

## DEPOSIT- Yann Mingard

How does our secular society manage its heritage and, with that, its future? By collecting and archiving data with near-religious zeal: human DNA in the form of slivers of umbilical cord, dental samples and sperm, DNA of animals already extinct in the wild, the seeds of all manner of (agricultural) plants. And, of course, vast quantities of digital data that we leave behind on the big data pathways of the internet, credit card statements and official registers. From 2009 to 2013, Swiss photographer Yann Mingard (\*1973) documented this avid pursuit of collection and storage in images that raise many of the unasked but pressing questions of our time.

Do propagation technologies transform the human prosthetic God into a veritable demiurge? Does the obsessive collection of data perhaps even mask a sense of unease at the disappearance of religious rituals and doctrines? What is the significance of a diversity of plant and animal species that exist only as rare individual specimens in laboratories, zoos and botanical seedbanks? Will the age-old fantasy of eternal life one day become a real biological and medical possibility? Yann Mingard pictures this dizzying array of issues in strikingly dark photographs in which medical instruments, data servers, human, animal and plant samples, the interiors and (occasionally) exteriors of laboratories and archives can often be discerned only on closer inspection. In the chapter on **Plants**, for instance, Yann Mingard shows an innocuous looking glass vessel against a background dark as night. In the glass are a few seeds of a Spanish plant that exists today in only six botanical gardens worldwide. In the section on **Animals**, we see a bull copulating, while a scientist on the other side of a glass screen stares into a microscope: propagation as a seemingly perfectly calibrated and controlled scientific process. A cylinder that looks like an old-fashioned spin-dryer or reminiscent of the *Star Wars* robot R2-D2 features in the chapter on **Humans**. The caption informs us that this silver drum contains four human brains and a dog, all frozen in liquid nitrogen, and all awaiting the day when they might be brought back to life again. A uniformed security guard stands before a shotcrete imitation of a rock formation, typical of military bunkers. Inside the mountain behind this artificial stone wall there are servers containing vast quantities of **Data**, from the banal to the highly sensitive, which we produce in increasing amounts every day, and entrust to these huge storage facilities.

These are just four examples of how we deal with our virtual and material heritage. At the same time, in the glistening darkness of Yann Mingard's photographs, something shines through that is almost beyond words or images, and which eludes the codes and formulae of science and medicine. Even the most imaginative of science fiction authors have, until now, made few forays into this crazy rational world of sterile petri dishes, blast-dried seeds, animals copulating with rubber vaginas, and high-performance data servers in former military bunkers. Can artistic, philosophical and essayistic images, thoughts and analyses catch up with the breakneck speed at which scientific achievements, insights and possibilities are developing? Pondering these realities is the challenge we face with the exhibition *Deposit*.

The exhibition includes a specially composed soundtrack by the Australian artist, Ben Frost, who now lives in Reykjavik, Iceland. He works regularly with artists, producers and filmmakers, and also with musicians such as Björk and David Bowie.

The exhibition is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated book published by Steidl Verlag, with essays by Jacques Arnould, Thomas Lemke and an extensive glossary by Lars Willumeit.

A collaboration between Fotomuseum Winterthur, Museum Folkwang, Essen, FotoMuseum Antwerpen and GwinZegal, Guingamp, Curator: Thomas Seelig.

Text by Thomas Seelig.

More on [www.yannmingard.ch](http://www.yannmingard.ch)