

palmer gallery

Exhibition 02

POST-PHOTOGRAPHY:
THE UNCANNY VALLEY

18.04.24 - 18.05.24

Private View:
Wednesday 17th April, 6-9pm

Nouf Aljowaysir
Boris Eldagsen
Ben Millar Cole

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On 17th April 2023, Boris Eldagsen won the Sony World Photography Award in London. However, instead of receiving the award, he confessed that the image he had submitted to the competition had been made in collaboration with various generative Artificial Intelligence systems. The story captured the global imagination and AI generated imagery was propelled into the public consciousness: How does traditional photography differ from AI imagery? Where does the artist's hand lay and what are the rules around intellectual property?

POST-PHOTOGRAPHY: THE UNCANNY VALLEY opens a year to the day since Eldagsen refused the award, pairing the artist with two emerging AI practitioners, Nouf Aljowaysir and Ben Millar Cole. Highlighting the technology's rapid evolution, the exhibition demonstrates the collaborative process between artist and machine, exploring themes around heritage, identity and the uncanny. The exhibition also critically engages with AI generated images, which are often viewed with suspicion. 'Uncanny valley' is central to this - a term coined in the 1970's to refer to a sense of unease experienced when facing technology that closely resembles humans, but isn't convincingly realistic. Generated from traditional photographs, the images in this exhibition are at once familiar and unfamiliar. Distorted elements present themselves, creating an unsettling effect, which pushes them beyond the boundary of traditional photography, and into the realm of post-photography.

Boris Eldagsen's infamous *The Electrician* - the image that won the Sony Photography Prize - will be exhibited alongside a new body of work where Boris pushes traditional photographic formulations towards the absurd, switching natural imagery for the synthetic: hair becomes wire and limbs become intestines. Nouf Aljowaysir's practice examines the biases in AI image making, questioning the inherent misalignments between AI datasets and the reality of the external world. She challenges the technology to recover her heritage from Saudi Arabia and Iraq, discovering how AI distorts her lineage, which she traced through oral histories from family members. Ben Millar Cole formulates figures with mislocated limbs - a common error in previous iterations of AI technology. Demonstrating the limitations of AI and the uncanny valley, Ben's practice playfully explores the boundary between human intention and algorithmic interpretation.



The Electrician, Boris Eldagsen, 2023



Hoods Pausing, Gender Roles, Ben Millar Cole, 2024

“THE ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION ENGAGE WITH THE CURRENT POSSIBILITIES OF CREATIVE COLLABORATION WITH AI TOOLS, HARNESSING THE UNIQUE AFFORDANCES BROUGHT ON BY THE VARIOUS TECHNOLOGIES, WHILST THINKING ABOUT THEIR IMPLICATIONS. IMAGE RECOGNITION TOOLS HIGHLIGHT THE IMPERFECTION OF THE MACHINE GAZE, WHEREAS PHOTOREALISTIC TEXT-TO-IMAGE MODELS FOCUS ON PORTRAYING OUR COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION DOWN TO THE SMALLEST DETAIL, WITH THE PROMPT ENGINEER AT THE STEERING WHEEL - TAKING THE VIEWER TO THE NEXT STAGE OF ART HISTORY”
[LUBA ELLIOT]