

# Uta Eisenreich

## *It goes without saying*

### *A glossary of signs*

#### 11.1 – 1.3.2025

Uta Eisenreich has been interested in sign languages for some time now. Her interest sprouted from a linguistic point of view—as language plays a key role in her practice. She developed a series of workshops in 2022 and 2023 with signers and linguists. The workshops awakened a keenness to explore and work with the personal stories of her collaborators, making them an integral part of the works. During that time, Eisenreich and her collaborators were able to gather and systematise an eclectic collection of materials: isolated signs, signs embedded in autobiographic short stories, hand alphabets, numbers, and pronouns, and bits of linguistic explanations from a pair of deaf linguists. In this presentation, Eisenreich brings the material together in two new video works, exploring the poetic space between sign and meaning.

*It goes without saying* (2024) is a two-screen video installation of a glossary of hand signs. Structured like a slide show, the work features signs the artist has learned from her Deaf collaborators, who use a range of sign languages: Dutch Sign Language, American Sign Language, Chinese, Korean, Jamaican, and Yugoslav Sign Languages. The glossary is a means for Eisenreich to learn sign languages by systematising them in alphabetical order, fashioning a system that connects to spoken languages. This is a leitmotiv in Eisenreich's practice: the imposition of an order system to a naturally anarchic reality. Nevertheless, this proposition of an order is experimental and tentative, as it is bound to change and grow as she learns more and more.

Through the exploration of iconic and arbitrary signs, the work offers a peek to the ingenuity, humour, and poetry inherent in signed communication. Furthermore, it highlights how sign languages, just like spoken languages, reflect cultural assumptions and attest the diversity of human expression.

In *What you see is what you get* (2024), Deaf signers from different linguistic backgrounds are involved in a playful, interactive game. They are using iconic signs, that visually resemble their meaning, so that non-signers can still guess the meaning. This encourages the viewer to see how iconic signs can transcend specific sign languages, allowing for cross-cultural understanding through shared visual intuition.

Uta Eisenreich's works feature performers Daniël Schoevaart, Ruva Kremers, Navarro Chris Richard, and Qian Sun. For their collaboration, she would like to thank linguists Kang-Suk Byung and Tashi Bradford, translators Ferdinand Wagenaar and Lissa Zeviar, graphic designer Paul Gangloff, and Niels Schumm and Jordi de Vetten.

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**Uta Eisenreich**, a visual artist based in Amsterdam, works at the crossroads of photography, performance, and philosophy. Arranging everyday objects in front of the unblinking eye of her camera, she creates playful tableaux that invite viewers into a peculiar game of logic, language, and meaning — ultimately challenging us to rethink our ways of relating to the world.

Born in West Germany in the 1970s into a family of teachers —a forgetful mathematician, an erratic elementary school teacher, an expressive dancer with golden curls, and a teenage amateur magician—she grew up channeling these diverse influences. As a teenager, she began exploring her interests in theatre and photography, before studying philosophy in Frankfurt Main in the 90s. In 2000, she graduated from Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, presenting humorous photographic works that conflate these interests and reveal — with tongue firmly in cheek — the hidden rules and structures of order.

Since then, she has developed an oeuvre that arranges enigmatic object combinations in front of the unblinking eye of her camera. Triggering the viewer's impulse to construct meaning, her images explore the poetic and humorous space between the sign and its meaning. Language plays a key role, but ultimately, her works question our cognitive toolkit as a whole — our ways of perceiving, understanding, misunderstanding, and representing the world. She has published on issues of analogy and representation: *A not B* (2010) and *As If* (2021) with ROMA publications, and her work has been shown in exhibitions and on stages internationally.

Uta Eisenreich is represented by Ellen de Bruijne PROJECTS and teaches at Gerrit Rietveld Academy.