

ART PAPERS

STRIKING IDEAS + MOVING IMAGES + SMART TEXTS

JULY/AUGUST 2011 US \$7 CAN \$9 UK £6 EU €8



PLEASURE
DOUGLAS HUEBLER'S
EVERYONE ALIVE

ELEGY
AND PERFORMANCE:
ANDREW KÖTTING

GOVERNMENT
ART AND ANTI-
PHOTOJOURNALISM

INFILTRATION
SERENE AL-KAWAS'
SPECIAL PROJECT



ANTIPHOTOJOURNALISM AMSTERDAM + BARCELONA

Antiphotjournalism could not have come at a more opportune time, with the recent killing of Osama bin Laden, a civil war and NATO bombings in Libya, civilian uprisings throughout the Middle East, and the continuance of the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq [FOAM; April 1—June 8, 2011; La Virreina Centre de la Imatge; June 7—October 10, 2010]. Curated by Carles Guerra and Thomas Keenan, *Antiphotjournalism* counters the clichés of photojournalism by exploring its expanded realm with photographic and video documentation of humanity and worldwide conflicts spanning from the 1960s to the present by Magnum photographers, conceptual artists, and anonymous amateurs. How do artists use “documentary” images? What are the impacts of new modes of image dissemination? What truth-value can we assign to them when they are used in war crimes tribunals? How do these uses pressure the status of the photojournalistic image?

The brutal videos of conflicts in Sarajevo and Mogadishu shot by television cameramen Robbie Wright, Shane McDonald, and Jonathan Cavender would never be shown on network television, although they probably should in order to allow viewers to grasp the reality of these wars. Pop music soundtracks accompany their work, in which they edit together clips rejected by the networks for being either too gory or not important enough. In Wright and McDonald's *Crazy*, 1993, Seal's refrain, “But we're never gonna survive, unless we get a little crazy,” inflects imagery of dead and charred bodies, distraught babies, and people trying to live their lives amid the complete chaos and destruction of the Sarajevo war zone. In a similar manner, it is unlikely that Ariella Azoulay's *Act of State 1967-2007*, documenting the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would be shown in a major museum in the United States—at least not with some sort of equal time given to an Israeli viewpoint. As a result, the exhibition is much stronger than if it were, to quote Fox News, “Fair and Balanced.”

Los Angeles photographer and critic Allan Sekula coined the exhibition's title. In turn, his documentary photographic series *Prayer for the Americans*, 1999-2004, was inspired by Mark Twain's short prose piece “The War Prayer,” 1904. Sekula's slideshow

includes photographs of the residents of Hannibal, Missouri, the town by the Mississippi River's edge where Twain lived and worked, and which he famously documented in his own writing. These candid shots show a side of the United States that is not often portrayed in the mass media, and are quietly as powerful as some of the exhibition's more in-your-face imagery. Likewise, American photographer Paul Fusco, on assignment for *Look* magazine in 1968, documented the mourners who viewed the train carrying assassinated presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy's body in his *RFK Funeral Train* series. Perfectly positioned aboard the train, Fusco captured thousands of authentic emotions, as citizens from all ethnicities and social classes solemnly paid tribute to a lost hero.

The French Magnum photographer Gilles Peress describes himself as a “forensic photographer,” stressing that his work goes far beyond mere documentation. He writes, “I don't care so much anymore about ‘good photography.’ I am gathering evidence for history, so that we remember.” While chronicling the displacement and eventual homecoming of residents of the small Serbian village of Cuska, where Serbian police, army, paramilitaries, and others had executed forty-one men, Peress and researcher Fred Abrahams discovered a cache of photographs of the aggressors taken by the war criminals themselves. This hard evidence has been used against the men, leading to the arrest of eleven of them so far. Peress' project is compiled in the book *A Village Destroyed: May 14, 1999*, further cementing the atrocities in the annals of history.

Walid Raad's *The Atlas Group*, dedicated to recording the contemporary history of Lebanon, presents the series *We Decided To Let Them Say ‘We Are Convinced’ Twice. It Was More Convincing This Way*, 1982-2007, which blurs the lines between fact and fiction as well as documentation and art. The work features photographs of the Israeli assault on Lebanon in 1982, attributed to an imaginary person, Marwan Hanna. Smearred, streaked, and scratched, the assembled works look as if they came from a cache of recently found negatives, printed some twenty years later. Background information on the admittedly thought-provoking work is available, with-

out directly defining Raad's work as a fictional, conceptual project. In the context of this exhibition, the curators take a chance of confusing some viewers, which perhaps is the point.

Hito Steyerl's video installation *Red Alert*, 2007, pushes the envelope even further. A monochrome still shown on three high-definition monitors, the work seeks to translate Alexander Rodchenko's 1921 paintings *Pure Yellow Color*, *Pure Red Color*, and *Pure Blue Color* into the present. The artist enlists two of video's basic constituents—the still and the color red—to tackle one of the most loaded images: catastrophe. Fighting fire with fire, she serializes the red monochrome, the high-alert color in the United States Department of Homeland Security's former Advisory System, to disable the catastrophic component of the image. Today, when Homeland Security's advisory characterizes alerts as either elevated or imminent, we may look back at the old chart with the same derision as we do the 1951 American Civil Defense film *Duck and Cover*, which taught children what to do in case of an atomic attack. The inclusion of Laura Kurgan's *Monochrome Landscapes*, 2004, presents a conundrum not dissimilar to that of Steyerl's *Red Alert*. Kurgan enlists satellite images to document locations such as the Cameroon rainforest and the desert in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The images are quite striking and present hard truths without calling on the emotional response triggered by the more heart-wrenching works. In this, *Antiphotjournalism* may be showing us one way to disable the catastrophic dimension of images, to which we are increasingly immune.

—Chris Bors

INSIDE FRONT COVER: *The Atlas Group* / Walid Raad, detail of *We Decided To Let Them Say ‘We Are Convinced’ Twice. It Was More Convincing This Way*, 1982-2007, archival inkjet prints on Hahnemühle paper, 19 plates, ed. of 7 + 2 AP; 5/7 (Weltkunst Foundation Collection; courtesy of the artist and Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London) / **OPPOSITE, TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT:** installation view of *Antiphotjournalism* at La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona (© Gasull Fotografia); **Allan Sekula**, detail of *Prayer For The Americans*, 1999-2004, slide projection [courtesy of the artist and Galerie Michel Rein, Paris]; **OPPOSITE, MIDDLE, LEFT TO RIGHT:** **Harun Farocki**, *Inextinguishable Fire*, 1969, 16mm film transferred to DVD, 25 minutes [courtesy of the artist and Galeria dels Àngels, Barcelona]; installation view of *Antiphotjournalism* at La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona (© Gasull Fotografia); **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT:** installation view of *Antiphotjournalism* at La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona (© Gasull Fotografia); **The Atlas Group** / Walid Raad, detail of *We Decided To Let Them Say ‘We Are Convinced’ Twice. It Was More Convincing This Way*, 1982-2007, archival inkjet prints on Hahnemühle paper, 19 plates, ed. of 7 + 2 AP; 5/7 (Weltkunst Foundation Collection; courtesy of the artist and Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London)

