OMER FAST
PRESENT CONTINUOUS
20 October 2015-24 January 2016
Exhibition co-produced by the Jeu de Paume, the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, and the KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg

Media partners
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Itinerant exhibition

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (UK): 18 March – 26 June 2016
KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg (Denmark): 23 September 2016 – 8 January 2017

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Cover:
Omer Fast — Continuity (Diptych)
2012-2015
HD video, color, sound, 77 min
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Curators of the exhibition
The artist, Marina Vinyes Albes (Jeu de Paume), Laurence Sillars (BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art) and Stinna Toft (KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art)

Summary
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EXHIBITION

- This is Omer Fast’s first solo institutional exhibition in France. His work has recently been shown at the Tate Modern (2014), the Musée d’Art Contemporain in Montreal, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and the Imperial War Museum in London (2013), at the Documenta 13 (2012), and at the biennials in Venice (2011), Taipei (2012) and Singapore (2011). In 2009 he was awarded the Nationalgalerie Prize for Young Art in Berlin and in 2008 he received the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Bucksbaum Award.

- For the exhibition “Omer Fast: Present Continuous”, the artist expands on the line of investigation begun with the video Continuity (2012), with a new project in which the notion of the double is fundamental. Far from clarifying those initial ideas, however, the new scenes making up Continuity (Diptych) (2015) underscore the strangeness, the ambiguity and the paradoxes of its earlier twin. In addition, other new works have been specifically produced for the exhibition by the Jeu de Paume.

- In the video 5,000 Feet is the Best (2011), part of this exhibition, Omer Fast addresses the questions raised by contemporary military strategies, use of drones in combat and, more generally, new forms of surveillance. These controversial issues are currently the subject of considerable debate, in both the political sphere and the world of art.

- Omer Fast is above all a storyteller. His way of constructing stories – his mastery of form, of narrative modes and of point of view – transcends his subject matter. While his work tackles social, political, geopolitical and historical issues, the narrative mode remains a critical factor.

- Omer Fast uses complex narrative structures to explore the different ways stories are constructed. Blurring the boundaries between “reality” and “representation” and between document and artifice, his practice questions the status of the image as such.

- Since he began his first projects in the early 2000s, Omer Fast has been investigating the way events are transformed into memories and stories, together with their modes of dissemination and media coverage.

- A substantial part of Omer Fast’s work is based on interviews. He records the verbal testimony of a refugee, drone pilot, soldier, porn actor and embalmer, then reinvents it in distorted or fragmented form during the editing process. This tampering with the facts raises the question of the primacy of the eyewitness and the way personal and collective stories are handled by the media.

- Despite its emphasis on narrative and its visual sophistication, Fast’s work is characterised by the uncanny, the distancing and a refusal of all viewer identification or catharsis. Using different strategies – repetition, looping, injection of surreal elements, and dissonance between image, sound and narrative – his videos are non-naturalistic and resist the temptation of any conclusion or revelation of some ultimate “truth”.

- Omer Fast’s work forces the viewer to construct his own interpretation by looking beyond the obvious: it is up to him to interrogate the images offered and thus commit actively to a critical reading of what he sees.
Omer Fast — 5,000 Feet is the Best
2011
Digital video, color, sound, 30 min.
© Omer Fast
THE EXHIBITION

THE JEU DE PAUME IS PRESENTING A MONOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION BY THE ARTIST OMER FAST. FAST’S WORK HAS ALREADY BEEN SHOWN AT THE DOCUMENTA 13, AS WELL AS AT NUMEROUS BIENNIALS AND GROUP AND SOLO SHOWS.

DRAWING FOR THE MOST PART ON MOVING IMAGES, FAST’S WORK EXPLORES NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY THROUGH A PRACTICE THAT BLURS THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN “REALITY” AND “REPRESENTATION”.

WHILE FAST’S STORIES ARE OFTEN ROOTED IN DOCUMENTARY, THEIR CONSTRUCTION IS NON-NATURALISTIC AND RESISTS THE TEMPTATION OF ANY CONCLUSION OR REVELATION OF SOME ULTIMATE “TRUTH”. FAST INVESTIGATES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE SOCIAL GROUP, TOGETHER WITH THE WAY EVENTS ARE TRANSFORMED INTO MEMORIES AND STORIES, AND THEIR MODES OF CIRCULATION AND MEDIA COVERAGE. FAST INVESTIGATES THE WAY EVENTS ARE TRANSFORMED INTO MEMORIES AND STORIES, TOGETHER WITH THEIR MODES OF DISSEMINATION AND MEDIA COVERAGE. IN THIS CHALLENGING OF THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION HE FOLLOWS IN THE WAKE OF PREVIOUS JEU DE PAUME PROJECTS CENTRING ON NEW FORMS OF NARRATIVE IN THE VIDEO AND INSTALLATION FIELDS.


Born in Jerusalem in 1972, Omer Fast grew up amid different languages and cultures. He spent a large part of his teen years in New York and later moved to Berlin, where he now lives. This personal experience of adaptation partly explains his interest in the issues of language, transmission, translation and identity that have been a feature of his video installations since he began making art in the early 2000s.
NARRATIVE

Fast is above all a storyteller. His way of constructing stories – his mastery of form, of narrative modes and of point of view – transcends his subject matter. While his work tackles social, political, geopolitical and historical issues, it is given meaning by his use of narrative and its effects. As Walter Benjamin noted in 1936, "By now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information [...] It is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it."

For the last fifteen years Fast has been continuously telling stories as a way of investigating the status of the image. In their intertwining of different registers – reality and fiction, original and copy, document and artifice – his video installations point up the codes and conventions that define TV and cinema "reality”. The Fast oeuvre homes in on the issue of objective truth, underscoring the discrepancy between lived experience, identity and discourse. Fast enjoys working with personal accounts – from soldiers, refugees, porn actors, embalmers – that form the starting point for many of his projects; he freely manipulates and modifies them in the editing process, making visible the complex business of turning facts into images and contesting the primacy of eyewitness testimony. He offers the potential narratives – the infinite ramifications – these accounts can give rise to. Sometimes these different narratives function simultaneously on the same plane, conjuring up Borges’s “forking paths” and Deleuze’s “falsifying narratives”. Fast’s work confronts us with an insoluble paradox: if a story is the outcome – as well as the hostage – of discursive conventions, it nonetheless remains the case that without these conventions there would be neither experience nor transmission.

“I’m often working in that gap between the moment of pain, the moment of experience, and the later moment of capturing that experience by looking at the scar and finding the words to describe it.”

Omer Fast — Continuity (Diptych)
2012 - 2015, HD video, color, sound, 77 min
© Omer Fast

REPETITION

Omnipresent in Fast’s work, repetition is also a core aspect of his filmic grammar: the double, the loop and reconstruction are defining features of his art. Repetition with variations and variations within repetition structure the videos included in this exhibition – 5,000 Feet is the Best, Continuity (Diptych) and CNN Concatenated – which are also pervaded by trauma, role-playing and war.

Omer Fast: Present Continuous begins with televised “historical reality” in the context of 9/11 in CNN Concatenated, moves on to a fictional tale of family horror in Continuity (Diptych) and ends with a consideration of new forms of long-distance war based on the personal account in 5,000 Feet is the Best. From the unleashing of the war against terrorism to “virtual combat”, we are shown the way our experience of the world is mediated by image technology whose impact on those involved – the TV viewer, the drone pilot – is becoming steadily more real.
EXHIBITION LAYOUT

CNN CONCATENATED, 2002

One of Fast’s earliest works, CNN Concatenated is representative of several of the major features of the works to follow: the scrupulous precision of the editing; the importance of the verbal and, more specifically, of the word as entity; the foregrounding of the mediated nature of the discourse – which, in addition, reveals the artist as falsifier; the full-time appeal to the viewer; and the shifting, multiple identity of the subject.

One of Fast’s very few studio works, CNN Concatenated is exclusively made up of images of newscasters from the American broadcaster. Using an enormous database of 10,000 words lifted from their commentaries, Fast shapes a poetic, disconcerting narrative that plays on the rhetoric of fear and insecurity. The newscasters look the viewer in the eye, addressing him or her in staccato, mechanical tones, as if possessed by some uncanny force. This has the effect of underscoring the contrast with the subjectiveness of what is being said, which paradoxically appears as the expression of a kind of collective unconscious.
While the method of CNN Concatenated is simple and intelligible, and its context readily identifiable, the narrative construction of 5,000 Feet is the Best takes a more complex turn in its echoing of the hidden reality it references.

In looking into the contemporary phenomenon of long-distance warfare using drones, 5,000 Feet is the Best questions current United States military strategies and the morality of new forms of surveillance. This video is the result of an encounter in September 2010 between the artist and a Predator drone operator working out of the desert in Nevada, near Las Vegas. During a series of interviews the pilot describes his work and his daily routine, but then begins to acknowledge the mistakes the drones regularly make, their tragic consequences for civilians and the psychological effects – sleep disorders, stress and anxiety – he himself suffers from. The pilot remains anonymous as Fast edits the interview, intercutting it with scenes in which an actor plays the pilot in a Las Vegas hotel room. Thus the narrative moves from one story to another, alternating between a detailed account of the exploits of the secret drone teams and the disjointed, ambiguous versions provided by the actor in the course of a simulated conversation. Reality and its representation become more and more closely intertwined in an endless loop. The dramatisation of this dual narrative is rigorously codified in line with the classical conventions of audiovisual documentary and fiction; this is Fast’s way of providing a critical reading of those conventions and the way they are perceived.
These same conventions are observed in Continuity (2012), in which the subverting of recognisable codes opens up disturbing cracks in the narrative. Cinematic continuity, achieved by splicing separate shots together to form an impression of linear flow, is intended to create meaning out of the fragmentary nature of perception, and as such shapes our representation of the world. Continuity originally made play with this system in a portrait of a German couple coping with the loss of their soldier son by compulsively recreating, in an obsessive, impenetrable ritual, his return from Afghanistan. As in 5,000 Feet is the Best, in which the film’s endlessly disrupted structure reflects the characters’ state of mind, filmic form in Continuity is closely tied to its subject. The viewer vainly seeks a coherent or reassuring interpretation as Fast’s sophisticated narrative, increasingly contaminated by surrealistic undertones, veers into nightmare.

For his exhibition at the Jeu de Paume, the artist has made a new film, Continuity (Diptych), based on the 2012 Continuity, but including fresh sequences. A teenage drug user and a destitute former soldier turned burglar appear as two possible embodiments of a multifaceted character: “The younger man,” says Omer Fast, “represents a possible past, and the older one a possible future. In between, we still have the parents who are stuck in an eternally repeating present, continually trying to find their lost son”.

Far from simplifying the first film’s ideas, the scenes making up Continuity (Diptych) underscore the strangeness, the ambiguity and the paradoxes of its earlier twin. Viewer can only come up with their own interpretation by looking beyond the obvious. Because he can only interrogate the images offered to him, he commits actively to a critical reading of the work.

This work was produced in 2012 by dOCUMENTA (13), Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienne, and Filmgalerie 451, Berlin, with the support of Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, ZDF/3Sat and OK Offenes Kulturhaus Oberösterreich, in 2015 by Jeu de Paume, Paris, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, and Filmgalerie 451, Berlin, with the support of Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (BKM).
A TANK TRANSLATED, 2002

Scattered along the exhibition itinerary, the four videos making up A Tank Translated mingle with the other works like a narrative discreetly punctuating other, different stories. Here Fast has separately interviewed four members of an Israeli army tank crew about their work and experiences. Their subtitled accounts are visibly tampered with by the artist, who eliminates or modifies certain words to create new meanings. Popping up unexpectedly, the portraits of the young soldiers offer the viewer a more personal relationship with what is being said by the commander, driver, loader and gunner of this war machine.

Omer Fast — Driver I, detail of A Tank Translated
2002
4 videos installation, color, without sound
Driver: 9 min 30 s; Loader: 4 min 9 s; Gunner: 13 min 25 s; Commander: 5 min 1 s
© Omer Fast
Omer Fast
b. Jerusalem 1972
lives and works in Berlin

. Awards

2009
Is awarded the Nationalgalerie Prize for Young Art in Berlin

2008
Receives the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Bucksbaum Award

. List of exhibitions

Omer Fast is represented by the galleries gb agency, Paris, Arratia Beer, Berlin and Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv.

2016
Omer Fast, Kunsten Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg
Omer Fast, Baltic Centre of Contemporary Art, Gateshead

2015
Omer Fast. Present Continuous, Jeu de Paume
MOCAK Muzeum Sztuki Wspolczesnej w krakowie, Cracow

2014
5,000 Feet is the Best, The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

2013
Everything That Rises Must Converge, gb agency, Paris
Everything That Rises Must Converge, Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv
Omer Fast, OK Centrum, Linz

2012
Omer Fast, Herzliya Museum of Art, Herzliya
Omer Fast, Henie Onstad Art Center, Høvikodden
Continuous Coverag, The Power Plant, Toronto
Omer Fast, Five Thousand Feet is the Best, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas
2001/2011, Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University, Columbus

2011
Omer Fast, Model Art Center, Sligo
Omer Fast, Hordaland Art Centre, Bergen
Omer Fast, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne
Omer Fast, Netherlands Media Arts Institute, Amsterdam
Omer Fast, La Caixa, Barcelona

2010
Omer Fast, gb agency, Paris
Talk Show, Berlin Documentary Forum, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
Screening: MNAM, Centre Pompidou, Paris
Omer Fast, Arratia Beer, Berlin
Screening: Ithaca University, New York
The Casting, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland

2009
The Casting, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis.
Omer Fast, Kunsthau Baselland, Basel
Nostalgia, South London Gallery, London
Nostalgia, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley
Omer Fast, Postmasters Gallery, New York
Looking Pretty for God (After G. W.), Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
Talk Show, Performa, New York

2008
Looking Pretty for God (After G. W.), Betty Rymer Gallery, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago
Omer Fast, Galerija Miroslav Karlijevic, Zagreb
Omer Fast, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver
De Groote Boodschap, gb agency, Paris
Omer Fast, Kunstverein Hannover, Hanover

2007
Omer Fast, Arratia Beer, Berlin
The Casting, Museum of Modern Art, Mumok, Vienna
Godville, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis
The Casting, gb agency, Art Unlimited, Art Basel, Basel
Omer Fast, Vox Contemporary Art Center, image contemporaine, Montreal

2006
Godville, gb agency, Paris

2005
Mixed Doubles (with Nam Jun Paik), Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh
Omer Fast, Postmasters Gallery, New York
Godville, Midway Contemporary, Minneapolis

2004
Omer Fast, L’Atelier /CNP, Centre National de la Photographie, Paris
ARSVIVA PREIS, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt; Brandenburgischer Kunstverein, Potsdam (with Jeanne Faust)
Spielberg’s List, Liste 04, gb agency, Basel

2003
Fiktion oder Realität?, Fri-Art, Center for Contemporary Art, Fribourg
Omer Fast, Postmasters Gallery, New York
A Tank Translated, Project Room, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt

2002
A Tank Translated, Fiac Perspectives, gb agency, Paris
Omer Fast, gb agency, Paris

“One way to look at my interventions — this conspicuous cuts and splices in the footage — is that they highlight what is generally suppressed in narratives that are based on the real. By what is suppressed I mean not only the manner in which such narratives are normally put together in relation to the real events they describe. I would also include the interests and motivations of their author and, more importantly, the many suppressed possibilities for how these narratives or events could have turned out differently: how they could have been otherwise lived or been written.”

Omer Fast
Tout ce que je connais et la façon dont je le connais est fait avant tout d’éléments abstraits : sphères, plans, quadrillages dont les lignes parallèles m’offrent de nombreuses possibilités, sans compter les miroirs que j’utilise pour présenter sur une seule photographie le même objet sous des angles différents, afin de donner, d’un même motif, des visions diverses qui se complètent et finissent, en se combinant, par mieux l’expliquer. Au fond, tout ceci est beaucoup plus...
THE JEU DE PAUME BOOKSHOP

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Texts by Jennifer Allen, Tom McCarthy, Laurence Sillars, interview with Omer Fast by Marina Vinyes Albes

Co-published by the Jeu de Paume, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead and KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg

208 pages, 35 €
English/French

Omer Fast

5,000 FEET IS THE BEST
Edited by Milena Hoegsberg et Melanie O’Brian
Texts by T. J. Demos, Liz Kotz, David Rohde, Jennifer Allen, Christoph Cox, Céline Condorelli, Simon Critchley, Am Johal, Tom McCarthy, Marit Paasche, Ed Steck, Karen Brown
Les presses du réel
2012
128 pages, 19 €

Omer Fast

IN MEMORY
Edited by Sabine Schaschl
Texts by Tom Holert, Anselm Franke & Hila Peleg, René Zechlin, Gideon Lewis-Kraus
The Green Box
2010
176 pages, 39.50 €

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PRESS VISUALS

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1-4. Omer Fast — 5,000 Feet is the Best
2011, digital video, color, sound, 30 min.
© Omer Fast

5. Omer Fast — CNN Concatenated
2002, digital video, color, sound, 18 min.
© Omer Fast
6-14. Omer Fast — Continuity (Diptych)
2012 - 2015, HD video, color, sound, 77 min
© Omer Fast
15. Omer Fast — Shooting of Continuity (Diptych)
Nzalet El Houssayn, Morocco, July 2015
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16-22. Omer Fast — Continuity (Diptych)
2012 - 2015, HD video, color, sound, 77 min
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OPENING TIMES
Tuesday (late-night opening): 11 am – 9 pm
Wednesday to Sunday: 11 am – 7 pm
Closed Monday

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