

Press Release

Harun Farocki
Gegen Krieg (Against War)
Curated by Antje Ehmann

November 18, 2022 – January 14, 2023
Opening: Friday, November 18, 6–9pm

Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 11am–6pm

From the mid-1960s onward, Harun Farocki observed, analyzed, and deconstructed the increasingly ubiquitous representations of war in a media landscape that expanded alongside his work over the following five decades. Beginning with the Vietnam War and continuing through the wars in the Balkans, and the Persian Gulf – as images of suffering were processed for mass consumption – Farocki's work raises the question, 'how do we view images?' and 'how are they coded to influence us?' Throughout his career, Farocki sought a language to counteract the images of war as they appear on TV screens.

In *Their Newspapers (Ihre Zeitungen)*, 1968, the voiceover soberly states, "The suffering of the Vietnamese people – an image of their suffering – comes from Vietnam to Berlin." Between 'the suffering' and 'an image of suffering' is Farocki's critique, which re-deploys text and image from print media and television reports into his own narrative. The short *White Christmas*, made the same year, similarly juxtaposes festive holiday rituals with footage of the Vietnam War.

At the beginning of *Inextinguishable Fire (Nicht lösches Feuer)*, 1969, we see Farocki in front of the camera rather than behind it. He addresses his audience directly, revealing the dilemma he faces between producing and reproducing images of suffering. Images of flesh burned by Napalm, will make us recoil, and to suppress the memory of the images and, ultimately, the facts to which they refer. How can the real suffering produced by Napalm be addressed without reproducing it? In the next moment, the camera pans over the tabletop on which Farocki rests his hands and the artist stubs out a cigarette on his forearm. Cut. A dead lab rat burns brightly. Addressing real suffering without reproducing it is illusory, but a critique of depictions through depictions themselves enables a critique of the socio-economic reality in which Napalm is invented – and sold for a profit.

In *A Way (Ausweg)*, 2005, Farocki examines the development between productive and destructive forces after the fall of the Iron Curtain. To what extent does the production of military weapons require the construction of an enemy at which they can be aimed? Farocki's montage juxtaposes clips of humming conveyor belts with footage from cameras of new weapons technologies that scan paths, ways out, and objects in the way. Brecht's closing quote "War always finds a way" suggests that capitalism always has a new trick up its sleeve – ensuring production and destruction fall into one.

Farocki's first film, *Two Ways (Zwei Wege)*, 1966, already exhibits the hallmark Farockian gesture of 'taking an image apart with the camera.' In an ironically exaggerated sequence, the camera pans across a religious, allegorical oil painting showing the deviating paths towards heaven and hell. *Two Ways* enters into dialogue with *The Silver and the Cross (Das Silber und das Kreuz)*, 2010, in which Farocki's camera again – some 44 years later – travels searchingly over an oil painting: Gaspar Miguel de Berrío's *Depiction of the Cerro Rico and the Imperial City of Potosí* (1758), which depicts the infrastructure around the mining city of Potosí from the perspective of the Creole elite. The silver that flowed from the veins of Cerro Rico ('rich mountain') beginning in 1545 ushered in a new era of capitalist world development. Farocki interrogates de Berrío's painting for traces inscribed in the geological epicenter of early capitalist colonial exploitation.

With *Transmission (Übertragung)*, 2010, Farocki takes us to places of memory, where he documents ritualized forms of pilgrimage, picturing visitors' choreographed encounters with

monuments and religious sites. The film recalls Susan Sontag's admonition: "All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with pictures that lock the story in our minds." The collective gestures of remembrance pictured in *Transmission* illustrate the realization of a coded social memory into individual behavior; what each site shares is their visitors desire to touch the untouchable.

Alongside more than 40 years of his films and videos, a selection of the artist's T-shirts emblazoned with political messages show how deeply the social criticism of his work was rooted in political activism. A reading table displays copies of Farocki's autobiographical and media-theoretical writings, which further situate the artist's work within contemporary history, evidencing the ways in which his personal politics and lived experience influenced his films and vice versa.

Harun Farocki's (b. 1944, now Czech Republic, d. 2014, Germany) over 120 films address practices of labor and the production of images – analyzing the power of the image in remarkable and prescient ways. His work demonstrates the powerful role of visual media in shaping our understanding of ourselves and others, as well as the social and political systems that send images into the world.

Solo exhibitions of Harun Farocki's work have been staged at Tate Modern, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Museum of Modern Contemporary Art, Seoul; among others.

His work is held in the collections of the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.), Berlin; Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Berlin; Goetz Collection, Munich; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; The National Gallery, London; and ZKM | Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea; among others.