

# At the same time somewhere else...

Melik Ohanian, Pia Rönicke, Sean Snyder

**Exhibition** 17 December 2005 – 19 February 2006

***At the same time somewhere else...* is curated by Judith Schwarzbart as the culmination of her one year position as curator/researcher at The Fruitmarket Gallery and Edinburgh College of Art. The exhibition has developed out of her ongoing interest in different working formats in artistic and curatorial practice.**

The exhibition brings together work by three international artists who share a methodology that is increasingly prevalent in contemporary art. The artists have in common a way of working which involves investigating materials and situations already existing in the world, and all three seem to be governed by a specific question or curiosity. Their practice takes the form of research, but a kind of research which is free from academic conventions and methods. They plunder a variety of traditions from conceptual art, documentary film-making and independent cinema to the mass media, examining both the evocative and the informative quality of an image.

All three artists are intrigued by images or stories which convey a connection to global structures and represent a personal or oblique point of view. They also share an interest in places and issues of representation, identity and urban structures. Their work is often an unpredictable journey, which takes surprisingly new directions along the way, while the material they use offers the viewer an opportunity for speculative inquiry.

Based across Europe and addressing various topics, these artists are united by an interest in the complex relationship between our notion of reality and storytelling, where fictive stories sometimes say a lot about reality while it can be hard to discern the truth conveyed by documentary photographs.

**Sean Snyder's** work is an extended research into the imagery and reporting of war. The intention is not to comment on political issues, but to investigate the representational modes of events that are consumed second hand. In a sense the attempt is to take the news seriously as something that conveys information and refers back to a reality beyond the television screen and printed page. In doing so, it attempts to reveal some fundamental questions of representation.

There are three related parts. *Untitled (Iraq)* 2003-05 is an ongoing archive of digital amateur photos produced by military forces and contractors excavated from photo file-sharing sites on the Internet. As such it exposes a layer of what would normally remain largely unseen images. Overt images of war and violence are excluded in favour of the banal subjects of amateur photographers. The images present a perspective different from that of the embedded reporter and evoke notions of tourist, classical and criminal photography.

*The Site* 2004-2005 uses a matrix of images and reports produced by western news agencies about the location in which Saddam Hussein was captured. Overlapping accounts and visual evidence are used to produce a similar, but inconsistent depiction of a location and incident that is restricted and no longer exists in reality. The analysis is not conspiratorial, but rather about accessibility, timing and the relation of reporters to their subject. For instance, it is interesting to note the media's particular focus on western consumer items like candy bars, processed meat and deodorant.

The video *Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars* 2004-2005 examines the acceptance of consumer products on all sides

of ideological divides and the transforming role of photojournalists given the availability of consumer digital imaging products. Using imagery from amateur sources and from media agencies like the Associated Press, conventions and complications of producing an iconic image of war are explored through concepts such as the history of staging, digital manipulation of images, the news viewer as consumer and the photojournalist as looter.

**Melik Ohanian** works in various media and with various topics, always allowing the audience a space for intervention either directly or on an imaginative level.

His new work *Invisible Film* is a poetic film with a violent undertone. In the Californian desert, El Mirage, Ohanian has projected British filmmaker Peter Watkins' film *Punishment Park* onto the location in which it was shot in 1971. Both controversial and relentless in its depiction of suppression and brutality, *Punishment Park* was heavily attacked by the mainstream press when it was released. Set in a detention camp in an America of the near future, the film in a pseudo-documentary manner portrays a group of young students and minor dissidents who have opted to spend three days in 'Bear Mountain Punishment Park'. The detainees, rather than accept lengthy jail sentences for their 'crimes', gamble their freedom on an attempt to reach an American flag, on foot and without water, through the searing heat of the desert. Ohanian's re-staging of the source material from *Punishment Park* plays with the reality of the projector and the fiction of the film, while the story of the film today is closer to reality today than could have been imagined when it was made.

Ohanian's *Slowmotion* offers visitors the opportunity to intervene in the work by changing the words displayed. The artist invites the viewer to programme his pre-historical computing machine with different letters, words or symbols, which are displayed on the light boards. The five panels are connected to a switchboard, which can be controlled by the viewer. Anyone who programmes the machine is asked to record by numerical transposition the code for each display in the small notepad provided. The artist describes *Slowmotion* as a kind of seismography, detecting and measuring the mood and atmosphere of a given place.

**Pia Rönicke** mixes recorded film and sound with drawings and animations, which visually confront ideas with the lived reality of human life and different architectural and urbanist ideologies. In *Cell City*, 2003, she contemplates the endless possibilities of modern architecture as a means of framing multiple ways of living, while also addressing the remoteness of idealism and current urban planning schemes.

In *Urban Fiction* the protagonist 'the urban subject' moves through the city, while performing a 'dialogue' between two of the twentieth century's most radical urban thinkers, the French architect Le Corbusier (1887–1965) and the Belgian artist Constant (1920–2005). Le Corbusier believed in a functional and rationally organised city where work, leisure and living all had their allocated space, whereas Constant believed in a dynamic city without divisions. Le Corbusier prioritised skyscrapers and suburbs and Constant preferred free movement, play and social space. Both

posters and film are a kind of storyboard, and on a formal level are inspired by Jean Luc Godard's film *Masculine/Feminine* (1966).

**Pia Rönicke** also presents her newest work *Zonen* (*The Zone*), a video shot in the outskirts of the Danish city Aarhus, in a so-called 'development zone'. The protagonists are a firm of architects who have recently won a planning competition for a vast housing complex for the area. Rönicke has invited the architects away from their drawing tables into the reality of the countryside which stands in contrast to their conversation and ideas about urban development. *The Zone* takes its cinematic inspiration from Andrei Tarkovsky's film, *Stalker*, 1979.

All works in the exhibition are bound together by a play with, on the one hand, the notion of information, which is always true or false, and storytelling, which draws the audience (viewer, listener, reader) into an imaginative universe where it is up to him or her to make sense of the story.

Judith Schwarzbart, Curator-Researcher, *The Fruitmarket Gallery and Edinburgh College of Art*

## Talks and Events

### Artists' Talk: Melik Ohanian, Pia Rönicke and Sean Snyder in conversation with curator Judith Schwarzbart.

Saturday 17 December, 3–4pm. Free. Booking essential.

### New Year's Day

Sunday 1 January, 12–5pm. Free.

Celebrate New Year's Day at the Gallery. Enjoy the exhibition, heart-warming food and speciality coffees served from the café.

### Curator's Tour

Thursday 12 January, 6.30pm. Free. Booking essential.

Curator Judith Schwarzbart will lead a tour of the exhibition.

### Ways of Seeing: Gallery Tour

Thursday 19 January, 11.30am–12.30pm. Free.

An opportunity for people aged 60 and over to enjoy a guided tour of the exhibition, led by Education Manager, Tracy Morgan and freelance educator, Mary Keegan, and discuss the themes presented in the artists work.

### Ways of Working Seminar

Thursday 26 January, 6.30–8pm. Free. Booking essential

Dr Richard Williams, lecturer in History of Art, Edinburgh University and artist Pia Rönicke discuss the role of research in the development and presentation of art.

### Making Art: Children's Workshop

Saturday 11 February, 11am–1pm. Tickets £4. 10 places.

Suitable for 7–11 year olds. Booking essential.

Artist Lindsey Hamilton will show children how to programme Melik Ohanian's interactive light installation *Slowmotion*. Using a combination of switches the children will compose their own designs to be displayed on the *Slowmotion* boards.

### Family Workshop

Saturday 11 February, 2.30–4pm. Tickets £4.

20 places available. Booking essential.

An artist-led family workshop. Suitable for children age 3–6 accompanied by one parent/guardian.

### **Opt In For Art: Film Making Workshop for Young People**

*Thursday 16 and Friday 17 February, 11am–4pm. Free.*

*8 places available. Booking essential.*

*Suitable for 14–18 year olds.*

This two-day filmmaking workshop offers young people the chance to develop a storyboard and use video cameras to create a short film. Delivered in collaboration with Young People Speak Out.

### **Opt in For Art Group Bookings**

The Opt in For Art programme offers free school and youth group visits to the current exhibition including assistance with transport, tailored activities and a free resource pack.

For further information contact

**Johnny Gailey**

**Opt in For Art Co-ordinator**

**P** 0131 226 8186

**E** [optinforart@fruitmarket.co.uk](mailto:optinforart@fruitmarket.co.uk)

### **Adult Group Bookings**

We welcome visits from colleges, universities and community groups. Visits must be booked two weeks in advance to enable us to prepare a tailored tour for your group. For further information or to book a group tour contact

**Tracy Morgan, Education Manager**

**P** 0131 226 8183

**E** [education@fruitmarket.co.uk](mailto:education@fruitmarket.co.uk)

### **Access and Location**

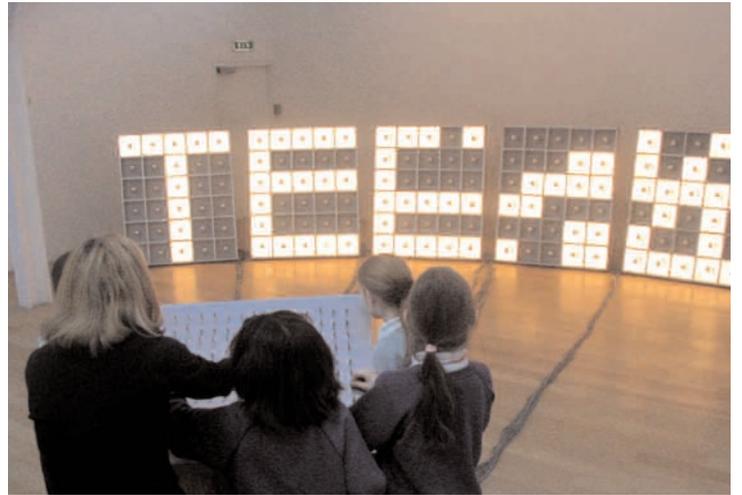
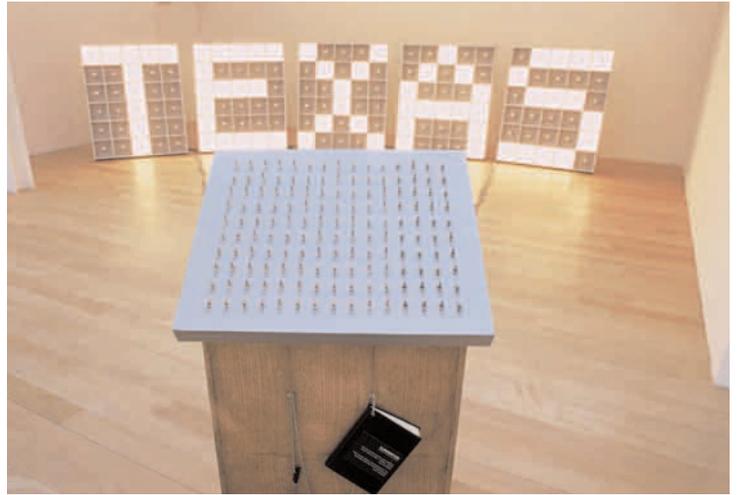
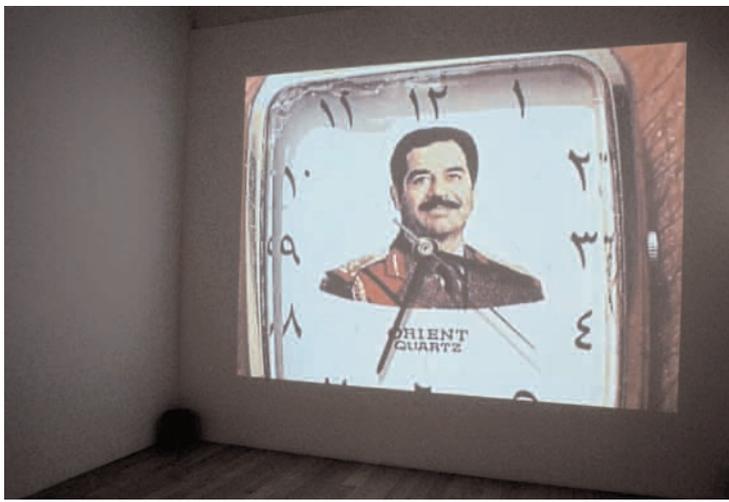
The Fruitmarket Gallery is an accessible venue with a lift to the upper gallery. Centrally situated behind Edinburgh

Waverly Rail Station, the Gallery is close to major bus routes on the Royal Mile, North Bridge, Waverly Bridge and Princes Street.

This guide is available in large print, on tape and email. Please ask at the bookshop for an alternative format guide or contact

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Photos: Alan Dimmick