

British Journal of Photography



British Journal of Photography / Issue #7919 / Septembre 2024

Work

An experimental exhibition made by SMITH and curated by Taous Dahmani pushes the boundaries of imaging, our bodies, and our (western) conceptions of the world/ by Diane Smyth / p. 10-15

GALERIE CHRISTOPHE GAILLARD
www.galeriegaillard.com

SMITH speaks about his perception-defying new work on show in the Arctic Circle, plus Ming Smith's triple exhibitions, a huge survey of the 1980s at Tate Britain, and insights into Paris Photo and Bristol Photo Festival. Any Answers with Albert Kelleher, an unsung hero of The Photographers' Gallery, and a spotlight on Paris' POUISH studio complex

Agenda

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Out of the Metropolis

“What we humans, with our limited senses, perceive as heat is actually invisible light, part of the electromagnetic spectrum whose waves are too long for our eyes to detect,” says the French artist SMITH. “Other beings, such as snakes, have access to this part of the spectrum – which we call heat, but which is nothing more than invisible light.”

He is speaking about his work with thermal cameras, a new evolution of which is going on show in Norway in November. For SMITH, these cameras

offer the intriguing ability to extend the boundaries of photography, our bodies, and our (western) conceptions of the world. Born in Paris in 1985, he started using experimental techniques in 2010 while studying at Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains, and discovered thermal cameras while surveying his apartment. Attracted by this equipment’s expanded optical range and the spectral nature of its images, he made thermal portraits he dubbed ‘Photomes’. In 2012 he created an installation, *Spectrographies*, in which he implanted an electronic chip in his arm and allowed visitors to physically ‘haunt’ him with their warmth.

SMITH’s practice with thermal imaging extends beyond the technical and scientific, encompassing a spiritual dimension and a radical rethink of our relationship with the environment. In 2021 he produced a series for *Rencontres d’Arles* titled *Désidération (Anamanda Sin)*, which tried to induce altered perceptions in viewers, while his new work, which has the working title *Dami*, is inspired by non-western rituals and knowledge. The name comes partly from traditional Amazonian use of ayahuasca and contemporary Brazilian syncretism (which combines ancient and Catholic faith), and partly from his own insights into trance states. The work shows SMITH in self-induced cognitive trances, in thermal video portraits filmed with cinematographer José Deshaies. A series of still images (or “mental postcards”) will also be exhibited at Galerie Christophe Gaillard during Paris Photo.

“Photography as I practise it, coupled with a knowledge of the world based on the discoveries and knowledge made possible by science, as well as intuition enhanced by spiritual practices and exercises – along with a curiosity and respect for non-western knowledge – constitutes a powerful resource for depicting a reality straddling the line between an objective



Agenda: Exhibition 11

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On show

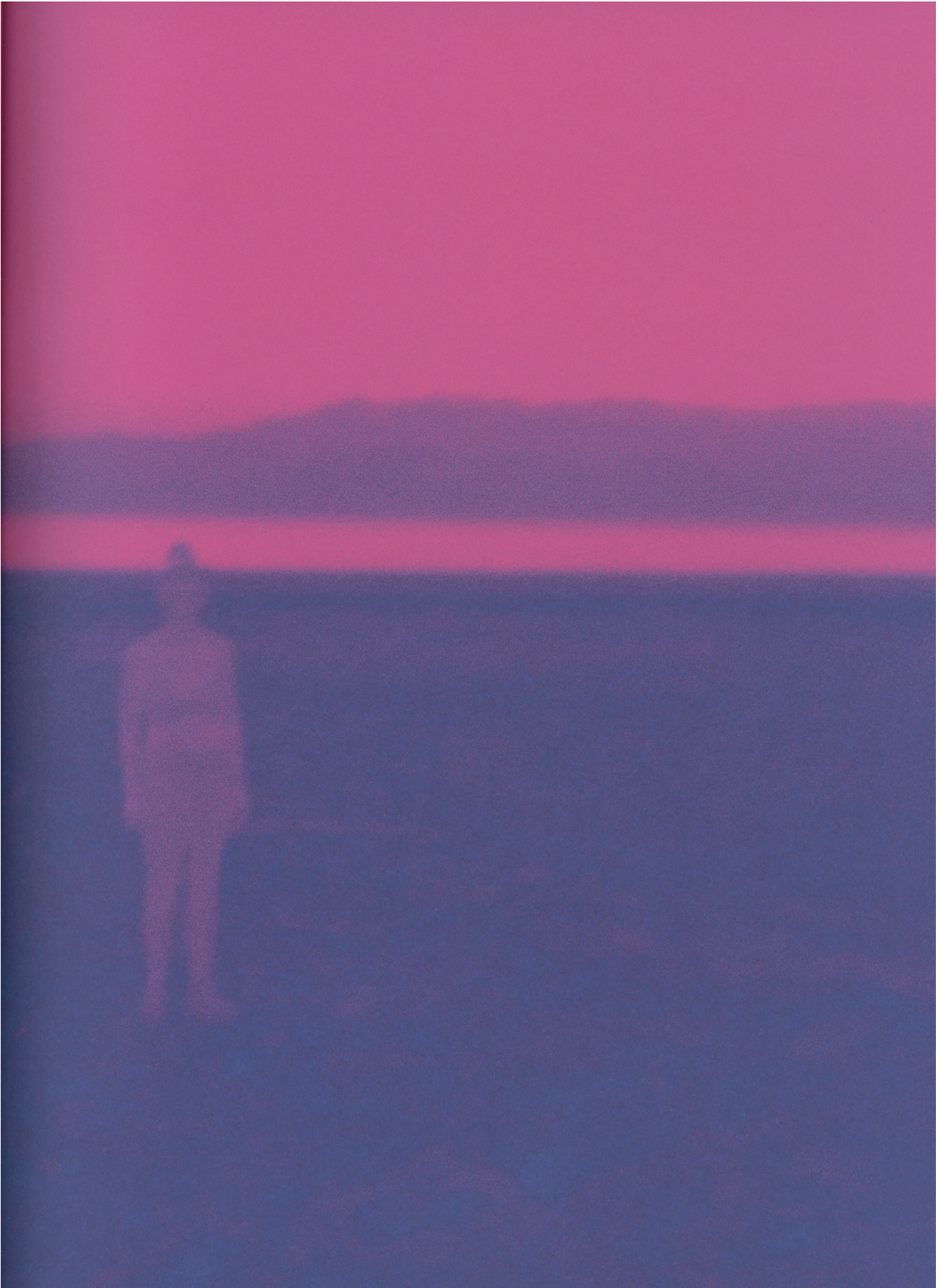
Out of the Metropolis is
at NOUA in Bodo, Norway,
until 15 December 2024.
noua.no

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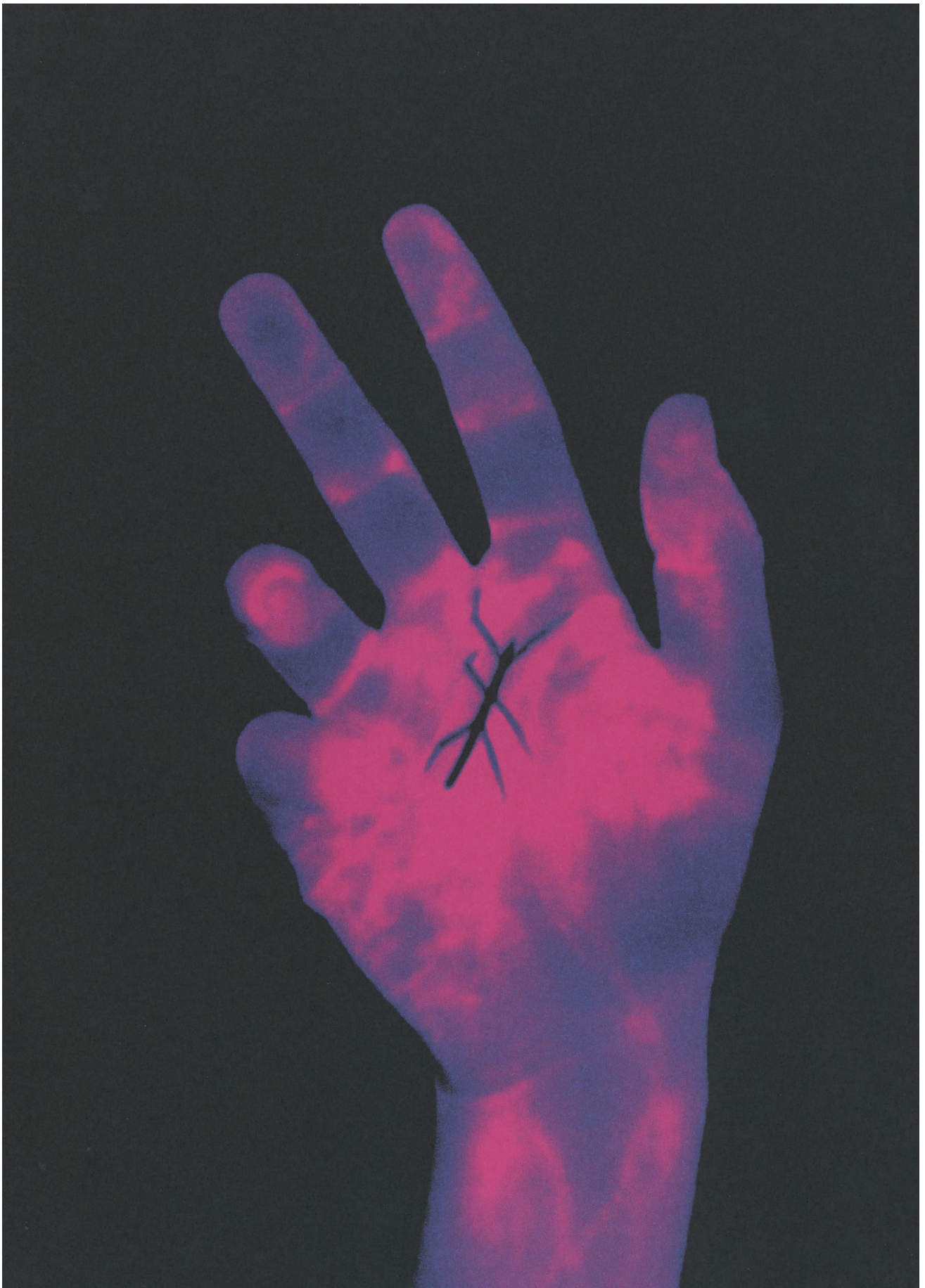


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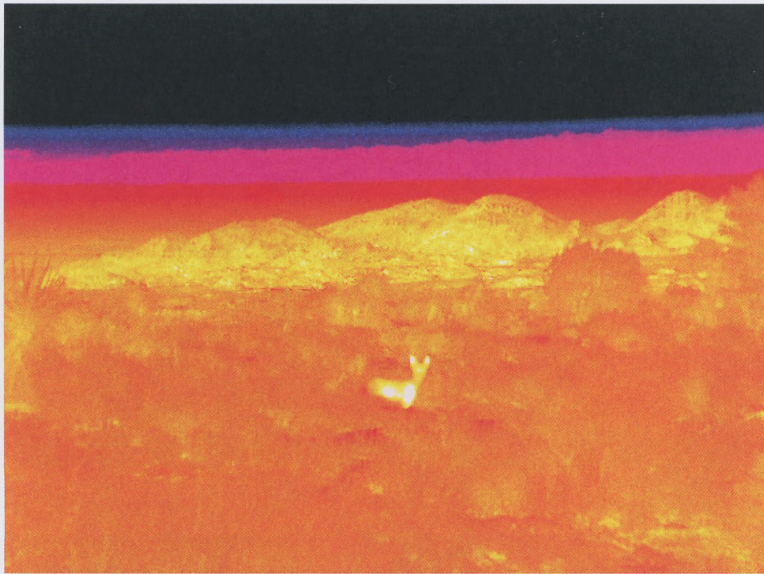


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All images from the series *Dami* (working title), 2024 © SMITH.



vision of the world and the world as I see it," says SMITH. He later adds: "I also try to multiply my vision exercises, to take on new points of view. Trance makes this possible by opening up the possibility of deep empathy with that which goes beyond us, passes through us, meets us."

SMITH's exhibition takes place at NÔUA, in Bodø, Norway, and is curated by Taous Dahmani, the London-based French, British and Algerian art historian, writer and curator, who SMITH says has a rare capacity "to deeply understand an artist's work and to slip into their mental, cultural, personal and intellectual universe". He approached Dahmani when he was invited to make the exhibition at NÔUA as part of a wider series of collaborations between artists and curators titled *Out of the Metropolis*.

OOTM is organised by NÔUA, Doubledummy in Arles, and the Finnish Museum of Photography in Helsinki. Subtitled *Art Exchange Across Borders*, it is a three-year project which aims to "increase possibilities of transnational art production by generating and providing innovative methods of production and presentation of visual art in the peripheries". It has hosted roundtable discussions on topics such as sustainable exhibition production, and staged two previous collaborative exhibitions at NÔUA. In 2025 SMITH will team up with Doubledummy co-founder and artistic director Sergio Valenzuela-Escobedo as lead mentors of the ENSP Arles mentoring programme.

For SMITH the exhibition offers the opportunity "to integrate the idea of a physical performance that allows access to new visions of the world, of a journey, of spiritual and physical work". But, speaking with *BJP* well ahead of the opening, he adds its final form has yet to materialise. "Everything is still in flux, like the world." **BJP**

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