

The Fascists

Jean-Marie Reynier

THINKING FEAR

The Fascists · 2022

The void already has a form

The Fascists belongs to the wider body of work *Thinking Fear*, begun in 2019. The photographic sequence presented here was produced in 2022. It is Jean-Marie Reynier's first work in which artificial intelligence enters directly into the making of the image. AI appears neither as a technical feat nor as an autonomous subject. It operates among other procedures - matter, modelling, photography and instant chemistry - and contributes to the construction of beings whose existence remains entirely visual.

The photographs show busts of fascists who never existed. Their appearance emerges from a hybrid process involving malleable matter, close to modelling clay, generative imagery and Polaroid. Each stage lends credibility while further removing the referent. Volume promises a body; the algorithm arranges plausible signs; the Polaroid gives the fiction the presence of a unique object exposed to light and time. What we see takes the form of evidence, yet that evidence points to no one.

The choice of the bust is decisive. Inherited from the monument, the museum and the official portrait, it turns an individual into an emblem. It simplifies the body, straightens the posture, isolates the face and establishes the distance authority requires. Here, however, the effigy precedes the person it should represent. Uniform, pedestal, sash, profile and gaze already compose power; the real subject can remain absent. Authority is manufactured without biography, without voice and without personal history.

This absence produces a particular unease. We believe we recognise periods, offices, perhaps even personalities. Yet nothing can be identified. The viewer completes what the image leaves vacant, summoning a collective memory of the leader, the dignitary, the military hero or the servant of the state. The synthetic image does not impose belief by force; it makes use of our desire for coherence. It reveals how few signs are needed for a figure to appear legitimate, historical and already known.

The void from which the series proceeds is not a simple lack. It is multiple: the missing model behind the portrait, the missing person behind the office, the missing experience behind the symbol; the political void into which fear, resentment and a desire for order settle. To speak of fascism's emptiness is not to deny its doctrines, its violence or its historical responsibility. It is to identify its ability to reconcile contradictory elements, change its vocabulary and appearance, and occupy spaces that politics, institutions or social bonds have ceased to inhabit.

This availability explains its power of metamorphosis. Fascism does not always return under its former emblems. It can present itself as restoration, efficiency, protection, common sense or a simple return to reality. It enters emotional fractures as readily as collective crises. Fear is central: it turns uncertainty into an expectation of rules, gives the enemy a face and converts fragility into a demand for authority. The subjectless bust becomes the exact image of a form ready to receive any name.

The restrained beauty of the Polaroids makes the device more dangerous. Nothing is strident; the colours are soft, the frames classical, the objects desirable. This seduction is not decoration added to the argument: it is the argument's test. Authoritarian regimes have always understood that formal order can precede allegiance, that repetition produces familiarity, and that the familiar eventually appears normal. The series does not reproduce propaganda; it examines the aesthetic conditions through which a fiction of authority becomes acceptable.

When exhibited, the framed Polaroids, the print *Augusto* and the neon *1919* shift the question once more. In the latter, the word *Versailles* glows like a desirable sign; the title instead returns us to the treaty of 1919 and the post-war landscape, a space of mourning, frustration and political recomposition that European fascisms learned to exploit. Faced with that date, the anonymous busts commemorate no one. They wait. *The Fascists* therefore does not ask who these men and women are. It asks when an empty form begins to look credible - and what our gaze is willing to place inside it.

















Exhibitions

DOCUMENTATION



AUGUSTO

Augusto, from *The Fascists*, 2023.

Pigment print on cotton paper, mounted on aluminium, unique work.

Conceived as a unique work for an exhibition, this print opens the series to other possibilities of scale and presence.

Gaze-Off, Milan, 2023.



The Fascists, framed Polaroids, 2022 · *1919* (inscription *Versailles*), neon, 100 × 30 cm, 2022, edition of 3.
Gaze-Off, Wopart, Lugano, 2022.



Installation detail, *The Fascists · Gaze-Off*, Wopart, Lugano, 2022.

WORK

The Fascists

2022	Photographic body of work
Process	Modelling, generative image, Polaroid
Format	Original Polaroids · 88 × 107 mm
Augusto	2023 · pigment print on cotton paper, mounted on aluminium Unique work
1919	2022 · <i>Versailles</i> neon · 100 × 30 cm · edition of 3

The fifteen works reproduced in this portfolio are a selection from a larger body of approximately 45 Polaroids made in 2022. The Polaroids appear at their physical size of 88 × 107 mm. To preserve the 1:1 scale, print this document at 100% / actual size, with no page scaling.

BIOGRAPHY

Jean-Marie Reynier was born in Lugano on 27 August 1983 and lives and works in Perroy, Switzerland. An artist, curator and publisher, he studied at the CSIA in Lugano, the Atelier de Taille Douce in Saint-Prex and HEAD Genève, in the CCC programme. His work has been exhibited in Switzerland and abroad since 1997 and is held in several private and public collections. Since 2021, photography has occupied the centre of his practice. A founding member of Fondation Bugnon, which he chaired from 2022 to 2025, he is now its artistic and executive director. He is also artistic director of Ananké.

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