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Lilly Lulay.
Artificial Archives: From Hand-Tinted Photographs to AI-Generated Images 8.1. – 7.2.27

Lilly Lulay. Artificial Archives: From Hand-Tinted Photographs to AI-Generated Images



Credit: Lilly Lulay, Interface T4/F0 from the series Latent Portraits, detail, 2026, © Lilly Lulay / Courtesy Kuckei + Kuckei, Berlin, Photo: Esra Klein. Press release and images available at: hausderkunst.de/press

This exhibition presents a new group of works by artist **Lilly Lulay** (b. 1985, Frankfurt am Main), placed in dialogue with selected historical photographs from the Münchner Stadtmuseum Photography Collection.

Working at the intersection of photography, digital image culture, and installation, Lilly Lulay investigates how historical images shape our present day. Her starting point is hand-tinted studio photographs taken from the 1860s onwards in Japan, chiefly in Yokohama, and collected by Western travellers. These photographs influenced European conceptions of Japan back in the nineteenth century. Today, both they and contemporary vacation snaps posted digitally are used to train AI image generators. Through sculpture, collage, and textile work, Lulay confronts the continuities between analogue and digital image culture. She illuminates how stereotypes and cultural appropriations of the analogue age remain pervasive in visual culture today.

Lulay's group of works comprises four series, exploring the diverse ways in which historical images connect to the present day. Her sculptures, collages, metal wall pieces, and fabric works

draw not only on visual source materials, but also probe the ways in which digital devices and apps actually function. Lulay translates into physical form aspects of digital images often treated as obscure, ephemeral, or immaterial within the discourse to create a tangible snapshot of current image practices. In the nineteenth century, titles such as “Samurai” were used to categorise and advertise images, and even today, these titles can be used as search terms and prompts. In Lulay’s series “10,001 Types and Costumes”, silhouettes of AI-generated figures overlay historical portraits of types by well-known photographers, including Kimbei Kusakabe, Felice Beato, Adolfo Farsari, and Kazumasa Ogawa. In this way, the machine’s perspective is exemplified as a textile object. The “Fake Furniture” series, in contrast, displays the cultural biases of AI tools. The style transfer misinterprets a hibachi stove as a side table, which Lulay then places into the physical space of the exhibition. The artist is interested in the verbal and metaphorical boundaries of images. This is why she elevates photo captions and photo studio props from incidental elements to central visual themes, incorporating glitches in her work.

Lulay created her work as part of her “Artists on Photography” fellowship, a programme initiated by the Münchner Stadtmuseum Photography Collection in 2024. In its first year, historical travel and souvenir albums from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania were a central focus. The programme combines scientific and artistic research, opening historic archives to modern perspectives.

In the exhibition “Artificial Archives: From Hand-Tinted Photographs to AI-Generated Images”, Lulay’s latest works will be presented for the very first time. They will be exhibited alongside a selection of the Yokohama photographs, as well as fourteen original photo albums from the Photography Collection predominantly put together outside of Europe for or by European travellers. These works reveal how photographic portrayals of regions and cultures were created and shared prior to globalisation. All objects on display are from the Münchner Stadtmuseum’s collection.

Further artistic research can be found in “Artists on Photography. Travel and Souvenir Albums from Outside Europe in the Münchner Stadtmuseum Photography Collection: Lilly Lulay/Eksuda Singhalampong” (Spector Books, 2026). The scholarly findings of Eksuda Singhalampong, recipient of the research fellowship, are also published there.

This exhibition by the Münchner Stadtmuseum Photography Collection is part of the “Artists on Photography” fellowship programme, produced in collaboration with Haus der Kunst München.
Curated by Dr. Kathrin Schönegg.

The project is also featured at the düsseldorf photo+ biennial from February 19 to March 29, 2027.
Artists on Photography is an initiative offered by Münchner Stadtmuseum. The 2025/26 project is made possible by the Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung.

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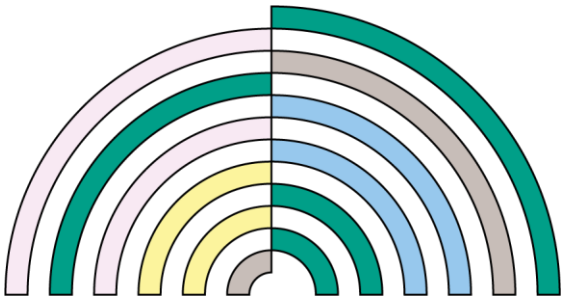
Biographies
Lilly Lulay studied photography, sculpture, and media sociology at Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach and École des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux. Her work transforms photographs taken by her and others into image objects, installations, and video collages. She dismantles photographs, shifting perceptions from the visual surface to the material, technical, and social structures in which our images are embedded. In her most recent projects, she has explored how smartphones, their apps, and AI-based data analysis have shifted the function of everyday photography – from a medium of memory to a means of communication, surveillance, and control.

Lulay's works are exhibited internationally and belong to public collections at George Eastman Museum (USA); Fondazione Fotografia Modena (Italy); Foam Amsterdam (Netherlands); Art Vontobel (Switzerland); FRAC Nouvelle-Aquitaine (France); Kunststiftung DZ Bank and Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation (Germany), and elsewhere. Lulay is represented by Galerie Kuckei + Kuckei, Berlin.

Eksuda Singhalampong is an assistant professor of art history at Silpakorn University in Bangkok (Thailand), where she lectures on Western art with a focus on gender questions in visual works, and Thai art. She was awarded her doctorate in art history at University of Sussex in 2016. Her research investigates discourses of Westernisation and modernisation in Thai society as well as how this influenced early modern art in Thailand in the second half of the nineteenth century. Singhalampong's research interests include gender, fashionability, connoisseurship, portraiture, and colonial/postcolonial issues in visual and material culture. She is currently studying the role of women in the social elite in Thailand's contemporary art scene.

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