially recorded version of *Da pacem Domine* – with all 24 singers socially distanced and wearing masks because of the pandemic – prioritises the search for a dialogue between the singers, with some of them hesitating and intermittently getting lost in the harmony, while their fellow singers maintain the dialogue.

Sensorial cohesion (confidence/kinship) and fragmentation in audio-visual culture have been at the foreground of David Claerbout’s research and practice, with recent emphasis on what happens when we no longer trust our senses due to the pervasive effects of virtualisation.

Of the virtual, Claerbout has said that while it may have no past to return to and no future to look forward to, its effects are transformative and permanent. The difficulties experienced are comparable to the sensorial distrust a schizophrenic patient may suffer. The point is not to attempt a return to a previous cohesion but to accept divided attention and let it jump from one realm into another.

Intended as a short, emotional history of the camera, *The Close* reflects on what Claerbout calls ‘dark optics’: a profound if chaotic recalibration in our time of the beliefs we share with regard to image, information and language.

“I do not have films with soundtracks. If used, the music is constitutional, and the film is made because of it. Previous work made in this vein include: *Sections of a Happy Moment*, *Travel (Relaxation profonde* by Eric Breton), *Sunrise (Vocalise* by Rachmaninoff), *White House (Pourquoi me réveiller?* by Jules Massenet), *Bordeaux Piece (Für Alina*, Arvo Pärt).”

“Sound is the indomitable child in the family of the senses, and in film I mostly do not allow sound. Occasionally I choose to work with generic (cheap) soundtracks on purpose. But this I can only safely produce every five years or so, and that has already caused enough healthy damage.”

THE CLOSE

The Close, 2022, single channel video projection, black & white, 6 channel surround sound, 15 mins 21 secs
(in collaboration with Concertgebouw Brugge and Vlaams Radiokoor)



The Close (Set Still), 2022, processual drawing on Hahnemühle digital etching paper.
Pencil, washed Chinese ink, hand-printed digital drawing, gouache, 61 x 89 cm



PERFECTIVE
in a way by the future

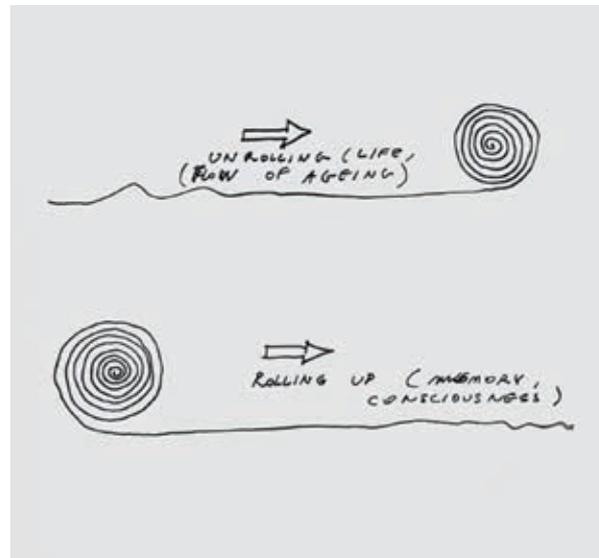
SAME
MAN

The Close

Jonathan Pouthier in conversation with David Claerbout

(JP) There is something strangely familiar yet disturbing about your film *The Close*. Faced with a street scene that could have been shot in any working-class district of a big city at the start of the twentieth century, we can't help but feel that these images are inhabited by others. At once faithful and totally subjective, this filmed archive footage lets its nature as pure technological artifice shine through. Viewers are immediately drawn to and confronted with the different layers of a memory that is both familiar and foreign to them. The perception we have of these images, of this synthetic simulation of a reconstructed past, is unsettled by a sensation of unreality symptomatic of déjà vu. Like those distant memories of which it has become impossible to say whether they still correspond to something that has actually been experienced, this film seems to merge with the unstable mechanisms of memory. What are these untimely images that your film covers up? From what memory have they emerged?

(DC) For a long time, I have been collecting and viewing footage filmed by others at different times. For this film, I started out from a found scene that I had kept in my memory for a dozen years. It was a film archive similar to those recorded by the thousands of operators who documented aspects of the contemporary world at the start of the twentieth century. I remember that it showed barefoot children playing in a cul-de-sac in front of a camera lens and some passers-by crossing the field. It had just rained and the light was beautiful. Over time, I lost each of the traces underlying the project. *The Close* was therefore made on the basis of these images preserved and developed in my memory. That is why I say it's a fake. Memory studies in recent decades have suggested that memory circulates in different areas of the brain. Initially stored in the hippocampus, its transit through the cortex affects its content and substance. If we try to visualise this memory, it will seem to travel backwards through the channel of our visual perception. That is why we must consider that memory is an active component of our visual perception.



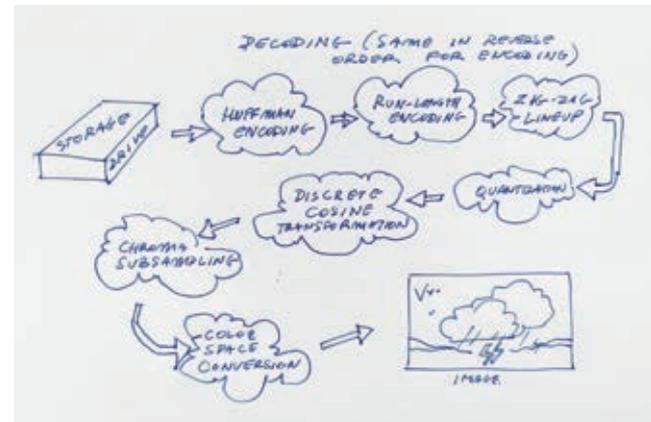
Note from the Dark Optics lectures, Henri Bergson's *Two Spools of Duration*

(JP) The film seems to be animated by a technological history of images that develops in the gaps between low resolution and hyper definition. The new means of disseminating images seem to go hand in hand with a regression in the quality of the images and our perception of them. Paradoxically, digital technologies have not been able to compensate for this phenomenon of progressive erasure. This almost ontological aspect is not lacking in your film. In your opinion, is this question of resolution a determining factor in the way we preserve these images in our memory?

(DC) In *The Close*, we witness a gradual, almost imperceptible transition from an original state of the analogue image on film to a virtual conception that would retain the formal and stylistic characteristics of the image of the child. We could say that it is a journey between the past, the present and the future of the filmic image. This question of the future of images is central to me. We must ask ourselves whether their accumulation allows us to forget or to remember? But also whether the technological developments of the image constitute a form of metabolism in its own right? It is obvious that the billions of dematerialised images with which we feed our imaginations today will probably have largely disappeared in twenty or thirty years. Information tends to become increasingly insubstantial, compressed and outmoded, and therefore less magnetising. It's amazing to see how technologies simply express by other means the understanding of the nervous system specific to the times in which they develop.

(JP) For Henri Bergson, our brain is not meant to preserve the past, but first to mask it and then to reveal the aspects of it that are useful in the present moment.

(DC) Compression is an interesting factor because it is a technology borrowed directly from the way our brain works. We use it unconsciously when we think and look. Coding, codes and compression technologies are similar to the way our visual perception works. The images I appropriate have already gone through the metabolic cycle of others. Some will say that my position is a lazy one and that one should instead throw oneself into the world. Personally, I have always seen myself as someone who catches the debris on the fringes of an explosive visual culture.



Note from the Dark Optics lectures, *Compression*

(JP) What are you trying to understand about these suspended images?

(DC) I would say that it has to do, above all, with a pictorial desire comparable to that of a painter. I am interested in the properties of light and matter. I deeply believe that an artist is free not to look for anything and not to construct anything. The artist can just listen and have an eye for those little things that happen on the periphery. That is what collecting images also means. It is a way of flying over a map made up of a multitude of pre-existing and virtualised worlds. The situations I appropriate do not have to imply any form of necessity or importance. My work simply consists of digging to find those places in which what is least important manifests itself the most, and then to open up the field to an elsewhere. This elsewhere is neither a void nor a hall of mirrors that does nothing but reflect itself endlessly.

(JP) The synthetic simulation of the analogue iconographic register questions the trust we can place in certain images. The images you manipulate in your film convey a very strong belief in the supposed objectivity of the camera. This is not the first time you have used images of a documentary nature. The reconstruction is generally based on an accumulation of details necessary to produce an effect of authenticity. What interests you in this simulation? Is it a way for you to produce an illusion of reality or to work on the components of the fake?

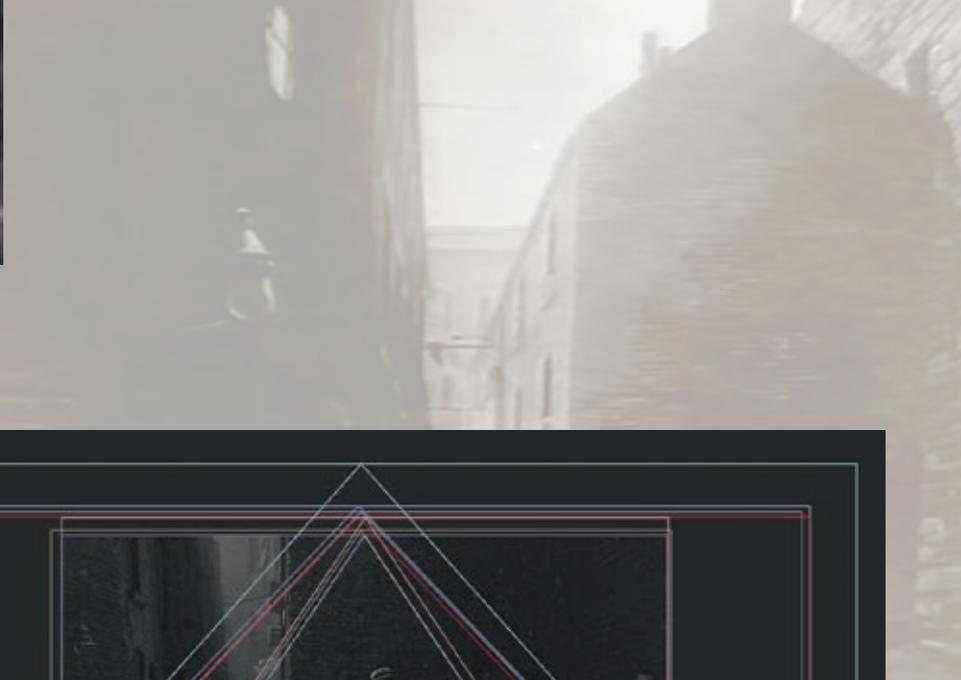
(DC) An image is by definition fake. To return to the metabolism of images, we can say that the images in *The Close* mobilise a past that is far removed from our *vita activa*. I rather like the idea that the image can address the viewer by telling him or her that they no longer have anything in common. I could also have worked with footage from the 1970s, in which the idea of a city portrait was similar. However, I preferred to take another step back in our visual culture to confront these picturesque shots of barefoot children playing in the streets. All this refers of course to iconographic sets that one should generally be wary of and which I tend to throw myself into. I even think that the intuitive decision that made me prefer this late-nineteenth-century iconography and made me opt for black and white comes precisely from this mistrust. I'm convinced that images of the past disappear twice. They disappear in *timed* time, and then they disappear again because they no longer correspond to our image mapping. In other words, the map of the world that we carry within us no longer allows us to relate to the gaze of another time.

Images from the shots on location and at Claerbout Studio. Bullet-time recording was used for part of the film. Shots took place in front of a green and blue screen. Chroma keying is a well-known technique in film and photography. Everyone on set, including camera men, dressed in period clothing so that they could intervene in the action if necessary. Comments are written in white marker on the rushes. This is how scenes are selected. The recording session of the Vlaams Radiokoor at Concertgebouw Brugge was organised in a unique way: in a circle around conductor Bart Van Reyn, the twenty-four voices were recorded separately so as to have greater control later during the sound mixing.



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Pool - stoom - Interactie
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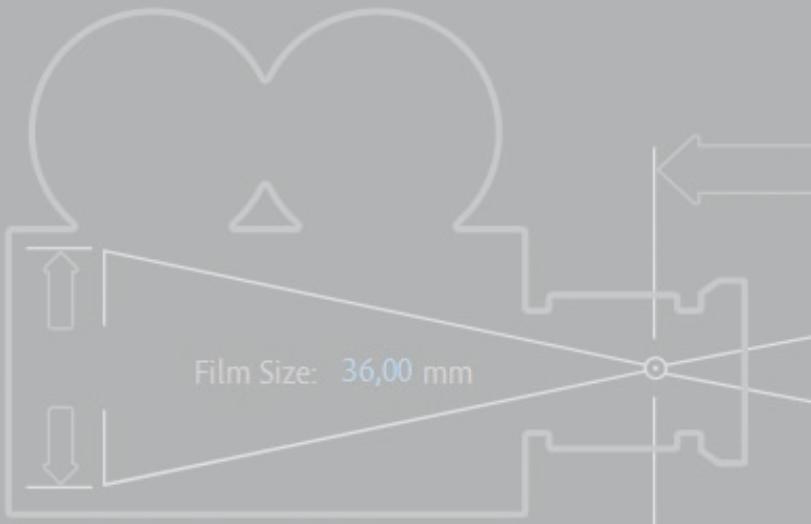


Live adan → Bevroren.
 verschil kune
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POP
 stil camera } Bew camera
 bew mens } stil mens
 In een beweging
 veel mogelijk!



Type: One-Node Camera



Film Size: 36,00 mm

Focal Length: 25,71 mm



Enable Depth of Field

Focus Distance: 1959,88 mm

Lock to Zoom

Aperture: 1,13 mm

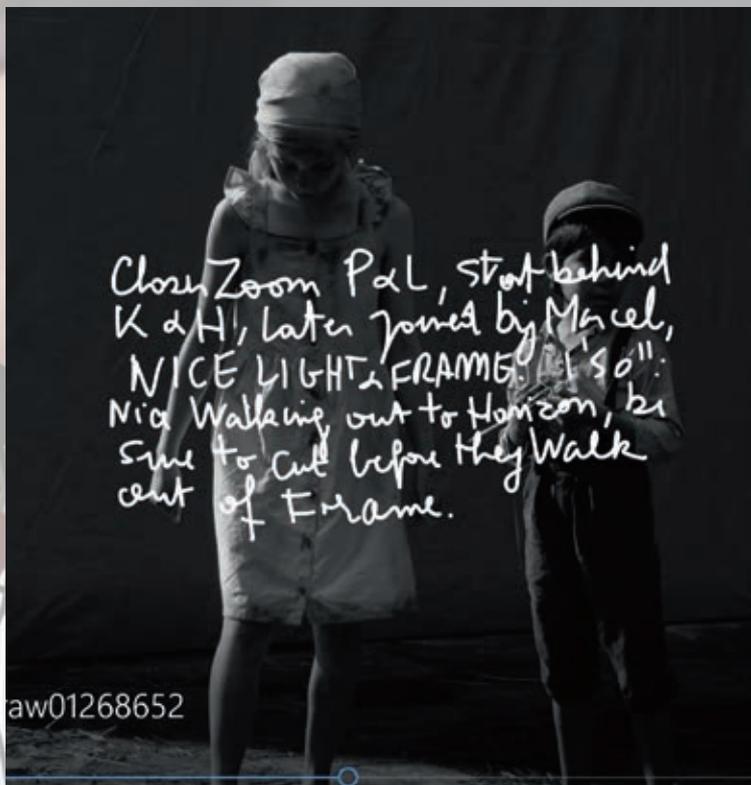
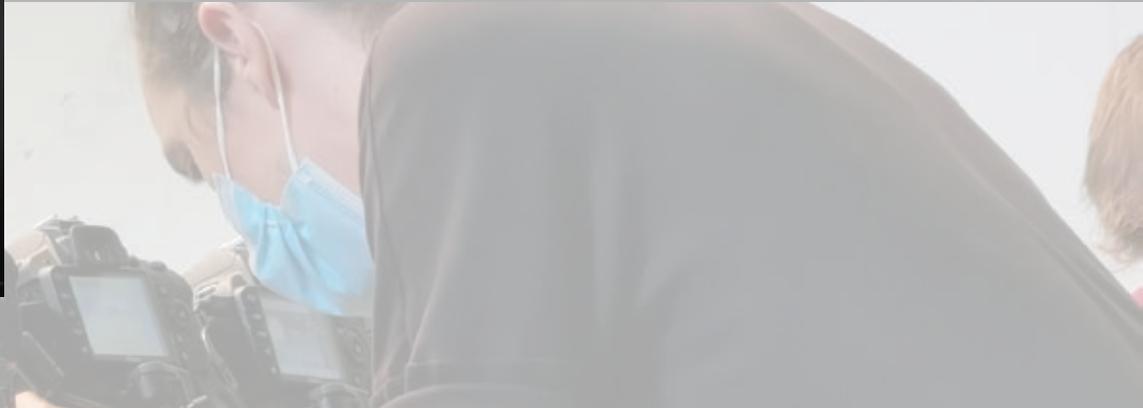
F-Stop: 22,7

Blur Level: 100,0 %



Same; Mia gaze Perime,
 Even better, with Ben
 and Levi behind her.
 Problem = Low?

aw01299701



Close Zoom PaL, start behind
 K & H, later joined by Marcel,
 NICE LIGHT & FRAME. 1.50":
 Mia Walking out to Horizon, be
 sure to cut before they walk
 out of Frame.

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Aircraft (F.A.L.) was recorded with a camera in an empty factory hall. The scene was created and added with the aid of an elaborate 3D model. A hybrid representation that creates the illusion of a photographic reality. Since *Oil workers (from the Shell company of Nigeria) returning home from work, caught in torrential rain* (2013), David Claerbout has regularly spoken of beings and materials stripped of their content, acting as nothing more than a brilliant zombie, and of the impact of the disintegration of the photographic image and the loss of optic confidence systems.

The 'assembly line' in *Aircraft (F.A.L.)* is not a random choice. "Working with synthetic images means operating in an extremely fragmented world where masses of details pretend to be a totality", explains Claerbout, referring to the work of neuropsychologist Iain McGilchrist and his theory about divided attention. "The synthetic image does indeed have something pathological about it, similar to the fragmented sensorial world of the schizophrenic patient."

The airplane in *Aircraft (F.A.L.)*, which is supposed to overcome gravity, is here caught in the Cartesian coordinate system consisting of millions of polygons. Resting on improvised wooden scaffolding, it looks as if it has been placed on life support.

In an attempt to rearrange the linearity of our experience of time into layers that cross each other, *Aircraft (F.A.L.)* features an object that looks simultaneously unfinished and redundant. In the same way, the image of the factory hall – where the future is being made – is being interchanged with that of the museum – where the past is being made.

A green-tinted photograph of an aircraft assembly line. The image shows the skeletal structure of an airplane fuselage in the foreground, with a large engine nacelle visible on the right. The background is filled with the complex network of beams and supports of the factory. The text "AIRCRAFT FINAL ASSEMBLY LINE" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

AIRCRAFT FINAL ASSEMBLY LINE

Aircraft (F.A.L.), 2015–2021, single channel video projection, black & white, stereo audio, endless



Aircraft Jurassic Age, 2021, washed ink, acrylic and felt pen on paper, 66.5 x 113 cm



It is, in fact Not the slope of running engine giving a some of the Machine being active, but the future illumination
in all Engines.

JURRARC ASS (OP CONSTRUCTION)

David Claubert 2000-00

Aircraft (F.A.L.)

Jonathan Pouthier in conversation with David Claerbout

(JP) To begin with, I would like to discuss the aeroplane that makes up the motif and main subject of your piece. In his essay *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, Bruno Latour wonders ‘where to land?’ when industrialised societies keep denying the consequences of their lifestyles on climate change. The aeroplane in *Aircraft (F.A.L.)*, on the other hand, remains immobile, as though unable to fly. Why does this symbol of industrial modernity remain grounded?

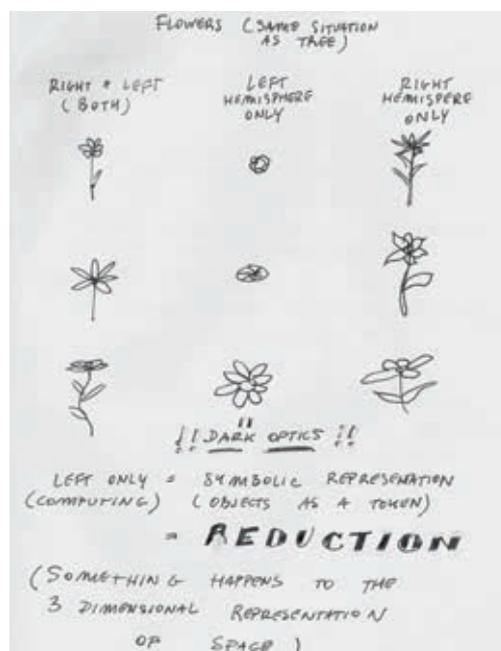
(DC) This metaphor allowed me to illustrate my work method for the production of this piece, but also my concerns about the nature of the image. The materiality of the virtual image has always interested me because we have always thought that this type of image was, by definition, incompatible with the very idea of matter. I, however, have had the sense that it constitutes something quite real and present. The way in which materials are determined by a complex set of data conditioned my research throughout the making of this film. For example, the aluminium surface that envelops the structure of the aeroplane shows no trace or sign of use. This detail becomes apparent, in fact, when the camera approaches the wings. The immobility of the aeroplane is a deliberate choice. Unlike any other machine of the industrial age, the aeroplane is an object that is considered to be in motion, even when it is static. Its nature is defined by its relationship with the airflow. The aeroplane in my film is not actually on the ground. It rests on a scaffold in a scene that is both improvised and organised. I sometimes think that, on the screen, it looks like a sarcophagus. This regime of indistinction between what is alive and what is inert, between what could be used and what is no longer usable, constitutes the dramatic subtext of the composition. This may seem paradoxical because in our culture the aeroplane symbolises a certain conception of progress. Its shape is similar to that of an arrow pointing permanently forward like an index of the future. It draws a line at the end of which everything would be led to move forward. I was interested in the idea of confronting this progressive thought with these materials that have been frozen for a long time, such as light, concrete, wood and metal.

(JP) What image lies at the source of this reconstruction?

(DC) For *Aircraft (F.A.L.)*, it is a black-and-white photograph dating from the 1950s of an assembly line in the suburbs of Chicago in the United States. It no longer exists. Its vertical wooden construction was remarkable. At the time, all metal had been requisitioned for the manufacture of war tools. A great deal of space and a lot of materials were needed to build this type of wooden architecture, with crossbeams exceeding fifty metres in length. The scale ratios are therefore gigantic. The aeroplanes were placed one behind the other like on an assembly line. The aircraft in question here is a DC4. I deliberately removed all references to its use and model, such as the US Air Force markings normally painted on the aircraft’s fuselage. Instead, I added lines to reinforce its perspective and aerodynamics within this environment. This erasure of any direct reference in the image also enabled me to mark a temporal indeterminacy and to condition the perception of the scene in a sense. I wanted people to be able to experience this place as contemporary and familiar. As it appears in the film, this aeroplane never really existed in the past. It is a strictly contemporary restoration based on a DC6 version produced by Red Bull. We can therefore speak of a staged situation, even if a certain improvisation can still be felt in the organisation of the space. Let’s not forget that at the time these production lines were set up, it was necessary to produce quickly and to improvise on the spot.

(JP) There is a shared history and imaginary between the development of aeronautics and the genesis of photography and cinema. One thinks, for example, of Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic studies on the movement of air at the end of the nineteenth century and of the way in which the propeller motif – paradoxically absent from your film – can appear as a metaphor for the device of cinematographic projection. There is a parallel to be drawn between the propeller and the Maltese cross of the projector, which stabilises the perception of the projected image and reinforces the illusion of depth of field. Like this architecture and this aeroplane, the nature of this place, that of an assembly line, asserts itself in turn as one of the subjects in its own right in your film. In what way does this work organisation, specific to a standardised industry, present itself as a matrix to rethink our relationship with virtual images?

(JP) This interest in fragmented vision has driven you to explore the constituent elements and properties of virtual images. The attention to detail in your work characterises a materialist and concrete approach to things. How would you define your relationship with this materiality of the virtual that you say you want the spectator to experience?



Note from the Dark Optics lectures,
Reduction

(JP) Is this why reflection phenomena recur in your films? I am, of course, thinking of the aeroplane, on which its surroundings are reflected, and of the still expanse of water in *Wildfire (meditation on fire)*. These mirror images seem to constantly reaffirm the flatness we are talking about here, but also the nature of the images we face. It is, in fact, often through them that we become aware of the sedimentation of the different layers structuring the whole.

(DC) The invention of the aeroplane was also a way of mapping the world. With a dominant view, humanity acquired the power to build or destroy that same world. According to the Wernicke-Geschwind model, the regions of the brain's left hemisphere, which contain the language centres, are only an abstraction when not contextualised by the right hemisphere. They treat the world as a collection of fragments. Working with synthetic images makes me think of the left hemisphere's tendency for abstraction and fragmentation. Even if this vision is the product of our brain, it is still a simulacrum. We are dealing with a world that is turned in on itself and that has voluntarily decided to deprive itself of a comprehensive vision. To put it another way, the fragments are content to exist without context.

(DC) We are all driven by the desire to touch. The relationship between what we see and what we touch is something that interests me. We are always talking about flat surfaces when it comes to studying the way the gaze functions. What degree of abstraction would we need to live in a world reduced to a succession of flat images? Would it also be possible to touch them? We now know that 3D optic simulations have added almost nothing to the way we interact with these surfaces, except perhaps an illusory temporal and geographic remapping. But they have made us aware that our perception is too often deprived of our other sensory modes. There must be a reason why we are beings who seek and accept this relationship with surfaces and screens. I believe it has to do with a certain dominance of the left hemisphere and the way it organises information. That is why our world appears to us as flattened and mapped out. Neuroscience has shown that patients who have lost their use of the right hemisphere of their brain tend to perceive the world in a flat and schematic way. This perceptual state corresponds to our world and our modernity. It is as literal as that. It would in fact be interesting to re-read our culture through the lens of the interactions and inhibitions of the hemispheres of our brain.

(DC) This also recurs in *The Quiet Shore* (2011). The reflection has the simple effect of authenticating a world. It also adds a layer of sophistication to the raw material of the image. What differences can we draw between a screen and a mirror? To externalise an image is to make it pass through a mirror. Nowadays, the screen operates as a mirror. Scottish psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist has clearly defined the mechanisms of reflexivity of the external world through one's own body. Any justification of the existence of an external world sends us back to schizophrenia. The world exists only for itself, and each being reflects it. This notion of *seeing* is also







Biological programming, which still exists in today's living creatures, dictates a reflex to stay away from fire if it cannot be contained (i.e. a wildfire). A 'meditation on fire' may therefore sound like an impossibility. Previous works such as *Sunrise* (2009) and *Reflecting Sunset* (2003) included images filmed directly into the Sun, looking straight at a raw 120,000 lux. These works are all about the wonder of images. How can so little do so much? A video projection of the Sun emits a meagre few thousand lumen but will still generate a brief human reflex – the search for protection from too much light.

Inspired by the inquiry into the amount of power needed to produce a digital 'still life' of fire (likely to set the computer system on fire), *Wildfire (meditation on fire)* confronts the biological and the digital. Long shots of silenced fire appropriate the notion of biological breathing time, while the abstract nature of the burning fire becomes a reference to the technological abstraction linked to its making, suggesting the increasingly abstract world we live in.

In *Wildfire (meditation on fire)* the camera has been removed and disintegrated into a numerical system of binary codes. We are confronted with an illusion of an image, a hallucination, a visual construct of computing. These images create an immersive experience of the otherwise un-experienceable.

WILDFIRE (MEDITATION ON FIRE)

Wildfire (meditation on fire), 2019–2020, single channel video projection,
3D animation, stereo audio, colour, 24 mins (in collaboration with Musea Brugge)



Wildfire (Twice Water), 2019, washed ink and pencil on paper, 36 x 51 cm

Wildfire (Balanced by Fire Only), 2020, washed ink and pencil on paper, 36 x 51 cm



Wildfire (Sulci and Giri), 2022, processual drawing on Hahnemühle digital etching paper.
Pencil, washed Chinese ink, hand-printed digital drawing, gouache, 67 x 61 cm



David Clark 2020 Wildfire - Small trees transitioning to red

Wildfire (Small Trees Transitioning to Red), 2020, acrylic paint on paper mounted on cardboard, 87 x 80 cm, courtesy Kunst Museum Winterthur, permanent loan from the Galerieverein, friends of the Kunst Museum Winterthur, 2021



David Cloutier 2020 - Wildfire (Baroque Curvature)

WILDFIRE
PLATE 270

Wildfire (Baroque Curvature), 2020, acrylic paint on paper mounted on cardboard, 81 x 80 cm, courtesy private collection, France

Wildfire (meditation on fire)

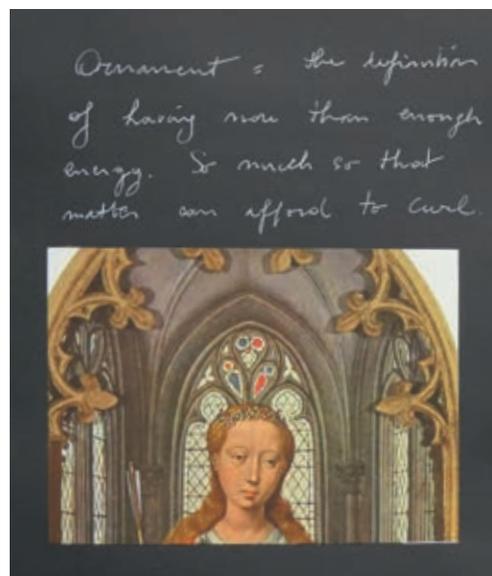
Jonathan Pouthier in conversation with David Claerbout

(JP) For philosopher Gaston Bachelard, the flame is a potential operator of images. It accentuates our pleasure of seeing and forces us to look. The burning landscape of *Wildfire (meditation on fire)* captures our gaze in a moment shared between fascination and terror. It stimulates our most primitive impulses and beliefs. What is the meaning of the fire that consumes your images?

(DC) I can't imagine a more transitional image than that produced by fire. The materials it consumes will never be the same again. This is probably why, in the Christian tradition, fire is equated with the purification of souls. In a way, the virtual possesses a similar transformative power. You can never really go back. With *Wildfire* I was interested in the transient states of matter and light. I tried to observe how light transforms the perception of matter, and vice versa. By freezing a certain gaze, the images of fire that I have been collecting for several years appear to me as architectures, with their floors, their nuclei and their periphery. It is possible to equate fire with an abstraction on the sole condition that we live in peace with the destruction it represents. If the aeroplane in *Aircraft (F.A.L.)* symbolises an arrow pointing to the future, fire predicts the opposite, backwards movement of fleeing. Every living creature is biologically programmed to stay away from a fire it cannot contain. The fire that has set the forest ablaze in my film obviously falls into this category. It is for this reason, and not out of provocation, that I see *Wildfire* as a meditation on our deepest fears. Fire possesses this ambivalence. It fascinates as much as it frightens.

(JP) In your film, fire shows its monumentality and verticality. The flames covering this idyllic nature and the wisps of smoke obstructing the view mobilise, in the background, an imaginary borrowed from the Gothic and Baroque styles. What is at stake in this pictorial and sculptural dimension of fire?

(DC) I want people to be able to touch this image and this light with their eyes in complete tranquillity. I want them to take in this scene with serenity, but also to appreciate these trees transformed into torches as permanent things, even though in graphic terms, everything seems to inform us that nothing will ever be the same again. It is, in fact, the calmness of the flame rather than the violence it represents that drew me to this project. Several of my works include references in the background to the history of painting and its iconography. These borrowings, however, are never shown head-on. Viewers have to pick them out in the layers of the image. I see them more as distant reminiscences



Wildfire (Black Book), 2020, courtesy Musea Brugge



Wildfire (Black Book), 2020, courtesy Musea Brugge

of a visual culture that we have inherited. In *Aircraft (F.A.L.)*, for example, this unfolds on the fringes of the image, that is, in the play of light and shadow that underlines the architectural dimension of the place in the manner of a modern-day cathedral. For *Wildfire*, on the other hand, the analogy is almost literal. The burning trees evoke the ornamental motifs of the flamboyant Gothic, in particular the '*mouchettes*', the flame-shaped stone ribs that adorned the façades of religious buildings. For its part, the smoke refers to the ornamental motif of the cumulonimbus in Baroque art and the ambiguity it implies between depth and surface in the perspective of the composition. I tried to incorporate this false flatness, this false depth of the Baroque, this bas-relief effect because I felt that it would be impossible for me to get around this point. I had to work with that. In itself, the Baroque is already a manifestation of the postmodern idea that depth masks a void in which there is nothing to be found. The same applies to the fear generated by the undead (zombies), which is nothing more than a surface.

(JP) In your essay *The Inflammable Image: Thoughts on Wildfire*, you refer to fifteenth-century Flemish painting, in particular Hans Memling and Jan Van Eyck, to illustrate the point when things tip into an optical regime of the image. For modern humanity, the apparatus of perception – that is, that we now only see through the transparent surface of the lens – has determined the system of visual confidence and relegated the other senses to peripheral functions. The fire in *Wildfire* is a powerful cathartic operator that mobilises our primary, not to say biological, instincts. What reflexes are you trying to provoke with these images? Is it a question of going beyond this regime of optical truth on which our visual culture is based?

(DC) This search for optical truth is particularly evident in Memling's *Madonna of the Rose Bower* and *St George with Donor* (c. 1490). Since the Renaissance, it has been driven by our confidence in a clear, universal, quasi-scientific perception free of pain and heralding the clarity of the lens. No stain should pollute our perception any more. The constant development and improvement of the optical field have led to the domination of the visual confidence system, a system we know today as visual culture. The distorted reflection of the scene on the surface of Saint George's armour in Memling's painting represents, in a sense, the announcement of this promise and of this new perception regime. This self-reflecting image functions as an optical device whose pre-programmed nature sets the parameters of the composition, shapes the meaning of the image, and conditions the experience of looking. Too much time now separates us from Memling and his contemporaries to allow us to grasp fully the impact of the painting as it appeared at the time. It may have been of the order of something that is still valid today and which could be defined as 'magnificence in evidence', that is to say, a clarity defined in a fragment of truth on which our belief in images rests. Above all else, we are believers, just as the viewers of the first film projections thought the footage was more real than real. The means of technical reproducibility that led to our visual culture, such as photography and film, brilliantly subverted the ancient power of language and writing – a slow, linear art – which made the progression of time and the understanding of history seem like one very long thread. Memling and Van Eyck's polyptychs are organised in such a way that representations of Heaven and Hell co-exist, side by side, while visually signifying a separation between the Earthly space and the Heavenly or divine space. This organisation of the composition refers to my research into divided attention, which is by nature opposed to the unified vision of the camera lens. The succession of images in the work of Memling and Van Eyck thus committed devotees to observe them from left to right, as if each work were a motionless journey.

- is Now! Das Erhabene in der Kunst von Barnett Newman bis heute', Burgdorf/CH
- Le Magasin, 'Oeuvres vidéo de la collection Pierre Huber', Grenoble
- Argus Building, 'Brighton Photo Biennale', Brighton
- Dumont-Wyckhuysse, 'Image In Motion', Roeselare

2005

- Centro Cultural de Belem, 'Lisboa Photo 2005', Lisbon
- Palais des Beaux-Arts, 'Belgique Visionnaire', Brussels
- Museum Kunst Palast, 'Slow Art – Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Flandern und den Niederlanden', Düsseldorf
- 'Le Printemps de Septembre', Toulouse
- Musée d'art moderne, 'Voisins Officiel', Lille
- Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik, 'Shadow Play. Shadow and Light in Contemporary Art – An Homage to Hans Christian Andersen', Odense (travels to Kunsthalle Kiel 2005; Landesgalerie Linz 2006)
- Museum für Moderne Kunst MMK, 'What's New, Pussycat?', Frankfurt am Main
- Biennale Prague, 'Double Vision', Prague
- Fondazione Torino Musei, 'Miniatures from eighteenth century until today', Turin
- Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 'Private View 1998-2000. Collection Pierre Huber', Lausanne
- Witte de With, 'Monopolis', Rotterdam
- Hamburger Bahnhof, Rieckhallen, 'Fast nichts. Minimal artworks', Berlin
- Seedamm Kulturzentrum, 'Manchmal weiss ich nicht, ob ich etwas wirklich erlebt oder ob ich es in einem Film gesehen habe. Von Olaf Breuning bis Sam Taylor-Wood. 33 Videoarbeiten aus der Sammlung Goetz in München', Pfäffikon

2004

- Taipei Biennial, 'Do You Believe in Reality?', Taipei
- Yvon Lambert, 'Works I told you about', Paris
- Galerie Neue Meister, '94-04. Zehn Jahre Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst in Dresden', Dresden
- Montevideo, 'Channel Zero', Amsterdam
- Krinzinger Projekte, 'Working Ethics. An Exhibition from a certain Flanders', Vienna
- Yokohama Museum of Art, 'Non-Sect Radical: Contemporary Photography III', Yokohama
- Le Plateau, 'Ralentir vite', Paris
- Greene Naftali Gallery, New York
- deSingel, 'DVD Lounge Incidents / De Nachten', Antwerp

2003

- Museum of Contemporary Art, 'War (What is it Good for?)', Chicago
- Kunsthalle Vienna, 'Attack! Kunst und Krieg in den Zeiten der Medien', Vienna
- Museet for Samtidskunst, 'Body Matters', Oslo
- Galerie Neue Meister, 'under ground', Dresden

- 'Outlook', Athens
- S.M.A.K., 'Gelijk het leven is. Belgische kunst uit de collectie van het SMAK', Ghent
- ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, 'Fast forward: Media Art Sammlung Goetz', Karlsruhe
- 'Guided by Heroes', Hasselt
- Postbahnhof am Ostbahnhof, '...lautlos irren, ways of worldmaking, too...', Berlin
- Caermersklooster, 'Still/Move', Ghent
- CRAC Centre de Recherche et d'Action Culturelle, 'Contre/Temps. Thierry Kuntzel. David Claerbout', Valence
- M HKA, 'Once upon a time...', Antwerp
- '31st International Film Festival', Rotterdam
- De Appel, 'Haunted by Detail', Amsterdam
- DAADGalerie, 'Teaser', Berlin
- Musée des arts contemporains MAC's Grand-Hornu, 'L'Herbier et le Nuage', Hornu
- Art & Public, Geneva
- Yvon Lambert, Paris
- Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, 'Group Exhibition', Antwerp
- Museum für Moderne Kunst, 'Das Museum, die Sammlung, der Direktor und seine Liebschaften', Frankfurt
- Museum der bildenden Künste, 'Malerei ohne Malerei', Leipzig

2001

- Korean Art Foundation, 'Unreal Time Video', Seoul
- INOVA Institute of Visual Arts, University of Wisconsin, 'Winter Exhibition: Tiong Ang, Serhiy Bratkov, David Claerbout, José Antonio Hernandez-Diez', Milwaukee WI
- Museum D'Hondt-Daenens, 'Aubette', Deurle
- Centre pour l'image contemporaine, 'La vérité est ailleurs', Geneva
- 'Berlin Biennale 2', Berlin
- Sammlung Goetz, 'Videoserie in der Black Box, 6 Künstler – 6 Positionen', Munich
- Cultural Center Strombeek, 'Touch me...', Sint-Niklaas, Roeselare
- Galerie Ascan Crone, 'Passion', Part I in Hamburg, Part II in Berlin

2000

- Limerick City Gallery of Art, Limerick
- Huis aan de Werf, cur. Moritz Kung, Utrecht
- Le Grand Hornu, 'Chantier du musée', Mons
- La Monnaie, 'L'Opera, un chant d'Étoiles', Brussels
- '18th World Wide Video Festival', Amsterdam

1999

- Fotohof, Salzburg
- [Exhibition with works from the Collection of the Flemish Community], Hallen, Bruges
- M HKA, 'Trouble Spot Painting', Antwerp
- 'Nuevos Caminos', Vigo, Galicia
- FRI ART, Centre for Contemporary Art, 'Transference. Locations in Memory and Time', Fribourg

- Hartware MedienKunstVerein, 'Dis. Location', Dortmund
- Galerie Ferdinand Van Dielen, 'Reflexive Figuration', Amsterdam

1998

- Shed im Eisenwerk, 'Not strictly private', Frauenfeld/CH
- Gallery by Night, 'Intimate Strangers', Budapest
- Beelden Buiten, 'I never promised you a rose garden', Tiel

1997

- Watertoren CHK, Vlissingen
- Pica en Flandes, Barcelona
- Palais des Beaux-Arts, 'Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge', Brussels

1996

- Montevideo Gallery, 'Tekeningen en projecten', Antwerp



Exhibition view Secession, Vienna, 2012, photo: Wolfgang Thaler



Exhibition view Tel Aviv Museum (Helena Rubinstein Pavilion), 2012, photo: Elad Sarig



Exhibition view Kunsthalle Mainz, 2013, photo: Norbert Miguletz

WORKS

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TRANSLATION

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COPY EDITING

Derek Scoins (English)
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DESIGN

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ART DIRECTION

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COORDINATION

Sofie Meert

PRINTING

die Keure, Bruges, Belgium

BINDING

IBW, Oostkamp, Belgium

FINISHING

Buchbinderei Richard Mayer
GmbH, Esslingen am Neckar,
Germany

ISBN 978 94 6436 635 8

D/2022/11922/15

NUR 642



HANNIBAL
BOOKS

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www.hannibalbooks.be

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The artist wants to thank:

Jonathan Pouthier
Lieve Eneman
Gautier Platteau and Team Hannibal Books

The galleries

Pedro Cera, Annet Gelink, Sean Kelly,
Esther Schipper, Rüdiger Schöttle,
Micheline Szwajcer

The studio and associates

Wout Bosschaert, Ben Van Den Broeck,
Olivier Vanden Bussche, Willem Corten,
Hanne Dewachter, Jochem Van Gool,
Florian den Hoed, Joke Van den Hof,
Nick Jacobs, Wim Janssen, Jasper
Janssens, Cederic Neven, Rozemarijn
Samplonius, Alexey Shlyk, Dana Stoian,
Haryo Sukmawanto, Tse-Ling Uh, Joren
Vandenbroucke

**Special thanks to all the anonymous
extras and actors and to**

Till-Holger Borchert, Lydie Delahaye,
Martin Engler, Joris Goorden, Christophe
Leunis, Vanessa Pouthier, Jeroen
Vanacker, Johan Vandermaelen

David Claerbout is a registered member
of SOFAM.