

Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center
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A Forged and Delicate Future

Gustavo Balbela
Elsa Gregersdotter
Andrej Lamut
Ida Nissen
André Viking

Curated by Eric Lawton

Out of the chaos the future emerges in harmony and beauty.

- Emma Goldman (1869 - 1940), anarchist political activist and feminist writer

A Forged and Delicate Future highlights five international artists — Gustavo Balbela, Elsa Gregersdotter, Andrej Lamut, Ida Nissen and André Viking — who reconstruct past-and-present-day ephemera in order to navigate the world's fragile state and propose alternative futures. In this exhibition, contemporary artists frequently combine disjointed text and image fragments against the backdrop of countries and homes infiltrated by rising authoritarian governments, disinformation campaigns, and ecological disasters. By twisting, stretching, and rearranging archival combinations of media, a more precarious and nuanced reality emerges.

A medium of found documentation, the archive can take the form of newspapers, family photo albums and even invasive plant species. Rather than submit to a chaotic and absurdity filled status quo, these artists dive headfirst into the disorder, treating each item they discover as a wholly formed piece of artistic material. Each shard of content can be reconfigured in each artist's own image as a way to make sense of the world and, ultimately, of themselves.

While some artists reflect on the external world, others turn inward. Some focus on personal memories, while others question whether the archive can fully encapsulate truth. As family narratives and stories pass down through generations, they often shift and mutate as time progresses. Ultimately, the works reflect an ambiguity of possibility, casting aside notions of absolute truth in favor of liminal realms punctuated by questions without answers.

Brazilian artist **Gustavo Balbela** juxtaposes found text and images from Brazilian newspapers in his series *Nothing Will Be As Before*. Constructed in the shadowed rise of an authoritarian and denialist Brazilian government, foreboding headlines are paired against disconnected, banal images from local print media. The resulting form highlights a chaotic arrangement where seemingly rigid news frameworks fall apart and leave the viewer reckoning with fragmented

absurdities. Physical collages expose this new reality of living in an age defined by a lack of objectivity and collapsing certainties such as freedom and health. In an environment where truth and reality seem to lose all consciousness, Balbela further dissects the content, assigning meaning to a world that doesn't seem to have any meaning at all.

In the film *Your Ears Are So Cute*, Swedish artist **Elsa Gregersdotter** explores the intimacy of female friendship by interspersing footage of older women in mid-conversation with subtitles crafted from backhanded compliments Gregersdotter has received over the course of her life. For example, one woman comments to the other, "*It's strange that someone as beautiful as you, can be so ugly at the same time.*" This forced pairing bridges the divide between her authentic experiences as a younger woman and the interpretations staged in a cross-generational context. Meaning can shift depending on the perspective and age of the recipient, as well as the viewer, as they reflect upon their own memories and conversations. These negative-positive criticisms about the female body reveal the oscillation of language and its dual ability to be both cruelly absurd and humorous at the same time.

Slovenian artist **Andrej Lamut** considers environmental destruction as a catalyst for sustainability by combining paper made from invasive plant species with various analog film techniques, including liquid emulsion, in his series *Invasive Alien Species*. Lamut recontextualizes the subject matter of invasive foreign plants, known for destroying native ecosystems, as a medium from which to build upon new strange abstract forms. The ensuing works showcase harmful plants like *Japanese Knotweed* and *Canadian Goldenrod*, by revealing their true character, reminiscent of otherworldly alien forms. Additionally, in the physical act of removing invasive plants from their destructive environment, Lamut actively supports the rehabilitation of his native environment.

In her series, *Compile Your Inventory*, Danish artist **Ida Nissen** constructs physical collages by cutting up, transforming, and glueing together photograms — camera-less images created in a dark room by exposing light directly onto light sensitive paper without the use of a negative. The combination of tactile symbols interwoven across colorful abstract emulsions acts as a response to the slippery, complex undertaking of facing an ever-changing world. Thematic and poetic symbols emerge, such as the orchid, a reference to Nissen's South-Korean heritage and name. Situated on the boundary between the familiar and unknown, the works offer clues pointing towards Nissen's own personal quest for truth, without necessarily providing any clean answers or resolutions.

Danish artist **André Viking** employs his own family archive to rebuild fragmented domestic narratives in his series, *Hello "Soul Mate"*. Combining photos from family albums with letters his father wrote to his family while incarcerated, Viking considers how identities can shift depending on the coupling and decoupling of visual and textual content. The subtlety of photography can only offer so much precision whereas text, especially primary source material, can extend the clarity of intention. Scenes which could be interpreted as melancholy suddenly become humorous and vice versa. The series also spotlights the connection and interplay between memory and identity as seen through the lens of the family archive.