

€36,50

# SONGS OF THE SKY

Photography & the Cloud  
Dec 11, 2021 – Apr 21, 2022

€75,20

€232,85

29,88

**CO** Berlin

# PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, Dec 2, 2021

## SONGS OF THE SKY

Photography & the Cloud

**C/O Berlin** presents the thematic exhibition **Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud** from **December 11, 2021, to April 21, 2022**. The **opening** will be held on **Friday, December 10, 2021, at 20:00**, at C/O Berlin in the **Amerika Haus** at Hardenbergstrasse 22–24, 10623 Berlin. Attendees must be fully vaccinated or show proof of recovery from Covid, wear a face mask and keep 1.5m distance.

„For centuries, we’ve looked to the sky to divine the future.  
Today, we look to the Cloud.”—James Bridle

Dozens of cloud faces gaze down at visitors from the exhibition wall. Many of them seem to smile, while others remind us of people we know, or creatures from mythology. The Korean artist duo Shinseungback Kimyonghun—consisting of Shin Seung Back and Kim Yong Hun—assembled these human-like cloud formations in their 2012 series *Cloud Face*. Instead of the artists themselves, however, it was the algorithms of a face-recognition program that caused the shutter to be released every time it detected figures in the sky. Once a realm of human imagination and a source of insight, the cloudy sky now reveals the limits of machine-driven artificial intelligence.

As early as 1922, the famous American photographer Alfred Stieglitz turned his camera to the sky for the first time “to find out what [he] had learned in 40 years about photography.” His series of cloud pictures, which he initially called *Songs of the Sky* before they became famous as *Equivalents*, paved the way to abstraction for a medium that had been associated with the depiction of reality. A century later, the thematic exhibition *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud* uses the original title to discuss the current change in photography due to digitalization and its consequences. Thinking about photography today entails a consideration of the infrastructures that form and organize networks. Regardless of whether images are generated by surveillance cameras or satellites, or consist of digitized archival material or personal vacation photographs on our smartphones and laptops, all photographs are saved on the cloud operated by artificial intelligence.

Similar to the way that clouds resonated in the beginning of abstraction in photography one hundred years ago, the way artists today interact with the cloud reflects the twenty-first century’s visions of the future. Juxtaposing historical and contemporary cloud photographs, the exhibition *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud* mirrors the consequences of cloud-computing technology on climate change and geopolitics. What stories can photographs relate about the “soul of the sky” (Étienne Pitois) in the digital age? Will commercial enterprises that maximize their earnings by evaluating and using our cloud data end up buying all of the

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clouds in the sky? Will the immense carbon footprint of the technical cloud accelerate global warming to such an extent that in the future it will be rare to see many-faced cloud creatures floating by in the sky? *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud* was curated by Dr. Kathrin Schönegg. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalog that was published by Spector Books, Leipzig.

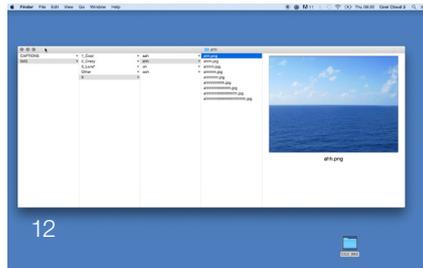
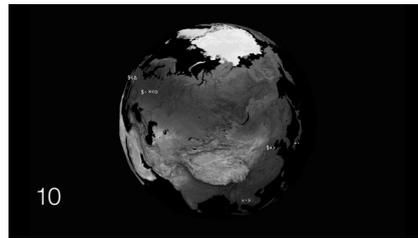
**Includes works by** Claudia Angelmaier, Sylvia Ballhause, Marie Clerel, Raphaël Dallaporta, Fragmentin, Noémie Goudal, Louis Henderson, Internationales Meteorologisches Komitee, Noa Jansma, Stefan Karrer, Almut Linde, NASA, Observatoire de Juvisy, Lisa Oppenheim, Trevor Paglen, Meghann Riepenhoff, Simon Roberts, Evan Roth, Mario Santamaría, Adrian Sauer, Andy Sewell, Shinseungback Kimyonghun, and Louis Vignes & Charles Nègre.

# PRESS IMAGES

Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud  
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U.S. Patent No. 11,208 Sheet 1 of 10 US 10,652,716 B2



# PRESS IMAGES

Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud

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**01** Almut Linde, *Dirty Minimal #70.1 — Sea of Clouds/29.3 Tons CO<sub>2</sub>*, 2012 © the artist, Courtesy PSM, Berlin **02** Marie Clerel, *December 2019*, from *Midi Series*, 2017–2019 © the artist, Courtesy Galerie Binome, Paris **03** Shinseungback Kimyonghung, *Cloud Face*, 2012 © the artists **04** Noa Jansma, *Buycloud*, 2020-2021 © the artist **05** Claudia Angelmaier, *Cloud (Stieglitz) I*, 2019, from *Untitled (Clouds)* © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021 **06** Simon Roberts, *The Celestials, #02A/028\_01\_2020*, 2020 © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021, Courtesy Robert Morat Galerie, Berlin **07** Mario Santamaría, *Cloudplexity*, 2019 © the artist **08–09** Andy Sewell, *Known and Strange Things Pass*, 2020 © the artist, Courtesy Robert Morat Galerie, Berlin **10** Fragmentin, *Displuvium*, 2019 © the artists **11** Evan Roth, *n22.210512e114.256075.hk*, 2017, from the series *Landscapes*, 2016–ongoing © the artist **12** Stefan Karrer, *Cool clouds that look like they should be spelling something, but they don't*, 2016 © the artist **13** Trevor Paglen, *CLOUD #865 Hough Circle Transform*, 2019 © the artist, Courtesy Pace Gallery and Private Collection, Geneva **14** The International Meteorological Committee, *International Cloud-Atlas*, Paris 1930, Courtesy Private Collection, Berlin **15** Adrian Sauer, *30.06.2015 (b)*, 2015 © the artist, Courtesy KLEMM'S, Berlin **16** Louis Henderson, *All That is Solid*, 2014 © the artist, Courtesy LUX, London **17** *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud*, Installation view at C/O Berlin, 2021-2022 © C/O Berlin Foundation, David von Becker **18** *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud*, (Evan Roth, *Landscapes*, 2016–ongoing), Installation view at C/O Berlin, 2021-2022 © C/O Berlin Foundation, David von Becker **19** *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud*, Installation view at C/O Berlin, 2021-2022 © C/O Berlin Foundation, David von Becker

A selection of max. four images may be used free of charge at one time, three months before beginning and until the end of the exhibition in the context of editorial reporting only. They must not be used for commercial purposes or shared with third parties. They may not be modified, cropped, or printed over. Please always include the correct copyright details and use the captions supplied with images. Publications must mention C/O Berlin, the artists, and the exhibition.

Editorial note when referring to C/O Berlin:

C/O Berlin is an exhibition space for photography and visual media. We are a nonprofit foundation unconstrained by commercial concerns. As such, we would appreciate if the word “gallery” was avoided when reporting on C/O Berlin. Many thanks!

**Contact** Magnus Pölcher . [press@co-berlin.org](mailto:press@co-berlin.org) . +49.30.284 44 16 41

# WALL TEXTS

Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud  
Dec 11, 2021 – Apr 21, 2022

## INTRODUCTION

Dozens of cloud formations resembling human faces gaze down at us. The Korean artist duo Shinseungback Kimyonghun assembled them in their 2012 series *Cloud Face*. Instead of the artists themselves, however, it was the algorithms of a face-recognition program that caused the shutter to be released every time it detected figures in the sky. Once a realm of human imagination and a source of insight, the cloudy sky now reveals the limits of machine-driven artificial intelligence.

As early as 1922, the famous American photographer Alfred Stieglitz turned his camera to the sky for the first time “to find out what [he] had learned in 40 years about photography.” His series of cloud pictures, which he initially called *Songs of the Sky* before they became famous as *Equivalents*, paved the way to abstraction for a medium that had been associated with the depiction of reality. A century later, the thematic exhibition *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud* uses the original title to discuss the current change in photography due to digitalization and its consequences using the subject and the metaphor of the cloud.

Thinking about photography today entails a consideration of the infrastructures that form and organize networks. Regardless of whether images are generated by surveillance cameras or satellites, or consist of digitized archival material or personal vacation photographs on our smartphones and laptops, almost all photographs are saved as digital data on the cloud. As zeros and ones, they have seemingly moved immaterially into the sky. But the cloud is not a romantic place up there. It is a network that constantly relocates our data. It is a machine through which artificial intelligences learn. It is also a techno-capitalist system that is lent material form by hard drives, servers, routers, fiber-optic cables, monitors, and computers. The cloud is an invention of privately owned Western corporations.

Similar to the way that clouds resonated in the beginning of abstraction in photography one hundred years ago, the way artists today interact with the cloud reflects the twenty-first century’s visions of the future. Juxtaposing historical and contemporary photographs, the exhibition *Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud* mirrors the consequences of cloud-computing technology on climate change and geopolitics. What stories can photographs relate about the “soul of the sky” in the digital age? Will commercial enterprises that maximize their earnings by evaluating and using our cloud data end up buying all of the clouds in the sky? Will the immense carbon footprint of the technical cloud accelerate global warming to such an extent that it will be rare in the future to see many-faced cloud creatures floating by in the sky?

*Songs of the Sky . Photography & the Cloud* was curated by Dr. Kathrin Schönegg. The exhibition catalog was published by Spector Books, Leipzig.

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With works by Claudia Angelmaier, Sylvia Ballhause, Marie Clerel, Raphaël Dalla-  
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Juvisy, Lisa Oppenheim, Trevor Paglen, Meghann Riepenhoff, Simon Roberts, Evan  
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### **EXPOSING / CALCULATING**

Since the 1990s, photography and its distribution have undergone a lasting technological transformation. During that decade, the exchange of information online via the personal use of infrastructures and networks began to be commercialized and commodified. At the same time, the dawn of digitalization (decried as spelling the “end of photography”) was approaching. After the year 2000, both developments converged as cloud-computing services entered the market. Concurrently, the photography industry was moving from analog to digital products. This real, industrial death of analog photography revitalized the medium in an art context, catalyzing reflections on photography’s origins—as can be seen in the example of the cloud as motif.

Lisa Oppenheim and Claudia Angelmaier reinterpreted well-known depictions of clouds from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in order to query the current relevance of the history of photography and analog photographic processes. Sylvia Ballhause and Simon Roberts foreground the production of images using now-obsolete equipment such as plate and view cameras and long-forgotten nineteenth-century techniques such as cyanotypes, whose intensive blue color is especially suitable for depicting skylines. The technique is used today to analyze the medium, as when Marie Clerel and Meghann Riepenhoff set aside camera and lens to allow light and the elements to interact directly with the sensitive paper. They are exploring anew the idea of photography as an indelible trace, seen as characteristic of the analog medium. The new material of digital photography is also examined in images of clouds. Adrian Sauer and Raphaël Dallaporta investigate the computational basis of the romantic cloud motif using repetition and variance, directing the viewer’s attention to variability as the basic condition of this new medium. Each individual pixel in a digital image may be manipulated, changed at will, or replaced, which increases the likelihood of it being distributed. This runs contrary to the traditional understanding of photography—obviated once digital replaced analog—as a physical connection to and materialization of reality.

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### **SAVING / DISTRIBUTING**

Beyond the changed materiality of photography, the integration of the medium into digital infrastructures has most recently been the topic of much discussion. The networking and distribution of images takes on a central role. Personal snapshots and videos wander between large and small screens, viewed on desktops, tablets, and smartphones, and they are saved, edited, commented on, and liked, before being sent on again.

Stefan Karrer downloaded some of the online images uploaded by chroniclers of everyday life and saved them in a folder on his desktop. This archive of found skies demonstrates the banality of photography on social media today as well as highlighting the importance of tagging, which underpins every organizing and storage system on which our activity around images is based. The metadata recorded by cameras and transported by images not only reveal locations, circles of friends, behaviors, and preferences—whether of supposedly personal, commercial, or government images—but also form the basis for all subsequent sorting and organizing processes of the digital data. Our consumer devices only seem to be the most important storage site of our images, because the vast majority of data circulates across the distributed cloud network composed of external servers in privatized data centers scattered around the globe and connected by undersea fiber-optic cables. Andy Sewell and Evan Roth have documented the beaches, cliffs, and shorelines where this otherwise-hidden infrastructure emerges from the ocean.

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### **OBSERVING / DETECTING**

In this computer era, it is not only the places where our images are stored that remain hidden. Most photographs today—taken by automated internet, surveillance, and satellite cameras, and processed and classified, edited and evaluated by algorithms and machines—remain invisible and unseen. These images no longer serve to depict something to the human eye. Instead, they have become autonomous and independent. Artists are increasingly turning to the motif of clouds to investigate the logic and function of such operational images.

Trevor Paglen and Shinseungback Kimyonghun make use of artificial intelligence to test out machine vision on clouds, for these fleeting phenomena form complex shapes hovering between representation and abstraction, subject and background, and positive and negative, which place demands equally on humans and technology. Nineteenth-century depictions of clouds first and foremost revealed the technical prowess of photography pioneers. Today, cloud photographs demonstrate the inadequacy of machines unable to extract meaning from the ambiguous subjects, yet the image of using artificial intelligence to map the pictorial surface evokes meteorological cloud atlases used since the late nineteenth century to identify typical patterns and shapes in order to classify clouds. At times, this has involved the use of tools such as threedimensional imaging with stereoscopic equipment—a means of observing clouds that Noémie Goudal is updating. Noa Jansma in contrast uses current image-recognition software to measure and assess passing celestial formations. In threat due to climate change, these shapes are developed as natural resources and converted into commodities offered for sale to exhibition visitors.

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### **THE CLIMATE, GEOPOLITICS, AND THE CLOUD**

When recognition software is used on clouds, the phenomenon's significance as a subject and a metaphor intersect. The amateur photographs and satellite images used to train the algorithms are themselves taken from the cloud, and the cloud is the place where artificial intelligence is schooled. The computing power this requires uses immense amounts of energy and negatively impacts the environment. But unlike Almut Linde's work, which depicts the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of a coal-fired power plant that also powers the cloud, the sooty smokestacks of data capitalism are largely invisible. This is also true for the many instances of artificial weather modification Fragmentin has gathered in order to examine human interventions into global weather, and the geopolitics of the Cloud that Louis Henderson addresses. The cloud is a techno-capitalist system that is lent material form by hard drives, servers, routers, fiber-optic cables, monitors, and computers that are themselves made from rare raw materials extracted in the so-called developing and emerging nations under often-exploitive conditions. The capitalist myth of our technology's immateriality is an invention of privately owned Western corporations and embedded in early 1970s diagrams of network technology. Mario Santamaría's research into US network patents has shown that the simplistic symbol of the cloud is used even today to explain technical systems while deliberately concealing their complexity. Clouds have always been an obscuring phenomenon, in computing technology as in fine-art photography.

# **PRESS RELEASE**

Berlin, Dec 2, 2021

## **Songs of the Sky**

Photography & the Cloud

### **Opening Hours**

Dec 11, 2021 – Apr 21, 2022

### **Press Tour**

Dec 10, 2021 . 11:00

### **Opening**

Dec 10, 2021 . 20:00

### **Opening Hours**

Daily . 11:00–20:00

### **Admission**

10 euros . reduced 6 euros

### **Organizer**

C/O Berlin Foundation

Amerika Haus . Hardenbergstraße 22–24 . 10623 Berlin

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