

Conference cycle

# Restitutions. Photography in Debt to its Past

Directed by Carles Guerra



Barcelona Photo Center

Eng

Photography has ceased to constitute a mere way of capturing images. The new uses of photography have transformed it into a civil contract that binds the subject to the photographer and the device. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay has discussed photography in these terms since the 2008 publication of her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New rights arise from this new encounter, one that photography must respond to. Suddenly, restituting, repairing, repatriating, and renaming are part of the new functions of photography, which faces a debt to its past and itself. This is undoubtedly the great era of restitution in terms of the colonial legacy. However, it is also true that there is little consensus on how to carry out this massive reparation. *Restitutions* examines ten case studies in which the victim of expropriation or abuse is not reduced to the human condition; instead, other victims are also contemplated that one might refer to as more than human.

New claims put forth against the most positivist historical understanding of photography question the institutions that heralded its development and made its recognition possible. The label that has been recently added to the renowned photograph by Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*, taken in March of 1936, reveals a paradigmatic shift in the humanist tradition that has sustained the history of photography. The image, which is currently on display in the new galleries opened to house the collections at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, has not had its appearance altered, yet it depicts something that is quite different to what previous generations have seen. The new label includes technical information revealing how the photograph by Dorothea Lange has participated both in the evidencing of injustice and in the generation of new forms of injustice throughout history. From 1979, the year Florence Owens Thompson demanded to be credited as the subject depicted in the image, the photograph has become the most notorious and fertile case study.

If photography is confronted with a crisis related to the type of evidence that guaranteed its function as a mechanism and as a process for obtaining proof of what has occurred; if photography is now the stage for urgent demands; and, if photography judges itself at odds with its own history, what will its immediate future entail? Presentations by guests from institutions dedicated exclusively to photography, and those affiliated with research groups that demand new rights over photographic heritage, along with women photographers, and activists can grant us a shared perspective on this crisis that will undoubtedly modify the status of photography in the following years.

Carles Guerra

*Dates*

**Tuesdays between  
March and May 2022:  
March 8th, 15th, 22nd  
29th; April 5th, 19th, 26th;  
May 3rd, 10th, 17th**

*Time*

**7.00 PM**

*Simultaneous translation  
will be provided in Spanish  
when the conference is  
held in another language.*

**[kbr.fundacionmapfre.org](http://kbr.fundacionmapfre.org)**

**Filmoteca de Catalunya**  
in collaboration with KBr  
Fundación MAPFRE,  
will screen three films  
complementing this  
conference cycle, starring  
Hilde Van Gelder, Ana  
Longoni and Michaëla  
Danjé / Cases Rebelles  
Collective.

The projections will take  
place after the talks and  
will be presented by the  
lecturers.

*Dates*

**April 6, 20 and 27  
at 7.30 PM**

**More information and  
ticket purchases at  
[www.filmoteca.cat/web/  
ca/cicle/Restitucions](http://www.filmoteca.cat/web/ca/cicle/Restitucions)**

**03.08** **Ariella Aïsha Azoulay**  
**2022** **“He is my ancestor,” claims**  
**Tamara Lanier, not a museum asset**

*On-site and online*

The daguerreotype of Renty Taylor, stored in the archives of the Peabody museum, is held there as a precious object, a rare high-value historical image taken during the time of slavery. Tamara Lanier's lawsuit questions the until-now-not-yet-challenged-imperial-right of the archive to continue to hold and claim property over the daguerreotype seized from her great-grandfather and demands its restitution. The daguerreotype of Lanier's ancestor continues to be held by the same institutions, which participated in his enslavement and in the transformation of the outcome of imperial technologies of violence into their private property. This lecture explores the abolitionist nature of Lanier's implications and consequences in regard to the existing technologies and infrastructures that enable the massive accumulation of visual wealth and its use against people from whom it was expropriated.

*(Conference held in English with simultaneous translation into Spanish)*

**Ariella Aïsha Azoulay** Professor of Modern Culture and Media and Comparative Literature (Brown University), and currently a Fellow at the American Academy in Berlin. Author of *Potential History – Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), *Civil Imagination: The Political Ontology of Photography* (Verso, 2012), *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books, 2008) and director of *Un-documented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder* (2019), shown at Errata (Tàpies Foundation, 2019 co-curated with Carles Guerra).

**03.15** **Teresa Ferré Panisello**  
**2022** **The Forgotten Legacy of**  
**Agustí Centelles. Beyond**  
**Wartime Photojournalism**

*On-site and online*

The photographer Agustí Centelles (1909-1985) has gone down in history as one of the great photojournalists of the Spanish Civil War. Centelles represents a legacy that was recovered during the *Transición* [Spain's transition to democracy] in the midst of the mythification of his career. However, his professional trajectory conceals a vast and exceptional body of work. This exceptionality becomes apparent when we approach, from a historical and photographic perspective, the series of unusual images that he made while detained at the French concentration camp in Bram between March and September of 1939. In Bram he took hundreds of photographs that constitute a unique contribution to the visual narrative of Spanish Republican exiles. However, against the grain of all logic, the photographer did not include them while registering the contents of his archive during the years of the transition to democracy, nor did he explicitly bring them back during the last years of his life. Why did he not make them public?

**Teresa Ferré Panisello** is a journalist and communications and journalism professor at the Universitat de Barcelona and an in-

dependent researcher at the Observatori de la Vida Quotidiana (OVQ). Her academic research is centered on photography and propaganda during the inter-war period, particularly on the figure of Agustí Centelles, the subject of her doctoral thesis. She has also curated several exhibitions on Centelles and published a number of books, including the diary that the photographer wrote while he was detained at the concentration camp in Bram. She is currently an independent researcher for OVQ on the projects entitled “*La imagen velada*” [The Veiled Image] that aims to recover the legacy of Catalan photojournalism from 1900 to 1939 and “*Gràfica anarquista. Fotografia y revolución social. 1936-1939*” [Anarchist Graphics. Photography and Social Revolution. 1936-1939].

**03.22** **Dr. Naluwembe Binaisa**  
**2022** **‘The beauty in the slum’:**  
**resistance and architectures**  
**of dispossession in Lagos, Nigeria**

*On-site and online*

Throughout Lagos, there is a centuries-long struggle against architectures of dispossession, framed by the ever-present colonial encounter. I draw on in-depth ethnographic research in Nigeria that seeks to understand the intersections between photography and political imaginaries. The title quote comes from Jide, a youth activist in Lagos, and highlights the guiding principle for those living in these areas who seek to tell their own stories through photography and video. Restitution of their right to the city is invoked through a lens of indigenous cosmologies, offering different forms of interpretation. Many have lost their homes and livelihoods to the destruction of the bulldozer, whilst others live under this imminent threat of being squeezed out of their ancestral heritage. Here the photographs are regarded as ‘always speaking’, privileging alternative sightlines of resistance to reveal the *longue durée* of contestation within claims for rights and restitution.

*(Conference held in English with simultaneous translation into Spanish)*

**Naluwembe Binaisa** is an interdisciplinary scholar and creative practitioner whose work focuses on the intersections of mobilities, belonging and citizenship across gender and generation dynamics. Her work interrogates racial capitalism and centres indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies. Naluwembe is part of the PHOTODEMOS Collective, working on the project *Citizens of Photography: the Camera and the Political Imagination*.

**03.29** **Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh**  
**2022** **“The morning does not decide**  
**of what remains of the day”**

*Online*

At the end of 1975, after Morocco invaded Western Sahara, the Sahrawi resistance began to gather photographs carried on the Moroccan soldiers who were captured or fell in battle. The majority of these photographs were simple portraits of the

soldiers' wives, girlfriends, children, parents or images depicting daily life in Morocco. During the years of war, these photographs grew into an involuntary archive, stored at temporary locations in the Algerian desert, where the exiled Sahrawi had sought refuge. Today these images await the necessary conditions, the end of the occupation and the ongoing conflict, to be returned to their owners: returned not to the state, but to the families who lost their loved ones in a hidden war.

*(Conference held in English with simultaneous translation into Spanish)*

In her practice **Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh** explores potentials of human agency by engaging in experimental, collective work processes. These include archiving practices such as the negotiation around a digital archive assembled with inhabitants of Burj al-Shamali, a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Photography acts as a medium for her to communally investigate notions of collectivity, power, and endurance; for example, in her engagement as a member of the Arab Image Foundation, and as a focus in her PhD in Art Theory and Cultural Studies from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (2018).

**04.05 2022** **Hilde van Gelder**  
**Ground Sea (Mar de fondo)**  
**Claiming nature's right to be reborn**

*On-site and online*

Using a selection of photographs realized by Bruno Serralongue for his *Calais* series (2006-) as well as her own photo-fictional field research, Hilde Van Gelder zooms in on the border landscape of the Northern French coast. This contested maritime zone lends itself to a microcosmic analysis of all our contemporary global challenges: migration, climate change, human rights, and neoliberal surveillance technology. In their terrible convergence they risk crushing us like a villainous, ecocidal wave. But it is also conceivable that a fertile ground wave (*mar de fondo*) will eventually grow, generating in its wake a real rebirth. *Ground Sea* presents a critical reflection on the indifference of a divided European Union regarding the substantial number of people on the move who find themselves stranded near, or drown in the English Channel. A reflection that allows us to imagine a world within which every living entity cherishes a fundamental right to be reborn.

*(Conference held in English with simultaneous translation into Spanish)*

**Hilde Van Gelder** is professor of contemporary art history at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven). She is director of the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture (LGC). Her research focuses on how photography can be an operative force within visual art for both re-legitimizing and imagining fundamental rights. Her last book, *Ground Sea. Photography and the Right to Be Reborn* (Leuven University Press, 2021), unfolds a vivid account of repeated trips to Calais and Dover between 2017 and 2020.

**04.19 2022** **Ana Longoni**  
**What do the photographs reclaimed by Víctor Melchor Basterra of the horror in Argentina tell us?**

*On-site and online*

It is frequently stated that no photographs exist of the disappearances of people who were executed by the last Argentine dictatorship (1976-1983). However, they do exist: they are not photographs taken before and after the disappearances, but during. They were part of the repressive bureaucracy that despite acting illegally and clandestinely continued to register detentions and confessions extracted through torture and even the death of detainees. These images have not remained a secret thanks to the bravery of a number of surviving prisoners who seized them from the archives of horror and made them public through claims presented via human rights organisms and law suits. This is the case of the photographs extracted from the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada [Navy School of Mechanics] (ESMA, one of the greatest clandestine detainment and extermination centers in Buenos Aires) by Víctor Melchor Basterra (1944-2020). I intend to focus more specifically on investigating the circulation of this series of photographs marked by invisibility and aestheticization.

**Ana Longoni** is a writer and researcher for the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, and professor at the University of Buenos Aires. Her work has revolved around the nexus between art and politics in Latin America since the mid 20th century. The author of numerous publications, her most recent book is entitled *Tercer oído* (2021). Since its inception in 2007 she has promoted the international platform *Red Conceptualismos del Sur*. She has curated diverse exhibitions including *Oscar Masotta. La teoría como acción* (2017) among others. From 2019–2021 she was the Head of the Department of Public Activities at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

**04.26 2022** **Michaëla Danjé / Cases Rebelles**  
**Arresting reiteration, altering continuous exploitation**

*On-site and online*

In September of 2018, with the widely publicized release of *Sexe, race et colonies* [Sex, Race and Colonies], which involved the unprecedented dissemination of 1200 images collected in a luxurious coffee table book, the publication of our text "Les corps épuisés du spectacle colonial" [The Exhausted Bodies of the Colonial Spectacle] interrupted initial enthusiasm and signified the beginning of an essential debate on the massive (re)circulation of photographs of colonial pornography under the pretext of historical research. Focusing critically and ethically on the spectacular methods of the field of historiography, our text questioned the reproduction of the original violent act inherent to the photographic device. Faced with the *realpolitik* of the events and the scientific, artistic, and other pretexts that perpetuate the dispossession (of the bodies, of rights), we called for retroactive systems that would allow the restitution and reparation of intimacy and authorship within a legal framework to protect the victims of colonization from continuous exploitation.

*(Conference held in French with simultaneous translation into Spanish)*

**Cases Rebelles Collective** Since its founding in 2010 the black collective Cases Rebelles offers critical and militant Afrocentric perspectives in the form of written pieces, videos, and several editorial projects.

**Michaëla Danjé** is a member and co-founder of Cases Rebelles. She is a multidisciplinary artist, musician, writer and documentalist. Among other projects, she has directed the work *AfroTrans*, an unprecedented anthology on black and trans voices. She is currently working on the essay *Négritudes spectaculaires*, which traces a critical history of the mobilization of black bodies through image.

**05.03 2022** **Xavier Ribas**  
**The Future of Chile in the Sodium Nitrate Photographs**

*On-site and online*

The visual history of sodium nitrate, also known as saltpeter and Chilean nitrate, is visible in a number of photographic albums compiled by sodium nitrate businessmen who were mostly of British origin. The albums form a photographic registry documenting the process of sodium nitrate extraction in the Atacama Desert between the decades of 1870 and 1920. This legacy, which is preserved in the archives and libraries of Chile, exudes capitalist and colonial rhetoric. The question we are posed is: how do we approach these photographic albums critically? How is it possible to recount the experience of sodium nitrate workers and their history of resistance from these images? How do we think of these photographs considering what was left out of the image? And, finally, how do we look at them from their historical outcome? As Andrea Jösch stated, these images anticipate a future of ruins and a coup d'état.

**Xavier Ribas** is a photographer and professor at the University of Brighton and at the Universitat Politècnica de València. He studied Social Anthropology at the Universitat de Barcelona and documentary photography at the Newport School of Art, Media and Design. His photographic work focuses on contested places and histories, geographies of abandonment, temporary settlements, and border territories. Since 2009 he has formed part of the collective research project *Traces of Nitrate* revolving around the extractive processes in Chile and the commercial networks that converge in the City of London's stock exchange. He lives and works in London.

**05.10 2022** **T. J. Demos**  
**Photographic Reparations and the More-than-human**

*Online*

Given the tragic ongoing multispecies extinction event we're currently living through, the representing of more-than-human disappearance appears as a melancholy photographic practice. But what of the politics of its aesthetics? The imagery of lost species may cynically commodify loss, and/or serve as a liberal repertoire for mourning, connecting photography to a necrospeculative economy. But might its associated eco-affects

of grief and despair otherwise connect mourning to militancy, to a transformative politics of anti-capitalist climate justice, to a collective witnessing that enlivens demands for a reparative future? What do reparations look like from within a global extinction crisis, and how might contemporary photography hold within itself a reparative horizon?

*(Conference held in English with simultaneous translation into Spanish)*

**T. J. Demos** Professor in the Dpt. of the History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of California (Santa Cruz) and founding Director of its Center for Creative Ecologies. He writes about contemporary art and global politics and researches the intersection of visual culture, radical politics and political ecology. Author of numerous books, including *Beyond the World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing* (Duke, 2020). He recently co-edited *The Routledge Companion on Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change* (2021) and directed the Mellon-funded Sawyer Seminar research project *Beyond the End of the World* (2019-21). He is Chair of the Climate Collective, providing public programming at the MAAT (Lisbon).

**05.17 2022** **Eyal Weizman**  
**in conversation with Carles Guerra**  
**Colonial violence and reparations in Forensic Architecture work**

*Online*

Reworking the notion of aesthetic registration, and using technologies to facilitate new modes of atonement to history and environments, Forensic Architecture investigations have radically transformed the notion of evidence. Through their methods they succeed in making the material environment speak for violent events that have otherwise gone unrecorded. Among the multiple projects that occupy this legendary team of researchers, there are an increasing number of cases that engage with colonial violence. Confrontation of this on-going violence requires a reworking of the notion of reparation along the lines of those people leading anti-colonial struggles, including the exercise of "the right return" and "environmental reparation." Colonial projects erase entire cultures and destroy the intricate life worlds that humans have woven with their environments. It is hard to speak of reparation as a type of transitional justice while evidence reveals violence is being perpetuated. How will the struggle evolve? The cases of dispossession in the Negev/Palestine, in Nueva Colonia/Colombia, in the Ixil Triangle in Guatemala, in Death Alley/Louisiana, and the genocide of the Herero and Nama in Namibia will help focus this conversation.

*(Conference held in English with simultaneous translation into Spanish)*

**Eyal Weizman** is the founding director of Forensic Architecture and Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. He has held positions in many universities worldwide. He is a member of the Technology Advisory Board of the International Criminal Court and the Centre for Investigative Journalism. In 2019 he was elected life fellow of the British Academy and appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 New Year Honours for "services to architecture".

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