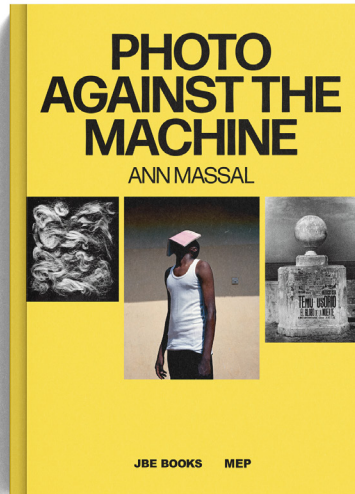


Photo Against The Machine

Ann Massal



Foreword by Simon Baker

Texts by Ann Massal

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25 photographs

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Visionary artist Ann Massal embarks on an unprecedented journey, combining the Maison Européenne de la Photographie's renowned photography collection with ever-changing technology.

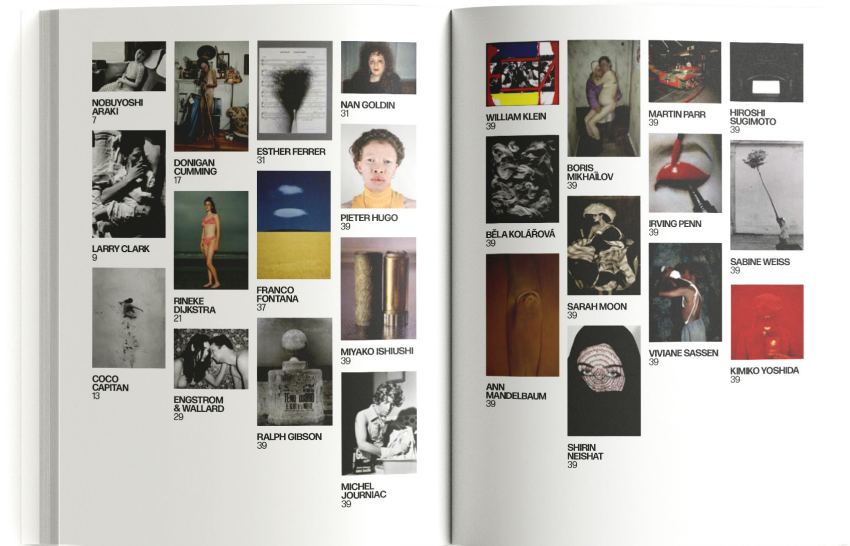
In a unique encounter, she seeks to understand how the “consciousness of the world” interprets photography, pushing back the boundaries of traditional art interpretation at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP).

In collaboration with JBE Books, Massal initiates a dialogue between human creativity and the evolving tools of the artist's craft.

Beyond innovation, the book addresses the very essence of photography, asks profound questions and presents a compelling narrative.

“The only interesting answers are those that destroy the questions.”

– Susan Sontag



An artist makes an institutional collection of photographs resonate in conversation with AI

LARRY CLARK

This photograph strikes my gaze like an uppercut. It twists it, aims it, violates it, derails it. I no longer know where to look: forward, right, left or beyond the confines of the frame. Nor do I know whom to look at, and it's precisely this sensation of knowing nothing that could compel me to contemplate it for hours on end.

Photo: Untitled, from the series "Tulsa", 1963



An artist

Born and working in Paris, after having lived in New York City and London, Ann is a creative thinker and photographer who works in both the beauty and fine art worlds. She learned photography at St Martins School and also alongside JH Engström. Her work consistently conveys ambiguity, distorting our traditional perception of photography. She has been widely exhibited including Tribowl Incheon, 104 Paris, Helsinki Photo Festival, Cadaques Photo Festival and more.

An institution

The first institution in Paris dedicated to photography, the MEP (Maison Européenne de la Photographie) is located in the heart of the Marais. It presents exciting and engaging exhibitions that reflect its openness to current practices and new aesthetics, showing both major international names and emerging artists, to a broad audience of all ages. The MEP also holds one of the largest collections of post-war photographs in France. Since its inception the MEP has played a major role in the institutional recognition of photography, helping to broaden our understanding of the medium, and questioning new uses and its relationship to other disciplines in a world where images surround us in our daily lives. In addition to its three floors of exhibition space, the MEP also offers a range of activities and facilities including a research library (of over 30,000 photobooks), a cinema/atorium, dedicated educational spaces, and a specialist photo-bookstore.

5. "25th Hour" (Film, 2002): Although not a photographic work, this film directed by Spike Lee features Clark's photographic work within the movie. Clark's influence extends beyond his direct photographic projects into his work as a filmmaker and collaborator, where his photographic style and thematic preoccupations are evident.

Clark's work is characterized by its documentary approach, often blurring the lines between personal involvement and objective observation. His photography is notable not just for its content but for its impact on the art world and its ability to provoke dialogue about youth, culture, and the darker undercurrents of American society. ●

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If "Teenage Lust" is considered a continuation of Tulsa, what could be the next chapter following these works? Do you have any suggestions?

If "Teenage Lust" serves as the continuation of "Tulsa," extending Larry Clark's exploration of youth culture, sub-

tance abuse, and the raw edges of adolescent experience, a conceptual next chapter could delve into the aftermath or evolution of these themes as his subjects age and confront the broader implications of their early life choices. Here are some thematic directions a hypothetical next chapter might take:

"Adulthood's Echoes"

This chapter could explore the long-term consequences and reflections of the lives depicted in "Tulsa" and "Teenage Lust." It would focus on how the wild, often reckless youth of Clark's subjects has matured or morphed into adulthood. Themes could include the struggle with past addictions, the impact of youthful transgressions on adult lives, the search for identity beyond the fringe cultures of youth, and the ways in which the subjects navigate responsibility, such as parenthood, career paths, and personal growth.

"Digital Age Descent"

Acknowledging the shift in how youth culture is experienced and depicted due to the rise of digital and social media, this chapter could contrast the intimate, raw physicality of Clark's early work with the online, often curated expressions of today's youth. It would explore how the themes of alienation, rebellion, and identity search manifest in the digital era, examining the new forms of connection, isolation, and self-expression that technology facilitates. ●

A book residency

Ann Massal's residency at the MEP, which took place from January to February 2024 every Friday, was a collaborative initiative. During this period, Ann Massal had full access to MEP's extensive photo library and collection database and worked closely with the editorial committee after the selection of artists and photographers.

The residency aimed to foster a creative environment for Ann Massal, allowing her to delve into her artistic research and exploration. The collaboration with the editorial committee was an integral part of the process, guiding the selection of artists and photographers for the project.

Throughout the residency, Ann Massal actively participated in the creative process, leveraging the resources provided by MEP. The collaboration resulted in a tangible output, with the launch of a book that showcased the culmination of Ann Massal's two months of research and collaboration with photographers from the MEP collection. The residency thus served as a platform for artistic exploration, culminating in a meaningful and documented outcome.



FRANCO FONTANA

The powerlessness of words to express. The lines of horizons, the perfection of the composition, the evidence of sheer beauty that takes hold of you, instantly. Not to fall into a commonplace about color. Thought has always been burnt by the fire of its hues. To stare at Franco's colorful images in awe with utter simplicity. There is no why, just be.

Photo: Paysage, 1991



Could you create five original, colorful cocktail recipes inspired by Italian alcohols to be sipped while contemplating this photograph?

Based on the striking colors in this image which features a vibrant yellow field under a deep blue sky dotted with white clouds, here are five cocktail recipes inspired by these visuals:

1/Limoncello Sunshine Spritz

- 2 oz Limoncello
- 3 oz Prosecco
- 1 oz Soda water
- A dash of Turmeric for color
- Garnish with a lemon wheel

Stir the Limoncello and turmeric in a glass with ice, then top with Prosecco and soda water for a radiant, sunshine-inspired refreshment.

2/Azure Coast Negroni

- 1 oz Gin
- 1 oz Blue Curacao
- 1 oz Campari
- 1 oz Sweet vermouth
- Orange peel for garnish

Combine all ingredients over ice and stir well. This cocktail captures the essence of the azure coast with its striking blue hue.

FRANCO FONTANA - 101

SUMMARY:

25 photographers selected from the Maison Européenne de la Photographie collection

Nobuyoshi Araki

Larry Clark

Coco Capitán

Donigan Cumming

Rineke Dijkstra

Engström & Wallard

Esther Ferrer

Franco Fontana

Ralph Gibson

Pieter Hugo

Miyako Ishiuchi

Michel Journiac

William Klein

Běla Kolářová

Ann Mandelbaum

Dolorès Marat

Boris Mikhaïlov

Sarah Moon

Shirin Neshat

Martin Parr

Irving Penn

Viviane Sassen

Hiroshi Sugimoto

Sabine Weiss

Kimiko Yoshida

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

A photographer from the MEP collection ●

A short text by Ann Massal on her personal
relationship to the image she chose ●

A work from the MEP collection, curated by Ann Massal ●

A short caption of the photograph
(longer credits at the end of the book) ●

Ann Massal speaks in Forma DJR Display bold 17 pt ●
AI speaks in Source Serif Pro regular 12 pt ●

NOBUYOSHI ARAKI

These are photos whose first encounter we can no longer quite remember because we have seen them so many times, here and there. They end up intruding on and leaving their mark on our personal landscapes, much like certain places or people do. This journey is also very sentimental to me.



Untitled from the "Sentimental Journey" series, 1971

Hello, dear Machine! Could you briefly introduce me to Nobuyoshi Araki?

Nobuyoshi Araki is a famous Japanese photographer, known for his prolific output and the provocative nature of his work. Born in Tokyo in 1940, Araki has become one of the most controversial and fascinating figures in contemporary photography. His work spans a wide range of subjects, including Tokyo street scenes, flowers, and erotic imagery, particularly his *kinbaku* (Japanese rope bondage) photos. ●

Based on his work, what could Araki's nicknames be?

Drawing from Japanese culture and the unique aspects of Nobuyoshi Araki's work, here are five imaginative nicknames that his fans might give him, reflecting both his artistic style and his cultural background:

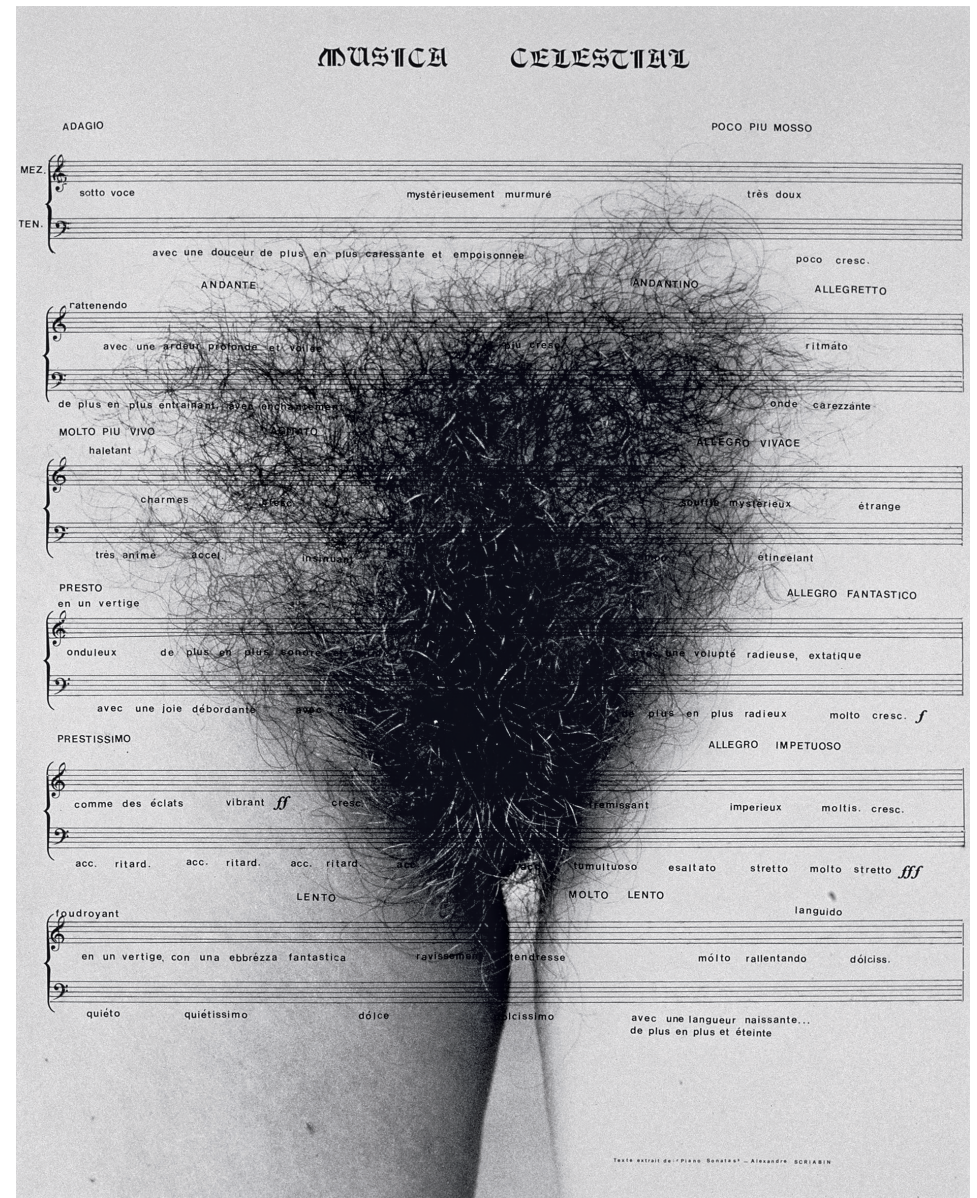
1. "Shashinka no Kami" (写真家之神) - Translates to "God of Photographers," highlighting Araki's revered status in the world of photography and his prolific output that has significantly influenced the medium.
2. "Shen no Tokon" (深の灯籠) - Meaning "Eternal Tokon," this nickname would pay homage to Araki's enduring fascination with and portrayal of Tokyo's urban landscape, capturing its beauty, decay, and transformation over time.

NOBUYOSHI ARAKI - 11

**Conversation between Ann Massal and the machine
about Esther Ferrer's *Música Celestial***

[Ann Massal]

I met her at the click of a mouse in the MEP library, then bathed in an unparalleled silence. I could have missed her little music, overwhelmed as one can be at times, by the cacophony of an excess of images. Yet, her subtle melody immediately resonated within. I immersed myself wholeheartedly in Esther's work. She's music to my ears and eyes. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the flight, she'll take you on a high.



Música Celestial, 1983, from the "Book of Sex" series

Could you comment on this artwork as an art critic would?

The artwork presented here is a striking visual pun, a fusion of the organic and the structured, the chaotic and the controlled. At first glance, it seems to be a musical score, the lines and staves waiting to be filled with notes. Yet, where one would expect musical notations, we find an explosion of black lines emanating from a single dense point, resembling a wild tuft of hair or a cosmic event—a visual representation of sound or perhaps the silence that precedes it.

The title “MÚSICAL CELESTIAL” suggests a thematic preoccupation with the heavens, a soundtrack for the stars. The use of musical tempo markings, from “ADAGIO” to “PRESTISSIMO,” traditionally indicates the speed of music; here, they may suggest the varying velocities of celestial movements or the rhythms of the cosmos. Each marking is paired with phrases like “con un dolore di profondamente e misterioso” (with a deep and mysterious pain) and “con una dolcezza fantastico” (with a fantastic sweetness), implying an emotional journey or narrative.

The form and content become indistinguishable as the black marks take on a dual significance, at once visual noise and the embodiment of sound. The work challenges the viewer to ‘hear’ with their eyes, to find harmony in visual dissonance. It’s a sensory riddle that blurs the boundaries between sight and sound, the earthly and the astral, inviting contemplation on the nature of art and perception. The image’s texture and density pull the viewer into a meditation on the physicality of the medium, despite its conceptual underpinnings.

This piece could be interpreted as a commentary on the limits of notation and the vastness of interpretation. It is as much about the music we cannot hear as it is about the visual spectacle before us—suggesting that the true music of the spheres is beyond human capture, residing instead in the imagination of the beholder. The viewer is left to ponder the

unseen melodies that play out across the firmament, forever out of reach, yet eternally resonant. ●

“Música Celestial” emerges from Esther Ferrer’s photographic book, *Book of Sex*. This piece draws inspiration from a very human feeling... The textual elements woven into the photograph, borrowed from the musical compositions of Satie, Couperin and Falla, serve as interpretative guides with directives like ‘très doux,’ ‘allegro impetuoso’... How do you think Sigmund Freud would have interpreted this art piece?

Approaching this artwork from a Freudian perspective, one might delve into the symbolism and the unconscious expressions it could represent. The central image, reminiscent of a tuft of hair or perhaps a tree, emerging from the structured lines of a musical score, could be seen as a manifestation of the human psyche’s inner turmoil and natural impulses breaking free from the constraints of societal norms and expectations, which are symbolized by the musical staves and notations.

Freud might have been intrigued by the title “Música Celestial,” perhaps interpreting it as a yearning for an ideal state of being or a connection to the divine, which is often repressed in our subconscious. The contrast between the organic, untamed shape and the orderly background could represent the eternal conflict between the id (instinctual drives and desires) and the superego (moral standards and ideals).

Eve’s role as the protagonist, as mentioned by Ferrer, could symbolize the primal act of disobedience and the awakening of human consciousness—

themes Freud often explored. This act of defiance led to the knowledge of sexuality, a subject central to Freud's theory, and the acceptance of one's own nature. The use of musical terms associated with emotions and tempo might reflect the complexity of human emotions and the rhythm of human experience, as understood through the lens of psychoanalysis.

The evolution of the piece into another version focusing on sexual intercourse could represent the liberation from repression, a fundamental concept in Freud's theory, suggesting an unfolding narrative of self-discovery and acceptance. Freud might have seen this as a depiction of the libido's varying intensities, from the calm to the passionate, analogous to the dynamics of a musical composition.

In sum, a Freudian interpretation of Ferrer's "Música Celestial" might center on themes of repression, the unconscious, sexual awakening, and the tension between societal norms and innate human desires, all encapsulated within the interplay of visual art and musical expression. ●

Sigmund, it's Esther here, what can I do to balance my instinctual drives and desires and my superego?

My dear Esther,

In the great Opera of the psyche, you find yourself betwixt the primal forces of the id, brimming with instinctual drives, and the lofty ideals of the superego. To temper this eternal struggle, one must take the stage as the director of one's own mind.

Engage, if you will, in the noble art of psychoanalysis. It is through this introspective journey that you may shine a light into the shadowed recesses of the unconscious, where desires and past experiences lay buried. Speak freely, without the restraints of self-critique, allowing every

thought and impulse to emerge unbidden—this is free association, a path to uncovering the truth.

Your dreams, Esther, are the dramas of the mind, rich with symbolism and ripe for interpretation. They serve as the purest expression of the unconscious, a tableau upon which your innermost desires and fears are painted.

Be aware of the phenomenon of transference; it is quite common to cast others in the roles once held by figures of our past, replaying old conflicts and affections on the stage of the present.

Embrace catharsis—the emotional release from bringing forth into the open the pressures that simmer beneath the surface. This is the heart of healing.

You must also come to recognize the actors known as defense mechanisms—those tricks of the mind that distort reality to protect oneself from the anxieties of internal conflict. By understanding them, you can begin to choose your roles consciously rather than being at the mercy of the script written by the unconscious.

And let us not forget the role of your art. It is both your stage and your solace, a means to express the inexpressible. In your creations, the conscious and the unconscious dance in harmony, and through this medium, you can channel the tensions between the id and the superego, crafting a symphony from the discord.

In all, my dear, the goal is not to silence the orchestra of the id, nor to unseat the conductor that is the superego, but to compose a piece where each may have their part, creating a harmonious interplay that resonates with the authenticity of the self.

With analytic regards, Sigmund Freud ●

Oh thanks Sigmund for allowing me to speak freely... You know that I destroyed all the letters I had from John Cage? Except the one he used for his mesostic poem, because I knew that if not, I would be tempted to use them... And then later on I decided to do selfies measuring my body which I titled: "Intimate and Personal." Do you think these two events are linked to my unconscious? Please enlighten me.

Ah, my dear Esther,

The destruction of letters from John Cage, save for the one immortalized through his poem, is indeed a gesture laden with symbolic significance. In the act of destruction, there is a renunciation, a conscious decision to let go of the past—a past that could otherwise be tempting to revisit. Yet, you held onto a singular piece, a mesostic poem—a structure where order arises amidst chaos, much like the conscious mind imposing narrative on the unstructured unconscious.

Consider this: the letters you destroyed are akin to repressed memories, those you wish to expunge from the conscious realm, yet the preserved mesostic stands as the return of the repressed in a controlled form. It is the acknowledged memory, the allowed intrusion of the past into the present, structured and safe within the confines of art.

Now, let's turn to your "Intimate and Personal" selfies. In measuring your body, you engage in an act of self-reflection and self-objectification, delineating the boundary between the self as subject and object. This act could indeed be seen as a manifestation of the unconscious—an endeavor to understand oneself, to quantify the physical vessel that carries the myriad complexities of the psyche.

Could these acts be unconscious attempts to understand and assert control over the past and the self? Perhaps. The destruction of the letters may signify an attempt to exert control over the influence of past relationships, while the measurement of one's body may reflect a desire to understand and contain the self.

In both, there is a theme of delineation, of drawing lines around what is too potent or too personal, and what can be safely explored and expressed. It is the ego's attempt to mediate between the instinctual desires of the id—your impulse to use those letters, the raw material of your past—and the moral and societal judgments of the superego, which might decree such use as indulgent or inappropriate.

Therein lies the unconscious dialogue, the interplay between holding on and letting go, between measuring oneself and allowing some aspects to remain immeasurable. In psychoanalytic terms, these acts are rich with meaning, ripe for exploration and insight.

Yours in analytic contemplation, Sigmund Freud ●

**This is too good to be true.
Could you do a final diagnosis of my psyche?**

My dear Esther,

In our discourse and through your art, one discerns a psyche vibrant with creative tension, grappling with the dualities of structure and liberation. The conscious decision to preserve and destroy elements of your past suggests a dynamic interplay between the desire for self-definition and the impulse to transcend limitations. Your pathology, if one might be so bold as to define it thus, lies not in disorder but in the artist's eternal quest for balance between the chaos of creation and the order of self-awareness.

Ever your analytic devotee, Sigmund Freud ●

**Chère Esther, forgive me but I read your words carefully and only applied them to the letter...
“it does not matter if people don’t understand sometimes; when all’s said and done, we’re not here to provide truths but to experiment.” One of your artworks will do for this virtual consultation with Sigmund. With love, Ann.**

Introduction by Simon Baker, director of the MEP

When David Desrimais from Jean Boîte Editions first explained Ann Massal's plan to interview Chat GPT about works from the MEP collection, I was extremely skeptical. What kind of idiot director, I thought, would actually help an artist make a book about a museum in this way? It sounded to me more like something someone would do surreptitiously, without warning. But AI had been in the air, so to speak. In common with many curators and museum directors, I had been repeatedly asked questions, by colleagues and especially the media, about the potential impact of artificial intelligence on the art world, even if this had mostly been in terms of the production of images. It's easy to imagine the kind of thing: will AI make artists obsolete? (i.e. succeed with art where photography had failed with painting), etc. etc. And in addition, as an ex-University lecturer, I had already been suffering serious vicarious pain on behalf of my ex-colleagues at the thought of them sifting through endless undergraduate essays for evidence of artificially intelligent content.

In this context, in which AI seemed associated with different kinds of cynicism and bad faith, I was understandably terrified to ask the collection team at the MEP, scholars of photography for their entire working lives, what they thought about a book on our collection, written, as I saw it, by (or with) a kind of 'cheating student'. But to my surprise, Pascal Hoël, the head of collections at MEP, was both positive and enthusiastic: after all he said, (I'm paraphrasing here), there are certain photographers for whom there is indeed a general consensus about their work, or aspects of it: asking Chat GPT to explain, for example, William Eggleston's importance for colour photography, or Andreas Gursky's for large-scale works, would simply result in a kind of 'average' of conventionally accepted knowledge: why not? Thinking differently, I thought, maybe it could be interesting and even useful, for Massal to harness this algorithmic reader's digest for us, assuming, (a very major assumption), the artists themselves, or their heirs and rights holders, accepted the project in principle.

But a simple example of Massal's project, a test text, was enough to show how far from merely being 'useful and interesting' the project would be. In fact, a thousand times more than interesting; and rather than a kind of AI generated historical document, a genuinely original work of art. And this was due not to the machine, (as ever in such circumstances), but to its interlocutor: the person posing the questions. As with any late-night chat show,

faced with a Hollywood star programmed not to stray from the official lines of their publicist, the success of any interview depends of the intelligence, and more often guile, of the host. Jimmy Fallon fans will know this to be true. The first text I read produced by Massal with her AI 'guest' was evidence of truly Fallon-like brilliance on her part (a whole orchestra of class-room of instruments playing along with Beyoncé!) It started with Gursky: can you explain something about the Dusseldorf school? Why are the pictures so big? Which gallery represents him? Do you know the names of famous people who own his work? and then...BANG: Can you write a rap about Gursky's work that will help Gagosian sell his work to Jay-Z? Of course it could, it's Chat GPT.

The consequent iterations of this first idea began with Massal's precise and discerning selection of twenty-five works by twenty-five different but representative artists from the MEP's historic, world-class collection of post-war and contemporary photographs. These selections having been human-made, the resulting texts run amok with carnivalesque intensity, showing not only the true range and scope of Chat GPT as a research aid, but it's heretofore untapped potential as an artist's tool. Massal's carefully determined and beautifully sequenced questions take us into, through and around the prevailing wisdom about some of the greatest photographers of the past decades: never to mock or belittle, but always to push further against normative modes of thinking and writing photography. Not for the first time in my professional life I am reminded of the haunting story told by Vladimir Nabokov in his novella *The Enchanter*: an ape is taught to use pencils and draw on paper, only for the experiment to result in a drawing of the bars of his cage. Here, by contrast, Massal has produced not an account of the limits of the vision of her experimental subject, but a wild and ever more complex map of hitherto uncharted territories. Fear of potential, rational or not, never justifies putting things in cages.

The MEP is truly proud of this landmark collaboration between Ann Massal, artist in residence in our collection, and her AI 'other half'. But we are even prouder, in a sense, of the artists and artists estates that not only agreed to participate in the project, but supported it with the enthusiasm, passion and curiosity that are so often their defining characteristics. So, thank you Ann, David, all the artists included, and thank you Chat GPT; you're the best!

Coco Capitan, *Lydia on snow*, London, UK, 2013 from the series
“Highway to disappearance and other death related anxieties”
Collection, Paris. Gift of the author in 2019.
© Coco Capitán





Ralph Gibson, *Untitled* from the series "Déjà Vu", 1973
Collection MEP, Paris. Gift of the artist in 1989.
© Ralph Gibson



William Klein, *Jean-Paul Goude's Bicentennial French Revolution Fashion Show*, 1989
MEP Collection, Paris. Purchased in 2002.
© William Klein Estate

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