

Muswell Press

Presents a book launch and phantasmagoria

# The Encyclopedia of Optography, The Shutter of Death



Written and Compiled by Derek Ogbourne

Readings by Susana Medina, Olly Beck, Ali Hossaini and  
objects from the Museum of Optography

We enter the mind of an artist whose fascination with the obscure and forgotten dark art of optography has reawakened an unforeseen new vein of enquiry. An image temporarily bleached in flesh by the light that illuminates things on to our retina, an afterimage. This image, at the moment of death, now hidden in the eyes of death can be held in the living hands, observed temporarily by living eyes, detached from its brain and life that once decoded life's light.

In the mid 17th Century, a Jesuit Friar called Christopher Schiener observed an image laid bare on the retina of a frog, a faint, fleeting record of what the eye had been fixed on at the moment of death. The fixing on the retina of the last image seen before death came to be known as an Optogram. (Time-Life, 1970). In late 1870's Heidelberg, Germany, the physiologist Wilhelm Kühne made the first and most successful visually identifiable optograms recorded as drawings. He also had obtained the only known 'human optogram', in Bruchsal. Optography was believed to be a new criminologist tool that would help to solve murders, akin to early DNA testing. A condemned young man, two scientists, Jack the Ripper, Salvador Dalí and the only known human optogram are leads followed by Ogbourne within the in the quest to uncover the truth and constant fascination behind this dark art.

Part science, part detective story, part history lesson, part psychogeography, but always already, simultaneously, 'art', the *Encyclopedia of Optography* investigates the human preoccupation with what exists within the very fine line between being and not being. Within every gaze that contemplates death. We imagine death, we imagine when and where. Ogbourne's project is about imagination and death. As a poetic metaphor, optography suggests a series of associations: the eye as camera; the eyelid, its shutter, the moment of retreat into the internal, the virtual and eventually, a real death moment.

The *Encyclopedia of Optography*, *The Shutter of Death* published by Muswell Press. It is both an artist's book and an anthology of writers who have a mutual research interest in optography and optograms—Each writer stakes out new territory in a subject now so obscure it has retreated into myth. They rediscover a secret world that rings of Victorian science fiction, gathering together for the first time pieces of the same jigsaw to make an comprehensive description of the events that led to the forgotten science of optography. Contributors are Dr Evangelos Alexandridis, as far as it is known the only person to have successfully produced optograms in the 20th century, Professor Richard Kremer, historian at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, Dr. Ali Hossaini, author of *Vision of the Gods: An Inquiry Into the Meaning of Photography*, Dr. Arthur B Evans, Professor of French at DePauw University, Bill Jay, author of more than twenty books on the history and criticism of photography, Paul Sakoilsky, artist and writer, Olly Beck, artist and writer and novelist and essayist Susana Medina, author of *Philosophical Toys*.

Hackney Empire Hospitality Room  
291 Mare Street, London E8 1EJ

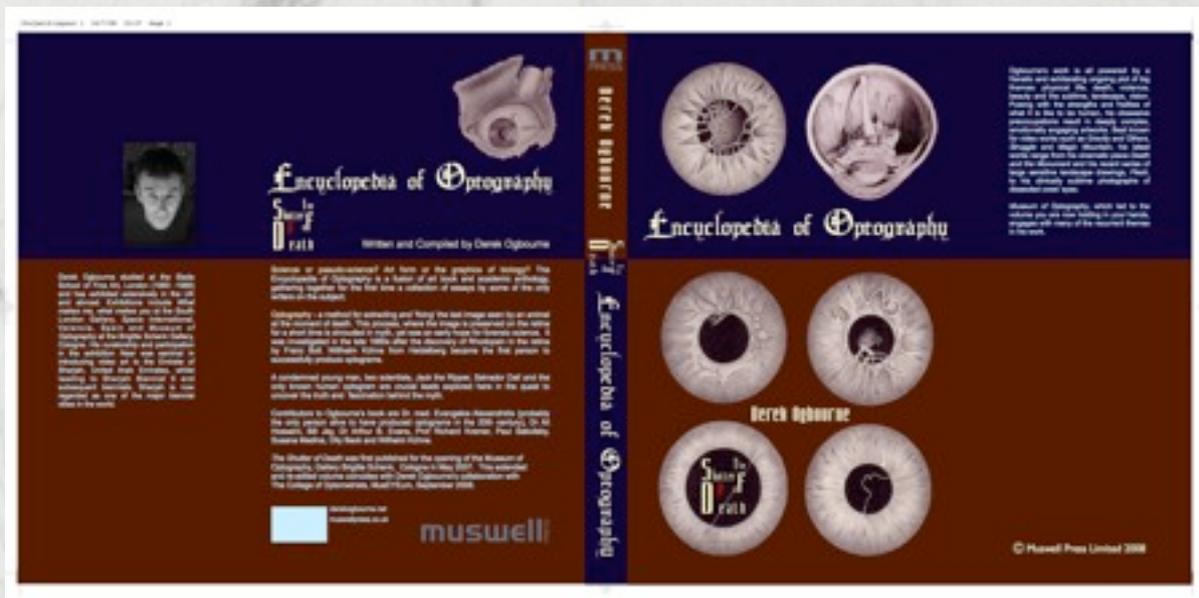
Tuesday 2nd December 2008

7.30 pm

Glass of wine

£7 entry

Box office 0208 985 2424



Enquiries about *The Encyclopedia of Optography*, *The Shutter of Death*

Muswell Press

Jan Woolf

Telephone: 0796 7161291

<http://muswell-press.com>

[derekogbourne.net](http://derekogbourne.net)

This book can be purchased at eSusanaMedina, an eshop

[www.susanamedina.net](http://www.susanamedina.net)

Also currently showing until 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009 *The MicroMuseum Of Optography*

**Venue:** The MusEYEum, The College of Optometrists, British Optical Association Museum  
42 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG.

Telephone: 020 7766 4353. Nearest tube: Charing Cross [www.derekogbourne.net](http://www.derekogbourne.net)

**Press enquiries:** Neil Handley, Museum Curator, [neil.handley@college-optometrists.org](mailto:neil.handley@college-optometrists.org)  
0207 766 4353. **Open 9.00-5.00 pm by appointment.**