#02

ON THE ART OF MAKING
WITHOUT HANDS

Le Saint-Suaire de Turin

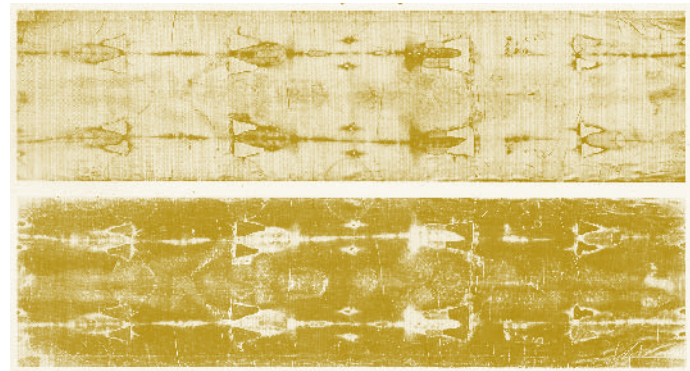
Image rendue positive par l'inversion photographique. — Ete.

SECONDO PIA, POSITIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE ('THE NEGATIVE') OF THE SHROUD OF TURIN, 1898
10,7 X 7,6 CM, MOUNTED ON BOARD

"...the dream of an autonomous, self-created image, a picture produced instantly in its perfect totality, outside the bodily conditions of human making..."[1]
Joseph Leo Koerner

It all starts with a thing, something between an object and an image. An image which sets in motion an infinite series of operations of replication; the making of a copy of a copy. An object that triggers the most extraordinary and rigorous scientific procedures to find out a truth, to see clearly. It poses a question of resemblance, and moreover, of a lost one. It is the question of a lost origin, one that will always be lost. The fantasy that it has been there, will trigger the desire to search for it again, and again. This is a desire for a retrospective invention, a desire to create the myth that there is an image not made by a human hand. The myth however, signifies a collective fiction that erases the procedures of making, the object-origin and its author so that the thing can shine in all its glory - an imprint of the body of God.

It is exactly this - a linen cloth with a constellation of stains locked in a reliquary. It does not offer something particular to see. As a believers says, at one of the rare occasions of its public ostentations: "...I was disappointed: *non si vede niente* (you can't see anything) everyone was saying. We tried..."[2] Then: "One actually saw, then, something else, simply in the looking forward to it or the desiring of it."[3] It is not a spectacular object, but it is undoubtedly very powerful one. It provides an interpretative schema for an extraordinary variety of images. At the same time it is an object that resists being inscribed into a mimetic economy that defines the image as an imitation, the result of elaborate procedures of producing a copy of a model. The Shroud of Turin is the canvass of an image that appeared spontaneously, miraculously circumventing all procedures of



POSITIV AND NEGATIV PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE OF THE SHROUD OF TURIN SCANNED FROM A REPRODUCTION BOUGHT AT A TOURIST SHOP IN THE TURIN DOME (PHOTOGRAPHY G. ENRIE, 1931)

making. Therefore, it resists to be called a representation. It is a true image. Or perhaps it is, a blank screen on which we project our desire to see? But I am getting ahead of myself.

The myth of the image with a divine origin is present in many religious traditions. In Christianity the name *acheiropoietos* (not made by human hands) is given to a group of images generated by a direct contact with the face or the body of Christ. The story of such an image first appears in the sixth century. Christ "dips a piece of linen (mandylion, mindil) in water, passes it over his face, which is then miraculously inscribed with its imprint" and sends it to King Abgar of Edessa.[4] Next to the Mandylion of Edessa, there is the more popular story of the Veronica, which captures an image of the face of Christ on a white cloth on the fourth station of the cross. The motif of the image not made by a human hand seems so important and powerful that its survives in several different versions. The transition between the imprint of the face of Christ and the story of a burial shroud that had preserved the imprint of his body appears centuries later. The first public ostentation in the fourteenth century was protested by the Bishop of Troyes who claimed that he knew the artist who created it. The Vatican then requested that the bishop remain silent and "with this silence as security" the shroud was displayed.[5] To the present day, it is kept in a reliquary at the cathedral in Torino.

On the 2nd of June, 1898 Secundo Pia, a lawyer who had taken the first photographs of the shroud, was paralyzed by an "intense emotion" after developing the negative plates of the photograph of the shroud he had taken. In front of his eyes loomed the real face of Christ. It was only then, with the invention photography – a technology that creates images by reducing the role of the maker's hand, when the shroud became the object of frenzied scientific explorations.[6] Not only is photography

ABOVE:
JAN VAN EYCK
PORTRAIT OF CHRIST
1440, OAK PANEL,
33,4 X 26,8 CM
© GROENINGE MUSEUM,
BRUGES

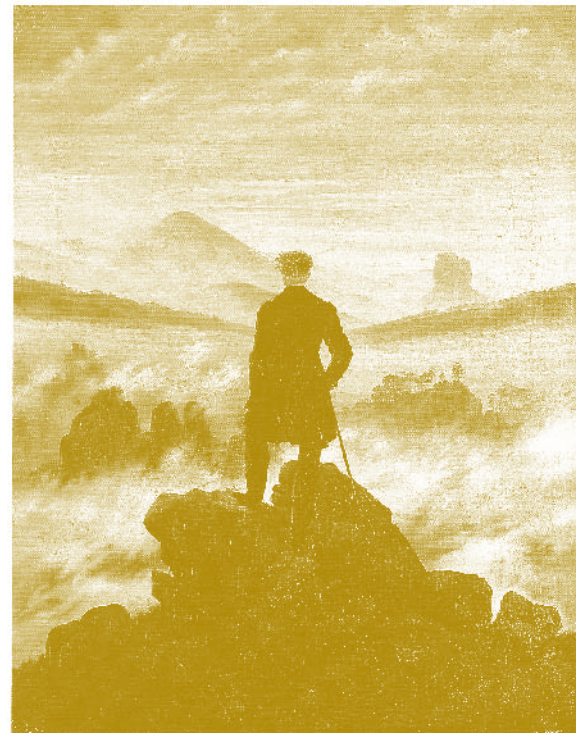
MASTER OF FLÉMALLE
ST VERONICA (DETAIL),
C. 1410, OIL ON WOOD
©STÄDELSCHES KUNSTINSTITUT, FRANKFURT

RIGHT:
ALBRECHT DÜRER,
SELF-PORTRAIT IN A
FUR-COLLARED ROBE, 1500
OIL ON LIME PANEL,
67,1 X 48,7 CM
©ALTE PINAKOTHEK,
MUNICH

"acheiropoietic technology", it also opened up the possibility to of turning the imprint of the body of Christ from a negative into a positive; to finally see the face, and make sense of the stains of the linen cloth. From that point on, science and religion become entangled in an endless tautological loop. The shroud was seen as providing the means for the "salvation of science"[7] and science and technology as providing the access to the real face of Christ.

What about art then? The acheiropoieton is precisely *not* a work of art. Or is it? It has, at its heart, the problem of resemblance created without the participation of a human hand. Christ as the true image of the Word was made "without inscription and formation...through the art of God."[8] From then on, the motif of the true image has been in artists' hands for centuries. Veronica's veil became an extremely fertile pictorial motif, in some cases providing justification for the display of superb artistic skill, a mode that is precisely the opposite of an image that is "not made." In his, Holy Face (1438), Jan van Eyck concealed the traces of the manual production from the pictorial surface by executing the image in an extremely realistic manner. Yet, his signature and the motto, "as I can", indicate the fact that the painting is the result of artistic production.[9] Later, Albrecht Dürer fashioned his Self-Portrait (1500) following the prototype of the *Holy Face*, which is itself acheiropoietos, the self-portrait of God. Caspar David Friedrich's, Wanderer above the Sea of Fog (1818), provides another instance of theomimesis, an invocation of the very model of divine creation. The specific manner of depiction of fog conceals all the signs of brushwork, of the making of the painting by an artist.[10]

Again, is the Shroud of Turin a work of art? Is art something that is not made by an artist? Here we come to a point well examined in the twentieth century. The Shroud shows a surprising proximity to the ready-made as



ABOVE:
CASPER DAVID FRIEDRICH
DER WANDERER ÜBER DEM NEBELMEER, 1818
OIL ON CANVAS, 98,4 X 74,8 CM
© BILDARCHIVE PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ, BERLIN

RIGHT:
MARCEL DUCHAMP
FOUNTAIN, 1917
(PHOTOGRAPH BY ALFRED STIEGLITZ)

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an object that subverts the very definition of the work of art, and to photography as a medium that claims authentic access to reality.[11] The Shroud and the ready-made embody similar truth-claims, each in its own way. The first by concealing its true origin, and the second by demonstrating that the "truth" of a work of art is not to be found in the fact that it is a product of a virtuous hand, but in being consecrated as true art. While photography is invested with various desires for showing "the truth" in an image, the ready-made deconstructs them by bringing them to their extreme. Abstract art inscribes itself precisely into this logic of the untraceable gesture of the hand on the surface of the canvas, and resurrects all the vocabulary of the origin, which, in its turn, is haunted by the vocabulary of the original absolute creation.

The history of interpretations of images not made by human hands is a history of a counter-motif. Its survival is a history of its reversals, re-appropriations. Why is such a motif so important? It is a necessary fiction that draws disparate gazes together; a political fiction. It is the supreme figure of invention, or pure making, perhaps the first step of making fictions that we share. It signifies the fact that the image is always a public phenomenon. We want to see it because it is original, or it claims to be true, or claims to circumvent all claims of originality (an operation that would be as miraculous as its opposite). The myth of the image-origin signifies the political condition of art, which is the mutual constitution of the work of art and the public gaze.

We could see the Holy Shroud as the greatest piece of appropriation art, a humble object, found by someone with an agenda. What about an exhibition about the condition of such an artifact, an object that excludes any artistic operation? Or more precisely, that masks it, hides it. How can such an artifact be translated into images today? Because of its condition - being a contact-image, a found

TOP:
GIORGIO ANDREOTTA CALÒ
UNTITLED (SELFPORTRAIT), 2009
SCANNED POLAROID
REPRINTED IN BLACK & WHITE ON PAPER
EDITION 5 + 1 A/P

ABOVE:
JAMES BECKETT
(POSTER, TITEL EN AFMETINGEN WORDEN NOG OPGEGEVEN)

image, and an instantaneous occurrence, it provides an interpretative frame for many contemporary art practices.

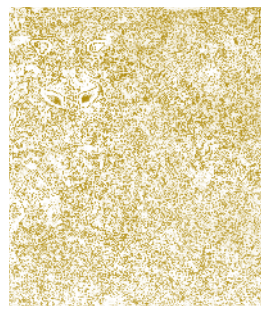
Central to Giorgio Andreotta Calò's installation is the act of self-fashioning that uses as a model an image of the face of Christ on a found poster. Images representing the face of Christ, however, are images that represent precisely the act of self-imitation of God. Thus, the installation presents an act of self-modeling in the very model of self-modeling. A Polaroid self-portrait, an image that is allegedly produced without much participation of the hand of an artist, makes us think that perhaps Christ himself is the first photographic self-portrait of God.

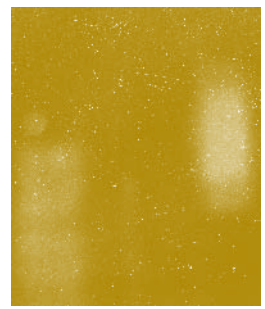
James Beckett's work replicates the shroud in a sense, but deconstructively. By using the same process that allegedly produced the stains on the Shroud, Beckett imitates the indexical moment. The format of the poster, by definition a public image, repeats the public condition of the Shroud, a religious-political object. Using appropriation as a strategy, Beckett ironically re-frames the poster - a found object that retrospectively announces yet another exercise of gazing together at the Shroud.

Susan Hiller's pieces touch upon the issue of authorship. The photographs, evidently found, carefully conceal any clear authorship. We are left with the question - are they manipulated by the artist? They are opaque and resist interpretation, inviting as many projections as the Shroud itself.

The Magic Mirror of John Dee and Demonology by Joachim Koester are two enigmatic objects that resist our gaze. Such opaque images, perhaps as the Shroud, are intended to bring us in contact with the supernatural.

Jonathan Monk's piece resonates with another important aspect of the Shroud - its presentation. Usually presented in rare public occasions, and kept behind a thick





TOP:
SUSAN HILLER
THE CURIOSITIES OF SIGMUND FREUD, 2005
'HERE THE PEN FELL OUT OF MY HAND AND INSCRIBED THESE SECRET SIGNS. I BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS AND ASK THAT YOU NOT TROUBLE YOURSELF WITH AN INTERPRETATION.' - 8 AUGUST 1882 LETTER TO MARTHA BERNAYS, 53 X 81 CM
EDITION OF 5 + 1 A/P

ABOVE:
JOACHIM KOESTER
DEMONOLOGY, 2006
PHOTOGRAPH, 31,5 X 26,5 CM, EDITION OF 6 + 1 A/P

JOACHIM KOESTER
THE MAGIC MIRROR OF JOHN DEE, 2006
PHOTOGRAPH FRAMED, 90X70 CM, EDITION OF 10 + 1 A/P

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glass, it is barely visible. The presentational machinery overpowers the object, or, in fact, shows that the presentational procedures both produce the presented object as true and conceal the fact that it is made. The book encased in Plexiglas remains somehow inaccessible, we think that it must be important and thus, ... it becomes important. The title of the book itself, Monkey Paintings, is a wink in the direction of an image “not made by a human hand”.

Dan Rees’ work is a contact-image, a constellation of stains in positive and negative, no recognizable image. Similar to the Shroud, which is so heavily protected that it is virtually impossible to remove it from its location, the key element here is that the artwork is inseparable from its physical location - the wall.

Philippe van Wolputte addresses the issue of authenticity and replication. What is more important - the act of intervention in an architectural space, its replication or the representation of a gesture of repetition in an image? As in the case of the Shroud, we are presented with multiple re-mediations of the image.

Mark Soo’s installation, and the way it is presented, touches upon the question of presentation and the deliberate obscuring of any direct, inspecting gaze. The constellation of lights reflected on the wall again replicate the shroud and its power as the material support for various fantasies.

Finally, Rosella Biscotti’s reproduction of a scientifically produced image of a human brain provides a counterpoint to the quest for the supernatural. A visually appealing, aestheticised image it poses a question similar to the one posed by the Shroud. The question of the difference between regimes and interpretative frameworks - is it art, or is it science?

TOP:
JONATHAN MONK
THE THINGS WE COULD DO BEFORE WE WERE HERE TO DO THEM, 2009, BOOK ENCASED IN PLEXIGLASS AND DISPLAYED HIGH ON THE WALL. 24 X 16 X 5 CM, EDITION OF 10 + 1 A/P

DAN REES
NO TITLE, 2009
DYPTICH

ABOVE:
MARK SOO
PRIVATE PRESLEY, 2008
VIDEO, TWO TELEVISIONS STACKED ON THEIR SIDE
EDITION 2 + 1 AP

RIGHT:
PHILIPPE VAN WOLPUTTE
5 NEW PIERCINGS, 2008
INSTALLATION, VIDEO ON MONITOR AND 2 PHOTOGRAPHS ON PAPER WITH SKETCHES, EDITION OF 5 + 1 A/P

Notes

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1
JOSEPH LEO KOERNER, THE MOMENT OF SELF-PORTRAITURE IN GERMAN RENAISSANCE ART (THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 1993), 84.

2
PIERRE VIGNON, REPLY TO M. DONNADIEU, IN L'UNIVERSITE CATHOLIQUE, XL, NO. 7 (1902), 368. QUOTED BY GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN, "THE INDEX OF THE ABSENT WOUND. MONOGRAPH ON A STAIN", TRANS. THOMAS REPENSEK, OCTOBER, VOL. 29 (SUMMER, 1984) 63.

3
DIDI-HUBERMAN, "THE INDEX OF THE ABSENT WOUND", 63.

4
MONDZAIN, IMAGE, ICON, ECONOMY, 194.

5
IBID., 196.

6
IBID., 197.

7
IBID., 201.

8
DOBSCHÜTZ, CHRISTUSBILDER,1:53. QUOTED BY JOSEPH LEO KOERNER, THE MOMENT OF SELF-PORTRAITURE, 85.

9
KOERNER, 106.

10
JOSEPH LEO KOERNER, CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH AND THE SUBJECT OF LANDSCAPE (YALE UVIVERSITY PRESS, 1995) 192.

11
AS MONDZAIN OBSERVES: "...THE HOLY SHROUD IS MANIFESTED UNDER THE DIFFERENT REGIMES OF MODERNITY IN THE DISCOURSE IT GENERATES: THAT OF THE STAIN WITHOUT AN AUTHOR, THAT OF THE SELF-PORTRAIT, AND THAT OF THE READY-MADE.", "THE HOLY SHROUD: HOW INVISIBLE HANDS WEAVE THE UNDECIDABLE", IN ICONOCLASH. BEYOND THE IMAGE WARS IN SCIENCE, RELIGION AND ART, ED. BRUNO LATOUR AND PETER WEIBEL. (CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS: THE MIT PRESS, 2002), 330.

TEXT
Alena Alexandrova
EDITING
Derek Brunen
DESIGN
Lesley Moore
PRINTING
J. Bout & Zonen

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THANKS
Dienst Kunst & Cultuur, Municipality of Rotterdam, Galerie Jan Mot, Galerie Volker Diehl

DISTRIBUTION
castillo/corrales, Paris
pro QM, Berlin
Boekie Woekie, Amsterdam

PUBLISHER
WILFRIED LENTZ ROTTERDAM
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Postbus 132, 3000 AC Rotterdam
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+31 10 4126459
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www.wilfriedlentz.com

#2 ON THE ART OF MAKING WITHOUT HANDS IS THE SECOND ISSUE OF A NEW SERIES OF PUBLICATIONS ISSUED BY WILFRIED LENTZ ROTTERDAM.

Published as an accompaniment to the show 'Not Created By a Human Hand'. From 24 December to 24 January 2009 at Wilfried Lentz Gallery and from February 4-7, 2009 at Art Rotterdam. Opening of the show on Christmas Eve 2009, Groothandelsgebouw Rotterdam. With this publication is a signed and numbered artist edition of James Beckett and Joachim Koester (500 copies).

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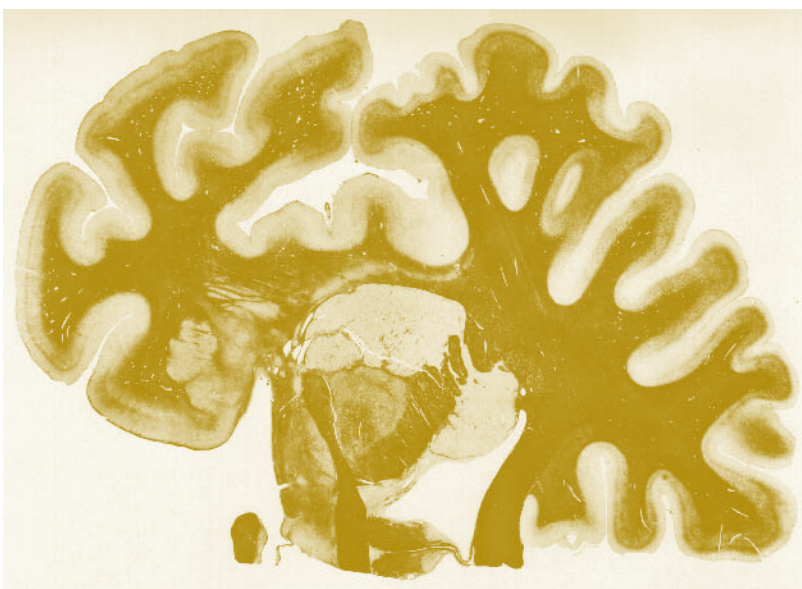
A PUBLICATION BY
WILFRIED LENTZ
ROTTERDAM



ROSSELLA BISCOTTI
NO TITLE (ATLAS ANATOMICUM CEREBRI HUMANI, PROF DR JELGERSMA), 2009
PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT