Open Call:
image, scrape, synthesise, collapse

The Photographers' Gallery invites proposals for an artist or collective to develop research and create a new digital commission to be presented online and at the Gallery in February 2025

The open call

This free open call is for artists or collectives to undertake or extend research around generative AI, self-made tools or similar advanced technology. The research will in turn form a new commission to feature on Unthinking Photography and at The Photographers' Gallery.

The opportunity is open to artists and collectives working with photography, digital and moving image practices. The selected artist/collective will receive a £4,000 fee and £5,000 production costs. Applicants can be based in the UK and internationally.

Proposals should consider:

- how the proposed project can be contextualised historically, in relation to photography, wider visual imagery and knowledge production
- how the practices and processes used within the proposed project might be preserved

The commission might address ideas (but not exclusively) such as:
- The networked image
- Corporate imperialism
- Synthetic images, as including of generative AI and a part of computational photographic practices
- The ecological effects of large language models and image generation
- Alternative and DIY approaches
- Images as coded data
- Ecological approaches
- Human in the loop
- Materiality of servers and servers as archive
- Regulatory frameworks for synthetic images

Apply for free on Submittable

Context for the open call

The Photographers' Gallery's digital programme is undertaking an ambitious research project exploring the intersections of photography, imperialism, and networked culture. It traces the transformation of photographic practices from the socially aware political contexts of the 1980s to the realms of computational, machinic and artificial intelligence (AI) practices of today.

The ongoing research, supported by Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, takes three publications as a starting point:
- Victor Burgin's '**Thinking Photography**' (1982)
- John Tagg's 2009 essay '**Mindless Photography**'
- The Photographer's Gallery's online platform '**Unthinking Photography**' (2016-today)

It will look at photography criticism and history, alongside the ontological shift that has taken place in the medium through the proliferation of digital cameras, the Internet, and the digitalisation of culture, apparent in Flickr, ImageNet and Instagram.

In recent years, as AI practices have become more advanced, technology companies rely on the networked qualities and values of digital photographs to inform pre-established <u>ground truths</u>. To compensate for shortcomings in their resulting models, they create and employ various algorithmic strategies within their ever more vast datasets through scraping.

Producing synthetic imaging and data as input for AI models are often suggested as solutions to what is considered a technological problem. These solutions allow models to generate millions of additional images to enhance machine vision or diversify content.

However, this approach can lead to both an 'overcorrection' and 'model collapse', where AI becomes overly reliant on synthesised information. This raises questions about which area of reality AI images represent: are AI images in touch with physical-world contexts, or do they instead represent our visually mediated network relationships?

Application Process

Applications are now open and accepted through the Submittable platform.
If you have any accessibility requirements and would like to send an application in any other format, please contact us at digital.programme@tpg.org.uk.

**Deadline for Submissions: Sunday 16 June 2024, 17.00 BST**
The commission will be selected by Sam Mercer (Producer, Digital Programme), Ioanna Zouli (Editor, Unthinking Photography) and the artist, coder and researcher Winnie Soon.

The commission will be selected by 14 July 2024. A schedule will be drawn up with the artist(s) with the work expected to be completed by December 2024. We are not conducting interviews, however if any questions arise during the shortlisting process about your proposal, we may be in touch.

The commission will be presented on Unthinking Photography and at The Photographers' Gallery from February – June 2025.

We will be holding a limited number of one-to-one sessions.
Book here for 15 minute sessions on 21 & 22 May 2024. Question and answers from these sessions may feed back into the FAQ below. Please read the application guidelines and context before booking a slot.
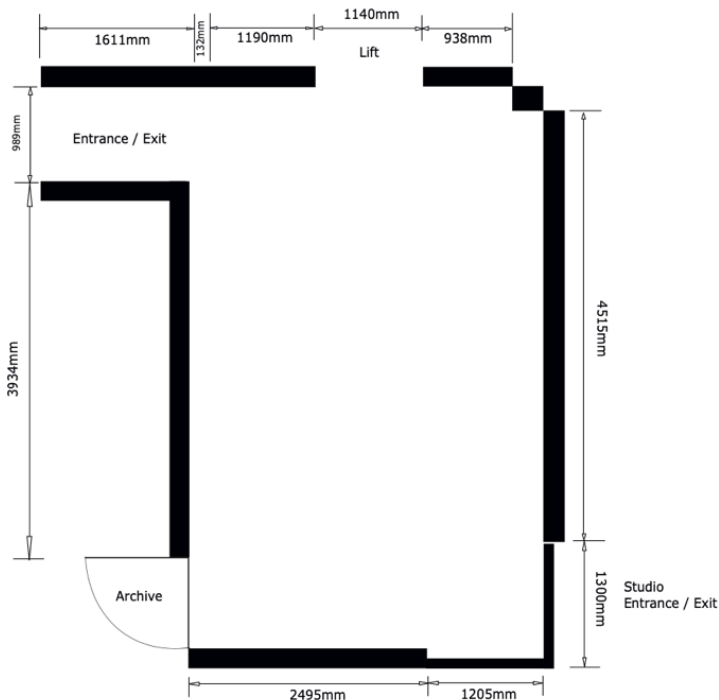
Frequently asked questions

Who can enter?
The open call is open to all practitioners over the age of 18 regardless of location. There is no need to have studied at an educational institution in the UK or elsewhere. TPG encourages applications from all individuals and groups who meet the criteria and whose work shows outstanding talent, originality and innovation. The Photographers' Gallery is committed to equal opportunities and we encourage applications from all persons without discrimination.

How do you apply?
Online applications will be accepted between 30 April and 16 June 2024 here. If you have accessibility needs and would prefer to submit in any other format (such as video), please contact us at digital.programme@tpg.org.uk.

1. Each submission should include a proposal (up to 500 words), how your proposal links to the open call (up to 200 words), likely outcomes (200 words) and a link/attachment towards a portfolio.

2. The selection process will be undertaken in English.

3. Artists, groups and collectives are able to submit. Applicants are also allowed to use human-machine collaborative projects of their own creation.

4. One submission by each person or group will be accepted.

5. All submissions are free.

Submission Requirements
- One project proposal (up to 500 words)
- How your proposal links to the open call (up to 200 words)
- Likely project outcomes (up to 200 words)
- Your name and contact details
- Examples of previous work and/or a link to your website

How will it be judged?
The *image, scrape, synthesise, collapse* open call is open to all areas of practices and works will be presented within the context of The Photographers' Gallery, Unthinking Photography and the research programme funded by Paul Mellon Centre set out above. Proposals should consider:
- how the proposed project can be contextualised historically, in relation to photography, wider visual imagery and knowledge production
- how the practices and processes used within the proposed project might be preserved
- how the work fits in to your practice to date

How will the selection happen?
One work will be selected by a team of people including members of The Photographers' Gallery digital programme, as well as an external invited selector. We are not conducting interviews, however if any questions arise during the shortlisting process about your proposal, we may be in touch.

Open Call

Free to apply, the call is open for 6 weeks, until 16 June 2024

Pre-Selection

The shortlist is drawn up by members of The Photographers' Gallery's digital programme and curatorial team

Taking place in second half of June

Shortlist

Selected by a jury: Ioanna Zouli, Sam Mercer, Winnie Soon

Taking place in second half of June

Selected proposal

Successful applicant contacted by 15 July 2024

How much is the commission?
The commission includes £4000 as an artist fee, paid in two installments upon signing a contract, and a production budget of £5000. A detailed budget will be developed upon selection.

What is expected as outcomes?
The commission will be displayed in two forms: online, on the platform Unthinking Photography, and at The Photographers' Gallery. The artist(s) will be expected to provide a schedule of work with timelines, information and images for communications in a timely manner, as per the contract, as well as taking part in a public presentation/event and video interview.

Useful links, references and examples.
unthinking.photography
Mindless Photography
Automated Photography
Thinking Photography
Data / Set / Match
https://cartography-of-generative-ai.net/
https://knowingmachines.org/
criticalai.art
https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/experiments-in-synthetic-data

Terms & Conditions

By submitting your application for the *image, scrape, synthesise, collapse* Open Call you are accepting the following Terms and Conditions. This agreement constitutes the entire and only agreement between you and The Photographers' Gallery. The Photographers' Gallery is a not-for-profit, independent, educational charity (UK Charity commission no. 262548).

> I confirm all the works submitted are my own and I have the intellectual copyright to use, exhibit and distribute them.

> I am not a staff member at The Photographers' Gallery, or a sponsor of the organisation.

> I understand that the name, captions, texts and images or moving image files I upload to the image, scrape, synthesise, collapse Open Call application site will be reviewed by The Photographers' Gallery curatorial staff to create a shortlist, and the commissions will be selected by a panel.

> Unless agreed otherwise, The Photographers' Gallery will only accept applications submitted through the Submittable website and cannot offer feedback on any individual application.

> If selected, I allow my images to be used in print and online (including social media and other platforms) for marketing, press, promotional and educational purposes related to the programme and The Photographers' Gallery's wider activities. Any images used will be fully and accurately credited when sent to press and third parties by The Photographers' Gallery. Copyright for all texts and images is retained by their respective author.

> If my application is successful, my name, text and selected works, can be uploaded to The Photographers' Gallery website and will be accessible to the public. My work will remain part of the Gallery's online archive for an indefinite period. Occasionally images may be cropped for purposes of fitting into the website format, this will only be done when absolutely necessary.

> The Photographers' Gallery reserves the right to edit extended texts submitted through the application process, this will be done in consultation with the artist.

> All submitted information, text and images are my sole responsibility, not The Photographers' Gallery's, and do not breach any third-party copyright. I am entirely responsible for all content that I have uploaded or make otherwise available.

> I do not hold The Photographers' Gallery, including all its staff and trustees, responsible for any losses, claims, liabilities, expenses, damages and costs, including reasonable legal fees, resulting from any violation of these Terms and Conditions or any activity related to the service (including negligent or wrongful conduct) by myself or any other person.

If you have any questions regarding your application, contact digital.programme@tpg.org.uk. If you have not been notified that your work has been selected by 1 August 2024, please assume your application has not been successful.

With support from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

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for Studies in British Art