



NŌUA

SMITH DAMI (IMAGO)

Curator:
Taous Dahmani

Exhibition design:
Rintala Eggertsson Architects



18 November
29 December
2024

IN ALL THINGS, LIFE!

by Dr Taous Dahmani

When we close our eyes and sink into darkness, our retinas lose the light they need to send images to our brain. Our vision fades into a black landscape, an impression of pure nothingness. Yet, colorful spots and abstract patterns may appear — a choreography of “phosphenes.” These spots create a personal gallery of abstract paintings, conjured by the brain’s scientific magic—though often just the mundane result of slight pressure on the eyes. In light of this experience, familiar to everyone on a daily basis, we can grasp how “seeing” and, consequently, “understanding” holds a far broader meaning than classical definitions of vision.

In this sense, the work of French visual artist SMITH should be seen as a true “reversal of the retina.” Far from evoking a painful operation or grim torture, it makes up a deep visual and philosophical exploration of the essential role of the transformation of light into neural signals in our vision pro-

cess. SMITH’s work is a “reappraisal of the retina,” since his apparatus—whether photographic or filmic—captures not only light but also provides a chromatic embodiment of all surrounding substances and materials. This is not merely a diurnal or nocturnal vision; it is a photopic perspective infused by human warmth, interpersonal relationships, and emotional atmosphere. This process of “unsettling the retina”—thankfully, not through a physical ocular intervention—proposes an intricate interplay between light and its interpretation in our visual cortex. It reflects how the images formed in our brains tell a unique story shaped by what we observe. When our sight engages with only a narrow slice of the world, our vision—both literally and metaphorically—becomes limited and constrained. So, what happens when we offer our brains a variety of alternative images to process? SMITH’s work invites us to experience just that: to see life *differently*; to glimpse at another dimension

of reality. His photographs and films aim at broadening our perspective, enhancing our experiences, and pushing the boundaries of what can be processed and understood.

By integrating information from both eyes, the brain constructs our three-dimensional perception of our environment. In *Dami (Imago)*¹⁺², distances, forms, colors and volumes are blurred, revealing a palpable new dimension—one where conventional rules no longer apply, allowing us to reinvent the very fabric of reality. With *Dami (Imago)*—a project that is as much a life experience for SMITH as it is an artwork—he seeks to question the nature of existence and our understanding of knowledge: it opens alternative pathways, as a mean to heal our relationship with the world and foster care for all living things. This exploration encourages us to challenge pre-defined societal norms and reshape fixed considerations, enabling individuals to break free from limiting beliefs. This way of seeing could be more equitable, inclusive and sustainable, ultimately enriching our collective experience. This is not an idealist manifesto or a quirky stance; rather, in a time of crisis, it is a radical reimagining of the world as the only sensible and urgent solution.

Indeed, SMITH doesn't just create visual worlds — images for us to look at — he unlocks new dimensions. Encountering SMITH's work is about experiencing expansion. Engaging with *Dami (Imago)* is an invitation to wander in new inner territories; to expand thought; to enhance sensitivity. As visitors to the exhibition, we are encouraged to journey through space and time, using color and aesthetics as gateways to new perspectives and ways of thinking. As we navigate through the maze, we may experience a sense of disorientation, prompting us to slow down and truly observe: to notice what is alive, what is in motion, and what lies still around us. With SMITH's thermal camera, we witness the heat radiating from various matter which would be normally invisible to the naked eye. Warmer areas glow in vivid hues of yellow, orange, and red, while cooler regions are cast in deeper shades of purple, blue, and black. As we meander through an intricate web, we are urged to seek solutions—strategies for navigating a world resistant to change. And maybe, as we step out, might remain a map of inspired transformations. The maze, the web, the maelstrom is a protected space for thought, empathy, friendship, action, connections, and practices that prompts us to occupy space and time anew.

The images of *Dami (Imago)* were produced under the dictation of self-induced cognitive trance, a method to bring forth the sight-based invisible, become acquainted with the unknown, to learn from alternative spaces and maybe shift perspectives. The images offer us a grammar of the transition from one moment of consciousness to another, the rituals that allow us to occupy the space where speculation meets reality. SMITH takes us on a journey of opening up, letting go, and paying attention to the whispers of the world. If we truly listen, we might just catch a glimpse of the earth's wisdom. The flow of videos reveals a human figure floating in a non-urban landscape, interacting with its surroundings in unexpected ways. SMITH's body - like all bodies - is a living learning device, absorbs and responds to its environment, becoming a vessel for exploration and understanding: discovering new forms of cohabitation, coexistence, and dialogue. As it navigates through the vibrant landscape, the body engages with the textures of the earth, the sounds of the wind, and the patterns of light, transforming each experience into knowledge.

With *Dami (Imago)*, SMITH urges visitors to use his practice and

mode of expression as inspiration to reimagine the status quo, believe in their dreams, and reconnect with the hope that other possibilities exist. To embody a radical overflow of reimagining our shared world, to ground our dreams as deeply as possible, and to elevate our damaged world in new directions. Let go, go through, start again, come back.

¹ Dami takes its name from the vocabulary of the Pano-speaking Amazonian peoples: the word dami refers to the visions of dazzling, metamorphic figures that appear during the ingestion of Ayahuasca.

² The final and fully developed adult stage of an insect is called the *imago*. However, for SMITH, the imago is also another acquired level of bodily experienced research.



Exhibition view
Dami (Imago)
 NOUA, Bodø 2024



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BIOGRAPHIES

SMITH (FR)

Artist

As an artist-researcher, SMITH experiments with and explores the links between contemporary humanity and its boundary figures - ghosts, mutants, hybrids - engaging his own body and that of his collaborators - writers, astronauts, shamans, engineers, designers, performers or composers - in interdisciplinary projects.

His work (exhibitions, films, performances, conferences) is regularly presented in the form of solo exhibitions, notably at the Rencontres d'Arles, the Palais de Tokyo, the Centre Pompidou as well as China, Korea and Latin America (Chile, Uruguay, Mexico).

Several monographs are devoted to his work, including "Löyly" (Filigranes, 2013), Valparaiso (André Frère, 2019), "Désidération (prologue)" (Textuel, 2021), "Desiderea Nuncia" (Palais books, 2021, Book Prize at the Rencontres d'Arles).

SMITH is also the author of several short films, including "Spectrographies" (2013 - with Mathieu Amalric, Dominique Blanc, Florence Thomassin, Bernard Stiegler); "TRAUM" (2015), or "Les Apocalyptiques" (2019).

SMITH is represented by Christophe Gaillard gallery and Modds agency in Paris. He is currently an associate artist at La Filature - Scène Nationale in Mulhouse, and laureate of the 2023 Villa Albertine in partnership with the writer Marie NDiaye.

Between 2017 and 2021, SMITH dedicated themselves to *Désidération*, a constellation-like work exploring the fractured links between contemporary humanity and the cosmos. Today, SMITH continues this quest with *Dami*, drawing from their practice of ancestral spiritual technologies (such as cognitive trance and Amazonian medicine) combined with interstitial bodily states (gender transition, experiences of weightlessness, and the subcutaneous implantation of extraterrestrial materials).

@traumsmith

Taous Dahmani (FR / GB / DZ)

Curator

Dr. Taous Dahmani (she/her) is a London-based French, British and Algerian art historian, writer and curator specializing in photography. Dahmani curated the 2022 Louis Roederer Discovery Award at Les Rencontres d'Arles in France. In October 2024, she curated two themed group exhibitions at the Jaou Photo Biennale in Tunis, Tunisia. The following month, she unveiled a solo exhibition of SMITH at NOUA in Bodø, Norway and curated 'Anastasia Samoylova: Adaptation' at the Saatchi Gallery.

Her writing is featured in photobooks published by Loose Joints, Textuel and Chose Commune, as well as in magazines like *The British Journal of Photography*, *FOAM*, *GQ*, *Aperture*, *Camera Austria* and *1000 Words Magazine*.

She is the associate editor of the award winning book *Shining Lights. Black women Photographers in 1980's-90's Britain* (MACK/Autograph ABP, 2024). She joined LCC (UAL) as an Associate Lecturer in January 2023.

@taous_r_dahmani

Rintala Eggertsson Architects (FI/NO)

Exhibition designers

Dagur Eggertsson og Sami Rintala er grunnleggerne av Rintala Eggertsson Architects, et norgesbasert arkitektfirma, som baserer sine aktiviteter rundt møbeldesign, offentlig kunst, arkitektur og byplanlegging.

The work of Rintala Eggertsson Architects has been exhibited at the Maxxi Museum in Rome, Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the National Art Museum of China and with the project 'Corte Del Forte' at the 2018 Venice Biennale. The company has received prestigious awards over the years such as The Global award for Sustainable Architecture, Wan 21 for 21 Award, Architizer A+Award, American Architecture Award. Their projects and texts have been published in magazines such as Abitare, Area, Architectural Review, A+U, L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, D'A Magazine, AMC architecture, Detail, and Wallpaper as well as New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Eggertsson and Rintala have taught architecture in Europe, Australia, and North America and in 2019 as Gensler Visiting Professors at Cornell University in New York.

@rintalaeggertsson

INFORMATION

Opening hours
Thur - Sun 12-16

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Newsletter
Sign up for NOUAs newsletter on our web page and get invited to all our openings as well as information about current events.

Free entry.

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NØUA is an artist-run institution for photography as contemporary art. NØUA collaborates with Norwegian and international artists, curators, writers and art historians from the region and abroad, to create a program that promotes conversations and new thinking about photography as contemporary art.

The program of exhibitions, lectures and artist talks is presented primarily in the premises in Bodø, but also outside the city and internationally, in collaboration with external institutions. Through the programme, we want to promote relevant productions and artistships, with the aim of giving the public an opportunity to participate in a timely conversation about the issues and opportunities facing photography as contemporary art today.

NØUA was established in 2017 by artists Marianne Bjørnmyr and Dan Mariner. The venue includes the exhibition space and project space on the building's second floor and a public arena at street level.

NØUAs program is always free and open to everyone. Follow us on social media or sign up for our newsletter to get our updates.

Out of the Metropolis

The 2024 exhibitions in NOUA are part of the collaborative project *Out of the Metropolis - Art exchange across borders* initiated by NØUA, the Finnish Museum of Photography (FI) and DoubleDummy (FR). The institutions are working together between 2023-25 to explore the challenges and possibilities for exchange and presentation of art in institutions in the peripheries.

The project challenges the roles, models and functions between exhibition spaces, curators, artists, and audiences in a micro-institutional context. The objective is to strengthen unconventional arenas for art in the peripheries by developing innovative strategies and methods for cross-border collaborative teams, co-production, and exchange of art, with particular focus on economic and ecological sustainability.

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