



HARLAN LEVEY PROJECTS

Jonas Englert

Simultaneities

Opening: Saturday, January 18, 15:00-19:00
January 18 - March 22, 2025



Jonas Englert, *Circles I* (video still), 2019.

When two political figures touch, their contact becomes the stage of multiple interactions: the symbolic meeting of two parties or states; the encounter of two minds; the communion of two bodies. They intertwine in what Merleau-Ponty calls a chiasm, which is specific to touch: you can see without being seen, you can hear without being heard, but to touch is always to be touched in return. Jonas Englert searches for these focal points, moments which can be read from a variety of perspectives, from pure sensory perception to complex socio-historical narratives. In ***Simultaneities***, he presents a decade of artistic research into human gestures, reflecting on the place of our bodies in politics, history, and aesthetics.

To make ***Circles I*** (2019), Englert combed global archives for instances of skin-to-skin contact between political figures. The result is a seven-channel video installation, featuring found footage of leaders shaking hands and embracing. ***Circles II*** (2019) is the diagrammatic counterpart of *Circles I*: each circle lists names, dates, and meeting places, and connects with the others in an uninterrupted loop of touch. Together, the pieces offer a non-linear approach to facts, a retelling of history as a round dance of interconnectedness.

Declaration of Principles (2022) further reflects on the political dimension of touch. The three panels of the triptych dissect the famous image of Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shaking hands before the White House for the 1993 Oslo I Accord, with Bill Clinton posing behind them as the benevolent patron of this exchange. Englert deconstructs these gestures, which were consciously staged for the cameras to create the historical image it has become. He juxtaposes still and moving footage of the moment with its pictorial references, from an Assyrian bas-relief to Renaissance paintings. Other stories are interwoven in the panels: on the lower left is the 25th US President William McKinley, whose assassin shot him while shaking his hand. His inclusion here refers to the potential violence of a handshake, a betrayal of its supposed meaning – that one is offering peace, that one is unarmed. On the top left, a resurrected Jesus refuses Mary Magdalene's embrace; on the right, he guides Thomas's finger into his side wound. Together, these two images encapsulate the whole spectrum of touch: from the untouchable, forbidden contact, to the most intimate, penetration as the ultimate proof of one's presence. *Declaration of Principles* peels back the layers of meaning surrounding this scene, following its threads within the wider fabric of human interactions.

The earliest work on view, ***Praeludium*** (2015), is a sensual approach to the subject of perception, oscillating between photography and moving image. The two-channel video installation features the face and hands of a performer, playing Bach's Prelude in F minor from The Well Tempered Clavier. The image and sound are slowed almost to a standstill, and the organ is invisible under the player's hands. The music is barely audible, but it's still perceptible in low-frequency and infrasound waves, which are felt in the body of the viewer as much as they are heard.

With his most recent work, ***Song of None*** (2024), Englert returns to the realm of sensation, arranging found footage in a three-channel installation based on harmonies of form and color. The images come from various scientific and institutional archives: aerial views, spatial probes, bacteria and cells multiplying under the gaze of the microscope. *Song of None* questions the human desire to see and touch, an urge so strong that we've developed machines, sensory prosthetics that extend our reach ever further, and banks to store these memories of sight. Some of these seeing-devices will outlive us; Englert leaves us to wonder what will become of the image, when there is no body left to perceive it.

Jonas Englert lives and works in Frankfurt. His work reflects social-philosophical phenomena, as well as political and historical narratives and materials through video, diagram, text, and sound. Englert received his Art Diploma from the Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach in 2018. Key exhibitions of his work include: *Looking for Humanity*, Kunstmuseum Magdeburg, Magdeburg (2023); *Palimpseste*, Heussenstamm-Stiftung, Frankfurt (2022); *Things I Think I Want*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt (2017); *Performing Portraiture*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2015); *Atlas 2013*, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (2013); and more. His works are part of the collections of the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C., the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Kunstmuseum Magdeburg. ***Simultaneities*** is his first solo exhibition in Belgium.