



8<sup>th</sup> Triennial of Photography Hamburg 2022

# CURRENCY

## CURATORIAL CONCEPT: ABOUT *CURRENCY*

The theme of the 8th edition of Triennial of Photography Hamburg is “*Currency*”. In its most prevalent use, it is an economic term used to measure the health of a national or regional economy. It might refer to the speculative value of material goods or to beneficial arrangements between nations, groups, and individuals. When extended to visual culture, its primary associations are of cultural capital. Deployed here, the term invites a critical engagement with transnational circulation, canon-making, mediation, translation, and visuality.

After more than a century of living with photography, we have learnt to perceive the world “photographically”, with many of us seeing the world in image formats shaped by the media platforms that host these images. Whilst images themselves are unstable forms, the mental repository we build through this prosthetic mode fundamentally shapes how we engage with the world around us. The contemporary is therefore tantamount to a “retinal era”, one that requires a different grammar for looking, reading, and responding to images beyond this saturated condition. However, while cameras are widely available, care should be taken around affirming the democratic potential of their presence.

Prior to the increased pace of digital image-making, Susan Sontag observed that: “A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex.” For Sontag, “The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images.” Though Sontag wrote these words in 1977, contradictions around photography and power remain relevant, signalling significant questions around access, intention, and representation.

Reflecting on Sontag's book in *Uses of Photography*, John Berger considered how the development of photography alongside the violent wars of the twentieth century led to its primacy over oral testimony. But what testimony is given by the photograph? When photographs fix the appearance of an event, they shape our memory, even forming what Roland Barthes had called a “counter-memory.” Yet significance is attributed rather than self-apparent. This means that when photographs become detached from their original context, they must be interpreted. Whether encountering images in institutional archives or in family albums, we aim to explore the myriad ways in which

these images “speak” to us. Restoring a photograph’s authenticity is then a paradox because the reconstruction of lived experience or context can never be fully actualized. With no underlying truth to make “lucid”, photographs are profoundly open. It is this openness that the curators seek and with it, the possibilities of narrative invention, speculation, and capacious understanding of worlds conjured.

With *Currency*, several questions are summoned: how do photographs grant access to experiences outside of our own? What powers do the photographed have, and how are the circumstances around image-making told? The curators respond openly to experiments with the medium, following propositions for alternative ways of seeing, feeling, deciphering and being together. We ask how those working with photography reimagine the relations between seeing, being seen and how the circulation of perceptions and knowledges inform and feed subjectivities.