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featuring all the Unseen 2015 artists



Laurence Aëgarter

Laurence Aëgarter's (b. 1972, France) work turns photographs into living projects, unravelling their fixed nature and allowing them to swing between past and present. Unseen discovers more about her collaborative approach to the medium.

With a practice that stretches the photographic moment, threading the past into the present, the work of Dutch-French artist Laurence Aëgarter is a dialogue between the two. Her approach to the medium is multilayered and project-specific, employing a range of inventive strategies that include installation, performance and participatory collaboration. Inciting an active conversation between artwork and viewer, Aëgarter's work animates the still image, loosening it from its singular origins and giving it new material life forms.

From military archives and prostitution cells to karaoke videos and the catalogue of the Louvre via a Chinese restaurant and Levi-Strauss, the artist's fields of research are extensive and diverse but always come back to the photographic image and the way we engage with it: the core of her work. Also trained as an art historian, Aëgarter uses archives, encyclopedias and other structures of knowledge that lay claim over our understanding of the world as rich repositories of material that she uses to bring to life parallel realities. Unwilling to relegate the past and its relics to history's dusty corners, her work juggles nostalgia with a playfulness that releases the image from its ties to time and place. The photograph is resurrected, slipping back and forth through time as a living project, freed to experience a state of 'permanent transformation'.

Aëgarter is interested in generating an open and collaborative experience of photography so the resurrection of the image often involves participants. *Herbarium Catalogus* was a commission from the city of Leeuwarden to bring a community together through art. Working with local residents in a neighbourhood that used to be a cloister in the Middle Ages, Aëgarter

decided to investigate a meticulous reconstruction of the archetypical medicinal garden of the medieval Abbey of Saint Gall based on an architectural drawing from the 9th century.

For the second stage of the project, Aëgarter printed a selection of images of war-torn and disaster-stricken landscapes found on the Internet. Spanning a hundred years of history, they are the mediated fragments of violence that form our collective memory: images that we encounter through the screen on a daily basis, interchangeable when the next catastrophe comes along.

"How do you carry on with these images? You see that in four days, they are gone, fallen into oblivion," the artist comments. Participants of the project were invited to symbolically 'cure' the landscapes using plants from the medicinal garden selected for their specific therapeutic use. Thirty-three of these collages were then printed in a newspaper-format publication titled *Healing Plants for Hurt Landscapes*. Passive viewers become active, spending time looking at the photograph, making a personal physical mark on a distant scar. The global becomes domestic and photography becomes holistic.

Through these intuitive physical interventions, the photographs are transfigured into surreal vistas that raise questions about our problematic relationship to images of conflict and destruction. The results draw the viewer into a complex and layered picture plane. Some sites are covered up by a humid herbal poultice while others are showered in bright flowers like a memorial. There is something difficult about the beauty of these new juxtapositions, which simultaneously feel both uplifting and melancholic, both playful and disturbing.



Alhazra o'ch'ra'nis - Al-Ahmad, Kuwait
from the series *Healing Plants for*
Aëgarter/Seelweil Gallery