

James Richards

Fevers

Sylvia Kouvali, *London*
12 March – 18 April 2026

Work tends to emerge in cycles. *Fevers*, shown here in complete form for the first time at Sylvia's gallery, marks an endpoint to the last few years' activity.

It is just over 30 minutes long and consists of three distinct chapters. Much of the work happened in the context of different exhibitions and events between 2022 and 2026, working with collaborators and friends: Billy Bultheel, Max Bloching, Steve Reinke and Lucy Beech. Sometimes these took the form of curated evenings bringing together artists and performers; other times, they appeared as looped materials shown within larger installations.

I've sifted through a number of recent experiments, reworking them into this longer-form piece, setting the parts within a larger structure so that an overall dramaturgy takes shape. It's a pleasure to retrospectively carve a sense of inevitability into otherwise scattered forms, allowing the recurring preoccupations to chime.

The last few years have been brutal: consuming streamed images of war and genocide, making art and teaching amidst the German state's bludgeoning doublethink. Arts funding across Europe cut to siphon more into defence. Wondering what it means to live from project to project, weaving poetic abstractions while absolute events are piped into our pockets in real time. Spending time with the materials here, I sense this manifesting as pressure, and at other times as a vacuum-flask brittleness. In convening *Fevers*, I found a rhythm emerged through this alternating. Throughout the work, I kept going back to this sense of physically emphasised looking.

The first part of the video brings together two classic art-house references, both rooted in the primal urge to inscribe presence through absence: a 4K animated remake of *The Flicker* (1966) by Tony Conrad and my own rough English translation of *Les Mains Négatives* (*Negative Hands*, 1978) by Marguerite Duras. Originally made on 16mm film, Conrad's work is based on three rudimentary elements—a title frame, a black frame, and a white frame—reducing cinema to its most elementary principle: alternating fields of light and darkness.

The text speaks of the caves of the Magdalenian period, more than 15,000 years ago, where humans placed their open hands against granite walls and blew pigments around them to leave behind outlines. These stencilled silhouettes are more voids than representations—negative impressions where the body briefly pressed itself into the world before disappearing. The pigment records not the hand, but its removal. Overlaid with the subtitles, the harsh pulse of the flicker pushes the eye away, while the overlaid text pleads for an absolute intimacy.

In another passage, the camera glides slowly over a vast surface—a landscape of stone, a massive rock formation, a cave wall, its scale impossible to grasp. Like seeing human likenesses in the clouds or moon, at various points the cracks and potholes form faces, sometimes clear, sometimes obscured. It is inspired by the photographer Brassai's 1950s photographs of graffiti-covered walls in Paris: anonymous incisions etched into urban surfaces that, for him, had come to replace nature in the modern city. The orphaned marks map out an urban unconscious.

After the austerity of these formal passages, the second half of the video becomes richer and thicker. It's made with a "back to basics" found-footage approach that I like to turn to when working on more logistics-heavy projects. Craving a kind of sketchbook-like impunity, I sit at my desk, gathering found scraps of sound and image, and rework them—teasing out surprises and collisions, improvising reams of material that are then channeled and edited much later.

I've wanted this piece to feel like a fever dream. Unfolding restlessly: surfaces fracture and accumulate, distortions multiply, each image, already marked by prior manipulations, folds into the next. Throughout the work, gestures recur and unravel—a choreography that persists through its own disintegration. The feverish figure resides not in resolution, but in the constant negotiation of visibility, where coherence slips away even as it briefly assembles. And in the end, a procession of flickering eyes remains: aperture, wound, passage. An unresolved flurry where the body yields to vision, vision opens onto disappearance, and the image is swallowed.

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Fevers (2026)

Written, composed and edited by James Richards

Sound design and field recording: Max Bloching

Animation: Peter Buikema

Voice: Liesl Lindeque

Additional music: *Snows Of Venice* by Billy Bultheel (2022), arranged and recorded by Billy Bultheel and James Richards at WIELS Brussels

Strings: Clara Levy, Julie Michael, Hanna Kölbel

Flute: Adam Sinclair

Contains an excerpt from the video, *A Map of the Pit* (2025) by Lucy Beech and James Richards

Support: Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Helena Kritis/WIELS, Brussels; Tom Engels/Grazer Kunstverein

Exhibition text adapted from a text written by James Richards and Tom Engels

SYLVIA KOUVALI

JAMES RICHARDS

Bio

James Richards (b. 1983, Cardiff) lives and works in Berlin.

Richards holds a BA in Fine Art, Chelsea School of Art and Design, London (2006). He also studied at UWIC, Cardiff, Foundation Art & Design (2003).

Solo exhibitions include: *Fevers*, Sylvia Kouvali London (2026); *Fevers*, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz (2025); *Our Friends in the Audience*, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo (2024); *When We Were Monsters*, Haus Mödrath, Kerpen (2021); *Alms For The Birds*, Castello Di Rivoli, Turin (2020); *Migratory Motor Complex*, Collective, Edinburgh (2019); *SPEED*, with Leslie Thornton, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Stuttgart (2018); *Crossing*, with Leslie Thornton, Secession, Vienna (2018); *Migratory Motor Complex*, Chapter Art Center, Cardiff (2018); *Music for the Gift*, Cym Yrun Fenis, Wales in Venice, Venice Biennale, Venice (2017); *Abyss Film*, with Leslie Thornton, Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (2016); *Radio At Night*, Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (2016); *Requests and Antisongs*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2016); *Crumb Mahogany*, Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (2016); *To Replace a Minute's Silence with a Minute's Applause*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2015); *James Richards*, Kunstverein München, Munich (2015); *James Richards*, CCA, Kitakyushu (2012); *Not Blacking Out, Just Turning The Lights Off*, Chisenhale Gallery, London (2011); *Call and Bluff*, Tramway, Glasgow (2009).

Group exhibitions include: *Tolia Astakhishvili*, mumok, Vienna (forthcoming, 2026); *Demolition/Escape*, Fluentum, Berlin (forthcoming, 2026); *Accidents*, Stavanger Secession, Stavanger (2025); *TO LOVE AND DEVOUR*, Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation, Venice (2025); *Focus: Recent Videos from the Museion Collection*, Museion, Bolzano (2025); *A Map Of The Pit*, Tate Modern, London (2025); *Preis Der Nationalgalerie 2024*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2024); *Tolia Astakhishvili: Between Father And Mother*, Sculpture Centre, New York (2024); *Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty*, Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris (2024); *Workers in Song*, Mudam, Luxemburg (2024); *The First Finger (Chapter II)*, Haus am Waldsee, Berlin (2023); *WORLD CLASSROOM: Contemporary Art through School Subjects*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2023); *The First Finger*, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2023); *signal...storms and patterns*, Para Site, Hong Kong (2023); *Full Burn: Video from the Hammer Contemporary Collection*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2023); *La Fabrique du Nous #1 / Des voix traversées*, IAC, Villeurbanne (2022); *Techno*, Museion, Bolzano (2021); *The Botanical Mind: Art, Mysticism and the Cosmic Tree*, Camden Arts Centre, London (2020); *Time, Forward!*, V-A-C Foundation, Venice (2019); *Biennial of Moving Images 2018*, The Centre d'Art Contemporain Geneve, Geneva (2018); *Sixty Years*, Tate Britain, London (2018); *Generation Loss. Ten Years of the Julia Stoscheck Collection*, Julia Stoscheck Collection, Dusseldorf (2017); *Whitney Biennial 2017*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2017); *British Art Show 8*, (Touring) Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, Inverleith House, Edinburgh, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Talbot Rice Gallery (2015-2017); *Less Than One*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2016); *The Screen: Sounds of Light*, CAPC, Bordeaux (2016); *Aleksandra Domanović, Yngve Holen and James Richards: Ars Viva 2014/2015*, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2015); *Biennale of Moving Images 2015*, Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania, Australia (2015); *Ars Viva 2014/2015*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (2014); *Moving Images at the Heart of the Centre. Biennale of Moving Images 2014*, Centre d'art contemporain, Geneva (2014); *Cut to Swipe*, MoMA, New York (2014); *Burning Down the House*, 10th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea (2014); *Meanwhile ... Suddenly and Then*, 12th Biennale de Lyon, Lyon (2013); *The Encyclopaedic Palace*, 55th Venice Biennale, Venice (2013); *Frozen Lakes*, Artists Space, New York (2013); *The Imaginary Museum*, Kunstverein München, Munich (2012); *The Voice is a Language*, Film and Performance Programme, Tate Modern, London (2012); *Coming After*, The Power Plant, Toronto (2011); *Art Now: Clunie Reid and James Richards*, Tate Britain, London (2010); *Generational: Younger Than Jesus*, The New Museum Of Contemporary Art, New York (2009); *Nought to Sixty*, ICA, London (2008).

Public Collections

Arts Council England, London

Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin

Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris

Frac Midi-Pyrénées, Toulouse

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

Tate Modern, London

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne

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