

Matèria In Plain Sight: Photography, Power and Public Space in Britain

04.12.2025 -
31.01.2026

Anna Fox, Jermaine Francis, Sunil Gupta, Karen Knorr, MacDonaldStrand,
Sarah Pickering, John Stezaker, Bettina von Zwehl

Matèria is pleased to present In Plain Sight: Photography, Power and Public Space in Britain, an exhibition of photographic works, co-curated in dialogue with Christiane Monarchi. Through the intersection of language and the use of public space, the exhibition explores photography as a transformative site for action and a declaration of intent - whether political, cultural, or personal.

At its core, In Plain Sight is both a reflection on Britain's rich photographic landscape and a testament to its profound contributions to social discourse with a particular focus on the last twenty years.

Bringing together the work of eight lens-based artists, In Plain Sight opens a dialogue with specific histories of the United Kingdom which continue to influence visual culture today. The photographs, video and sculptural works included from these UK-based artists oscillate between fiction and document, while conceptually grounded in the experience and existential analysis of contemporary culture in Britain, where it originated and from where it ventures abroad.

The exhibition also resonates with the history of Matèria itself, tracing back to the formative years its director, Niccolò Fano, spent in the UK during the 2000s. More than a survey, this selection is deeply personal, shaped by the artistic influences and relationships built during that time - most notably, the long-standing dialogue with curator and editor Christiane Monarchi, with whom Fano has collaborated on multiple occasions and the ongoing relationship with artists Karen Knorr and Sunil Gupta, both featured in the exhibition.

Monarchi's expertise in photography is extensive; she is the co-director of HAPAX, which publishes a biannual print magazine commissioning new photographic ideas and runs a project space in London. She also founded Photomonitor, which has published over 1,400 online features since 2011 and has commissioned new writing in partnership with the University for the Creative Arts. A publisher, editor, curator, lecturer, and artist mentor, Monarchi also serves on the steering committee of Fast Forward: Women in Photography and is a trustee of the Centre for British Photography.

*Matèria would like to thank The Approach and kaufmann repetto for their support of John Stezaker's participation in the exhibition.

Among the works on view, Anna Fox's *Friendly Fire* (1989) critiques the performative rituals of Thatcher-era leisure. Documenting paintball games undertaken by corporate teams and social groups, Fox mirrors the absurdities of simulated combat against the backdrop of post-industrial Britain. The work exposes how play and violence, spectacle and critique, coalesce within the social fabric, transforming the photographer herself into both observer and reluctant participant.

In Jermaine Francis's *A Post Industrial Dreamscape* (2024), the artist presents a filmic and text-based meditation on postcolonial Britain - its racialized identities, music cultures, and shifting political landscape. Drawing from archival material, personal imagery, and the architecture of deindustrialised Britain - ranging from the 1970s up to 2024 - Francis constructs a visual essay that moves between resistance and reflection. The work's layered soundtrack, produced in collaboration with Tony Bontana, reclaims rave and club culture as radical spaces of collective expression against the oppressive politics of the 1980s and 1990s.

Sunil Gupta's *Trespass* (1995) revisits - in three acts - the politics of visibility through digital photomontage. Created on one of the first Apple computers, the body of work examines questions of belonging, sexuality, and migration across domestic and public contexts. The exhibited work, sourced from *Trespass III* - set in Essex and described by the artist as a "gateway into England" - situates queer and diasporic identity within the contested terrain of British multiculturalism.

Karen Knorr's *Country Life* (1984) offers a satirical portrayal of Britain's social hierarchies at the height of Thatcherism. Created in domestic interiors and manicured gardens across London, Scotland, and Oxfordshire, the series parodies the attitudes of the landed gentry through a refined interplay of text and image. By appropriating the still life and landscape genres, Knorr maps a terrain where nature and property intertwine, revealing the persistence of privilege and the slow evolution of Britain's class structures.

MacDonaldStrand's *False Flags* (ongoing) directly confronts the symbolism of nationalism and the visual language of propaganda. By digitally erasing national flags from photographs of right-wing marches in the UK and the USA, MacDonaldStrand withdraws the legitimising iconography of nationalism, leaving behind stark, ambiguous gestures of allegiance. The works, originally produced as large-scale printed flags, can no longer be shown in full, but are presented here folded into ceremonial triangular frames.

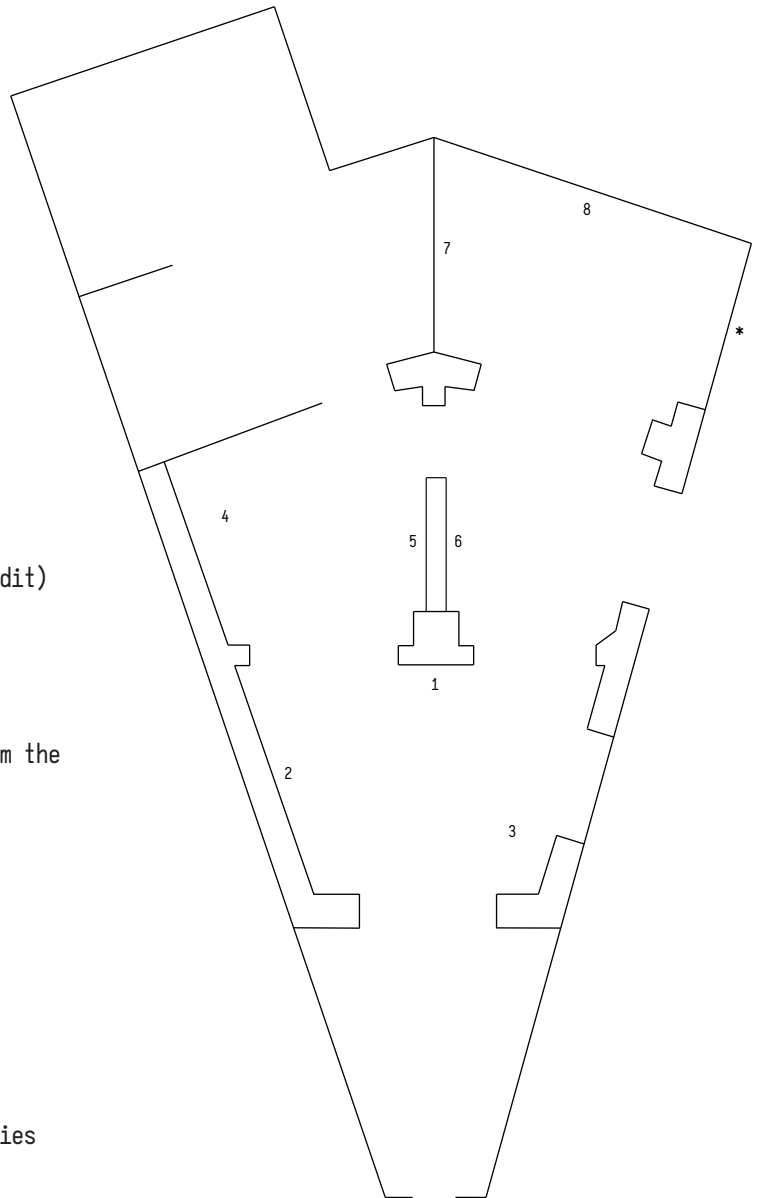
Sarah Pickering's *Explosion* series (2004-2009) documents the staged pyrotechnics used in British police and military training, where controlled blasts are engineered to simulate the shock of real conflict. Photographed in the English countryside, these eruptions of fire, smoke, and light appear both spectacular and unsettlingly out of place, exposing the tension between authentic danger and its fabricated counterpart. Pickering's images reflect on how contemporary culture prepares for, aestheticises, and consumes violence, transforming moments of orchestrated destruction into seductive, suspended scenes. Through this interplay of artifice and spectacle, the work explores our mediated relationship to conflict and the systems that rehearse it.

John Stezaker's exhibited work encapsulates the artist's longstanding engagement with the found image and the mechanics of visual perception. A pivotal figure in British conceptual art, Stezaker has, since the 1970s, redefined the relationship between photography, cinema, and the unconscious through his precise acts of appropriation and disruption. By cutting, splicing, and reconfiguring archival images - often drawn from film stills, postcards, and publicity portraits - he reveals the latent psychological charge of the photographic fragment. The work on view exemplifies his ability to transform the familiar into the uncanny, exposing how desire, memory, and representation intertwine within the collective image bank of modernity.

Bettina von Zwehl's *Sea of Troubles* (2023-2025) turns to the 17th century as a mirror for contemporary instability. Developed during a residency at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the series draws from the era's fascination with natural philosophy, tea culture, and magical thinking. By painting and pressing used teabags on glass, von Zwehl creates delicate, light-infused abstractions that echo landscapes in flux - metaphors for both colonial entanglement and the fragile alchemy of creation.

Artworks

- 1 John Stezaker
Star
2017-2018
Collage
53.5 x 42 x 4 cm (framed)
- 2 Anna Fox
Thatcher, from the series Friendly Fire (1989)
2025
Giclée print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Satin
52 x 62 x 4 cm (framed)
- 3 MacDonaldStrand
False Flags
2024 - ongoing
Digital print on fabric (flag)
65 x 32,5 x 5 cm (framed)
- 4 Jermaine Francis
A Post Industrial Dreamscape_Lost In Music (2024 Edit)
2024
Single-channel video
11'57
- 5 Bettina von Zwehl
Camellia sinensis var. sinensis III (Collage), from the series Sea of Troubles
2024
4x photographs on rice paper
79 x 82,5 x 4 cm (framed)
- 6 Sunil Gupta
Untitled #2, from the series Trespass 3 (1992-95)
2025
Giclée print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Bright White
70 x 110 x 2,5 cm
- 7 Karen Knorr
A mood of Highly Coloured Naturalism, from the series Country Life (1983-1985)
2024
Silver bromide print on Ilford paper
63,5 x 72,5 x 3,5 cm (framed)
- 8 Sarah Pickering
Groundburst N.1, from the series Explosion (2004 - 2009)
2004
Adhesive vinyl wallpaper (site-specific)
Variable dimensions
- * Nicolás Lamas
Collective memory
2023
Bronze, metal and glass
77 x 50 x 30 cm



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Matèria | Via dei Latini, 27 - Roma

materiagallery.com

Matèria

Opening hours

From Tuesday to Saturday
from 11 am to 7 pm

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Based in the neighbourhood of San Lorenzo in Rome, Matèria opened its doors to the public in 2015. The gallery proposes an exhibition programme that touches upon all aspects of Contemporary Art. Since its founding, Matèria's purpose has been the furthering and development of the work of its selected group of Artists. The gallery programme features four exhibitions per calendar year, conceived and produced directly with its artists and often in dialogue with the space through a site specific approach. Matèria's gallery shows strive to further the research and experimentation aspects of artistic practice, with the results of this approach often showcased in a growing list of Italian and international art fairs.

Matèria represents the work of Fabio Barile, Karen Knorr, Mario Cresci, Xiaoyi Chen, Giuseppe De Mattia, Sunil Gupta, Marta Mancini, Joachim Lenz, Francisca Valador, Stefano Canto, Bekhbaatar Enkhtur, and Maïmouna Guerresi.

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