

## PRESS RELEASE

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## PHOTO LONDON

### Booth A04

Somerset House, The Strand, London

10-14 May 2023



Atong Atem, *Akuot*, 2015, Ilford smooth pearl print, 84x 59 cm

The work of four female photographers takes centre stage at the Messums Photography booth at this year's Photo London: Atong Atem (illustrated above), Yan Wang Preston and Polly Penrose are presented together with a set of specially commissioned prints by Dr Ingrid Pollard.

**Atong Atem** is an Ethiopian born, South Sudanese artist living in Melbourne who works primarily with photography and video to explore contemporary identity through portraiture and in particular the fluidity of migrant narratives and postcolonial practices in the African diaspora. Atem's work was first presented in Cork Street in 2020, with a collection of works from an on-going series that is now held in the National Gallery of Victoria (purchased 2021) and exhibited here.

**Polly Penrose's**, first solo show at Messums Wiltshire in 2022, extended the breadth of female lens-based art, leaning into a narrative that is personal as well as sculptural. Penrose makes nude self-portraits, her face hidden, and her body posed as a sculptural object within a series of different, often challenging spaces.

**Dr Ingrid Pollard's** series of three works, *When you look down on us there will be nothing to smile about* will also be exhibited. Commissioned by Messums, it is a powerful and unique response to vintage photographs by Thomas Dinesen shot in the Ngong hills Kenya, which formed part of his sister Karen Blixen's archive. Pollard uses portraiture photography and traditional landscape imagery to explore social constructs such as Britishness or racial difference. She is associated with Autograph, the Association of Black Photographers and was nominated for the 2022 Turner Prize.

**Yang Wang Preston's** 2021 Cork Street debut of works from the *Mother River* and *Forest* series in 2021 was followed up by the sale to the Victoria and Albert Museum (2022) of *Egongyan Park, Chongqing, China, 2017*. The final print in the edition will be offered at Messums Photo London.

Alongside these remarkable works, Messums Photography will also exhibit a debut work by French artist Jean Vincent Simonet who unveils a unique print which pushes photographic process into the individual and painterly. Simonet has a solo exhibition at Messums Cork Street running during Photo London, offering visitors the opportunity to explore his work further.

Continuing a theme on the unique and original, a large vintage print, dated 1963, by Norman Parkinson of Elisabeth Frink's London studio inscribed by Norman Parkinson "to Lis" will be presented on the sculptor's original studio easel.

And finally, the dramatic and compelling images of Jeffrey Milstein shot from a helicopter capture the patterns of nature and civilisations in a series that nods to the innate language of order and pattern that architects our lives by accident and by design.

## Artist Biographies

**Atong Atem** (b. 1994) (illustrated above) is an Ethiopian born, South Sudanese artist living in Melbourne. Atem works primarily with photography and video to explore contemporary identity through portraiture and in particular the fluidity of migrant narratives and postcolonial practices in the African diaspora. She explores concepts of home and identity through a critical and sentimental lens and references the works of photographers Malick Sidibe and Seydou Keita as well as science fiction writers such as Octavia Butler as her aides in navigating these liminal spaces.

Atem's photographic images are both studies of history as well as portraits of people and explore storytelling, performance and costume as pillars of cultural expression. She is interested in 1950s kitsch interiors, and sci-fi tropes as she is in the cultural heritage of South Sudan, Kenya and Australia – places which all form part of her own identity. Interested in the way that visual histories and narratives shape identity, she uses them in a playful way, layering different identities and references to create images that have a maximalist aesthetic.



*Novembre Flowers #3, 2022*, Unique Inkjet ultrachrome print on plastic foil, washed and fixed, 138 x 98 cm

**Jean-Vincent Simonet** (b.1991) is best described as an alchemist, creating pictures that sit uneasily in the borderlands between photography, sculpture, and painting. His unique approach is a result of his family heritage and his fascination with the process behind image making. After the establishment of a successful career as a photographer, he returned to his family's industrial printing factory, realising the huge potential for experimentation that was offered by industrial printing machines.

Simonet began to understand that through using heat, humidity and different drying methods, he could transform, erase, vanish, almost sculpt the surface of a print. The resulting works are printed on a plastic foil-type surface that has been put through a variety of processes whilst the ink is not yet fixed. No two pieces can ever be identical even if they are made from the same original file and the physicality involved and gestural expression that Simonet brings to each print is finally fixed when it is run through water for the last time.

Simonet graduated from ECAL in 2014. He is based in Paris and Zurich where he juggles between commissioned photography, editorial and personal explorations.



*Self Portrait Stuffed with Packaging Nuggets*,  
Hackney, February 2021 (edition 1/8)  
Photo rag baryta paper  
50 x 74 cm

**Polly Penrose** (b. 1976) studied Graphic Design at Camberwell College of Arts in London. She went on to work in Fashion Styling and after that worked for the photographer Tim Walker. She has always taken photographs but started to take the practice seriously when she entered and won a competition held by the London Photographic Association in 2008. Since then, she has been included in numerous exhibitions throughout the UK, including *Body Language*, her first solo exhibition at Messums Wiltshire in 2022.

Penrose has been taking self-portraits on a ten-second timer and more recently a remote for nearly 20 years. Her work is unpremeditated and spontaneous and records her responding to her environment. She explores identity and the opposed notions of vulnerability and empowerment, comedy and tragedy. Her pictures focus less on sexuality and female allure, but retain the awkward, often beguiling force of the body as an object, pushed into a space, forced into a position whilst feigning a sense of normality and control. Penrose's work has been featured widely in publications including *The Guardian*, *Dazed Digital*, *The British Journal of Photography*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Artnet*.



*Untitled 1*, Sept 2021.  
Archival digital print with acrylic and  
handwritten text, 297 x 210 cm

**Dr Ingrid Pollard** (born 1953) is a British artist and photographer. Her work uses portraiture photography and traditional landscape imagery to explore social constructs such as Britishness or racial difference. Pollard is associated with Autograph, the Association of Black Photographers. She lives and works in London.

In the 1980s, Pollard produced a series of photographs of black people in rural landscapes, entitled *Pastoral Interludes*. The works challenge the way that English culture places black people in cities. From 2005 to 2007, she curated *Tradewinds2007*, an international residency exhibition project with an exhibition at the Museum of London Docklands. She has participated in group exhibitions at the Hayward Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Pollard has worked as an artist in residence at a number of organisations, including Lee Valley Park Authority, London (1994), Cumbria National Park (1998), Wysing Arts, Cambridge (2000), Chenderit School, Oxfordshire (2008), and Croydon College (2011). She has also held numerous teaching positions and is currently a lecturer in Photography at Kingston University. Pollard is a member of the Mapping Spectral Traces research group. In 2016 she was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society. In 2018 she was the inaugural Stuart Hall Associate Fellow at the University of Sussex.



*Egongyan Park, Chongqing, China, 2017*  
Edition 3/3, Chromogenic Print, 120 x 150 cm

**Yan Wang Preston** (b.1976) is a visual artist with sustained interests in landscape representation, its relationship to national and personal identities, migration as well as the environment. With large-format photography as her primary media, her solo, collaborative and participatory projects employ still and moving image, sound, performance, installation and the artist book to explore complex ideas from multiple angles.

For her first major project, *Mother River* (2010-2014), she photographed the entire 6,211km Yangtze River in China at precise 100m intervals on a large-format plate camera. Her second project, *Forest* (2010-2017), investigated the complexities, hopes and failures of constructed urban nature in China by following the adaptation journeys of transplanted old trees.

Wang Preston's projects are internationally and critically acclaimed. She won the 1st Prize in Professional Landscape, Sony World Photography Awards (2019), 1st Prize in Professional Commission, Syngenta Photography Prize (2017) and the Shiseido Photographer Prize at the Three Shadows Photography Annual Award in Beijing, China (2016). She was awarded as one of the Hundred Heroines by the Royal Photographic Society in 2018.

Her solo exhibitions have been presented at leading public institutions such as the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, UK (2022), LOOK Photo Biennale, Liverpool, UK (2019), Xposure Photography Festival, UAE (2018), Gallery of Photography Ireland (2017), Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum (2015) and the Swatch Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale (2015). Her first solo exhibition in London, *Yan Wang Preston: With Love* was presented at Messums London in June 2022.

Wang Preston was born in Henan Province in China in 1976, to a family of medical doctors. She gained her BA in Clinical Medicine in Fudan University, Shanghai, in 1999 and was subsequently qualified as a practicing anaesthetist. She emigrated to the UK in 2005 and changed her career to photography. In 2009 she gained a MA in Visual Arts at Bradford Collage, Leeds Beckett University. In 2018 she was awarded a PhD in Photography by the University of Plymouth.



**Jeffrey Milstein** (b.1944) lives in Woodstock, NY. He received a degree in architecture from UC Berkley in 1968 and practised as an architect before turning to photography in 2000. Growing up his two interests were art and flying, becoming a pilot at the age of 17. His passion for flight led to his well-known typology of aircraft photographed from below while landing. The work was presented in a solo show at the Ulrich Museum of Art in 2008, as well as in a year-long solo show at the Smithsonian National Air and Space

Museum in 2012. In 2016 it was on display at the Brandts Museum in Odense, Denmark.

In recent years Milstein has reversed the direction of the camera creating award winning unique aerial images of man-made landscapes that are iconic and emblematic of the modern world. These photographs have been recently shown in solo shows at Kopeikin Gallery, Bau-Xi Gallery, and Benrubi Gallery in 2017-2018. The National History Museum of Los Angeles County opened a permanent installation in 2017 which included a large-scale reproduction of Milstein's aerial photograph of Beverly Hills. His aerial photograph of Newark Airport is a cover image for the catalogue accompanying the traveling FEP exhibition 'Civilization, The Way We Live Now'.

### EDITORS NOTES:

#### Talks and Exhibition Programme:

**Polly Penrose Artist Talk:** Thursday 11 May, 11am (Stand A04 Photo London).

**Yan Wang Preston Artist Talk:** Friday 12 May, 11am (Stand A04 Photo London).

**Jean-Vincent Simonet** is exhibiting at Messums London, 26 April - 26 May 2023.

For press images or interviews, please contact: [press@messumwiltshire.com](mailto:press@messumwiltshire.com)

Launched in May 2021 with a programme of talks and exhibitions featuring international, renowned and emerging artists and photographers working in various parts of the world, **Messums Photography** favours dialogue between contemporary imagery and archives, reflecting on the evolution of photography as a storytelling genre.

MESSUMS WILTSHIRE is a multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

MESSUMS LONDON is a modernist gallery and exhibition space at 28 Cork Street, London.