

Re-Staging of an exhibition-concept by Manon Slome and Joshua Simon

In 2008, a group of international participants, young curators, and lecturers of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) generated a set of questions on the *Aesthetics of Terror* exhibition. Originally planned to be shown at the Chelsea Art Museum, New York, the show was pulled by the curators Manon Slome and Joshua Simon following 'institutional demands' that would have compromised the integrity of the project. After this cancellation, which was shortly before the scheduled opening in November 2008, Slome then resigned from her position as chief curator at CAM.

Following these incidents, the curators: Olaf Arndt, Moritz von Rappard, Janneke Schönenbach, Cecilia Wee, in their exhibition *Embedded Art* (Akademie der Künste, Berlin 24.01.2009 - 22.03.2009;), offered "virtual asylum" to *Aesthetics of Terror*, inviting curators Manon Slome and Joshua Simon to present their exhibition through *Embedded Art's* video projection programme. Through this inclusion, Slome and Simon introduced the selected works in Berlin and the *Aesthetics of Terror* weekend was the only occasion for visitors to view these works as an entire installation before they were drawn together as a book project, released with Charta Books in 2009.

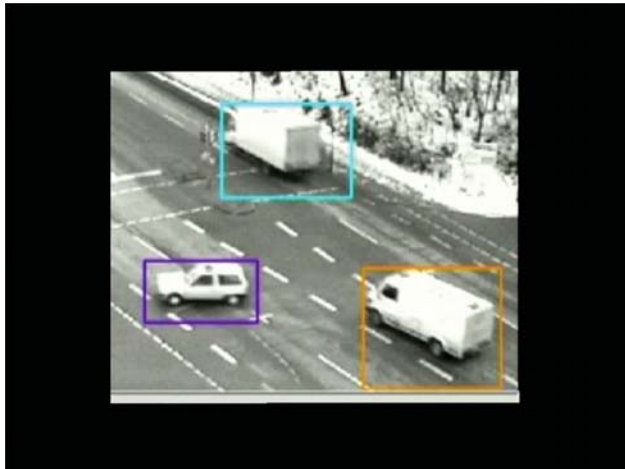
The Postgraduate Programme in Curating also exhibited the project at the White Space, in Zurich as a slide show with images from the Berlin show and other documentation, together with a list of questions on the context and meaning of the project. This was accompanied by workshops and talks with Joshua Simon, Friedemann Derschmidt, Karin Schneider, Tal Adler.

Terror is, in and of itself, an image making machine. The very point of terror is a spectacle that plays endlessly in the media. In the events of 11.09.2001, thousands have died, but billions of people watched the attack and the falling towers endlessly until those images were etched into the global psyche. While terrorism and its representations have been widely discussed ever since the attack, very few of these contemplations have tackled the issue of specific formal qualities and pictorial strategies of terrorism.

The exhibition *The Aesthetics of Terror* tries to do exactly that; namely, it investigates certain visual characteristics of the spectacle of terror and its echoes in contemporary art. The exhibition employs the distinction made by artist Roe Rosen on the principle gap between representations of underground terrorism, produced by terrorist groups, and images of State terror - this is the gap between figuration and abstraction. The representational apparatus of State terror, says Rosen, is based on the blurring or erasure of central figures, exchanging it for

abstraction: Smart Bombs' aerial views of bombardments, for example, or the blocking of visibility by grids or satellite type images that obscure rather than illuminate. On the other end, representations of underground terrorism strive for a central, powerful figure or symbol – the portrait of a suicide bomber, collapsing skyscrapers and the icon of bearded Osama Bin Laden with his golden gown and triangular composition - “this is an icon in the religious sense: a human, semi-divine person whose very appearance defies the divide of life and death,” Rosen claims (*Western (Maarvon) – New Film Magazine*, Issue 1, Dec. 2005, p. 59).

The works in *The Aesthetics of Terror* map the relationship between abstraction and technology; colour and violence, pixilated images and sovereignty, saturation and contour, authenticity and resolution. *The Aesthetics of Terror*, suggests an emergence of an artistic sensibility. This has been informed by the imagery and politics of terrorism in the media.



Harun Farocki, *War at a distance*, 2003, 58 min. Courtesy of the artist + Greene Naftali Gallery, New York

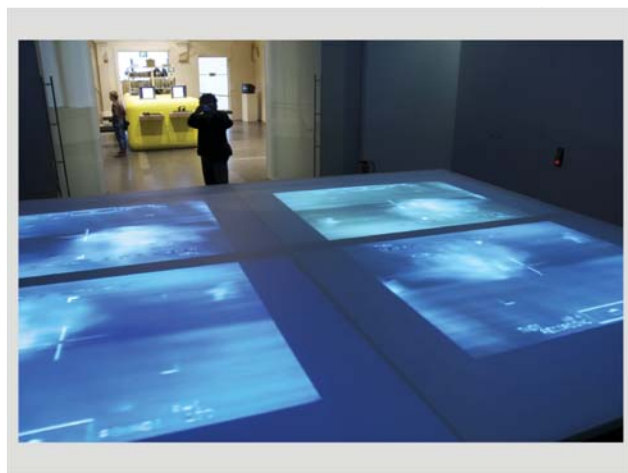
We started to talk about the exhibition „aesthetics of terror“ when we heard that it was cancelled.

We read the catalogue and began to question media, art, representation, and the power of images.

How could they imagine art to be so dangerous?

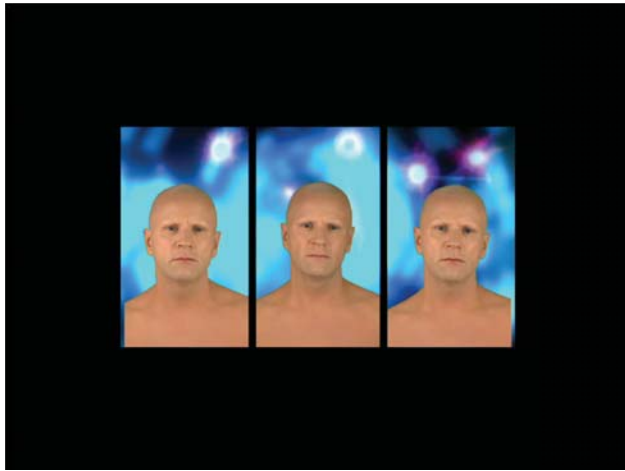
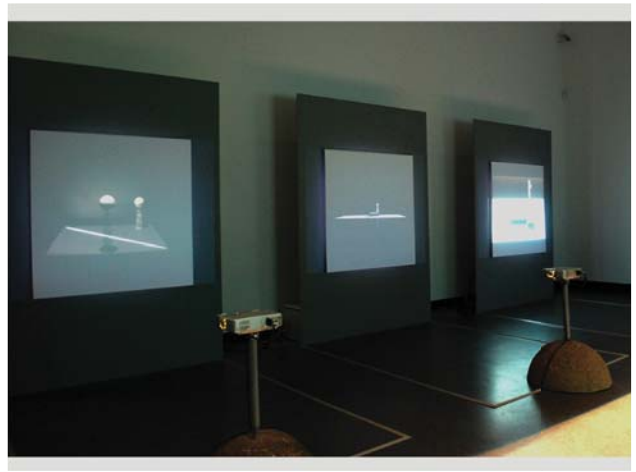


Johan Grimmonprez, *DIAL H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997, video, 01:08:00 min courtesy of the artist + Sean Kelly Gallery





Jenny Holzer, *Hand prints green white*, 2006, oil on linen, 4 elements, 58" x 176" x 1.5", Courtesy of the artist + Cheim & Read, New York



Björn Melhus, *Deadly storms* (2008), 9-channel video installation, 00:07:27 min

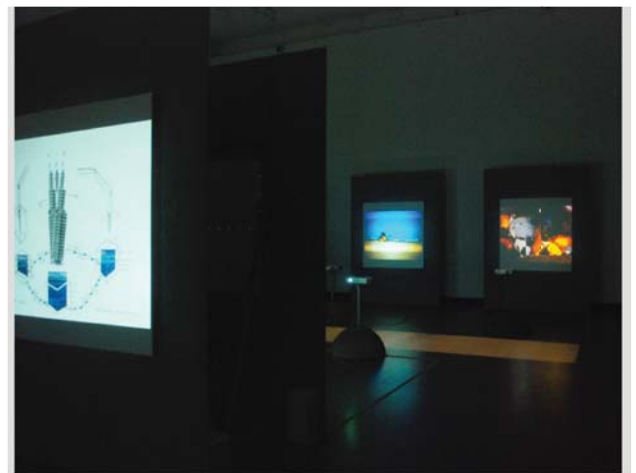
How do media images shorten a specific situation into an icon – freezing it into one picture that does not create contradictions or complexity?

Are some works of art capable of representing more complex analyses?

And had we as well handed over „explanations“ to images and media?



Teresa Diehl, *Same Time, Different Landscape* (2009) detail, Glycerine soap, filament Courtesy of the artist

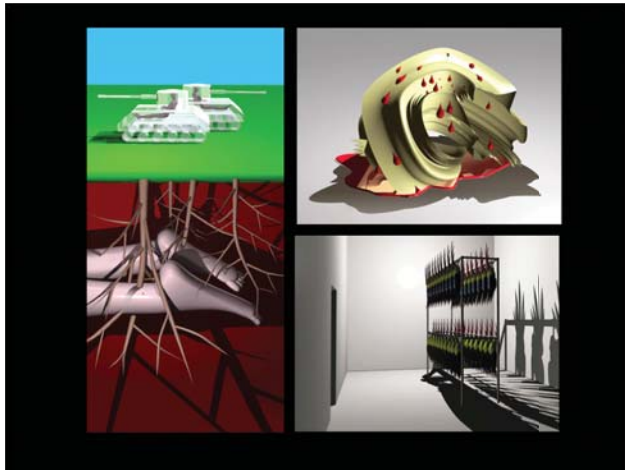




Richard Mosse, *KILLCAM*, 2008, hd video and youtube downloads, 05:52 min quicktime movie hd, courtesy of the artist + Jack Shinman Gallery, New York

How are we addressed? By media? By art?

As viewers who are safely at home but still feeling agitated? As individuals? As specific groups? How are you addressed?



Yves Netzhammer, *We belong to our organs, so we can only partly plan our lives*, 2008, 9-channel video installation, 20 min loop, Courtesy of the artist + Galerie Anita Beckers, Frankfurt am Main



Martha Rosler, (from the *bringing the war home series*), *beauty rest*, 1967-1972, photomontage, 22" x 26", Courtesy the artist + Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

