

PRESS RELEASE

Memory, Erasure & Appearance - Isabelle Delvallée and Claude Cahun

200 years of Photography from 1826 to 2026

Preview: Friday 15th May 2026, 5–8pm

EXHIBITION DETAILS:

Dates: 15 May – 5 June 2026

Opening Hours:

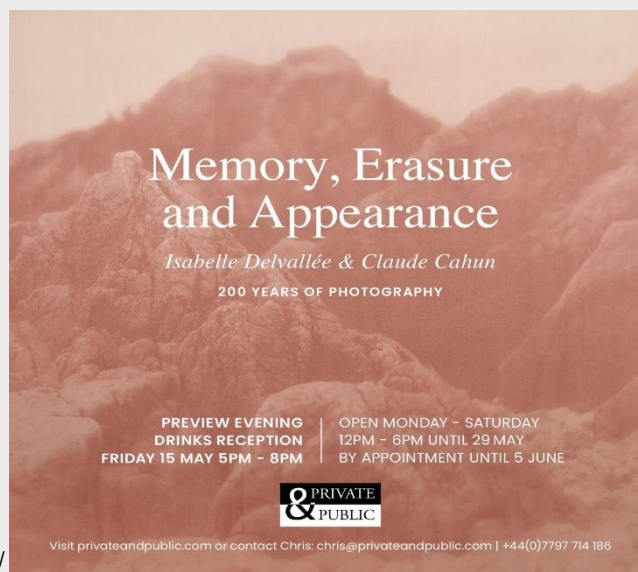
Monday to Saturday: 12– 6pm

Location:

Private & Public Gallery, Sommerville House,
Phillips Street, St. Helier, Jersey JE2 4SW

Online Catalogue & Film

<https://privateandpublic.com/project/memory-erasure-and-appearance/>



Keith Haring, Pop Shop 1

Photography emerged from a blend of artistic curiosity and scientific discovery, with roots stretching back centuries before the first successful photograph. One of the earliest key concepts was the camera obscura, a device known since ancient times and described by figures like Aristotle. It projected an inverted image of the outside world onto a surface inside a darkened room, but the image could not yet be permanently recorded.

The breakthrough came in the early 19th century. In the 1820s, French inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce created the first permanent photograph using a process called Heliography. His image, 'View from the Window at Le Gras' required many hours of exposure. Niépce later partnered with Louis Daguerre, who refined the process after Niépce's death. In 1839, Daguerre introduced the daguerreotype, the first commercially viable photographic method, producing highly detailed images on silver coated plates.

'View from the Window at Le Gras' by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, Heliographic Print, 1826.

Photography continued to evolve rapidly through the 19th century with improvements in exposure times, portability, and image quality. By the late 1800s,

innovators like George Eastman popularised photography with roll film and user friendly cameras, making it accessible to the general public.

These early innovations transformed photography from a scientific experiment into a powerful artistic and documentary medium.

This milestone is important because it highlights how profoundly photography has shaped modern life, artistically, scientifically, and socially.

First, it provides an opportunity to reflect on photography's evolution - from fragile, one-of-a kind images like the daguerreotypes to today's instant digital photography. This transformation mirrors wider technological progress and changing ways of seeing the world.

Second, the bicentennial underscores photography's cultural impact. It has documented historical events, shaped public opinion, and influenced art movements across centuries. From war reporting to family snapshots, photography has become central to how people record memory and identity.

Finally, it encourages renewed discussion about the future of images. In an age of smartphones, artificial intelligence, and image manipulation, photography's role is more complex than ever. The bicentennial invites

both celebration and critical reflection, honouring its origins while questioning authenticity, truth, and ethics in visual media.

And so it with great pleasure, in this the bicentennial year of the founding of photography, that Private & Public Gallery presents new works by the highly acclaimed French photographer and artist Isabelle Delvallée whose return to the slow, fragile and uncertain techniques of the pioneering photographers of the 19th century offers a radically different experience in a world saturated with instantaneous images and endless social media where everything appears readily visible and endlessly circulating.

Isabelle Delvallée's work uses traditional techniques where the image never fully reveals itself and unfolds as a three-part journey, in which photography is no longer understood as a means of capturing reality, but as an unstable space, a threshold where memory, erasure, and appearance continuously intersect.

Through the use of gum bichromate printing, an early photographic process inherited from Pictorialism, Delvallée situates her practice within an artisanal and temporal dimension. Each image is built through layers, gestures, and successive alterations. Far from mechanical reproduction, the print becomes a living surface, shaped by water, pigment, and time. This process grants the image a fundamental quality: it remains in a state of balance, never entirely fixed.

Rather than documenting a landscape, Delvallée presents a fragmentary and intimate experience. Quiet interiors, open windows, simple objects, these motifs evoke not so much a place as a lived presence. Yet this presence is already marked by distance. Forms soften, textures blur, as if time had already begun its work.

What is shown is not a document, but a trace. Landscape becomes less a territory than a condition: a world still present, yet already fragile, already on the verge of becoming memory. The second movement introduces a decisive shift. While the first part still holds onto the real, here the image begins to dissolve. Forms waver, figures emerge only to withdraw, absorbed by light and material. At times, a presence seems to surface, a silhouette, an

organic shape, a trace of a body, yet it never stabilises.

In some works, a diffuse yellow tone acts as a luminous veil, obscuring rather than revealing. Elsewhere, blur and layered textures create a visual instability that resists fixation. Photography no longer reveals; it erases. To see becomes an experience of loss. The image does not grant access to presence, it accompanies its disappearance.

A section of the exhibition takes place in darkness, where the image initially seems absent. Only under ultraviolet light do forms begin to emerge: a flower, a figure, a fragment of a scene. Here, the image exists only under certain conditions. It depends on light, on time, on the viewer's attention. The spectator is no longer presented with an image but participates in its appearance.

This experiential dimension extends the very logic of the gum bichromate process. As in early photographic development, the image is first latent, embedded within the material. Yet unlike a fixed revelation, it remains unstable, always on the verge of vanishing again.

Across these three movements, memory, erasure, and revelation, the exhibition proposes a sensitive reflection on the contemporary condition of the image. No longer a fixed object, but a fragile phenomenon, shaped by time, loss, and the uncertain possibility of appearing.

Rather than offering images to be consumed, Isabelle Delvallée creates situations in which visibility itself becomes uncertain. What we see is never fully given, never entirely stable. It emerges, withdraws, and transforms under our gaze.

In this shifting space, we also present works by the trailblazing French surrealist photographer Claude Cahun, who moved to Jersey in 1937 and whose images have been carefully chosen by Delvallée not for their well-documented transgressive, cross dressing or surrealist portrayals but for the technical printing processes which recognise Cahun as master of transformation who used the physical metamorphosis of the print as a wider metaphor.

On closing I would like to thank Isabelle for her kindness, creativity and good humour and also Rouen Ollivier, Museum Registrar at Jersey Heritage for placing her trust in this exhibition and facilitating the loan of these important works by Claude Cahun.

Chris Clifford BA (Hons) MA – Gallery Director



Isabelle Delvallée, Le Hocq, 2025, 106 x 78cm, Gum Bichromate on Hahnemühle Paper



Isabelle Delvallee, Azura, 2026, 106 x 78cm, Gum Bichromate on Hahnemühle Paper



Isabelle Delvallee, Solaris, 2026, 106 x 78cm, Gum Bichromate on Hahnemühle Paper



Isabelle Delvallee, Fragile, 2025 106 x 78cm, Gum Bichromate on Hahnemühle Paper



A selection of photographs by the 20th century French artist Claude Cahun, courtesy of Jersey Heritage Trust, will also be on display as part of the exhibition.



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