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# Laurence Aëgerter

Laurence Aëgerter's (b. 1972, France) photographs prioritise the participation of her viewers in collaborative, experiential projects regarding time, the mind and the human condition. Her new series *Photographic Treatment* © is an exploration of photography as a therapeutic device for dementia.

**Q** Your work primarily focuses on — themes in the realms of psychiatry, memory and healing. What draws you to these topics on such a consistent basis?

**A** The power that images possess — is so strong that they can often be used in addition to, or instead of, chemical medications. This practice fascinates me, and I'm compelled to investigate how art and my own work can be useful for society beyond aesthetics and insular art discourses. The basis for my interest in, and subsequent projects about, the potential power of images is how it reflects the vulnerability, and can enhance the resilience, of the human condition. Beyond this, analysing art through the lenses of social studies and philosophy also brings me great joy.

**Q** Your new series, *Photographic Treatment* ©, uses image pairings to stimulate engagement from senile dementia patients. Can you tell us more about this topic and your choice to create diptychs for the final series?

**A** While dementia can't be cured, — the ways that we care for people with the disease can be improved, and that is what I aim to do with this series. Brain stimulation is especially important for individuals suffering from the adverse effects of dementia, as it has proven to be helpful with slowing down the process of brain degeneration, according to the brain plasticity principle 'use it or lose it'. It is my belief that pairing images is a powerful strategy to stimulate brain activity. The process of recognising connections between two images engages specific cognitive functions, involving associative creativity and fantasy. The second aim of *Photographic Treatment* © is to improve the wellbeing of individuals with dementia through the social interaction involved in the connections being made, while looking at the photographic diptychs. This series is indeed an art project, but it

was also a finalist for an innovation care award in the Netherlands, which speaks to its integration with specialised scientific criteria by experts in the field of care giving.

**Q** Some of the photographs in — this project are your own, while others are more obviously archival images. What were your criteria for pulling together different source materials to form a cohesive final product?

**A** I created a photographic data — base of around 2000 images, collected from Internet sources like Creative Commons, as well as my own photographs. The most obvious point of unity between the images is the fact that they are all black and white portrait layouts. But the more important criterion for my image selection was a given image's immediate legibility; a recognition that is often complicated for those afflicted with dementia's side effect of visual impairment. For this reason, each photograph portrays only one object with no secondary point of attention, as this might confuse the reading of the main subject. Additionally, each object is provided with a qualifying context. For example, a pencil is understood as such because a hand holds it, ready to write, and an ashtray is recognised because it is depicted with a burning cigarette. Objects that have been zoomed in on, or images consisting of too many different small objects, are difficult for someone with a severe stage of dementia to perceive.

**Q** In addition to your striking — image pairings, *Photographic Treatment* © incorporates one of the five senses other than vision: smell. Tell us about your use of scent in this project.

**A** I chose to silkscreen ten — different scents onto the diptychs: soap, rose, kummel, lavender, orange, honeysuckle, caraway, clove, eucalyptus and peppermint, all selected for their

soothing and revitalising qualities. I believe that the use of more than one sense, in addition to vision, creates a stronger and more lasting perception of what the images are meant to convey. At the moment, I am investigating how I can also incorporate some sort of tactility — the sense of touch — into future projects.



PHT #087, from the series  
*Photographic Treatment* ©, 2016  
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