

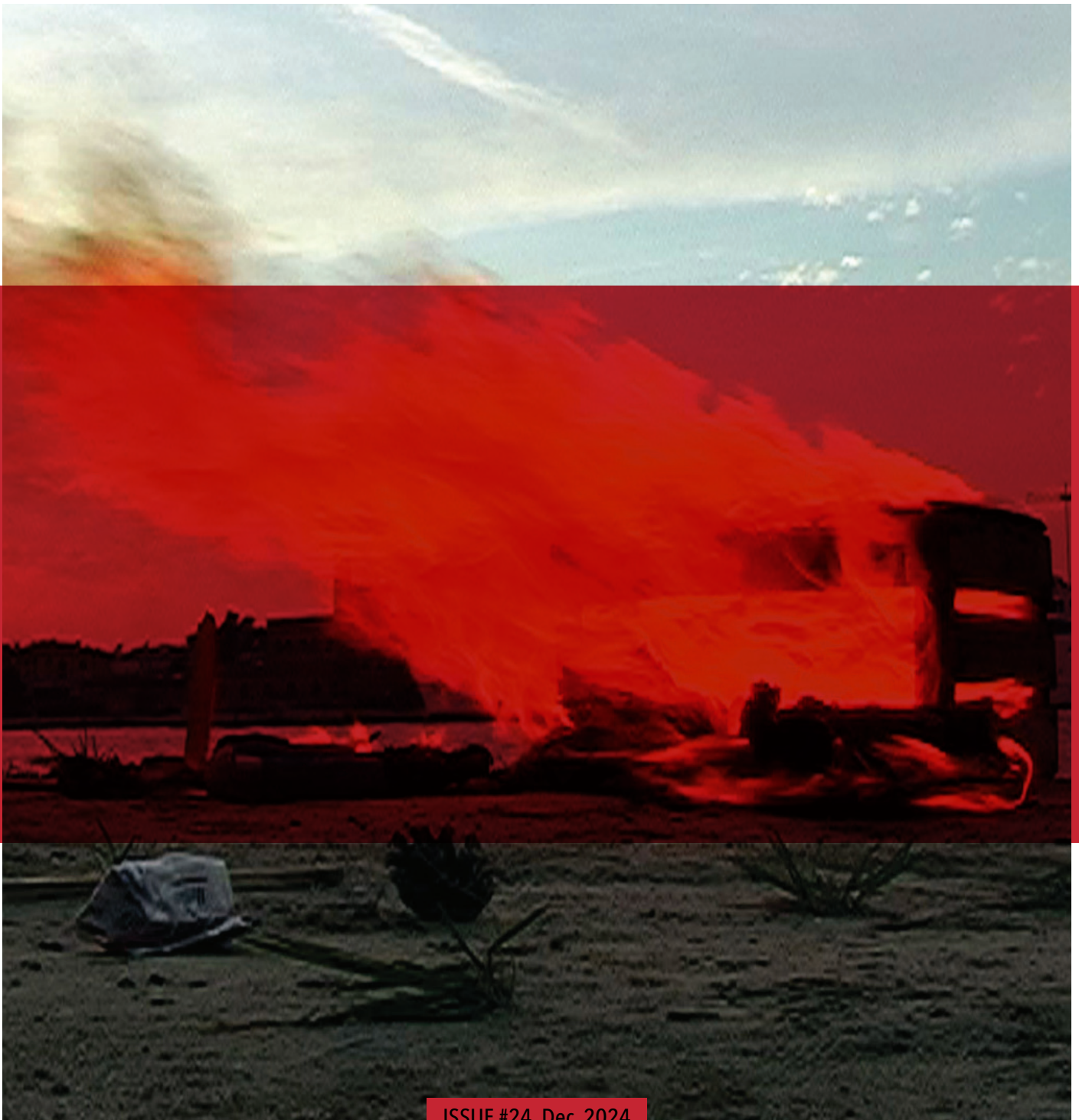
CONTEMPORARY

IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

Marco Bartolozzi | Sahar Baseri Saadi | Shams Ul Arfeen Hashmi | Gianluca Lombardo | Mohamed Melehi

Silvia Muscolino | Olga Orsik | Alexis Peskine | Latifa Saeed | Wael Shawky | Michel Couturier | Alessandro Turco



ISSUE #24 Dec. 2024

Art is an experience, not an object.

Anish Kapoor



TOTAL ARTS
at
courtyard
www.totalarts.gallery Dubai - UAE



Shahla Hosseini and Fereydoun Ave. Dimensions (including frame): 87 x 66 cm

Artists Emergency Aid is an ongoing project, initiated in 2020. It is based on the urgency of helping artists in need. It is an initiative by recognized, prominent members of the artistic community to support less-fortunate artists and offer them the possibility to continue their creative journey. The project consists in exceptional collaborations between well-established artists pairing to work mutually on a respective artist's print or artist proof. The coinciding artistic interventions by two recognized artists on one artwork aim to create unique, unrepeatable art pieces destined to be presented online or in physical exhibitions and sales. The fund is to cover artists' essential needs. It enables cultural representatives, participants, and major actors to fulfill part of their social responsibility towards the cultural and artistic community.

Contributing Artists:

Morteza Ahmadvand, Nazgol Ansarinia, Mohamad Hossein Gholamzadeh, Sahand Hesamian, Shahla Hosseini, Reza Lavasani, Ahmad Mir, Mehrdad Mohebbali, Farhad Moshiri, Hooman Mortazavi, Ahmad Morshedloo, Ali Nasir, Shirin Neshat, Nicky Nodjoumi, Fereydoun Omid, Farah Ossouli, Mohamad Piriaie, Behjat Sadr, Bijan Saffari, Ashkan Sanei, Baktash Sarang, Shideh Tami, Shantia Zakerameli, Dariush Zandi

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Michel Couturier, Bonfire, Venice, 2007

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ARTISTS

6 **Marco Bartolozzi**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

8 **Sahar Baseri Saadi**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

10 **Shams Ul Arfeen Hashmi**
By: Lenka Piper

12 **Gianluca Lombardo**
By: Anna Guillot

14 **Mohamed Melehi**
By: Federica Falchi

16 **Silvia Muscolino**
By: Anna Guillot

18 **Olga Orsik**
By: Lenka Piper

20 **Alexis Peskine**
By: Sophie Kazan

22 **Latifa Saeed**
By: Sophie Kazan

24 **Wael Shawky**
By: Sophie Kazan

26 **In memorial
Michel Couturier**
By: Anna Guillot

32 **Artificial Intelligence
Interviewed with
Alessandro Turco**
By: Fabio Gamberini

EDITORS' NOTE

As we close out 2024, this issue of ContemporaryIdentities marks the final one of the year. It has been a year of challenges, but also a year of growth, reflection, and resilience. Art, in its many forms, has been a constant companion, helping us navigate these times with humanity, expression, and community. For nearly six years, ContemporaryIdentities has been dedicated to connecting artists and art enthusiasts from around the globe. We are incredibly grateful for the responses we've received from writers, artists, and the wider public, which continue to inspire and fuel our passion for art.

In this twenty-fourth issue, we are thrilled to feature a memorial, written by Anna Guillot about Michel Coururier. "Michel Couturier or a phantasmatic shift in the world is what you might say when you encounter the Belgian artist's work on paper and videos and begin to grasp their iconic code, language and meaning. The titles of Couturier's cycles of work, and the diversity of media in which he works, present us with a complex weave, an articulation of content and form whose heterogeneity is only apparent".

We would also like to express our deep appreciation to all the artists and art writers who have contributed to this journey. A special thank you to our board member Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary) for his continued support, and to our esteemed international art critics: Federica Falchi (Italy), Anna Guillot (Italy), Sophie Kazan (UK), and Lenka Piper (Czech Republic).

Our gratitude also goes to Fabio Gamberini, our editor for the Artificial Intelligence section, who conducted an insightful interview with Alessandro Turco to explore the connections and contrasts between two seemingly distinct worlds: art and science at the age of AI art.

As we bid farewell to 2024, we look forward to another year filled with creativity, exploration, and collaboration. Take care, everyone, and we hope you enjoy the art featured in this issue.

Here's to a vibrant and inspiring 2025!

Happy New Year in advance!

Warm regards,
Sara Berti & Elham Shafaei

Marco Bartolozzi

Italy | Zoltán Somhegyi



Lost at Sea, Photo documentary project, 2019-2024, Fine-Art Print on cotton paper, 40x60 cm

There is something in Marco Bartolozzi's photographs that we could label as the representation of a "sham insignificance". One can often feel that insignificance is something that can only be negative: especially in our world today, everything seems to be about and around the particular, the extraordinary, the one that is beyond the normal and only through this can something have a great significance, and only because of this it should deserve our attention. Marco Bartolozzi, however, emphasizes that it should not necessarily be so. He highlights that there can be much to see and experience even in a seemingly simple scene. Therefore, although the places shown in his photographs look insignificant, but this appearance is an intentional sham – they are there to stimulate us, through their very simplicity, to reflect on what is beyond all this? The artist carefully selects the places, the composition and also the tonality of the images, in order to help us slow down, and ruminate on the poesis of the vision. Only through this can we start seeing the hidden values of what first looked insignificant and understand that the significance is just beyond the immediately visible. There is another layer that we can fill with ideas, emotions, memories, stories and desires.



Lost at Sea, Photo documentary project, 2019-2024, Fine-Art Print on cotton paper, 40x60 cm



Lost at Sea, Photo documentary project, 2019-2024, Fine-Art Print on cotton paper, 40x60 cm

Sahar Baseri Saadi

Iran | Zoltán Somhegyi



Overflow Series, 2021, Oil on canvas, 80x120 cm

Sahar Baseri's works, first strike us with a basic question: what is exactly happening there? What are the figures doing, in the water and in the swimming pool? They are elegant, definitely not in a dress that would be suitable for swimming. The realistic execution and figurative style of the paintings are thus in strong opposition to the dream-like, imaginary world that they depict. And it will be this point when we realize that the water here is not that much an actual context, more like a metaphor of the context, hence a visualization of the flow in which we live our lives. It sometimes gives us the opportunity to float, to swim comfortably, to enjoy the movements, while in other cases it overflows us (as the title of the series refers to), thus forcing us to put together all our strength to keep control of the situation. Whichever happens though, it will always provide us with the opportunity to understand more of our ever-changing, floating existence.



Overflow Series, 2024, Oil on canvas, 100x120 cm



Overflow Series, 2022, Oil on canvas, 130x100 cm

Shams Ul Arfeen Hashmi

Pakistan

Lenka
Piper



Baah 2, 2024, Acrylics on canvas, 90x180 cm

The primary focus of painter Shams Ul Arfeen Hashmi is landscape painting. However, his work departs from traditional landscapes through its unique composition, emphasizing specific details of the scenery. By doing so, Hashmi transcends conventional approaches—he observes familiar landscapes with a fresh perspective, highlighting their details and presenting them to both him and the viewer in a new light. This method transforms classical landscape painting into a novel art form where abstraction and realism intersect. For Hashmi, painting is a journey—from emotions to thoughts, from lines to colors—culminating in their harmonious fusion. His layered technique adds depth to his works, whether depicting the sky, grassy terrain, or the sea.



loch reeds 3, 2022, Acrylics on canvas, 90x120cm



Untitled, 2024, Acrylics on canvas, 120x180 cm

Gianluca Lombardo

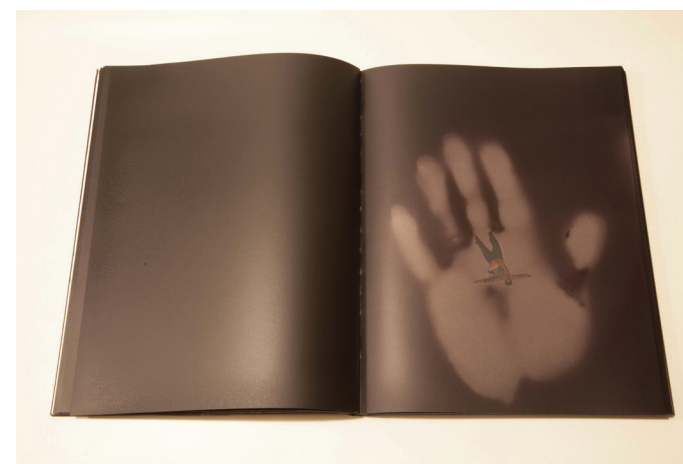
Italy | Anna
Guillot



A mezz'aria (In mid-air), 2021, Artist's book, cover, Courtesy KoobookArchive.

Gianluca Lombardo's 'A mezz'aria' - a significant work that alone could stand for the author's entire production - presents an artist's book as a simulacrum with ethical content. Opening to a singular synesthetic involvement, such a book, moreover, requires from the audience an exercise of special dedication.

It is a work capable of implementing perhaps more than others its dynamic consistency as an "open work." Its multisensory dimension demands active interaction and prolonged engagement on the part of the user-handler: rather than sight, which may well have gratification, in the first instance 'In Midair' seems to privilege the sense of touch through the thermal faculty the hand has of conducting heat. The work manifests itself only through the emittance of temperature by those who are willing to experience its fruition by feeling each page with their hand for a time. A page that, although it contains images, is presented as monochrome due to the superimposition of a black heat-sensitive paint that conceals its contents. At first there is nothing to suggest that anything will present itself to view; by searching the surface, however, one will have a way to keep one's hand in areas in which to pause: by acting on the page for a lapse of time, the thermal energy of the hand will operate as unveiled. The images that emerged are disturbing; they are about people united by having experienced an accidental drama, and their last moments of life. But what is really disturbing is Lombardo's thesis that makes the book a device capable of engaging in a very touching operation indeed: "I selected 18 images from the web, isolated them from context by canceling the reference to the Towers. After



A mezz'aria, 2021, Artist's book, Digital printing on paper, Varnish heat-sensitive, 26x20x2 cm, Unique.



A mezz'aria, 2021, artist's book



A mezz'aria, 2021, preparatory study

'suspending' them in nothingness without perspective or place or time, I turned these human beings upside down, as if they were plummeting upward in an ideal redemption capable of reversing the motion that threw them into the clearings in front of the two skyscrapers. I suspended them in midair in their upward rush. I turned them upside down almost thinking that I could give them a fragment of pacified memory, in a still image that no longer fears gravity, and hoping somehow, in this way, to reverse space, to reverse the motion of time, to reverse history, to reverse Evil."

Mohamed Melehi

Morocco
Federica Falchi



Portrait of Mohamed Melehi, Courtesy of Loft Art Gallery, Casablanca, Morocco

When Mohamed Melehi returned to Morocco in the 1960s, he brought with him the vast currents of his global artistic sojourn, which, like a river flowing into the sea, harmoniously converged with the cultural rhythms of his homeland, giving rise to a fresh tide of creative expression. A visionary at the heart of the Casablanca Art School, Melehi did not solely navigate the chasm between East and West; he reimagined abstraction as a dialogue with Morocco's artistic heritage and not as a foreign imposition, conceiving a space where the popular and the traditional inform and transform one another. Melehi's iconic waves, elegant and infinite, shattered the boundaries of traditional form, embodying a paradox with no clear beginning nor end, yet unceasingly undulating—forever evolving, forever expanding. Through fluid, geometric forms, Melehi forged a new postcolonial, pan-Arab identity that neither mimicked the past nor conformed to the present, but carved a new path between them. His art became an anthem of aesthetic disobedience, therefore challenging the viewer's perception of culture, expanding the boundaries of artistic resistance.



Untitled, 1980, Cellulosique sur bois, 80x80 cm, Courtesy of Loft Art Gallery, Casablanca, Morocco



Untitled, 1996, Cellulosique sur bois, 95x110 cm, Courtesy of Loft Art Gallery, Casablanca, Morocco

Silvia Muscolino

Italy
Anna
Guillot



Il tiro con l'arco (The archery), 2024, Pen brushes on organdy, 150x140 cm

The pictorial research found in Silvia Muscolino's large canvases, from the diptych 'Here' and 'Now' to the trilogy of enamels on panel in 'The Garden of the World Has No Limits', as well as the work aimed at mere technical experimentation declines the form-color relationship in a particular and sensitive metric synthesis, as in a kind of two-dimensional, suspended and luminous choreography. The need for an awareness of the dynamics of perception and synesthesia permeates the entirety



Qui (Here), 2024, enamel on canvas, 200x200 cm

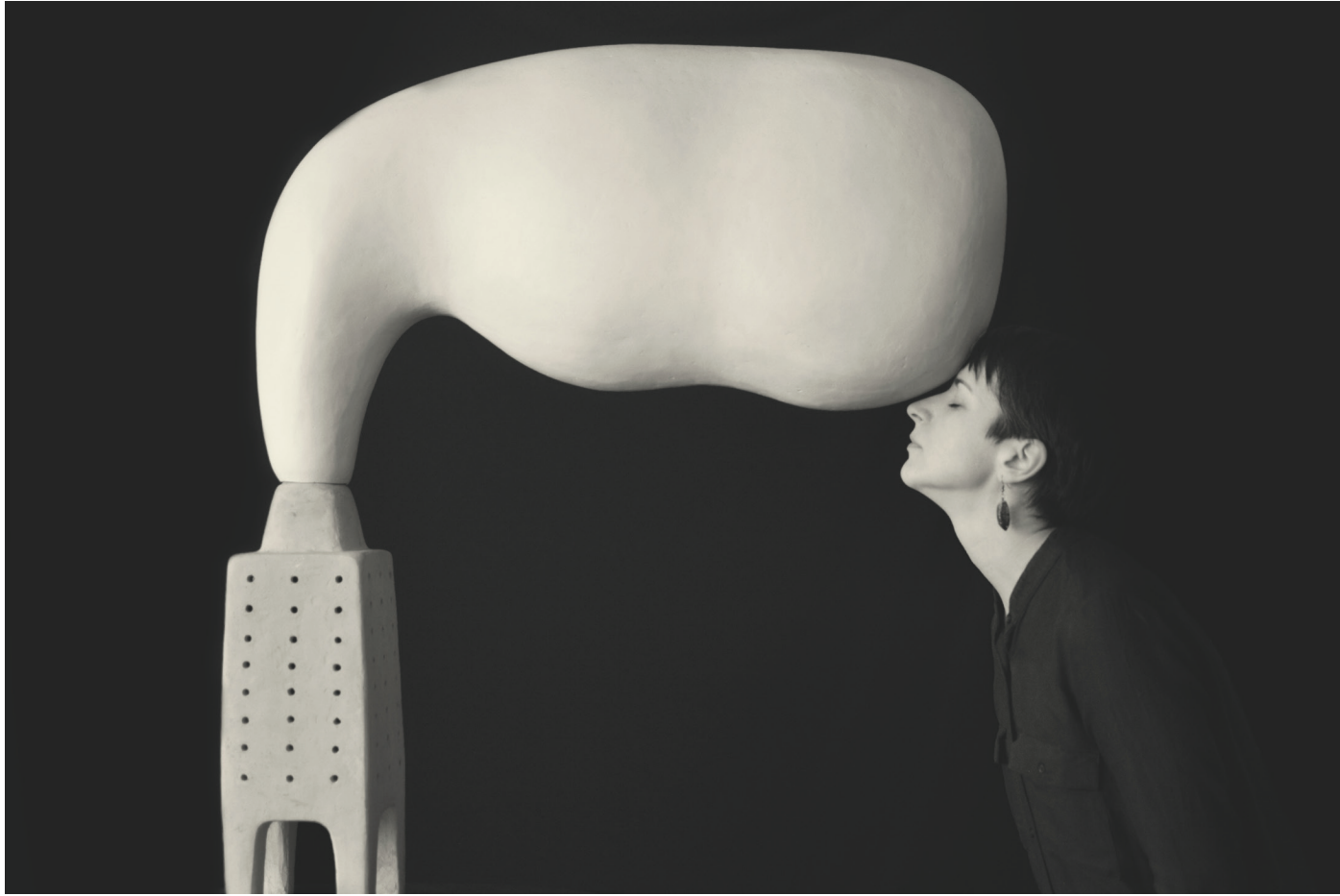


Ora (Now), 2024, enamel on canvas, 200x200 cm

of the young Sicilian artist's (Catania, 1998) recent production. Because of the peculiar vital spirit and for different perhaps unfathomable reasons, references emerge from such works of which Silvia is probably unaware (or perhaps not). From a distance, somehow, one glimpses a joyful breath, a promising vitality, a hymn to life. The Matisse of *La danse* and other fauves atmospheres come to mind. Together, but on an entirely different plane, it is not difficult to glimpse something of that production of Carla Accardi, typical of the form-color flow and research of *Forma 1* (a postwar Italian art movement). In these canvases and acetates, we seem to be able to read a vague awareness, the residual trace, a *je ne sais quoi* of a certain Italian 20th century that can be revisited from Silvia's point of view, which shares its light and exuberance in a basic, naive, almost primordial, Gauguinian dimension. But this is not all the pictorial work of Silvia Muscolino, a young artist living her time. It is not only about the precise linearity of a path. Parentheses open up in her iterics that could become new choices and viable paths. The figure is latent, the subject emerges in new works and on the one hand takes on a cut that almost seems to open to illustration with panoramas and jungles, and on the other insists on the aniconic dimension with an oriental flavor and of some coveted asceticism.

Olga Orsik

Belarus
Lenka
Piper



Cloud production, 2022, Stainless steel, ceramics, polymer, 95x90x36 cm

The work of sculptor Olga Orsik reflects a profound respect for the uniqueness of the moment and the natural materials she uses—stone, wood, marble. While drawing on familiar forms such as the human figure, head, and hands, she transforms them into intimate objects that feel both new and personal. Her minimalist shapes often reference everyday situations we take for granted, yet they have the power to pause us, revealing the extraordinary within the ordinary. Olga Orsik's sculptures not only capture fleeting, singular moments but also share them with the viewer, reminding us that life is composed of small, essential experiences—quiet, intimate, and worthy of our attention.



Freedom, 2020, Polymer, oak, 102x95x23 cm



Generalist, 2023, Polymer and acrylic, 70x39x42 cm

Alexis Peskine

France and locations
worldwide | Sophie
Kazan



Folhas Secas, 2024, Mint, chrome oxide green pigment, lemon gold leaf and nails on wood, 180x283 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and October Gallery, London, UK

Alexis Peskine is an Afro-Brazilian artist who is inspired by his roots and visual culture. His latest series, Forest Figures focuses on human identity and resilience in the face of natural phenomena. It follows two previous series: Fire Figures (21-2020) and Power Figures (2017). In all of them, Peskine explores themes of spirituality and healing using natural backgrounds, wood, leaves, minerals, shells, and also the East African phenomenon of Nkisi (plural: Minkisi) pierced power figures. According to



Séetal, 2024, White and black paint, archival varnish, 24k gold leaf and nails on wood, 150x111 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and October Gallery, London, UK

Congolese beliefs, sacred figures contain powerful and healing properties. Piercing them with nails or clevers releases these natural properties or powers. And so, Perskine uses configurations of nails of different thicknesses and with gold, silver and palladian leaf heads, to highlight these dark, iconic portraits. They have a divine or magical quality, and the nails reference their magical healing properties, as well as the power of nature and creation.



Séetal, 2024, White and black paint, archival varnish, 24k gold leaf and nails on wood, 150x111 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and October Gallery, London, UK

Latifa Saeed

UAE Sophie
Kazan



Dust devil, Installation view, Beyond Emerging Artists' Exhibition, Curated by Morad Montazami at Marignana Arte Gallery, Venice Biennale, Italy

The artist Latifa Saeed's experimental art practice explores ecological themes and materiality, based on the four elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Her installations highlight the magic and mystery of natural phenomena calling to mind local folklore and genies of the desert. Her Dust Devils is a series of four installations based on each of the elements, using projections, smoke machines, technology (electro-magnetic readers, LCD screens) and sound. In this way Saeed draws the viewer into a liminal and sensory space. Dust Devil Earth consists of a glass receptacle in which sand is swept up like a tornado using electromagnetic waves. Her Water installation involves moving smoke or steam, a soundscape of a crackling fire characterizes the third element. The frequency waves impact the visitor's mood and state of mind. Dust Devil Air is a yellow string of dust or sand or smoke which seems to draw all the elements together and forms a fragile movement in space. Saeed art underlines the earth's fragility, "nature will always be the most advanced technology," she says, and "we must protect it as humanity will never be able to bring it back" if it is lost.



Dust devil, Installation view, Beyond Emerging Artists' Exhibition, Curated by Morad Montazami at Marignana Arte Gallery, Venice Biennale, Italy



Dust devil I [water], 2023, Mix-Media, 100x40 cm

Wael Shawky

Egypt-USA
Sophie
Kazan



Representing Egypt, 2024, Drama, 1882, 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, © Wael Shawky. Photo Credit Mina Nabil, Courtesy of Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Lisson Gallery, Lia Rumma, and Barakat Contemporary

Artist Wael Shawky's practice centers on visual research of the past to better understand the present. His curated and created the solo exhibition, Drama 1882 for the Egypt Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale, consists of art installations and the screening of a musical, Drama 1882. Shawky wrote, composed, staged and produced it with a cast of almost 200 actors, about the Urabi nationalist uprising against British colonial forces. This is the artist's first musical, though he has worked on numerous historical films, using puppet actors. The trilogy, Cabaret Crusades I (2012), II (2012) and III (2014) considered Arab narratives of the past and I am Hymns of the New Temples (2024) is set in Pompeii before its destruction. "You need as many angles for the same topic as possible. You need to feel and sense the mud, the soil – you cannot sense it from the film alone," Shawky insists.



Representing Egypt, 2024, Drama, 1882, 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, © Wael Shawky. Photo Credit Mina Nabil, Courtesy of Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Lisson Gallery, Lia Rumma, and Barakat Contemporary



Representing Egypt, 2024, Drama, 1882, 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, © Wael Shawky. Photo Credit Mina Nabil, Courtesy of Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Lisson Gallery, Lia Rumma, and Barakat Contemporary

In memorial

MICHEL COUTURIER

Anna Guillot



Périphéries, Brussels, 2002

'Michel Couturier or a phantasmatic shift in the world' is what you might say when you encounter the Belgian artist's work on paper and videos and begin to grasp their iconic code, language and meaning.

The titles of Couturier's cycles of work, and the diversity of media in which he works, present us with a complex weave, an articulation of content and form whose heterogeneity is only apparent. There are several possible ways of describing Michel Couturier's atmosphere and themes, and of defining a line of interpretation, and the prism of cinema is one of them. Without going back too far in time, Godfrey Reggio's¹ experimental Qatsi trilogy, completed some twenty years ago, contains neither dialogue nor narrative outline. Considered emblematic of social and environmental protest, it is a unique and breathtaking look at the superstructure of the world and modern life. In the early 1980s, Kojaanisqatsi provided food for thought in the debate about technology and the notion of progress in a world driven by speed. An analogy can be drawn with McLuhan's theories and the questions posed by philosophy, science and other branches of knowledge.

In Reggio's films, a number of issues and implications linked to the idea of progress, such as movement and speed, or abundance and consumption, converged to create a tragic vision. In

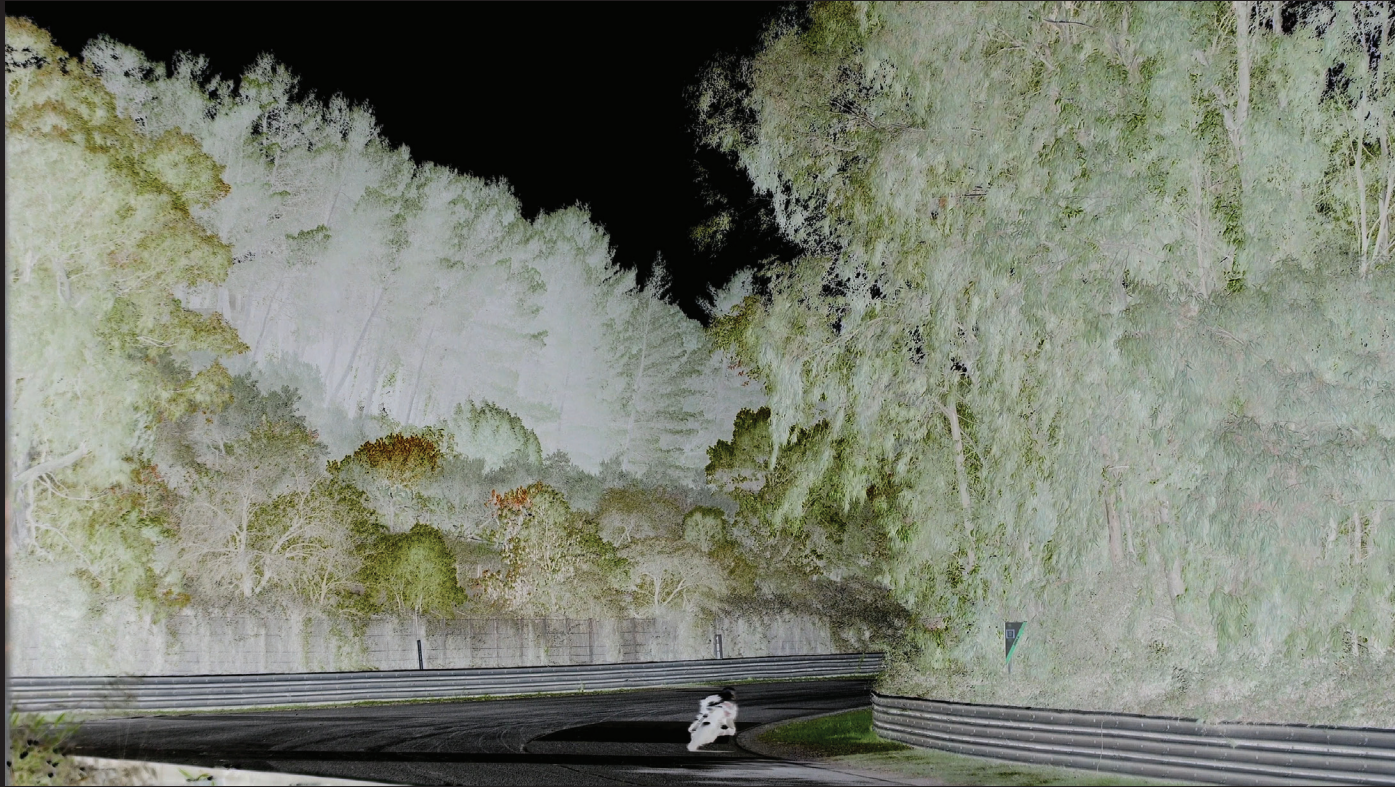
Couturier's work, these questions find their own clear, measured and at the same time complex conceptual development. The Belgian artist's gaze and vision are articulated in a different way, riddled with subtle and learned clues and based on other elements that are unique to him and entirely situated in the present time.

In the early 2000s, Michel Couturier began his 'photo-graphic' work focusing on public space, its signs and signals. The Périphéries cycle focuses on the urban landscape in cross-section and detail: large-format photographs of shopping centers, car parks and suburbs, unexpectedly combined with extracts from Cesare Pavese's Dialogues avec Leuco. Within the Périphéries poster series, a conversational complicity is created, a semantic understanding between the two parties: photography and writing. At the same time, he produced a series of graphic works on paper, reproducing details of urban furniture, silent and hybrid traces that are a little like vestiges, a little like ghosts. The content of these two types of work was the subject of an interesting conceptual analysis in a conversation between Couturier and Michela Sacchetto² on the occasion of the exhibition Il y a plus de feux que d'étoiles.

This is how the great theme of Myth, which lies at the heart of Michel Couturier's work, emerges - as the quotations from Pavese make clear³. In Dialogues avec Leuco, twenty-seven conversations written between 1945 and 1947 and structured in dialogical form, Cesare Pavese explores the repertoire of Greek mythology by defining the characteristics and relationships between the themes addressed and the pairs of characters (in Le mystère, it is Dionysos and Demeter who speak⁴; in La Chimère, Hippolocos and Sarpedon; in Les hommes, Cratos and Bia; in Les dieux, two unspecified interlocutors who seem to belong to contemporary times, etc.). This is clearly a mythology influenced by ethnology and by various currents of modern thought, in which the concept of myth, although specific to an era that is historically past, is recognized as a cultural



Posters, Musée de la Photographie, Charleroi, 2015



L'Enlèvement de Proserpine, videostill, 2018



L'Enlèvement de Proserpine, videostill, 2018



Les Ports de Sicile, videostill, 2019



substratum that is inalienable and constitutive of man.

Here, myth assumes the function of a tool for excavating and understanding the human being, a catalyst for displacement and sublimation, and an interpreter of profound experience. For Couturier, introducing Pavese's text into his work was an anticipatory introduction - as we have said - of what was to become the foundation of his subsequent approach. In recent years, during repeated visits to Sicily, Michel Couturier has literally allowed himself to be immersed in the culture and places of the Myth. It was in the footsteps of Proserpine (Περσεφόνη-Κόρη), in the area known as the 'Umbilicus Siciliae' inland, in the central part of the island near Enna, in Pergusa, that the video work *L'Enlèvement de Proserpine* (2018) was born and completed. The result of a study of the area, a long period of filming in the vicinity of Lake Pergusa and studio work, this work forms a striking and poignant part of the three-year cycle that gives its title to the Catania exhibition *Un Royaume sans Frontière/Terraferma5*.

Lasting 7'20', the themes of *Périphéries* clearly return in another form, and the duality between present and myth makes a comeback. M.C.'s videos, animated by a sensitive reflection, decipher places. A vague tremor runs through the images, the cuts, the editing. Pieces of Sicily, not just the lake - which is in danger of drying up - Etna, the Trapani salt marshes, the rocks, the water, the bushes: a whole whiteness, snow, salt, smoke, vapor, fog, clouds and an ochre-colored fire.

A light wind blows, almost carrying us towards the cliff where a cave opens, towards the water or in the middle of a flock of birds.

But at the same time, the silhouette of a titan on a steel steed appears. A man on a motorbike

on a racetrack with a glorious past built around the lake, the Pergusa circuit, now in a state of abandonment and decay. There are also traces of a shopping center. All is quiet, with little movement. Yet it evokes something heavy, nature, a life, if not completely impoverished, at least in great danger. In a veiled way - if not in the title - the video refers to the ancient pagan myth. A drought and famine caused by Ceres followed Proserpine's abduction from the lake. Jupiter's intercession only partially repaired the damage: Proserpine was only allowed to return to her mother Ceres in spring and summer and was forced to stay with her abductor Pluto in autumn and winter. This is how mythology interprets the alternation of the seasons. With such a framework, the Couturier suggests something unsettling and troubling.

There are many visual references, and at one point the atmosphere of Tarkovsky's *Nostalgie* comes to mind. In addition to the editing by the author, the sound design and color grading also contribute to the character of the work, its disconcerting atmosphere and its constant distancing from the objective and predictable. The collaboration with sound artist Yannick Franck, a specialist in the sound engineering of video works and immersive installations, enables *L'Enlèvement* to be shaped through electronic sound - using loops, distortion effects, compression, variations in speed and pitch, delay, reverb and chorus. The same applies to post-production and color grading, thanks to the contribution of Miléna Trivier.

Set in today's reality, the one that Marc Augé questions in terms of the question of place, the video work *Les Ports de Sicile* is part of a cycle on Sicilian ports. Here, the feeling of contemporaneity is reflected in the idea of transit, the flow of vehicles and goods. This feeling is nomadic and precarious, but it is also likely to generate contamination and real reciprocal exchanges.

Images of places of transit follow one another: large areas of asphalt, scrap metal, barriers, pylons, lighting masts, containers, dump trucks and semi-trailers; these are places where life seems to be on hold, places that are unlivable and contradictory, but important and significant in past and recent history. Regularly, flocks of birds light up the atmosphere at the same time as they open

onto the myth. Can asking who the Augur is contribute to our understanding? Are we called upon to interpret the will of the Gods by observing the flight of birds?

Le génie des lieux, a double video loop shot in the port of Catania, reveals the unexpected, the emergence that seems to sum up Couturier's work on the theme of Myth. A surveillance camera captures and reflects an incredible image, a kind of glittering texture that at first sight is impossible to decipher. At the same time, the same thing happens in the window of an office in the port. The sun and the sea meet in an extraordinary shimmer; the result is a seduction for the eye as alluring as the song of a siren. Is it an entity that is both natural and supernatural? Is it Genius loci sending its signal?

Placed in a historical and existential perspective, Couturier's approach poses a crisis and raises questions. In truth, there is nothing 'fantastical' about the artist's 'slippage of the world, or at least not in the Freudian or Lacanian sense, as the subject's elaboration of mostly unconscious drives and desires through fantasies. Rather, it is a poetics of disenchantment. Michel Couturier's work, by posing as a reflection, a discourse tending towards detachment and neutrality, almost a-critical, like a disguised and subtle denunciation, assumes the role of an ethical tension. I would say that his role is to be on the side of the person who records and waits.

1 The Qatsi Trilogy consists of three films directed by Godfrey Reggio (New Orleans 1940) and set to music by Philip Glass: Koyaanisqatsi (1982), Powaqqatsi (1988) and Naqoyqatsi (2002). (Editor's note)

2 Published in Flux-News N°67, autumn - winter 2015.

3 The exhibition Il y a plus de feux que d'étoiles was held in Charleroi at the Musée de la Photographie.

4 'Dionysus: They would not be men if they were not sad. Yet their lives must die. All their wealth is death, which forces them to do their utmost to remember and to plan ahead. [...] But what do you want us to give them? They will always make blood out of everything.

Demeter: There's only one way and you know it. [...] Give meaning to this death of theirs. [...] Teach them to live in bliss. [...] To teach them that they can be equal beyond pain and death. But we must tell them. Just as wheat and vines descend into Hades to be born, let us teach them that death is also new. [...] They will die and have conquered death. They will see something beyond blood, they will see us. They will no longer be afraid of death and will no longer need to appease it by shedding more blood'. (C. Pavese, The Mystery)

5 Exhibition in Catania, Italy, at On the Contemporary space (2019).

In Brussels, the Fondation Eté 78 has included L'Enlèvement de Proserpine and Le génie des lieux in its 2019 programme



Génie des Lieux, Musumeci Arte Contemporanea, Brussels, 2018

Interviewed with Alessandro Turco

Medical imaging and art.

By: Fabio Gamberini



A frame from Your Darkness music video by the human tornado February 2024

FG: Do artists and scientists have a common foe or a common ally nowadays?

AT: This interview with Alessandro Turco explores the connections and contrasts between two seemingly distinct worlds: art and science. On one side, the structured, methodical approach of scientific research; on the other, the boundless creativity and intuition of artistic expression. Where do these realms overlap? Where do they diverge? And how can artificial intelligence serve as a bridge between them? Alessandro Turco, a medical physicist and multifaceted artist, is uniquely positioned to address these questions. With over 15 years of experience in imaging and radio diagnostics, his scientific career has focused on mammography, dosimetry, and the analysis of large data volumes. He has also tackled the ethical and technical challenges of implementing AI in medical fields, bringing a nuanced perspective to the conversation. In addition to his scientific work, Turco is an accomplished musician and visual artist. Recently, he has embraced artificial intelligence as a tool in video production and direction, exploring how technology can expand the boundaries of creativity. This dual identity—as a scientist and artist—makes him an ideal voice to examine the parallels and disparities between the creative processes of art and the innovative-driven methods of science. In this interview, Turco shares his critical yet hopeful perspective on AI, reflecting on its potential to enhance both artistic and scientific endeavors while acknowledging its limitations and ethical implications. His insights highlight the ways AI can serve as both a tool and a collaborator, helping to shape the future of artistic expression and scientific discovery. This dialogue

invites readers to consider the evolving relationship between art and science, revealing unexpected synergies and challenges as these fields continue to converge in the age of AI.

FG: Hallo Alessandro and welcome on Contemporary identities, as a first question I would like to exploit your engineering background in order to discover your opinion about what is the general perception of artificial intelligence today, and how does it influence its application in medicine and art?

AT: Artificial intelligence is often perceived as a single, indistinguishable entity where technologies like machine learning, deep learning, and neural networks are conflated. This creates unrealistic expectations, fueling both unjustified enthusiasm and unfounded fears. In medicine, this leads to an overestimation of AI's capabilities while overlooking its practical limitations. In art, such confusion risks undervaluing the human creative process, mistakenly attributing abilities to machines that are, in fact, the product of human ingenuity.

FG: How does AI fit into existing workflows, and what are its practical limitations?

AT: In the medical field, a practical example is AI's use in assisting radiologists, particularly in mammography. As the volume of images to analyze continues to grow, AI can serve as a first reader, helping doctors detect potential anomalies. However, a machine's capability is always tied to the data it has been trained on, which introduces precision challenges and bias issues. In art, AI can act as a co-creator but remains bound to its training data and pre-set algorithms, lacking the sensitivity and intuition inherent to human artists.



A frame from Glass and Steel music video by diease illusion, February 2024

FG: What is the importance of data in training AI, and what challenges arise in this context?

AT: AI relies on data for learning and functioning, which presents two major issues: data quality and introduced biases. In medicine, if training data is unrepresentative or partial, the system may produce inaccurate diagnoses or fail to recognize critical patterns. In art, this translates into creative limitations: AI outputs depend on its training data, potentially leading to aesthetic flattening with creations that reflect the past more than authentic innovation.

FG: What role does legislation play in the context of AI?

AT: Legislation often lags behind technological innovation, creating regulatory gaps in both medical and artistic fields. In medicine, questions arise about who bears legal responsibility for AI errors: the physician, the software developer, or the data provider? In art, the issue becomes intellectual property: who is the author of an AI-created work? This regulatory delay risks hindering the adoption of AI technologies, leaving fundamental dilemmas unresolved.

FG: How does the role of a musician change in the era of social media and live streaming platforms like Twitch?

AT: Today, musicians are also content creators: it's no longer enough to play an instrument; they must manage cameras, create engaging stories, and master self-promotion online. This evolution echoes the flyer distribution of the 1980s, but with modern tools like social media. To stand out in this saturated environment, artists need to elevate both the quality of their music and the way they visually and narratively present their work, a challenge shared with contemporary artists competing for attention in an increasingly digitalized and fast-paced market.

FG: Do you think AI can be compared to innovative musical tools of the past?

AT: Absolutely. AI can be seen as a tool, much like auto-tune or recording technologies. The difference lies in its application: it can enhance human performance or be used explicitly to create something entirely new. The challenge is to balance creative use with the preservation of artistic authenticity, ensuring that technology doesn't become just another way to conform to market demands. This tension between innovation and marketability is as present in music as it is in modern art, where AI tools push boundaries but must be carefully wielded to avoid stifling genuine creativity.

FG: How is artificial intelligence changing the medical field, and what implications can be observed in art as well?

AT: In the medical field, artificial intelligence is primarily used for image processing, such as filtering, denoising, and upscaling, as well as for recognizing diagnostic patterns, for example, identifying tumors in mammograms. These tools promise greater speed and accuracy, but the issue of biases in training data and ethical implications are often overlooked. Similarly, in contemporary art, AI is seen as an innovative resource for accelerating creative processes and offering new perspectives, but we must ask ourselves what the ethical limits are and whether these technologies are truly improvements or merely alternatives to existing ones.

FG: What are the risks of relying on AI for traditionally creative or analytical human activities?

AT: A fundamental risk is the loss of human skills: just as modern humans have lost the ability to do mental

calculations, in medicine, there is the danger that doctors, relying too much on automated systems, may progressively lose the ability to make accurate diagnoses. In art, the risk is similar: if artificial intelligence becomes an omnipresent tool, we may lose the ability to appreciate the complexity and uniqueness of human creation, reducing art to simple, repetitive, pre-set patterns.

FG: What are the main ethical issues related to the use of AI, both in medicine and in art?

AT: A key aspect is the issue of thresholds. In medicine, deciding where to place the threshold between sensitivity and specificity in diagnostic algorithms is crucial: thresholds that are too low generate false positives, leading to overdiagnosis, while thresholds that are too high may result in missed diagnoses. In art, ethics manifests in the distinction between inspiration and appropriation: how can an AI-generated work be considered original? And who is the true author? These dilemmas require deep reflection on what we define as "creation."

FG: How can AI be both a promising tool and a source of illusions?

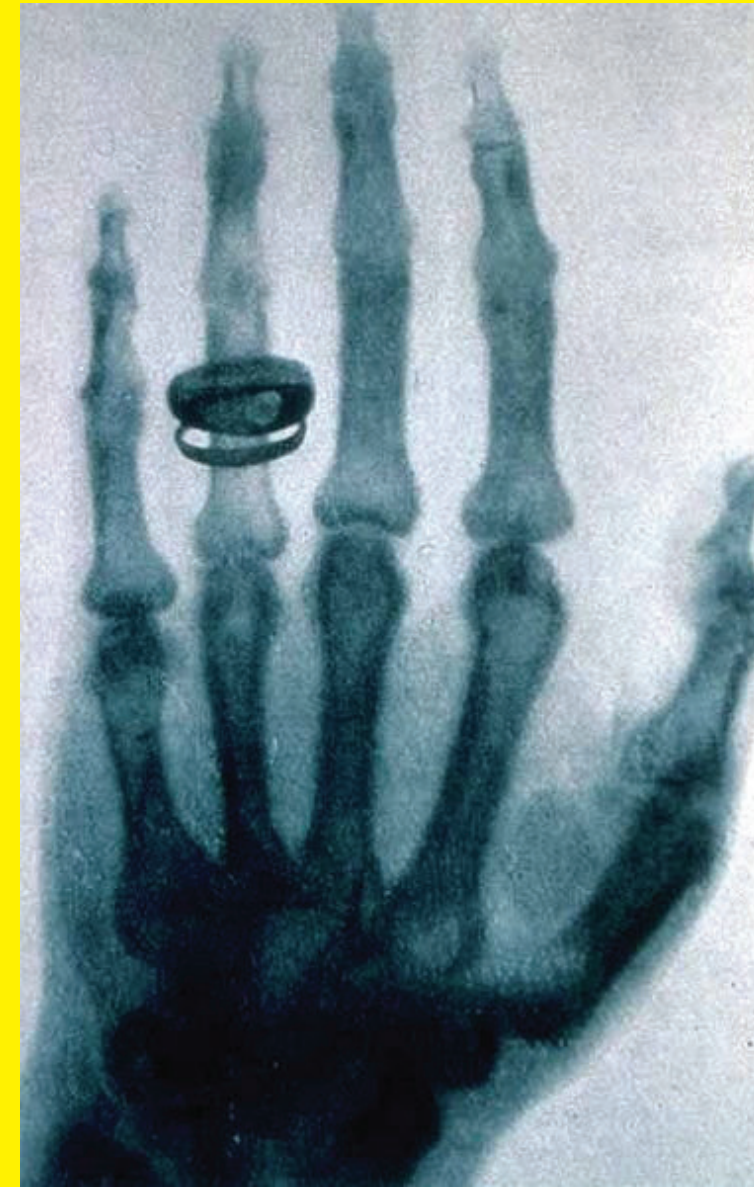
AT: AI is often seen as a revolutionary technology capable of overcoming human limitations. However, this view is often based on unjustified enthusiasm, fueled by a limited understanding of its real capabilities. For example, in medical image processing, it is assumed that AI tools are automatically "better," when in fact they offer different solutions, not necessarily superior ones. Similarly, in art, AI can offer new visual languages, but the risk is that it becomes idealized, overshadowing the manual and creative work necessary to achieve truly meaningful results.



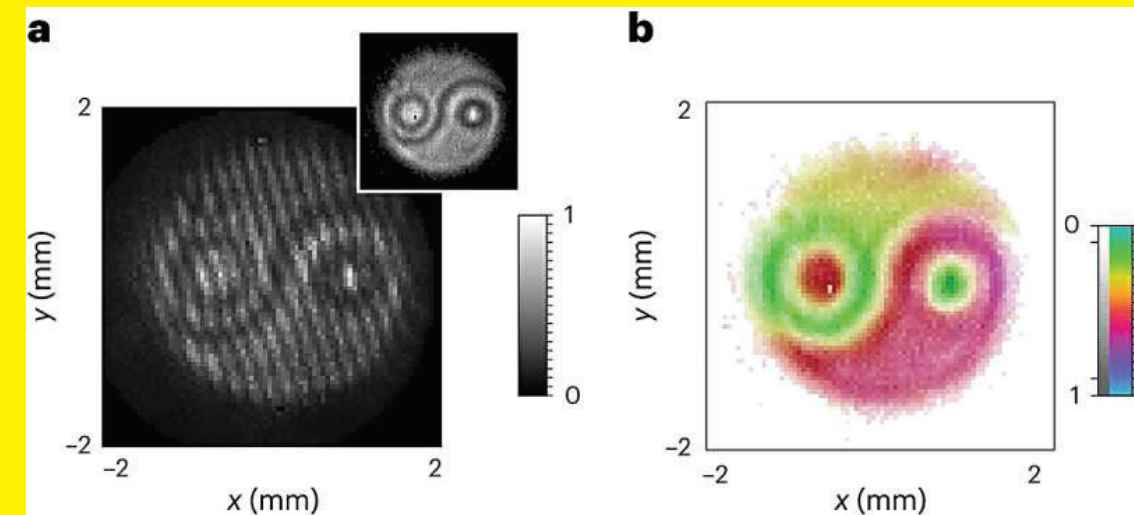
A frame from Invisible music video by disease illusion February 2024



Reindeer body world's Exhibition



First radiograph ever captured in 1895, Conrad Roentgen's wife's hand



Biphoton state holographic reconstruction - Ottawa University



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