

Scryer in the Archive was initially developed in collaboration with Grazer Kunstverein and If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Amsterdam.

Scryer in the Archive is made possible with Leading Support from Nuyten Dime Foundation, Mondriaan Fund, and Support from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Toronto.



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Scryer in the Archive is presented as part of *Artist First*, a Mercer Union commissioning platform. *Artist First* Commissions are made possible with the generous support of Kaye & Paul Beeston, Rebecca Carbin, Jane Corkin, Popsy & Bob Johnstone, David & Erica Neligan, Nuyten Dime Foundation, Jeanne Parkin & Jennifer Parkin, and Morden Yolles. Learn more mercerunion.org/artistfirst

artistfirst



Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art
1286 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M6H 1N9 Canada
(one block east of Lansdowne TTC Station)

Tuesday through Saturday, 11AM - 6PM
office@mercerunion.org | www.mercerunion.org

Director & Curator: Julia Paoli
Assistant Curator: Aamna Muzaffar
Audience Development Coordinator: Sonya Filman
Digital Communications Assistant: Beatrice Douaihy

Board of Directors: Femi Adeyinka, Matt Brown, Miles Gertler, Sarah Heim, Christie Kirchner, Yaniya Lee, David Neligan, Chiedza Pasipanodya, Erica Russell, Brigid Tierney

Mercer Union acknowledges the support of its staff, volunteers and members, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Arts Council, and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.



Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des arts
du Canada

ISBN: 978-1-926627-60-1



PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

fORUM

Resonance
and
Transmission

Resonance and Transmission is a multi-part events program informed by Aimée Zito Lema's embodied entanglements with archival materials. Exploring cultural and artistic responses to recorded histories, practices of appropriation, and corporeal memory, the series asks: What does it mean to resonate with a movement, an artist or an event? What does resonance mean and what does it permit? And what does it not attempt to do? How does resonance differ from appropriation? What is the role of the body in contacting, transmitting, remembering feminisms and other social movements?

Guests include Giulia Damiani, Sebastian De Line, Harold Offeh and many more. A full list of speakers along with the event schedule will be announced this fall our website: mercerunion.org

Resonance and Transmission is organized by a group of curators, writers, and researchers based in London, Montréal, Toronto, and Amsterdam interested in overlooked feminist histories and generational processes of knowledge transmission, comprising **Giulia Damiani, Gabrielle Moser, Vanessa Parent, and Helena Reckitt.**

fORUM is Mercer Union's ongoing series of talks, lectures, interviews, screenings and performances. Admission to our public programming is free, and all are welcome.

To receive future publications by mail and many other benefits, become a member of Mercer Union.
Cultivating artists and challenging audiences since 1979.

artistfirst

In 2018, Mercer Union invited **Aimée Zito Lema** to begin working toward the artist's first solo exhibition in North America. Over the next four years, the artist undertook an extensive period of research and production to develop *Scryer in the Archive*, a new body of work that reflects on her family's experience of living in Argentina during the political turmoil of the 70s, and traces its intergenerational impact from her own childhood through to that of her children.

Mercer Union's collaboration with Aimée emerges from our long-held commitment to commissioning new work, and creating milestone opportunities for artists to bring their visions to fruition in Toronto. Through our commissioning platform *Artist First*, we invest in the lifecycle of a project from conception to realization, cultivating discovery, risk-taking, and artistic development through long-term support and dialogue. To learn more, visit mercerunion.org/artistfirst



BIOGRAPHIES

Aimée Zito Lema is a Dutch-Argentinean visual artist who engages with social memory, using archives as a main source of inspiration and material. She studied at the National University of Arts in Buenos Aires, and graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. She holds a master's degree in Artistic Research from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, and was a resident at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (2015-16). Her work has been exhibited at Oude Kerk, Amsterdam (2021); Grazer Kunstverein (2021); Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam (2019); Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (2018); MACBA, Barcelona (2017); the 11th Gwangju Biennial (2016); and Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016).



Aimée Zito Lema:
Scryer in the Archive

17 September - 19 November 2022



A conversation between Aimée Zito Lema and Doreen Mende

DOREEN MENDE: Your recent works *214322* (2019–20) and *Here is Where we Meet* (2021) suggest a research process that uses photography to conceptually and materially address the chronopolitics of the image, through which our present is continuously transformed by the past towards the future. In this regard, your work demonstrates methods of morphing, overlapping, embodying, and spatializing time’s materiality. I would consider it an articulation of transhistorical unsettling that releases a non-linearity of photographic time-space through a non-disciplinary potentiality of artistic intelligence. Not only does history then appear to be unfinished, but also fragmented and transformed. This profoundly challenges the concept of history as brutally disciplined by the divisional ratio of modernity into a closed object. Your approach suggests what could be considered as an image’s transgenerationality—a relational (dis)continuity of visual thought that is of particular interest to me. How might we understand the transgenerational activation of the images you are presenting?

AIMÉE ZITO LEMA: I have been thinking across generations for years, working with photographic material from the Argentina National Archive in many of my projects. For this new work, I wanted to connect historical photographs to images of my own intimate surroundings. I tried to put these two worlds together: where I was coming from historically, and the daily surroundings of my children, my home, and my living in this country. While it seems mundane, it is intimately connected to a deeper traumatic history.

When I travel to Buenos Aires, I often encounter archival materials from various sources that connect to these ideas, or help draw them together. This material is sometimes in unexpected places, and sometimes it is right where I grew up. In boxes, on bookshelves. It’s in my family home that I found the magazine compilation that I’ve been working with for this exhibition. The magazine is called *Nuevo Hombre*, it was a revolutionary magazine in Argentina during the seventies. I got very much into this compilation. It provided a physical framework from which to use historical material, especially because there are images in the compilation that have not been circulated elsewhere.

DM: It sounds as if you develop research-specific methodologies that allow you to materialize, visualize and narrate the blockages in time when images with social and political function cease to circulate. By engaging with *Nuevo Hombre*, it seems you are working with a carefully edited composition of images and texts. Perhaps your artistic intervention into *Nuevo Hombre* is a practice of re-editing their specific reality that seems distant yet familiar to you. Would that be a good point of entry?

AZL: I was drawn to images from the magazine that depict protests from this time of political struggle in Argentina, as I feel quite connected to this moment. I began to trace all of the bodies that I have been photographing onto these protest images, to create different compositions that eventually become a kind of map. They are quite abstract as drawings. When these lines are overlaid on top of the historical image and enlarged, the two really start speaking into space, in relation to the body of the viewer. Not only as an image that you can see, but really as a landscape object, a space that you can almost inhabit. An image that becomes space. It’s very physical.

DM: The image itself is reality. Specifically in those societies ruptured by revolutionary processes, the image’s capacity is to generate its own spatiality and its own temporality, yet how do you deal with an image when the context around its own reality completely changed?¹

AZL: I am also interested in thinking of the boundaries of these images. I’ve had this thought for some time, but in this body of work at Mercer Union, I feel it’s coming out as more of a question. What is the boundary between the historical image, and the image that is in a family album? Or the image that I find in a box at home? What makes it into the archive? Who decides? I think more and more, I find myself going from the national archive into the shoebox family archive.

DM: Can we come back to the magazine *Nuevo Hombre*? How do you relate to it with your specific concern for its revolutionary purpose or potentiality? Can you share some names of the photographers or writers of the magazine?

AZL: My father was in the magazine’s editorial group. He was also active as a lawyer for political prisoners for the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) or Communist Workers’ Revolutionary Party and other militant organizations, which led to persecution and years of exile from the country. After the dictatorship ended and democracy returned, we migrated back to Argentina. That’s why this material—the magazine, and photographs—are all in my family’s house. In *Nuevo Hombre*, many of the contributors worked anonymously because of the danger they faced in participating in the publication. The magazine published more than seventy issues from 1971 to 1976. Directors of the publication include Manuel Gaggero, Rodolfo Mattarollo, and Silvio Frondizi, who was assassinated in September 1974. Other contributors include Alicia Eguren and Enrique Jarito Walker. I have found the names of two photographers, Pedro Luther and Jorge Aguero, who worked with the magazine. Due to the risks associated with the publication, many contributors adopted pseudonyms or wrote under seals of authorial secrecy.

DM: I consider this kind of lived experience, and politics of the biographical, a crucial condition for research shifting the grounds of the politics of knowledge.

AZL: I cannot think of a moment in which I have not been surrounded by this material. Especially photographs. But I have not always engaged with them, or included them in my artistic practice. At a certain point, it became clear that I had to. A path started from looking at them to re-photographing them, to reprinting them, to putting them on top of my body, to now adding a new generation to the image: my children and the traces of their existence, their bodies on top of the old images. In a way, tracing my own existence. Where you come from, where you stand, and why you stand where you do. I live here in Europe as a direct consequence of political acts. I am very conscious of this.

DM: Through this, I see your work taking up Tarek Elhaik’s concept of the “incurable image,” a way to address the coloniality of the image, specifically in the South American context.² Here, it’s not possible to cure what has been inscribed in land, language, minds, and bodies through genocidal violence—killing millions of lives, displacing families across generations, expropriating history and land—to install a New World View. Sylvia Wynter analyzes 1492—the year of Columbus’ “discovery” or colonization of the Americas—as a moment “in which

people across continents and oceans were brought together into a single field of power.”³ Such an “incurable image” cannot reconcile the “unpayable debt,” that Denise Ferreira da Silva proposes to us as a way to consider the aftermaths of political injustice, slavery, for which words and images are not sufficient.⁴ Each of these writers demands we find a means to articulate the unspeakable-yet-present in the archive: what the image might have captured, but cannot be rationalized by grammar. With this in mind, I’ll return to our beginning through a writing of yours that I came across when preparing for our conversation, where you describe your understanding of “history as a raw material.” I like this a lot. Would it be appropriate to approach your work, too, as a form of storytelling by means of images?

AZL: I can feel uncomfortable when things are straightforward. I feel compelled to disrupt constantly. But maybe this disrupting of the image is another way of narrating, almost never wanting it to be fixed. Through this layering of the images, layering of time and generations, I’m trying to create a new narrative. It’s not a narrative in words but through images, recreating images that allow a new experience or understanding of history.

¹ Doreen Mende, “The Undutiful Daughter’s Concept of Archival Metabolism,” in *e-flux* #93, 2018. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/215339/the-undutiful-daughter-s-concept-of-archival-metabolism/>.
² Tarek Elhaik, *The Incurable-Image: Curating Post-Mexican Film and Media Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
³ Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 5–57.
⁴ Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (Sternberg Press, 2022).

Doreen Mende is a curator, theorist, and researcher. Mende was appointed head of the cross-collections research department at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden in November 2021. She previously served as head of the CCC Research-based Master of the Visual Arts Department at HEAD Genève, where she remains a professor of Curatorial/Politics. Mende is currently working on Decolonizing Socialism. Entangled Internationalism (DECOSO), a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. With friends, she is a founding member of the Harun Farocki Institut, Berlin. entangledinternationalism.org

Cover image: detail from Aimée Zito Lema, *Scryer in the Archive*, 2022. Courtesy the artist.
Back and Left image: Aimée Zito Lema, *Here is Where We Meet*, 2021. Installation view: Oude Kerk, Amsterdam. Courtesy the artist, Oude Kerk and tegenboschvanvreden, Amsterdam. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij.