



International Center of Photography

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media release



Tacita Dean  
*Flo: Baby Lotion*, 2000  
© Tacita Dean  
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

## Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art

On view from  
January 18 through  
May 4, 2008

Media Preview  
January 17, 2008  
11:30am - 1:00pm

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One of the most compelling issues explored by artists in recent years centers on the nature and meaning of the archive, that is, how we create, store, and circulate pictures and information. This widespread investigation examines the archive as both a conceptual and physical space in which memories are preserved and history decided. From January 18 to May 4, 2008, the International Center of Photography (ICP), 1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street, will present *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. Organized by renowned scholar and ICP adjunct curator Okwui Enwezor, the exhibition presents works by leading contemporary artists who use photographic images to rethink the meaning of identity, history, memory, and loss.

No single definition can convey the complexities of a concept like the archive. The standard view evokes a dim, musty place full of drawers, filing cabinets, and shelves laden with old documents, an inert repository of historical artifacts. Against this we have another view of the archival impulse as a way of shaping and constructing the meaning of images. It is this latter formulation that has engaged the attention of so many contemporary artists. *Archive Fever* explores the ways in which artists have appropriated, interpreted, reconfigured, and interrogated archival structures and materials. The principal vehicles of these artistic practices—photography and film—are also preeminent forms of archival material, and artists have used them in a variety of ways. The works presented here take many forms, including physical archives arranged by unusual cataloguing methods, imagined biographies of fictitious persons, collections of found and anonymous photographs, film versions of photographic albums, and photomontages composed of historical photographs. In spite of the diversity of subject matter, these works are linked by the artists' shared meditation on photography and film as the quintessential media of the archive.

Artistic uses of the archive suggest not only a serious interest in the nature of the archival form as found in photography and film, but the larger relationship of art to historical reflections on the past. *Archive Fever* investigates this form as both an artistic medium and a working method that generates new kinds of relationships to information and opens new historical vistas. As both an artistic vehicle and a methodology of critical approaches to artmaking, the archive functions as a force of active translation and a mechanism for reenacting historical events.

Encompassing work produced from the 1960s to the present, *Archive Fever* serves as a conversation between generations of contemporary artists. Included are Stan Douglas's *Overture*, *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* by Zoe Leonard, Thomas Ruff's *Machines*, and Fazal Sheikh's *The Victor Weeps: Afghanistan*.

*Overture* (1986) by Stan Douglas is a looped, 16mm film that stitches together two separate footages shot by the film division of the Edison Company: one shows Kicking Horse Canyon, shot in 1899, the other White Pass in British Columbia, shot in 1901. As a train winds its way through precarious stretches of the Canadian Rockies, a narrator recites passages from Marcel Proust's novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. Douglas has carefully synchronized text and image as a meditation on the very logic of time—passing as a moving image and a narration—as it bears on the relationships between history and identity, nature and culture, positivism and romanticism.

In *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1993–96), Zoe Leonard deploys a cast of 29 actors to stage events in the life and career of an imaginary black actress. The 78 photographic images that comprise the work, produced in collaboration with filmmaker Cheryl Dunye, follow Richards from her childhood in Philadelphia in the early 1920s to her heyday as a screen ingenue in the 1930s and '40s, through the civil rights era of the 1960s, and on to the final image of her as an older woman in 1973.

Thomas Ruff's *Machines* (2003) are haunting, monochromatic prints of industrial machinery. The *Machines* are extrapolated from large-format glass negatives produced in the 1930s and '40s for the product brochures of Rohde und Dörrenberg, a now-defunct machine and tool company that operated in Düsseldorf-Oberkassel. Ruff has manipulated the originals in various ways—scanning, cropping, coloring, and enlarging—thereby investing the machines with a totemic presence.

Photographer and journalist Fazal Sheikh traveled to Afghanistan to document the ravages of its long war, recording ruined villages, desolate landscapes, and damaged people. In *The Victor Weeps: Afghanistan* (1997), survivors tell stories of murdered family members, of nearly unimaginable terror and hardship, and of hope for a better future. Sheikh focuses on specific injustices that are rarely publicized, but carefully avoids the easy visual vocabulary of victimization. The openness and lack of pretense of the subjects demand the respect of the viewer.

*Archive Fever* will also feature the first showing of three new works from artists Hans-Peter Feldmann (*9/12 Front Page*), Walid Raad (the latest in the series "We Can Make Rain But No One Came To Ask"), and Lorna Simpson (*Jackie*).

## Curator

Okwui Enwezor is Adjunct Curator at the International Center of Photography and Dean of Academic Affairs at San Francisco Art Institute. He has held teaching positions at Columbia University, New York, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Umeå Universitet, Sweden. Enwezor was Artistic Director of documenta 11, Kassel, Germany (1998–2002), and the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1996–97). He is the recipient of the College Art Association's Frank Jewett Mather Award for Criticism and the Peter Norton Curatorial Award. He lives in New York and San Francisco.

## Publication

*Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*

ICP/Steidl Publication, 2008

By Okwui Enwezor

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Softcover

## Sponsors

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## Public Programs

An Evening with Stan Douglas

January 18 | Friday | 7:00 pm | \$5/Free for ICP Members

The School at ICP, 1114 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street

Stan Douglas' challenging and complex work, which plays with time and narrative structure, has made him a leading figure in contemporary video art. Join us at the School at ICP for a special talk with this renowned artist. This evening is held in conjunction with the ICP exhibition *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*.

## Participating Artists

### Christian Boltanski

Born Paris, 1944; lives in Paris

### Tacita Dean

Born Canterbury, England, 1965; lives in Berlin

### Stan Douglas

Born Vancouver, B.C., 1960; lives in Vancouver

### Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica

Born Neutitschein (German-annexed Czechoslovakia), 1944; lives in Berlin

Born Timisoara, Romania, 1951; lives in Berlin and Karlsruhe

### Hans-Peter Feldmann

Born Düsseldorf, Germany, 1941; lives in Düsseldorf

### Jef Geys

Born Leopoldsburg, Belgium, 1934; lives in Balen, Belgium

### Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Born Güaimaro, Cuba, 1957; lived and worked in New York; died Miami, 1996

### Craigie Horsfield

Born Cambridge, England, 1949; lives in London

### Lamia Joreige

Born Beirut, 1972; lives in Beirut

### Zoe Leonard

Born New York, 1961; lives in New York

### Sherrie Levine

Born Hazelton, Pennsylvania, 1947; lives in New York

### Ilán Lieberman

Born Mexico City, 1969; lives in Mexico City

### Glenn Ligon

Born Bronx, New York, 1960; lives in New York

### Robert Morris

Born Kansas City, Missouri, 1931; lives in New York

### Walid Raad

Born Chbanieh, Lebanon, 1967; lives in New York

### Thomas Ruff

Born Zell am Harmersbach, Germany, 1958; lives in Düsseldorf

### Anri Sala

Born Tirana, Albania, 1974; lives in Paris

### Fazal Sheikh

Born New York, 1965; lives in Zürich and New York

### Lorna Simpson

Born New York, 1960; lives in New York

### Eyal Sivan

Born Haifa, Israel, 1964; lives in Paris

### Vivan Sundaram

Born Shimla, India, 1943; lives in New Delhi

### Gediminas and Nomedas Urbonas

Born Vilnius, Lithuania, 1966; lives in Vilnius

Born Kaunas, Lithuania, 1968; lives in Vilnius

### Andy Warhol

Born Pittsburgh, 1928; lived and worked in New York; died New York, 1987

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