

On the occasion of

# Sjæl Seele Soul

at palace enterprise

My grandparents dressed as if they had stepped out of a sepia-toned gelatin silver print, their clothes all beige, grey, black, and brown. They taught at the local school, played the organ in church. Like early photography, they weren't exactly lively. Strict Christians, their behaviour was measured, somewhat stiff. Their grandparents had lived in a world where the fastest communication device was the pigeon. A time where leather was, what plastic is to us today – photography, an exciting and exclusive new technology. My grandparents' grandparents existed before electricity "made angels of us all"<sup>‡</sup>, before "the car created highways and resorts (...) the automobile version of civilization"<sup>§</sup>. They lived in a time where the landscape had not yet been reduced to stage and model – for the car and for the camera. Before we sacrificed the near to gain the far.

The large photograph *Commute* (2025) shows a hearse on a highway. Surrounded by people commuting to work, making calls, playing songs, cursing, singing along, in their sedans, hatchbacks, trucks, coupes, SUVs, vans, pickups and busses, it must have been the only vehicle heading not into the day, but out of it – a soulless body moving among the living.

Death is the ultimate unshareable event. In this deal with the devil, life itself, the thing as such, is traded for its ultimate counterfeit. A lifeless body is perfect representation. No imitation, no make-believe, not even likeness, just the same. The thing itself, unchanged yet altered. This perfect image, however, creates an unbearable void. So, we bury or burn the corpse, removing it from touch. It is an iconoclasm of sorts – a removal of the most literal image from circulation. *Commute* shows a body's final ride. A moving image.

Photography is like a seamlessly executed magic trick. Seduced, we overlook how each image carries with it a whole reservoir of other photographs, past and present, alongside the motif it depicts. If the glowing red pupils in *Retinal Rift* (2025) recall horror films, party pics of drunken eyes, grainy tabloids claiming paranormal activity or silver gelatin prints of mediums vomiting woolly white cotton, it is because, like all photographs today they function like pictures of pictures. The images are already there, in the air, circulating, and the act of photographing but a gesture of framing.

Photography, of course, is not transparent mediation. Nor is it merely representation. The Photographic inscribes itself; it leaves a signature. Never fully erasing its own process, is its perfect watermark. Light leaks, lens flares, streaks, halos, are not traces of the supernatural, but marks of photographic materiality itself. The blur is not in the world; it is a trace of the camera's own motion, a recording of its limitations; the film grain a material presence rather than something representational. Aimed at a human, a flash sometimes makes eyes glow vampire red, as if the person would be possessed. No such magic is at play, but it is also not simply photographic noise. The thing is: Pupils only seem black; really, they are shadowy windows to a blood-rich interior. The flash which fires faster than the iris can contract, bounces off the retina and returns to the lens at the speed of light. The photographic "red eye" then, is reflected light taking on our blood's crimson hue; a flare filtered by the very plasma that fuels the retinal neurons translating visual data into signals to our brains. In a sense, these photos are recordings of the act of seeing as such, of human optics and the logics of the camera itself.

Photographic images can bypass reflection and go straight to the gut – think of body horror movies or pornography. The Photographic is not merely visual; it is visceral. *Retinal Rift* shows the mechanics of an organic eye recorded by a machine eye, an encounter between the machine-like and the weirdly human. They are glimpses into the abyss: a shared threshold, an uncanny intelligence, a symbiosis. Like the hearse in *Commute*, these eyes appear both familiar and wrong, logical and horrendous. They are things that usually slip by. The blood in the image, the body in the flow.

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<sup>‡</sup> Edmund Carpenter, *Oh What A Blow That Phantom Gave Me*, 1972

<sup>§</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964