



blind



In the Blur: A Clouded
Vision, A New Perspective

“In truth, nothing is seen. Nothing precise. Nothing definitive. One must constantly adjust one’s vision.” This quote by Grégoire Bouillier, taken from *Le Syndrome de l’Orangerie*, could by itself justify the title and concept behind the major exhibition “In the Blur,” currently on display at the Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris. And yet, a much broader ambition underpins this visual inquiry, conceived by Claire Bernardi and Émilie Philippot, respectively Director of the Musée de l’Orangerie and Chief Curator. The exhibition is accompanied by a publication released by Atelier EXB.

Blur — this “loss in relation to clarity,” as Claire Bernardi describes it — that elusive yet omnipresent element in our experience of the world, had never before been approached as a transversal interpretative key to the history of contemporary art. This is the bold wager of both the exhibition and its accompanying book. As Bernardi sums it up: “In the discipline of art history, there is always this idea that what is well-conceived must be clearly expressed. [...] With blur, we enter a domain of art where we must accept not being able to define.”

Seeing Differently: From the indistinct to the manifest

It all begins with Monet’s *Water Lilies*. Their silence, their lack of defined form, this immersion in a pictorial matter offering neither horizon nor anchor point, becomes the starting point for a reinterpretation. This blur is not the result of a failing eye, but a deliberate gesture. A way of telling the world differently — perhaps more truthfully.



Claude Monet, *The water lily pond, pink harmony*, 1900, Oil on canvas, 90 x 100,5 cm, Paris, Orsay Museum, © photo : Orsay Museum, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt



Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Landscape with a river and bay in the distance or Confluence of the Severn and the Wye*, around 1845, Oil on canvas, 94 x 1163 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris, Photo © 2014 Grand Palais Rmn (Louvre Museum) / Mathieu Rabeau

It is on the ruins of World War II that this aesthetic took on political significance. Blur became a strategy. In the face of the unspeakable, it veiled without hiding, revealed without showing. “After the discovery of the concentration camps, faced with the impossibility of representing the unrepresentable, blur comes to veil a reality the eye cannot bear,” the book explains. It became both retreat and reprieve, but also resistance: a refusal of imposed clarity, of the sharp image as a shield from confronting reality.

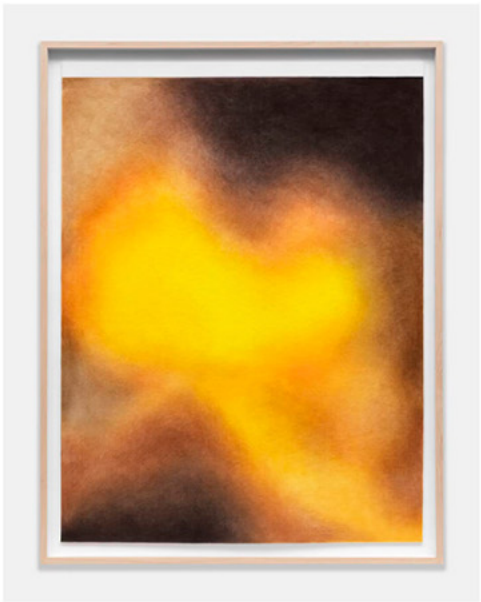
The exhibition and the book follow a thematic, rather than chronological, thread. Within this structure — which brings together paintings, videos, and photographs by artists such as Gerhard Richter, Léa Belousovitch, Rothko, Sigmar Polke, Wojciech Fangor, and many others — blur takes many forms: optical smearing, “imperfect” focus, formal instability, identity dissolution, motif erasure. But above all, it demands a different gaze. “This exhibition compels us to look at artworks differently and to linger over them in order to reflect on this question: what does blur mean? We chose not to approach this form through the lens of capturing motion or the instantaneous, or through photographic issues — as was the case with the Flou exhibition in Lausanne at the Photo Élysée Museum in 2023 — but rather as an aesthetic in the visual and fine arts,” says Émilie Philippot. This visual disturbance is an invitation to learn the art of contemplation.



Gerhard Richter, September, 2005, Oil on canvas, 52,1 × 71,8 cm, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of the artist and Joe Hage, 2008 © Gerhard Richter 2025



Gerhard Richter, Blumen, 1994, Oil on canvas, 71 × 51cm, Nîmes, Carré d'Art, Nîmes Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996 © Gerhard Richter 2025

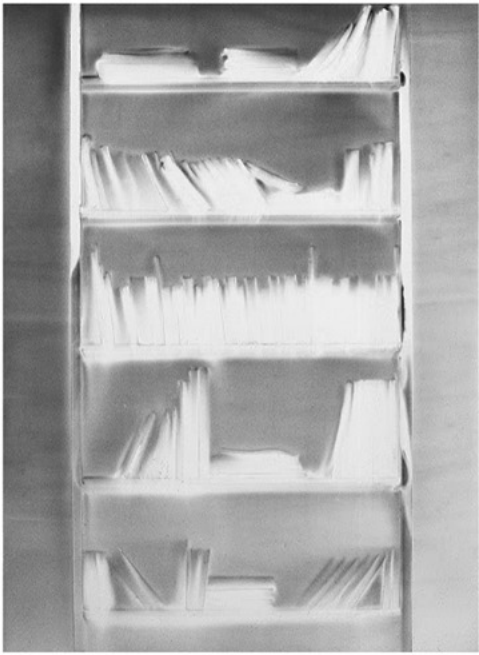


Léa Belousovitch, Sequoia National Forest, Californie, United States, september 27 2021, Brasiers serie, 2023, Coloured pencil drawing on wool felt pen, 80 × 60 cm, Bruxelles, collection particulière © ADAGP, Paris [2025]

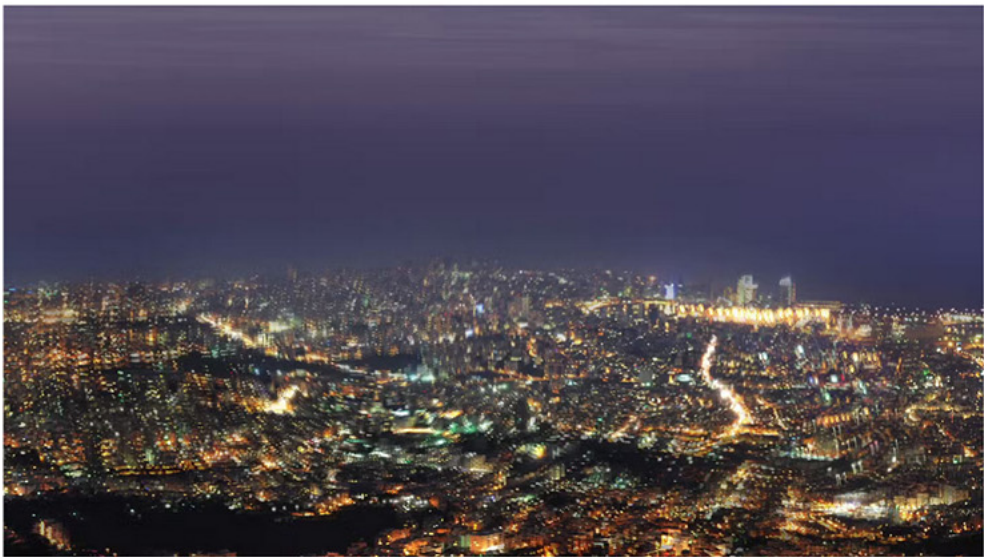
Photography — the medium par excellence of sharpness — becomes in this exhibition a field of subversion. In Gerhard Richter’s work, pictorial blur is fed by photographic archives reworked to the point of dissolution. Nearby, Thomas Ruff’s pixelated Twin Towers portray blur as “the madness of the real, its disruption, its optical extravagance, its drifting below the waterline — an accretion disk either haloing beauty or compassionately embracing the unnamable and unrepresentable abominations,” as described by Jean-Pierre Cléro, a member of the Centre Bentham at Sciences Po Paris. Hiroshi Sugimoto’s ocean views slip into meditative abstraction. And in a discreet display case, amateur snapshots — unintentional blurs, everyday tremors — remind us that blur is also the language of memory and emotion.



Thomas Ruff, 2004, Chromogenic print under Diasac, AP, © ADAGP, Paris [2025]



Claudio Parmiggiani, Polvere, 1998, Soot on acrylic on wood, 200 × 146 × 3 cm, Dijon, collection Frac Bourgogne, Courtesy Studio Claudio Parmiggiani



Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige, Waiting for the Barbarians, 2013, Sound video, 4 minutes 26 seconds, Corte, collection Frac Corsica, Video still from Waiting for the Barbarians, copyright by the artists Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige & galerie In Situ – fabienne leclerc, Grand Paris © Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige Commissioned by the Onassis Cultural Centre for the Visual Dialogues

Among the most poignant images is that of a young woman seen from behind in a sky-blue dress, standing out against a verdant landscape — and her story lingers. The work, by Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar, is part of his installation *Six Seconds* (2000). Here, blur is no gratuitous aesthetic choice; it embodies an ethics of vision.

The artist does not show horror; he shows the refusal to evoke it. This African woman, the sole survivor of her family, refused to speak. She turns her head, escapes the frame, flees both words and image. The camera — normally meant to freeze a moment — captures six seconds of movement, of disturbance, of trauma, of the refusal to speak of what she witnessed. Blur becomes the silent witness to what cannot be said, shown, or understood: “the indirect signifier of refusal, of flight, and of endured torment.” The face is invisible; the back bears the weight of the gaze. What we ultimately see is what cannot be seen.



Alfredo Jaar, *Six Seconds*, 2001, Pigment inkjet printing, 238,8 × 162,6 cm, New York, courtesy de l'artiste © ADAGP, Paris [2025]

In the book, alongside essays by philosophers, critics, curators, and art historians, Pauline Martin — Director of the Swiss Camera Museum in Vevey — offers a beautiful tribute to amateur blur, to shaky, failed, low-quality images that are deeply human. “Blur allows us, in the most intimate and difficult places to narrate or represent, to see what is usually invisible,” she writes. Other voices are heard as well, like Peter Geimer, Director of the German Center for Art History in Paris, who champions the “potential image,” inherently vague. Or Marc Donnadieu, independent art critic and curator, who refers to blur as a “breath” — “to be blurred,” he writes, is to exist in the world with an awareness of how difficult it is to fully be.

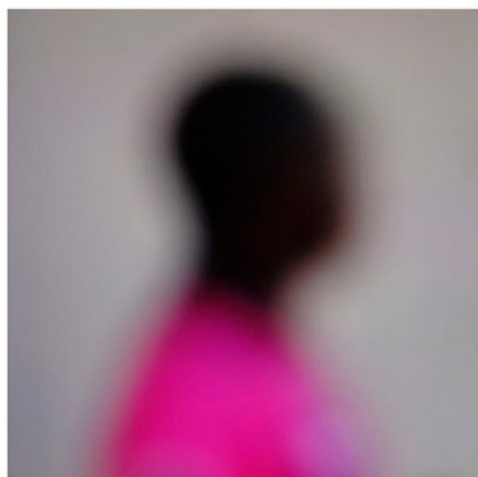
An invitation to slow down

In a world saturated with ultra-high-definition images, “In the Blur” takes the opposite approach. It proposes we recalibrate our vision, unlearn sharpness to better embrace uncertainty. It invites us to look longer, more slowly, more deeply. Far from being a defect, blur becomes a revealer. It doesn’t hide reality; it makes it visible in another way.

And so remains this sublime paradox: blur, far from dimming the image, restores its weight. It liberates interpretation, disrupts visual control. It is a way of not knowing — or at least of acknowledging that we do not know. “The value of an image is measured by the extent of its imaginary halo, which is to say that a stable and finished image cuts the wings of imagination,” wrote Gaston Bachelard. “In the Blur” reminds us that it is precisely those unstable, porous, unfinished images that open the eye — and the mind.



Mircea Cantor, Unpredictable Future, 2015, Lightbox, 70 × 100 × 20 cm, Paris, particular collection, Mircea Cantor © ADAGP, Paris [2025]



Mame-Diarra Niang, Dream morphology #6, 2021, Inkjet printing on metallic photo paper rag, 100 × 100 cm, © Mame-Diarra Niang. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town / Johannesburg / Amsterdam



Vincent Dulom, Homage to Monet, 2024, Inkjet on canvas (unique), 150 × 150 cm © Orsay Museum / Allison Bellido Espichan

The exhibition “Dans le flou, Une autre vision de l’art de 1945 à nos jours” (“In the Blur: Another Vision of Art from 1945 to the Present”) is on view from April 30 to August 18, 2025 at the Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris. The book *Dans le flou, Une autre vision de l’art de 1945 à nos jours* (*In the Blur: Another Vision of Art from 1945 to the Present*) is published by Atelier EXB, April 2025.



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