



PALAEANTHROPOLOGICAL PHYSIOGNOMY
Phantom images 1991-1992/2024

Counter/Surveillance
Exhibition at the Wende Museum
Culver City (Greater Los Angeles)
PST ART: Art & Science Collide
organised by the Getty Foundation
October 2024 - October 2025



Everybody casts a shadow in the cabinet.



The viewer's face is reflected on the glass plate, making the viewer part of the work.
The phantom image can only be viewed on its own as a shadow image behind the plate.



The main exhibition space of Counter/Surveillance.

Gerhard Lang explores human perception through pictures of creatures showing human-and-animal-hybrid faces, phantoms that do not exist (or have not been found as yet). He does this by using a *Minolta Montage Unit*, in Germany known as a Phantombildgerät. This “phantom imaging device” combines images using artificial light, mirrors, lenses, a surveillance camera, and a control monitor. The phantoms depicted in Lang’s photographic collection *Palaeanthropical Physiognomy* were made in 1991 and 1992 in collaboration with a detective responsible for interviewing witnesses, in an interrogation room at the German Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA).

The Japanese company Minolta began manufacturing its Montage Unit in the 1950s to assist in the identification and facial reconstruction of victims of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Its analogue mirror technique combines fragments from up to four portraits, each the size of a passport photograph, creating a single image, a so-called phantom image. Police forces in Japan and the United States subsequently used the Minolta Montage Unit to identify suspects. Its use became standard procedure in West German police departments at the time of the Baader-Meinhof terror attacks, beginning in the 1970s. While police-produced phantom images rely on mugshots of arrested persons, Lang, working with the detective, used photos of all the residents of his home village in Germany, Schloss-Naues, along with photos of insects, primates, owls, and other animals.

In this way, Lang uses the phantom imaging device as an apparatus of earnest and playful creation, capable of exploring nuances of interpretation. *Palaeanthropical Physiognomy* suggests that the outcome of a technical device is determined not only by the device itself but also the artist’s intention.

Police use phantom imaging devices to investigate suspects. Lang uses a phantom imaging device to investigate perception itself. – Joes Segal



The works are coated dry-plates that were made by hand using an analogue image-transfer technique. The images shown here do not fully represent the layered character of the actual works.

Above and following spread: Phantom images from the series
Palaeanthropological Physiognomy, 1991–1992/2024







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All photos were taken by Gerhard Lang.

On this website there are more works by Gerhard Lang, which involve the phantom imaging device (Minolta Montage Unit). The term identikit photograph in older texts and works is nowadays translated as phantom image. To find out more about previous phantom works, click on the following titles on the WORK page: Hong Kong Photo Essay | Simulacra ex Speculis | Flores Umbrae | New Reports from the Countryside | Identik Photographs of Clouds | Palaeanthropical Physiognomy. Identikit Photographs (1992)