

Dominique Somers (°1969, Belgium) studied photography and followed a post-graduate training in audio-visual arts in Antwerp. She worked as a curator and collection researcher at the Museum of Photography in Antwerp and was the assistant of Dirk Braeckman.

She is currently an artistic assistant at the School of Arts in Ghent and works on a practice-oriented PhD research project, examining how flash light can be mobilized to address certain aspects of perception and its materialisation.

She writes about the photographic medium and teaches the history of photography.

Her work has featured in several national and international solo and group shows, including at Ghent University (2019), Rencontres d'Arles Photofestival (2019 & 2016), Museum of Photography Antwerp (2019 & 2015), Offprint London (2016), Ryerson Univerisyt Toronto (2016), Joey Ramone Gallery Rotterdam (2016), RIOT Ghent (2016), Stilll Gallery Antwerp (2015 & 2014), Brussels Art Fair (2014 & 2013), AF Santander (2014), Fotomuseum Winterthur (2013), London Drawing Centre/Essex University Gallery (2012), M HKA Antwerp (2011, 2009 & 2008), Croxapox Ghent (2010) and Norwich Video Festival (2007). Her artist book *00A* was published in 2015 (APE, Ghent). Other publications include PhotoBook Belge (2019), Turning Photography (2017) and Extra magazine #20 (FOMU Antwerp, 2016).

Somers' artistic practice entails a phenomenological investigation into visuality and its limits, in particular with regard to photography. Although most of her projects do not result in traditional photographs, the medium remains one of the common threads in her research. She is fascinated by the way images come into being through the interaction of man and machine, by aspects of automatism and automation. Her works often display a strong awareness of both medium specificity and (sometimes lack of) human agency. References to the history of visual media and the use of 'out-of-date' processes and techniques such as pen plotters, slide projectors, magnesium flash torches and analogue films are essential to many of her works.

One of her main interests are so-called operative images, images that unveil certain aspects of their own creation process. She particularly has an eye for acheiropoietic phenomena - impressions created by light that in essence do not need the help of an apparatus or human intervention to appear: nuclear 'shadow images', spark photograms, the formation of fulgurites by lightning strikes - and how they relate to ways of thinking about photography in the past up until today.

Somers' research frequently focuses on extreme forms of materiality and light or on radical regimes of time, which can only be captured by means of a technical procedure, as they tend to operate beyond the realm of human perception and awareness. The blinding effect of too much light versus the comatose void of too much darkness, exceptional time frames such as the ultra-short event of the camera flash exposure or the extremely long, dynamic (half-)lifespan of the radioactive autograph; these are but a few examples that raise fundamental questions about what it means to be photographic or to become visible, conditions she is keen on examining.

As a rule Somers adopts a trial-and-error method of working, setting in motion different experiments and tests with no predetermined outcome, often executed in cooperation with renowned scientific research facilities that grant her access to their highly restricted laboratories.

One such project is being carried out at this very moment at the Belgian nuclear research center, where Somers is studying the creative/destructive forces of radiation flashes by exposing light-sensitive material to different types of radioactive isotopes. Searching for what might be considered a photographic 'origin', an archetypal form made by the force of light, she collaborated with a high-voltage test site in the UK where artificial lightning strikes were generated to create petrified shapes called fulgurites out of ordinary sand.

Somers' working strategies and subsequent results incorporate conflicting feelings of threat and wonder towards the natural forces and technological possibilities that are involved. Her playful approach balances between taking charge of things and losing control, between creations of a 'higher' energy and artefacts made by man, between the imminent obsolescence of engineering techniques, technophobia and the spiritual, the occult. It's her way of challenging her role as author and artist, while at the same time questioning the cultural mechanisms and beliefs we adopt to cope with technological change and visual appearances that manifest in an unforeseen manner.