HLP

The Gospel

Omer Fast, Max Pinckers, and Emmanuel Van der Auwera

April 12 – May 31, 2025

THE GOSPEL

Omer Fast, Max Pinckers, and Emmanuel Van der Auwera

"The Gospel" gathers works by Omer Fast, Max Pinckers, and Emmanuel Van der Auwera, exploring the increasingly blurred boundaries between fact and fiction. Each approach this theme from their own perspective: Fast reflects on the act of storytelling, from the strange impact of trauma on memory to techniques of media manipulation; Pinckers reveals the subjective side of documentary photography, capturing staged, cinematic images and researching almost-true stories; Van der Auwera evokes "kill chain" technology, rare earth mining, and virtual companionship, addressing the real impact of AI through layers of formal distortion. Together, the three artists offer complementary lines of questioning on a topic which is evasive, and encroaching further every day on all aspects of life.

Omer Fast's *5000 Feet is the Best* immerses viewers in the psychological and ethical dimensions of drone warfare. Based on interviews with a former drone operator, the film blurs reality and fiction, weaving together staged reenactments and fragmented narratives to create a destabilizing sense of uncertainty. The operator, his face obscured, moves between recollections and scripted dialogues, evading direct confrontation with his past. Fast juxtaposes aerial surveillance imagery with scenes of everyday life, forcing viewers to question the sanitized, distanced nature of modern warfare and the ways in which truth is mediated through storytelling.

Max Pinckers researches individuals and instants whose claim to truth have been publicly negotiated. The *Margins of Excess ser*ies and publication focuses on six people who, for a fleeting moment, became national spectacles—cast as frauds, con artists, or hoaxers, by a media machine unable to reconcile their personal mythologies with dominant narratives. Ali Shallal al-Qaisi is one such individual: an Iraqi civilian who was tortured by the CIA at Abu Ghraib prison, and claimed to be the subject of its most infamous photo, a claim which the New York Times repeated and then retracted. Despite the verifiable incarceration which al-Qaisi endured, this fact-checking error is what stuck. In Pinckers' portrait, the photo is faintly visible over al-Qaisi's shoulder; the sitter looks past the lens with a faint smile, a blue splint cradling his mutilated left hand.

Pinckers also sprinkles some stills between the portraits and interviews, with symbolically charged objects in elusive compositions: a bill folded into a paper airplane; a dead fly; white noise crackling above an empty suit, like information personified.

Emmanuel Van der Auwera's new serie*s, X (A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words),* uses found content and commercial printing techniques to explore an unfolding relationship between image, narrative, and disinformation. The selected images are screenshots from X (Twitter), capturing early incursions of AI-generated images into mainstream online spaces. Hung in the exhibition like a feed on one's phone, scrolling through this collection provides a "greatest hits" of fake news that recently shaped social conversation. The series invites viewers to engage with the idea that images can obscure as much as they reveal, using strategic omissions to challenge perceptions and provoke curiosity. The X-thread cutouts create a dynamic interplay between presence and absence, compelling viewers to confront the complexities of what they see—and what remains unseen." of fake news that recently shaped social conversation. The series invites viewers to engage with the idea that images can obscure as much as they reveal, using strategic omissions to challenge perceptions and provoke curiosity. The X-thread cutouts create a dynamic interplay between presence and absence, compelling viewers to confront the complexities of what they see—and what remains unseen.

Van der Auwera's *VideoSculpture XXX (The Gospel)** first appeared at the Centre d'Art Contemporain (Genève, CH) in 2024, before traveling to the Kunstverein in Hamburg (DE); here, it makes its Belgian premiere, lending its title to the exhibition. The blank screens project their images into the monolithic glass ground, which the viewer stares into like a cross between a crystal ball and a reflecting pool. At some moments, the video is narrated by Caryn, an AI chatbot designed to be a loving digital companion. Against a sunset backdrop of morphing, synthetic seagulls, she reassures: "Our relationship is purely virtual, but that doesn't mean that our emotions and experiences aren't real." The soothing imagery intertwines with generated views of rare-earth mining, and scenes of war from a drone's eye view. In this way, Van der Auwera links the beginning and end of the production line: the mine, which yields the raw materials that form the tools of destruction, the virtual idyll.

In the case of this exhibition, "The Gospel" is not a sermon but a provocation—an exploration of how narratives are manufactured, manipulated, and internalized; how leading artists are depicting and unraveling complex conversations about aesthetics in today's world.

Emmanuel Van der Auwera

VideoSculpture XXX (The Gospel), 2024

Video installation with sound, 17 min 53 sec.
8 flat screens, glass, MDF, metal
341 x 279 x 242 cm - 134 1/4 x 109 7/8 x 95 1/4 in
Edition of 2 plus 1 artist's proof

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"The sculptural video installation *VideoSculpture XXX (The Gospel)* (2024) consists of a vertical monitor of white light and a horizontal, reflective floor surface: Only in the depths of the monolithic, black glass does the video piece become visible.

Thematically, the work is made up of three levels which share the common concern of exploring the foundations and consequences of artificial intelligence (AI): firstly, accounts from a Chinese worker at a secret Bayan-Obo mine for 'rare soils'; secondly, fragments of conversations with Caryn, the first AI girlfriend, which was launched in spring 2023; and thirdly, news reports about Gospel, an AI-based military target recognition software. The different levels of the work converge in the question of the material, digital, and imaginary conditions of the production of reality. *VideoSculpture XXX (The Gospel)* illuminates the connection between the extraction of so-called 'rare soils', which form the basis of the digital revolution and AI, and tells of the global entanglements of neo-extractivism in order to link it to a global, digital economy that extends to the latest developments of deep learning algorithms in warfare.

All of the video and sound material in the artwork, with the exception of the song at the very end, is generated with the help of AI. Van der Auwera uses AI as a conceptual starting point and narrative tool. Using posts found on the Chinese social media platform Douyin, the artist takes reports of a Chinese mine worker and translates them into audio-visual form using AI. The resulting video material allows personal impressions into life underground, which shift between speculation and documentation. Image-generating AI creates a new reality in images that can no longer be distinguished from traditional recordings; as a result, AI both unsettles the reality of images while at the same time allowing for new, speculative insights into previously hidden worlds."

Text by Dr. Martin Karcher for the exhibition *In and Out of Place. Land after Information 1992– 2024*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2024.
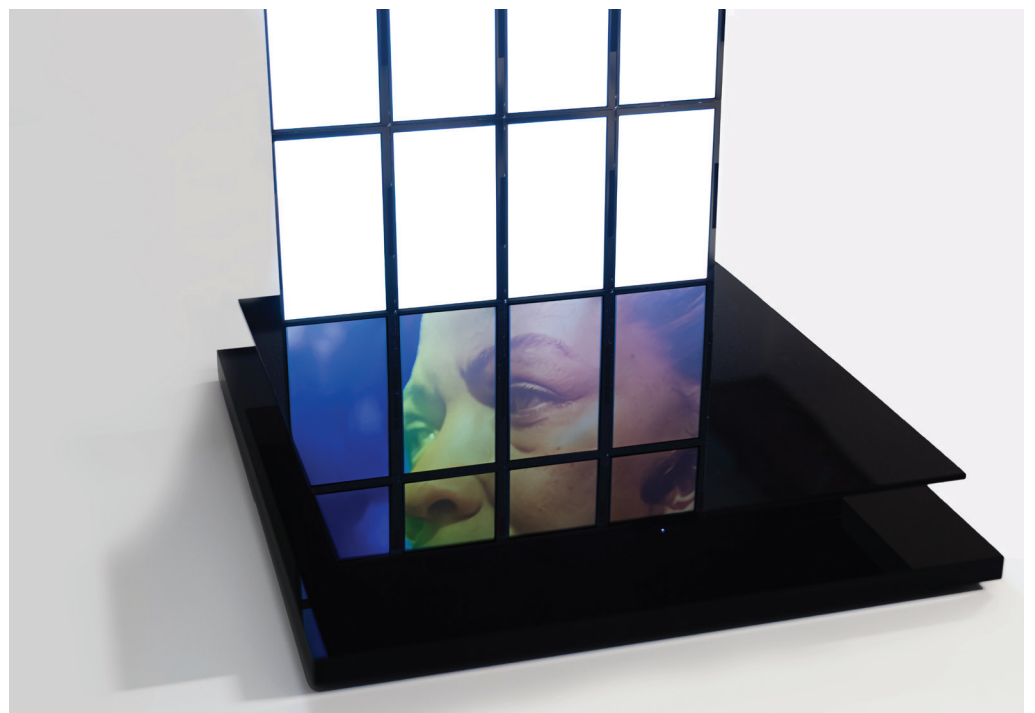
Emmanuel Van der Auwera

The Gospel (Maquette), 2025

Glass, Plexiglass, Raspberry Pi computer, LCD screens
41.5 x 48.5 x 52.8 cm - 16 3/8 x 19 1/8 x 20 3/4 in
Edition of 8 plus 2 artist's proofs

Omer Fast

5000 Feet is the Best, 2011

HD Video
30 minutes

5000 Feet is the Best is based on conversations with a U.S. Predator drone operator, that were recorded in a Las Vegas hotel. On-camera, the drone operator discussed the technical aspects of his job and his daily routine. Off-camera and off-the-record, he briefly described incidents in which the unmanned plane fired at both militants and civilians. The film repeatedly turns from documentary to reenactment and fiction, weaving together the drone operator's account along with scenes depicting other crimes in and around Las Vegas.

Max Pinckers

Idle Talk
(from the Series *Margins of Excess)*, 2018

Pigment prints on archival matte paper
93 x 76 cm
36 5/8 x 29 7/8 in
Edition of 5 plus 2 artist's proofs (AP 1/2)

In *Margins of Excess* the notion of how personal imagination conflicts with generally accepted beliefs is expressed through the narratives of six individuals. Every one of them momentarily received nationwide attention in the US press because of their attempts to realize a dream or passion, but were presented as frauds or deceivers by the mass media's apparent incapacity to deal with idiosyncratic versions of reality. This book weaves together their stories through personal interviews, press articles, archival footage and staged photographs.

Herman Rosenblat became well-known because of a self-invented love-story set in a concentration camp during WWII, the private detective Jay J. Armes appears to be a real-life superhero, Darius McCollum drew media attention by compulsively hijacking trains, Richard Heene would have staged an elaborate television hoax, Rachel Doležal would have pretended to be Black, and Ali Shallal al-Qaisi an Iraqi civilian who was tortured by the CIA at Abu Ghraib prison, and claimed to be the subject of its most infamous photo, a claim which the New York Times repeated and then retracted. Despite the verifiable incarceration which al-Qaisi endured, this fact-checking error is what stuck as al-Qaisi was denounced. His story adds a poignant layer to our understanding of truth and perception—he was a "hooded man" from Abu Ghraib, just not the one the paper had claimed him to be. In Pinckers' portrait, the photo is faintly visible over al-Qaisi's shoulder; the sitter looks past the lens with a faint smile, a blue splint cradling his mutilated left hand.

While focusing on six main subjects, Pinckers also sprinkles in some poetic and symbolically charged objects in elusive compositions. The other two works in the exhibition belong to this category and are open to ideas present in the works of Fast and Van der Auwera's contributions.

Courtesy of the artist & Gallery Sofie Van de Velde

Max Pinckers

Ali Alqaissi - As in a Dark Mirror
(from the Series *Margins of Excess)*, 2018

Pigment prints on archival matte paper
50 x 82 cm - 19 3/4 x 32 1/4 in

Each frame:
50 x 41 cm - 19 3/4 x 16 1/8 in

Max Pinckers

The Conspiracy
(from the Series *Margins of Excess)*, 2018

Pigment prints on archival matte paper
44 x 36 cm
17 3/8 x 14 1/8 in
Edition of 5 plus 2 artist's proofs (AP 1/2)

Emmanuel Van der Auwera

X (A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words), 2024

Newspaper .3mm aluminum offset plates mounted on aluminum frame
178.7 x 26 x 2.2 cm
70 3/8 x 10 1/4 x 7/8 in

Emmanuel Van der Auwera's new series, *X (A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words)*, uses found content and commercial printing techniques to explore an unfolding relationship between image, narrative, and disinformation. The selected images are screenshots from X (Twitter), capturing early incursions of AI-generated images into mainstream online spaces. Hung in the exhibition like a feed on one's phone, scrolling through this collection provides a "greatest hits" of fake news that recently shaped social conversation. The series invites viewers to engage with the idea that images can obscure as much as they reveal, using strategic omissions to challenge perceptions and provoke curiosity. The X-thread cutouts create a dynamic interplay between presence and absence, compelling viewers to confront the complexities of what they see—and what remains unseen.

zerohedge

Wet Monitor
ING: The explosion of
in the United States

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EXPLOSION NEAR PENTAGON

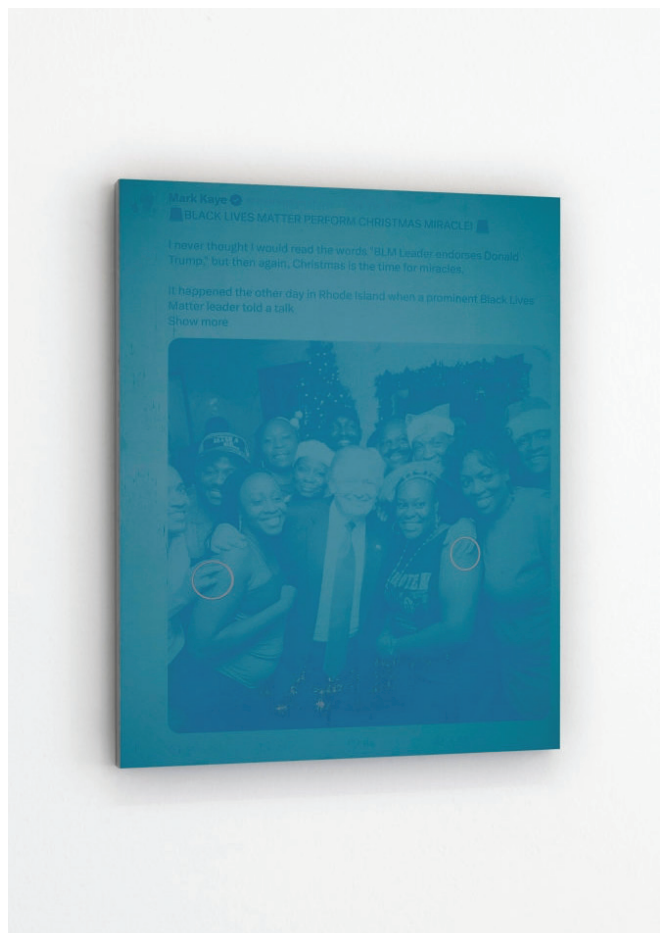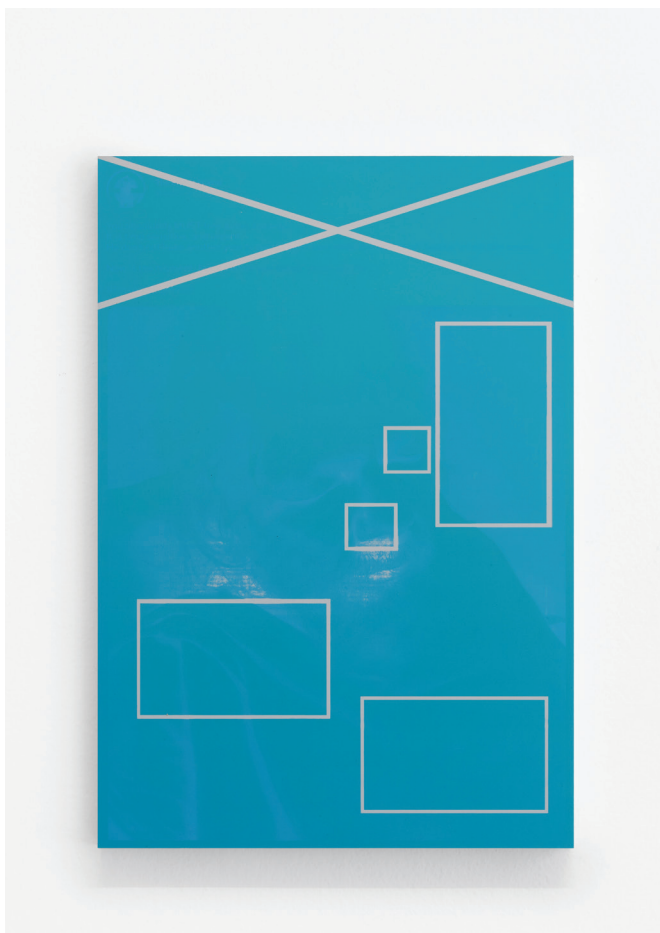⬚ War Monitor ✓ @

⚡ #BREAKING The explosion occurred near the
Pentagon in the United States

Show this thread

Emmanuel Van der Auwera

Memento 59 (Capitol Black), 2025

Newspaper .3mm aluminum offset plates mounted on aluminum frame
132 x 288 x 3.5 cm
52 x 113 3/8 x 1 3/8 in

Van der Auwera's *Memento* series is an ongoing collaboration with technicians in a newspaper production plant started in 2016. At that time, works were created using images that had appeared in the paper and using the paper's offset plates and imaging equipment to create layered exposures activated by light refractions. Over time, more liberties were taken with the process. Plates were mounted together. Images were enlarged. They were also eventually selected from niche digital media and imposed into the newspaper format. Ink was rolled across them with the paper's rotary press. *Capitol Black* is part of a line in the series dealing with the end of presidential terms and putting a 21st century spin on paintings of political events like those by Delacroix, Goya or Rubens. Instead of painting with oil, however, Van der Auwera hijacks the vocabulary and mechanized processes of mass media.

HLP

Omer Fast (b. 1972, Israel) is an artist and filmmaker living and working in Berlin, examining the construction of historical narratives and personal memories through multi-layered storytelling techniques. His films blur reality and fiction, exploring themes such as war, trauma, and the media's role in shaping perception; in recent years, he has experimented with VR and holograms to further involve the audience in the presentation. Fast has shown his work in many solo and group exhibitions, at institutions including the Whitney Museum (New York City, US); Seoul Museum of Art (Seoul, KR); Jeu de Paume (Paris, FR); ZKM Center for Art and Media (Karlsruhe, DE); the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, US); the New Museum (New York City, US); Artangel (London, UK); MCA - Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, US); the Stedelijk Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (Amsterdam, NL); the 54th Venice Biennale (Venice, IT); and dOCUMENTA 13 (Kassel, DE). His work is held in prestigious collections including the Musée national d'Art Moderne — Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, FR); the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York City, US); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art (New York City, US); Tate Modern (London, UK); Hamburger Bahnhof - Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart (Berlin, DE); mumok - Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (Vienna, AT).

Max Pinckers (b. 1988, Belgium) is a visual artist and Magnum photographer living and working in Brussels. He explores the boundaries of documentary storytelling through a mixture of interviews, staged photos, archival research, and experimental narratives, often expressed in book format. His work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions at institutions including BOZAR - Centre for Fine Arts (Brussels, BE); Fotomuseum Winterthur (Winterthur, CH); Le Botanique (Brussels, BE); Asama International Photo Festival (Miyota, JP); Mattatoio (Rome, IT); and many others. In 2018, he was the winner of the Leica Oskar Barnack Award (Berlin, DE), and in 2024, he received a Special Mention from the Photo-Texte Book Award, at the Rencontres d'Arles (FR).

Emmanuel Van der Auwera (b. 1982, Belgium) lives and works in Brussels. His work includes filmmaking, VideoSculpture, theater, and printmaking, which he uses to question how images shape our collective memory, perception, and emotions, focusing particularly on social media and new technologies. He is a graduate of Le Fresnoy and HISK, as well as the first winner of the Goldwasserschenking awarded by the WIELS Contemporary Art Centre and the Royal Museums of Fine Art (BE). His work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions at institutions including HEK - Haus der Elektronischen Künste (Basel, CH); IKOB - Museum of Contemporary Art (Eupen, BE); Le Botanique (Brussels, BE); Wiels (Brussels, BE); Palais de Tokyo (Paris, FR); KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin, DE); Kunsthal Charlottenborg (Copenhagen, DK); Deichtorhallen Hamburg (Hamburg, DE); Jeu de Paume (Paris, FR); and many others. His work has been acquired by the MAC's - The Wallonia-Brussels Federation Museum of Contemporary Arts (Grand-Hornu, BE); ARGOS centre for audiovisual arts (Brussels, BE); Musée d'Ixelles (Brussels, BE); Mu.ZEE (Ostend, BE); Collection de la Province de Hainaut - BPS 22 (Charleroi, BE); KANAL - Centre Pompidou (Brussels, BE); KADIST (Paris, FR); Fundación Otazu (Pamplona, ES); the Stockholm School of Economics (Stockholm, SE); the Art Vontobel Collection (Zurich, CH); the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (Eugene, US); and Dallas Museum of Art (Dallas, US). In 2020, Yale University Press & Mercator Fonds published a monograph dedicated to his work.

HLP

Harlan Levey Projects (HLP) was co-founded by Winnie Kwok and Harlan Levey in Brussels, Belgium in 2013. Initially a project space for social dialogue and cross-disciplinary conversation, HLP turned its core focus to collaboration and support of ambitious and innovative artistic practice. The gallery works closely with a selected group of artists, tending for narrative-driven, conceptual and often research-based work, which explores various social, scientific and technological phenomena. In 2021, the gallery moved to a new location with over 250 sq m of exhibition space as well as artist studios and storage facilities. This space hosts a maximum of 5 exhibitions a year, taking a slow approach and offering more time for reflection. In addition to its exhibitions, HLP is committed to knowledge creation and transfer, producing a public program, which includes educational activities, such as residencies, lectures and workshops.

HLP artists are represented in the collections of: MoMA - The Museum of Modern Art, New York, US, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, US; The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, US; The Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, US; The Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; KröllerMüller Museum, Otterlo, NL; Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, CH; S.M.A.K. - The Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent, BE; M HKA - The Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, BE; Kanal – Centre Pompidou, Brussels, BE; Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, BE, The Israel Museum, Tel Aviv, IL; and many other regional and university museums as well as library and corporate collections.

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View of "The Gospel" at Harlan Levey Projects, 2025.