

sjæl/seele/soul

simon dybbroe møller

solo exhibition

20 august — 11 october 2025

'A camera store seems a perfect setting for a horror movie. A working title might be, Invasion of the Camera Robots; it would be based on the Cyclops myth, with the camera clerk as Ulysses. A camera's eye alludes to many abysses. Each click would expose the clerk and his store to partial annihilation. I leave the ending for readers to figure out.'

– Robert Smithson, *Art Through the Camera's Eye* (c. 1971)

Generally regarded as science-fiction, Jordan Peele's 2022 film, *Nope* is actually about photography. Up until the finale, the picture's extraterrestrial – a UFO that is more predatory animal than ship – takes the form of a gigantic, monstrous eye. Its pupil is an orifice through which it consumes people–spectators, screaming as they pass through the eye's digestive tract: a canal similar to the pleated bellows of a Victorian camera. Towards the end of *Nope*, the alien shapeshifts into what looks like an 19th-century aperture. The camera eye is cyclopic, the film seems to suggest. It devours what it sees. While the unknown (the inexplicable, the unseeable) is in the sky above us – just as similar genre films have placed it in the sea, in outer space, or in the desert – the more pervasive horror of being watched, or of being photographed, is exemplified by the singular camera lens.

It has always been there, watching throughout history, in myth. In his unpublished text, *Art through the Camera's Eye*, Robert Smithson relates the camera store to Polyphemus' cave. It is inescapable without being devoured by the cyclopic camera eye, a tricky situation much like Odysseus got himself into. How then, do we evade the camera's eye today, when photography is so ubiquitous that we effectively live in Smithson's horror film?

Photography has always been present, treated with suspicion even, in Simon Dybbroe Møller's work. In *Performance* (2006), the artist jumps upon a pile of slide cases (within which the documentation of the performance is then put in and shown through cracked glass). In one photograph from the 2017 series, *Young Cultural Producers*, he mockingly captures a young man emulating the pose of a street photographer. The title of Dybbroe Møller's bin-lined sculptures, *Aperture & Orifice* (2014) equates the camera with a sphincter. In *Retinal Rift* (2025), the artist captures the camera eye itself. Each photograph in this series depicts a single eye subject to the red-eye effect. Light from a camera flash catches the blood at the back of the retina and makes the pupil appear red.

The eye is caught off-guard, the flash revealing life in a subject long considered dead. As Rebecca Solnit observes in *River of Shadows*, '[...] photography was associated with death both in the many, many images of the dead made during the early years of the medium and in the way photography seemed to cheat death by making at least appearance permanent'. With *Retinal Rift*, Dybbroe Møller offers a counterimage to the lifelessness that permeates much of his other work: calcified bodies, disembodied limbs, broken bones.

It is not the first time the singular eye has appeared in Dybbroe Møller's work. For *News* (2010), he filmed make-shift versions of news broadcasting logos resembling the all-seeing eye, a symbol of protection that has been used from Ancient Egypt to surveillance technology. Yet providence must also be treated with suspicion. The eye hangs there in a cloud watching us; we can never escape its gaze, or as Smithson says, 'As long as cameras are around no artist will be free from bewilderment'.

text by Saim Demircan