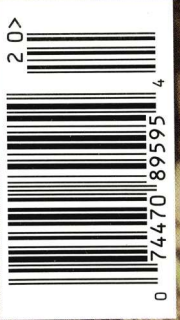


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a curatorial crossing



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MARIA ANTELMAN: THE APARTMENT • ATHENS, GREECE

A large scale photograph of a group of soldiers, dressed up in retro uniforms turning their backs to us is the first thing you see entering US-based Greek artist Maria Antelman's first solo show at The Apartment gallery. "Where am I?" you wonder, looking at the old guns, the strange hats and the unidentified location, which looks like a forest. The fog (smoke?) covering the trees behind the soldiers in the next picture adds to the mystery, while the photograph of another group of soldiers caught resting in the woods seems to give a clue away: the impression you get on the whole is that of sneaking into a Hollywood studio, where a historic film is being shot, or rather that of viewing a set of campaign photographs targeted for the media promotion of the film. The funny thing is that you are not looking at a set shot, but at "natural" images taken during the annual Reenactment/Revival of the Battle of Monmouth (apparently a landmark in the history of the 1776 American Revolution), which takes place somewhere in a park in New Jersey.

At a time where the "Real War" "out there" seems to be following a blockbuster scenario, Antelman invites us to watch the Hollywood-like Reenactment/Revival of a historic battle set in real time. These smartly conceived and beautifully executed photographs offer us a penetrating, and, needless to say, unfortunately well-timed glance at the American psychosis with war and the extent to which this hysteria affects the way the whole planet conceives reality. At the same time it is a brilliant comment on the different levels involved in the reconstruction of reality.

Antelman's survey on representation and time, based on found footage, makes itself clearer in the second part of the exhibition, which consists of two films. In *Voyage—A Comprehensive Questionnaire*, short cuts from the same Reenactment/Revival of the Monmouth battle are set against the voice of a medium, which communicates messages from aliens. The video, a sequence of animated photos, to be more exact, is coupled with voice-overs from an extraterrestrial research website and form a clairvoyant that channels aliens' messages. Anachronistic situations and bizarre lifestyles are transformed into futuristic scenarios reflecting on Americana by merging past and future, fact and fiction, the ridiculous and sublime.



Maria Antelman, VOYAGE #3, 2003, C-print

The impression of a relax-everything-is-going-to-be-all-right voice as a medium and the formal way in which the perversions are being spoken out—just like completing a statistic questionnaire—is hypnotizing, making it even more difficult to make out who the aliens are after all: is it ET or the thousands of 'just like you an me' Americans who dress up in red, brush down their guns, and live like every weekend's a battle in a New Jersey park? What we have here is a multi-layered comment on the obsession of American culture with its heroic past, and at the same time a humorous look at the semiology of dozens of sub-cultures—an inextricable element of American society.

In the second film *New Horizons*, a "frequently asked questions" session addressing the "ins and outs" of Cryogenics is juxtaposed with the visuals from a rodeo competition. The quasi Surreal effect of the cinematic images of cowboys struggling on the back of a horse passing the baton onto the flamboyant shots of saddles and spurs on the screen, together with the soundtrack of a conversation on the possibilities of eternal life, calls for a do-it-yourself subjective reading. Watching Antelman's film, Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, and especially his book

America, comes to mind, where nothing is more real than *The Truman Show* (show/life in the homonymous movie). Moreover, at another level, both videos seem to pay tribute to Chris Marker's survey on cinematic time, the video's being a composition of photographs, filmed in a way that brings to mind Marker's much-sited photomontage in *La Jetee*. Even if in the layers of film's "parallel use of texts" and images of different subcultures that constitute Americana (from rodeo to cryogenics), let the different layers of Antelman's glance manifest themselves more clearly, the core of her work has been conceived on the surface, which is communicated with the very first click of her camera. Antelman's work is, at the end of the day, less about the (sur)reality of different subcultures, and more about the way reality is experienced and represented in different cultural and mental levels.

Despina Zefkili
Athens, Greece
2004

WAR IN IRAQ: THE COORDINATES OF CONFLICT, PHOTOGRAPHS BY VII: INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY • NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Four days before 9/11, seven independent photojournalists came together and formed VII. Now numbering 10, VII merges the talents of some of the world's most influential photojournalists. Included in ICP's "War in Iraq" are the works of Christopher Anderson, Alexandra Boulet, Lauren Greenfield, Ron Haviv, Gary Knight, Antonin Kratochvil, Christopher Morris, James Nachtwey, and John Stanmeyer.

"War in Iraq" exposes the immediacy of the war on the ground and its effects on the thousands of soldiers and civilians involved. The exhibition begins with images of pre-war US and Afghanistan, and ends with post-war Iraq as of July 2003. Some of the photographers traveled with and under the protection of US troops, while others traveled alone from city to city, unprotected and at the heart of the violence. Accompanied by first hand accounts from the photographers themselves, the images are gritty, poignant, sad, and disturbing. We are taken from the battleground to the prisons, through the aftermath of the destruction, and into the everyday lives of US troops, Iraqis, and Afghans.

Still fresh in my mind are Christopher Morris's comments about how after 20 years of photographing wars, this was the first time that all that he could feel was the conqueror, and not the liberation of the people. There are also observations of young and sheltered boys trained to fight, but not to understand the consequences; boys from the Midwest thrown into Iraq as if it were another planet, and who sincerely believe that they are defending freedom because that is why the "bad guys" hate us. It cannot be ignored how little planning and foresight went into the US-led war in Iraq. How did policy become so jaded that something of this magnitude could become so trivialized by political agendas and ideologies?

Not to say that "War in Iraq" takes an overtly anti-war or anti-US stance. It is a reflection on the war, and although points of view are never hidden, the work is allowed to speak for itself. But in light of the recent US presidential elections and ongoing criticism of the Bush administration, it seems to challenge us to think critically and to understanding the war as a human issue, and not the usual propaganda chess game between good and evil. It is a reminder that war does not just affect nations, it affects individuals. What this war was really about is up to each of us to decide, but we must consider which questions to ask and where those answers are to be found.

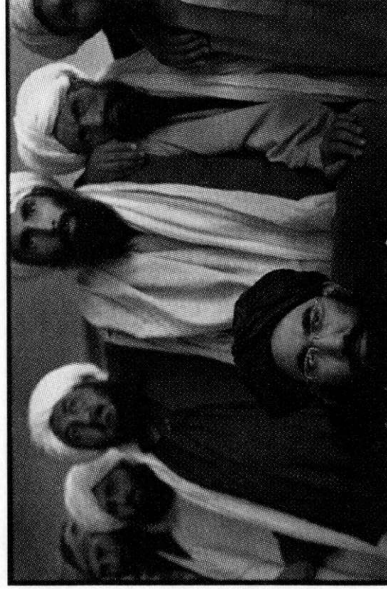
Grace Kim
New York, New York
2004

JON KESSLER: DEITCH PROJECTS • NEW YORK, NEW YORK

It was not a few days after 9/11 that some friends of mine were hanging out together and began to deploy the media tagline, "... in the wake of September 11," as a sort of all-purpose absurdist suffix, generally coupled with some phrase describing a banal action. Examples of these spontaneous drunken Madlibs may have included: "getting a beer from the fridge . . . IN THE WAKE OF SEPTEMBER 11," or "changing the channel . . . IN THE WAKE OF SEPTEMBER 11." While some people may find this humor obscene or at the very least tasteless, I think that it's clear that the targets of our mockery were not the victims or heroes of 9/11, but the speed with which the news media was able to start packaging or marketing their coverage of the tragedy. For about 24 hours after the occurrence, the TV news coverage was powerful and totally



Gary Knight, U.S. MARINES OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 4TH MARINES TAKE DIVYALA BRIDGE (DEAD REPUBLICAN GUARD IN THE FOREGROUND), SUBURBS OF BAGHDAD, IRAQ, APRIL 2003, 2003



John Stanmeyer, HEAD OF THE OFFICE OF THE TALIBAN (CENTER) AND OTHER TALIBAN OFFICIALS AT THE AFGHAN EMBASSY, ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN, SEPTEMBER 2001, 2001