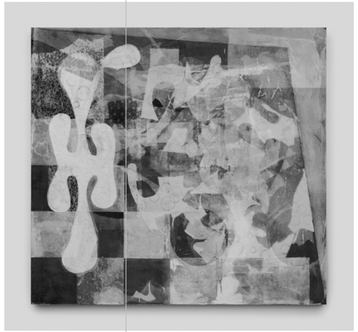
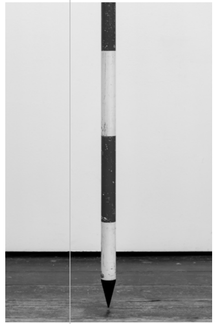


Moyra Davey
Of Jane (Film As), 2014
2 c-prints, tape, postage, ink
30.5 × 92 cm
Courtesy of greengrassi, London



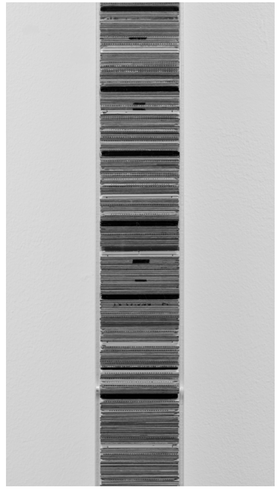
Nora Kapfer
Kürbis (III), 2026
Bitumen, paper, oil on linen
150 × 160 cm



Zaid Arshad
Untitled, 2025
Leica Geosystems © surveying prism pole
Dimensions variable



W. Rossen
Untitled, 2026
Oil on linen
145 × 200 cm



Zazou Roddam
Stratum #1, 2026
Stainless steel, slide film, plexiglass
140 × 5 × 5 cm

Zaid Arshad
lives and works in New York. Recent exhibitions include: Hans Goodrich, Chicago (2026), Final Hot Desert, London (2026), Benny's Video, New York (2025), Parent Company, New York (2025), Turquoise, New York (2025), Galerie Katharina Blum, New York (2024).

Moyra Davey
(b. 1958, Toronto, Canada) lives and works in New York. Recent exhibitions include: Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como (2026), greengrassi, London (2026), Sainsbury Centre, Norwich (2026), Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin (2025), Manif d'art 11, Québec (2024), The Whitney Museum, New York (2023), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023), Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery – Concordia University, Montreal (2022), Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (2021), Galerie Buchholz, Berlin (2020), Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto (2019), Bielefelder Kunstverein, Bielefeld (2018), Portikus, Frankfurt (2017), EMST – National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens and Neue Neue Galerie, Kassel (2017), Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (2016), Camden Art Centre, London (2014).

Nora Kapfer
(b. 1984, Munich, Germany) lives and works in Berlin. Recent exhibitions include: Edouard Montassut, Paris (2024), Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2024), Centro, Glasgow (2023), Galerie Lars Friedrich, Berlin (2023), Rothschild & Co, Zurich (2022), Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, Fribourg (2022), Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (2022), The Wig, Berlin (2021), Edouard Montassut, Paris (2021), Galerie Lars Friedrich, Berlin (2020), WIELS Contemporary Art Center, Brussels (2017), Vesch, Vienna (2013), Wiener Art Foundation, Vienna (2012).

Zazou Roddam
(b. 2000, London, UK) lives and works in London. Recent exhibitions include: ESSAIS, Paris (2026), Further Down The Line, Liverpool (2026), Hot Wheels Athens, Athens (2025), Galerie Oskar Weiss, Zürich (2025), Brunette Coleman, London (2025), Hans Goodrich, Chicago (2024), Chess Club, Hamburg (2024), Brunette Coleman, London (2023).

W. Rossen
(b. 1995, Zaandijk, The Netherlands) lives and works in Amsterdam. Recent exhibitions include: Wschód, Warsaw (2026), Velo Project, Milan (2025), 50Litre, Amsterdam (2025), De Ateliers, Amsterdam (2024), Wschód, New York (2024), Wschód, Warsaw (2023), Diez, Amsterdam (2022), Städelschule, Frankfurt (2022).

All images courtesy of the artists and Brunette Coleman, London
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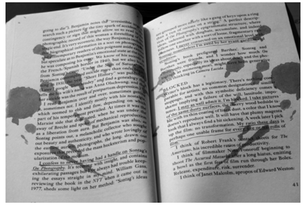
Brunette Coleman

IMAGE AS TRACE II
Zaid Arshad, Moyra Davey, Nora Kapfer, Zazou Roddam, W. Rossen

5 June – 4 July 2026

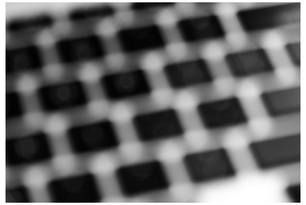
A Reader
Emile Rubino



Emile Rubino, *Worth a Thousand Words #11*, 2025–2026



Emile Rubino, *Worth a Thousand Words #1*, 2025–2026



Emile Rubino, *Worth a Thousand Words #7*, 2025–2026



Emile Rubino, *Worth a Thousand Words #5*, 2025–2026



Emile Rubino, *Worth a Thousand Words #12*, 2025–2026



Emile Rubino, *Worth a Thousand Words #13*, 2025–2026

I was re-reading Moyra Davey's *Notes on Photography & Accident* when the waiter spilled the coffee I ordered. The symmetrical stains left across pages 40 and 41 of my copy of *Index Cards* formed a Rorschach test, spreading over a passage in which Davey confesses: "I'm blocked. I take pictures of the same dusty surfaces, the cherry wood bedside table with its thin coating of linen dust, a colour I know doesn't reproduce well."[1] I remember feeling a sense of relief when I first read this part of the text as a student, not only because Davey also confesses to "never having had a handle on Sontag's *On Photography*,"[2] but because her writing confirmed that the enjoyment of photography is a fragile thing. There is something paradoxical about the boundlessness suggested by the medium's contingency on the outside world and the way curiosity turns into boredom as one keeps framing and reframing everything through the same old lens.

I regularly go back to my sun-bleached copy of Annie Ernaux and Marc Marie's *L'Usage de la photo*. I find comfort in Ernaux's take on stains and photography. "I realise," she writes, "that I am fascinated by photos in the same way I've been fascinated, since childhood, by blood, semen and urine stains on sheets, or old mattresses discarded on pavements; by the stains of wine or food embedded in the wood of sideboards, the stains of coffee or greasy fingers on old letters – the most material and organic kinds of stains."[3] As I read it again recently, the screen of my laptop went black, and a rare ray of Belgian sun revealed a constellation of fingerprints, dust and smudges – a photogram-like record of flu season turning into spring allergies.

In the first paragraph of *The Optical Unconscious*, Rosalind E. Krauss relates an anecdote about John Ruskin as a child. "Deprived of toys," she recounts how he became fascinated by things like "the burl of the floorboards" or "the carpet" and "what patterns [he] could find in bed covers, dresses, or wall-papers…"[4] Krauss uses the anecdote about Ruskin's childhood fascination with incidental patterns as an indexical trace of the unconscious visual processes that her account of modernism seeks to theorise. Together with Ernaux's realisation, this story implies something of a childlike enjoyment of indexicality as a two-way medium – one in which abstraction and realism are not mutually exclusive but only confirm each other to reveal that the world is wonderful in its banality.

So much has been said about indexicality – "the semiotic function by which signs indicate their object"[5] – to the point where writing anything else about it can feel pointless. Last summer, during a residency in the French countryside, I was working my way through a big book titled *Photography Theory*. Surrounded by stable flies coming from the cattle farm located across the street, I skimmed through this book published in 2007. In the studio, flies kept shitting on the digital collages scattered across my work table. In the book, scholars kept arguing over the changing role of indexicality in light of digitalisation. Nearly twenty years after this book came out, the word "digitalisation" almost feels like a relic of the past – even as countless underpaid workers are tasked with teaching machines to recognise what things in the world look like. Somehow, everything's changed and everything remains the same. In common perception, indexicality is still equated with photography and vice versa. When we say that an artwork feels "photographic," the remark often implies that the work seems to point back to some tangible aspect of reality – something that could be found/verified or seen out in the world, in spite of the work's abstract qualities. Similarly, every headline about self-driving cars going around in circles and delivery robots colliding with public infrastructure comes as a reassuring glitch in the matrix; a sign that the world still makes sense. In some ways, the causal nature of indexicality is to the psyche what gravity is to physics.

Today, as the exclusivity of vision in its most disembodied form prevails in an unprecedented manner, it seems natural that we look for models which arc back to pre-industrial days, when "vision [was] conceived in terms of analogies to the senses of touch."[6] In *Techniques of The Observer*, Jonathan Crary points out how, for a painter like Chardin, "sensory knowledge and rational knowledge are inseparable."[7] After referring to the way in which "Newtonian and Cartesian physics […] both sought to confirm the unity of a single homogenous field"[8] Crary returns to Chardin's iconic *Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1739). He writes: "This depicted act of effortless mastery, in which vision and touch work cooperatively is paradigmatic of Chardin's own activity as an artist. His apprehension of the co-identity of idea and matter and their finely set positions within a unified field discloses a thought for which haptic and optic are not autonomous terms but together constitute an indivisible mode of knowledge."[9]

Revisiting Sontag's notion of an "ecology of images," French philosopher Peter Szendy, begins his recent book *For an Ecology of Images* with an account of Pliny's fable. According to the fable, the beginnings of painting can be traced back to the "daughter of a potter of Sicyon"[10] who was in love with a young man about to depart, and who "'drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp.'"[11] Szendy mentions how "this gesture of tracing a projected shadow started to become the object of serial reproductions," as "machines were made to realise silhouettes on the model of the "physionotrace" invented by Gilles-Louis Chrétien in 1783."[12] However, he also notes how the rest of the story tends to be forgotten. Indeed, the gesture of the potter's daughter in turn gets translated by her father who produces a clay relief from the outline she drew. Therefore, Szendy concludes, "the first image in the history of art is a *transformat*."[13] Here, again, haptic and optic are not autonomous terms.

Interviewed about his recent novel, the writer Ben Lerner suggests that much of his work deals with the idea "there is something crucial about the imagination's capacity to redescribe reality."[14] In Lerner's *Transcription*, the narrator accidentally drops his cellphone in the sink of his hotel room just before an important appointment to interview his mentor. Afraid to admit that his only recording device isn't working, the narrator places the dead phone as if it were ready to record and goes on to conduct the interview with the device as a placeholder. In the second half of the novel, the public revelation that the mentor's final interview was not a factual record but a transcription turns out to be a contentious matter as some feel they've been deceived by an unexpectedly unreliable narrator. When describing the moment the cellphone fell in the sink, Lerner describes the cracked screen in which "liquid had seeped in," and how the family photograph on the home screen was "growing abstract around the edges."[15] Perhaps that is the circular fate of images: eventually they fade, unfurl or are hidden away in boxes, and what remains is less a record than the trace of a relation to the world.

1 Moyra Davey, "Notes On Photography & Accident," in *Index Cards* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions 2020), 41.
2 Ibid., 40.
3 Annie Ernaux and Marc Marie, *L'Usage de la photo* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 74.
4 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 1.
5 Martin Lefebvre, "The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images," in *Photography Theory: The Art Seminar*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 221.
6 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 59.
7 Ibid., 62.
8 Ibid., 64.
9 Ibid., 64.
10 Peter Szendy, *For an Ecology of Images*, trans. Marco Roth (New York: Verso, 2025), 11.
11 Ibid., 11.
12 Ibid., 14.
13 Ibid., 15.
14 Ben Lerner and Alexandra Schwartz, "Parents, Ghosts, and *Transcription*," YouTube video, posted by Pioneer Works, May 7, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHGBZ6K_xw
15 Ben Lerner, *Transcription* (London: Granta Books, 2026), 9.