

KW

**Image Bank
22 June –
1 September 19**

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Opening: 21 June 19, 7 pm

Image Bank was founded in 1970 in Vancouver (CA) by artists Michael Morris (born 1942 in Saltdean, UK), Vincent Trasov (born 1947 in Edmonton, CA), and Gary Lee-Nova (born 1943 in Toronto, CA). Derived from William S. Burrough's novel *Nova Express* (1964), the name Image Bank refers to a mode of disruption or "mirror displacement" of dominant ideology, which enables unlikely juxtapositions to create new meanings—similar to Burroughs "cut-ups"—and cites a shared mythology or collective creative consciousness. While its main mode of operation constituted an international exchange of images and correspondence by mail, Image Bank can be characterized as a fleeting body of various modes of production that drew from an ever-growing international network of artists who interacted through performance, political campaigns, festivals, mail, and many other activities. Besides Morris, Trasov, and Lee-Nova (who left the group in 1972), artists frequently taking part in the group's initiatives included Dana Atchley, Anna Banana, Kate Craig, Robert Cumming, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Glenn Lewis, Eric Metcalfe, Willoughby Sharp, General Idea, and Ant Farm. Image Bank maintained close ties with Ray Johnson's *New York Correspondence School* as well as with Robert Filliou and his concept of the *Eternal Network*, who both worked on similar practices involving networks that emerged from a moment of collaborative production and fundamentally questioned the boundary between art and life.

Image Bank is presented in collaboration with the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, CA) and marks the most comprehensive institutional survey of the work of Image Bank to date. It presents hundreds of files of ephemera from the Morris/Trasov Archive, including correspondence, postcards, stationery, notes, collages, and concept drafts as well as photography, videos, and props.

Arranged in sections, the archival materials are presented in a large vitrine, giving an overview of the collective's most important mailings and image requests. These encompass postcard exhibitions, the Annual Report, correspondence with Ray Johnson and Robert Filliou and related stationary, stamps, and envelopes. Image Bank started its mail-outs in 1970 with an appropriated offset image of a bathing suit model sitting on an inflatable swan, stamped as "Image of the Month." This was accompanied by a list of artists, their addresses, and image requests. Initiating a system of sending and receiving, subsequent mailings provided a thematic framework such as "1984"—a call for images of a future world taken over by totalitarianism—or "A Cultural Ecology Project"

which asked for so called "Piss Pics." While such activities placed absolute value to the ephemeral moment, the existence of the archive reveals a significant paradox in the work of Image Bank: the diligent archiving, filing, and cataloguing transported their projects into the future even as they, as with "1984," invoked the future into the present. Image Bank's interest in the archive is connected to its interest in ritual and fetish as affirming the mythological and libidinous power of a culture obsessed with images and celebrating a continuity of mythic tropes within mass culture. In this framework, camp and masquerade were implemented as aesthetic strategies offering a way out of normative modes of image production and visual representation.

Lists and directories were pivotal to the structural workings of Image Bank, whose interest in banks and corporate as well as bureaucratic identity predated institutional critique by several years. The *Annual Artists' Directory*, consisting of more than 1000 names and addresses of artists involved in Image Bank, was published in two issues of General Idea's *FILE Magazine* and as a stand-alone book in 1972 (by Talonbooks, Vancouver, CA). The directory, in large part reproduced as wallpaper for the exhibition at KW, works as a strong visual emblem of the collective's



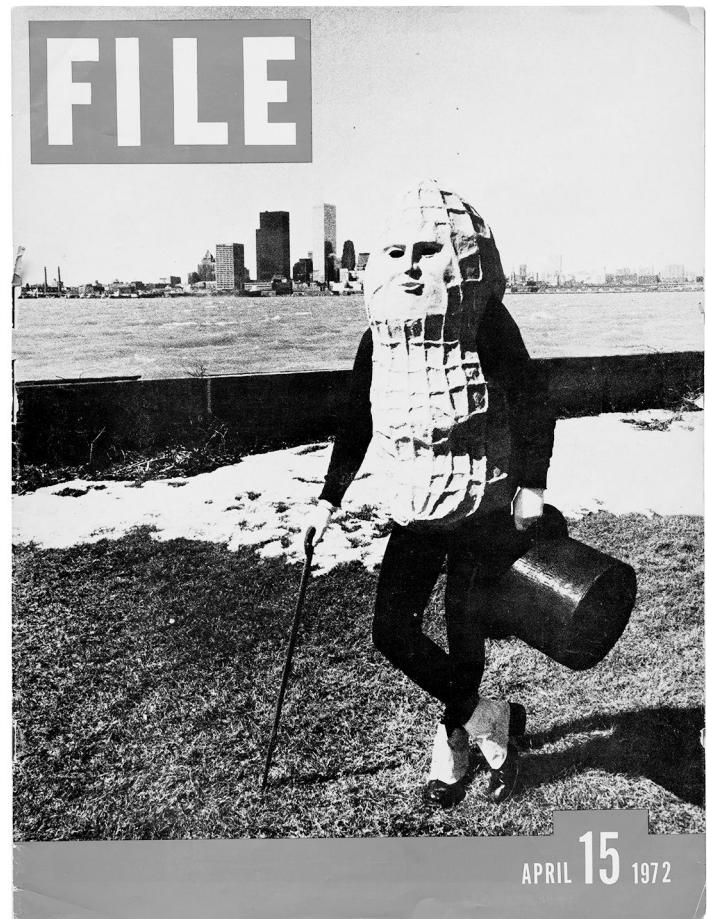
IMAGE
of the
MONTH

Image Bank, *Image of the Month*, 1971, photocopy and ink on paper, Collection: Morris/Trasov Archive, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia (CA)

objective to create new social forms and a new economy of creation, operating outside the dominant modes of market distribution and the museum's cultural gatekeepers (despite the museum's world interest in it). The network and networking formed a central axis of Image Bank's radically distributive practice, anticipating topics relevant today such as tagging, collective authorship, and user-generated content. Image Bank's use of frequently changing, gender-crossing aliases—a nod to Marcel Duchamp's rendering of identity as fluid and circumstantial—and the collective's reworking of images and texts from mainstream media suggests a queering of popular imagery and a questioning of individualist authorship and autonomy: Eric Metcalfe and Kate Craig were alternately known as Dr. and Lady Brute; Michael Morris performed and corresponded as Marcel Dot, Forget Maoist by Chairman Dot, Forget Dadaist by Marcel Idea; and Vincent Trasov as Mr. Peanut and Marquis d'Arachide.

Gathered in its own section of the exhibition, the research Image Bank undertook as "Color Bar Research" emerged from a painterly practice transposed from the canvas onto the world. In 1972, Morris and Trasov bought a 6.25-hectare property with cabin, creek, forest, clearing, and kiln, which was referred to as "Babyland." The location served both as an idyllic getaway for visiting artists and as a set to photograph props, naked people, and small pieces of wood, painted in all the colors of the spectrum—the "color bars"—or alternating "color dots". The resulting photographs, videos, and performances were explorations of depth of field, perception and psychedelics, essentially removing painting and sculpture of their autonomy and turning them into props for extended performances. *Light-On* (1972), a black-and-white projection presenting naked people in Babyland "drawing" on each other by directing light onto each other's bodies via mirrors, is a play on the intersection of painting, drawing, nature, and the "natural" human body. Accompanied by a score from Canadian electronic composer Martin Bartlett, the three-channel projection by Michael Morris in the back room is strong visual testimony to the colorful, experimental project, which lasted for about four years. Used in various photographs but essentially a state of mind, the transparent "Hands of the Spirit" mounted on the wall imply a gesture of camp and assign a moment of extreme artificiality to the real world—an image that most aptly describes Image Bank's general ideology.

In 1974, Vincent Trasov campaigned as Mr. Peanut for Mayor in Vancouver's municipal election. "Peanut," a highly generic and cheap snack, was yet another Duchampian abbreviation for: **P**erformance – **E**legance – **A**rt – **N**onsense – **U**niqueness – **T**alent." William S. Burroughs endorsed the candidacy in a public speech, stating in almost dadaistic fashion that "the inexorable logic of reality has created nothing



Cover, *FILE Magazine* 1, no. 1 (April 1972). Collection of the Morris/Trasov Archive, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia (CA).

but insoluble problems," and therefore demands an illogical candidate—Mr. Peanut. The peanut column at the beginning of the exhibition presents the prop as a recurring trope for Image Bank: Mr. Peanut appears throughout the exhibition not only as a synonym for politics infused by art and humor but also as frequent guest in Babyland's psychedelic experiments, bathing for example with naked Granada Gazelle.

Included in the exhibition are interviews and documentaries, giving a more in-depth sense of the historic moment and the social structures of Image Bank that would lead to the founding of Western Front in 1973 by Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov together with Kate Craig, Glenn Lewis, Eric Metcalfe, and others. *The Art Stars Interviews* (1974), conducted by Willoughby Sharp and Ant Farm, was shot in Los Angeles on the occasion of *Decca Dance*—an event with 1,000 guests from the network that was inspired by Robert Filliou's idea of celebrating art's birthday. The video consists of interviews with participants who reflect on their roles in the event and in the network in general. *Byron Black* (1974) juxtaposes different video material and photography related to Color Bar Research, Ant Farm, and a staged TV show, superimposed by the voices of Byron Black, Morris, and Trasov, who comment nonchalantly on the images, events, and ideologies of the network.

Public program

Guided tour through the exhibition with the curator Scott Watson and artists Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov
22 June 19, 2 pm
In English

Guided tour through the exhibition with assistant curator Kathrin Bentele
25 July 19, 6 pm
In German

ZAPP Magazine
Screening and talk with Corinne Groot, Rob van de Ven and Kathrin Bentele
14 August 19, 9 pm
Venue: KW Courtyard
In English

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Opening hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed on Tuesday

Admission

8 € / reduced 6 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 € / reduced 8 €
berlinpass holder 4 €
Free admission to visitors under 18, holders of the KW Lover* card, and on Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 pm

Guided tours

KW offers free guided tours through the exhibition during regular opening hours. For further information on tours for large groups (over 10 people), please contact Duygu Örs at do@kw-berlin.de or +49 30 243459-132.

Networks as Structural Models for Art— Distributive Practices since 1960

Lectures by Prof. Dr. Julia Gelshorn, University Freiburg (CH) and Hanna Magauer, University of the Arts Berlin
27 August 19, 7 pm
Venue: KW Studio, Front building, 1st floor
In German

Guided tour through the exhibition with curator and director Krist Gruijthuijsen
29 August 19, 6 pm
In English

Colophon

Curators: Krist Gruijthuijsen, Maxine Kopsa, Scott Watson
Assistant Curator: Kathrin Bentele
Public Program and Outreach: Sabrina Herrmann
Head of Production: Claire Spilker
Technical Management: Wilken Schade
Head of Installation, Media Technology: Markus Krieger
Installation Team: KW Installation Team
Registrar: Monika Grzymislawska
Press and Communication: Karoline Köber, Katja Zeidler
Interns: Lutz Breitinger, Daniela Nadwornicek, Sarah Wessel
Text and Editing: Kathrin Bentele, Krist Gruijthuijsen, Friederike Klapp, Scott Watson, Katja Zeidler

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