



DARREN ALMOND, *NIGHT + FOG (MONCHEGORSK) (12)*, 2007. BROMIDE PRINT MOUNTED ON KAPAMOUNT, 48 X 60 IN. COURTESY GALERIE MAX HETZLER, BERLIN.

**BERLIN**

**DARREN ALMOND**

GALERIE MAX HETZLER (OSRAMHÖFE TEMPORARY SPACE)

This past summer, as Venice, Kassel, and Münster became essential ports of call for the arbiters of contemporary art, one important exhibition remained well under the radar. Housed in Galerie Max Hetzler's temporary space—a former bulb factory in East Berlin—was Darren Almond's provocatively titled "Night + Fog." Referring to Alain Resnais's seminal 1955 documentary depicting the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, Almond presented three bodies of work that engage with the legacies of 20th-century totalitarianism. Though hardly an innocent subject, Almond's efforts became legible through the public debate regarding the possibilities of aesthetic representation—both after and about—the historical trauma of the Holocaust.

One critical issue that haunted the exhibition was Almond's use of the title of Resnais's film to label a particular series of bromide photographic prints of the dead forests of Siberia. In the past five years Almond has traveled to the nickel mines of Norilsk, formerly Norillag, one of the largest gulags of the Stalin era, and has documented the deadly effects of the elevated levels of sulphur dioxide on the nearby forests. While unspeakable crimes against humanity and the natural environment

certainly occurred at Norillag, and Almond's stark black-and-white landscapes justly capture the desolation, it is troubling that this dual reference to Stalinism and acid rain is couched within the language of the Holocaust. The specific political and historical context alluded to in "Night + Fog," a reference to the arrival of prisoners into concentration camps under the cloak of darkness, the subconscious suppression of knowledge and culpability for the committed atrocities, and a 1941 decree made by Hitler authorizing the disappearance of political dissidents cannot be made into a universal equivalent for all catastrophes. Because the categorization of the Holocaust as a unique event in history is regularly undermined, Almond's elision of contexts is not exceptional but is no less disturbing. In its postmodernist negation, it raises the thorny issue of cultural and moral responsibility on the part of artists who wish to participate in this field of representation.

Despite such an initial lapse, Almond tackles this question in the installation titled *Archive* (2007). Made of galvanized steel, the piece forms an unenterable block of floor-to-ceiling archives filled with perfectly organized stacks of pristine white paper on every shelf. Commemorating the estimated number of prisoners who died at Auschwitz, it confronts an appropriate way to depict that which is fundamentally unrepresentable. Echoing the work of French artist Christian Boltanski, Almond ostensibly presents himself in the image of the historian, whose task is to inventory and reconstruct facts as faithfully as possible. He complicates any claim to authenticity

or access to the “real,” however, by embracing the fetishizing effects of mass culture on aesthetic memorialization. Through a strategy of cool conceptualism and high production values, the installation becomes a sleek design object, pointing to the artist’s tenuous role in negotiations between the task of mourning and the temptation of merchandising.

This duality is further explored in *Terminus*, the exhibition’s grand finale, consisting of seven pairs of bus shelters relocated from the Polish town of Oświęcim (where Auschwitz-Birkenau was located). One pair, with a sign pointing to the *MUSEUM*, confronted viewers just before they turned a corner into a large hall filled with an array of shelters, stationed one across from the other, as if to signal the possibility of arrival and departure (an option that prisoners, arriving by trains, did not have). Continuing Almond’s long investigation of global networks of circulation, these bus shelters are supposed to elicit a range of mnemonic significations. By transcending their physical identity as relics of a postwar transportation system, they are meant to create a framework for reflection on the relationships among the trauma of the Holocaust, the emergence and demise of state socialism, and the recuperation of these events by both contemporary art practice and a thriving tourist industry.

The question, of course, is whether such dilapidated artifacts, covered as they are by today’s stickers and graffiti and used mostly by the local Polish population to move within the city, speak equally about the past and the present, and whether the gallery environment specifically nurtures this dynamic. Can such literal readymades be considered, as Almond claims, “a metaphor for the fragility of human life”? Can they provoke the viewer to reconstruct the unquantifiable magnitude of Auschwitz-Birkenau when they are standing in an art space in Germany? Or do they become spectacular, deracinated signs that create an easily digestible, ultimately banal mode of “Holocaust tourism”?

Almond’s work cannot encapsulate the Holocaust, nor can it fully avoid its commodification. Rather it suggests that the project of our generation is to invent an aesthetic language that opens new conduits to memory and transforms its own representational and historical blind spots into a subject for critical reflection.

—NUIT BANAI

## JONATHAN HOROWITZ

GALERIE BARBARA WEISS

The relationships between glamour and violence, desire and war, were the controversial themes of Jonathan Horowitz’s exhibition “People Like War Movies.” The show’s centerpiece was the video work *Elvis, '58/'93* (all works 2007), in which the artist compares the life of the king of rock ‘n’ roll with that of Chief Warrant Officer Clifton “Elvis” Wolcott—whose deployment in the US-Mogadishu campaign was immortalized in the Hollywood blockbuster *Black Hawk Down*. As in earlier videos exploring the private lives of Rock Hudson and Doris Day, or juxtaposing scenes from *Ben-Hur* with footage of Mussolini, Horowitz uses entertainment as an entryway to darker issues. Here, he collages excerpts from this glorifying war film with footage of Presley as rebel rocker, patriot soldier, and actor—the connection with war being made by Presley’s performance in *GI Blues*.

The second work in this politically engaged exhibition, *untitled* (nowthatsfuckedup.com), was a gruesome enlarged photo of a soldier whose

head had been blown off. American soldiers posted this photo on the now banned website named in the title, and as a “reward” were granted access to porn images also posted on the site. While *Black Hawk Down* attempted to

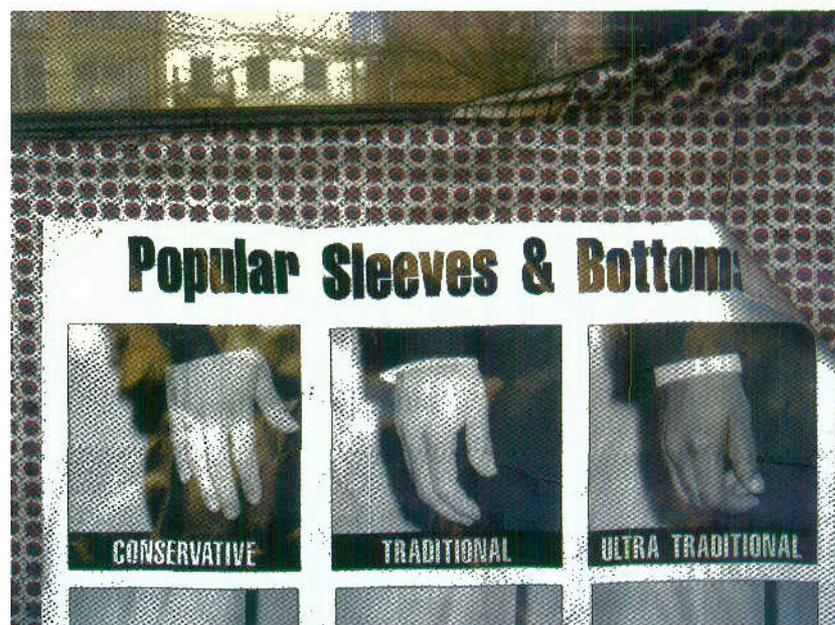


JONATHAN HOROWITZ, STILL FROM *ELVIS, '58/'93*, 2007. VIDEO, 13 MIN. COURTESY GALERIE BARBARA WEISS, BERLIN.

show the choreographed “beauty” of the horrors of war, on the Net they are revealed in all their brutality—albeit, Horowitz bleakly implies, at the price of becoming fodder for warped voyeuristic fantasies.

—RAIMAR STANGE

TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN  
BY EMILY SPEERS MEARS



GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON, *UNTITLED (CONSERVATIVE, TRADITIONAL, ULTRA TRADITIONAL)*, 2005. DIGITAL C-PRINT, 12 X 16 IN. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NILS STAERK CONTEMPORARY ART, COPENHAGEN; STANDARD, OSLO; AND TEAM GALLERY, NEW YORK.

## FRANKFURT GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON

FRANKFURTER KUNSTVEREIN

A sparse installation of stark work that mostly deals with marginal subcultures (ex-cons, bikers, skaters, militias), Gardar Eide Einarsson’s first institutional solo show left a powerful impression of the individual’s relationship to the state. Yet on their own, the Norwegian artist’s pieces sometimes seem insubstantial—such as a simple 20-second video loop, taped from television, proclaiming “These colors don’t run” against a fluttering American flag, or other more journalistic photos and found objects—relying on the other works’ accumulated mass to buttress them.

The show’s questionable conceit was that the artist intends to trap us in this critical disdain, the unsatisfying emptiness of the halls being specifically designed to make things appear challengingly unfinished. Most convincing were the faux-Minimalist paintings—a strong series of black-and-white acrylic-on-canvas prison tattoos that come off as Ellsworth Kelly leached of his hue—and “graffiti” works, all carefully executed to communicate hasty or slapdash application, but in which each drip has actually been meticulously outlined and painstakingly reproduced. These faked dribbles also appear in the similarly monochrome “Outlaw” paintings of eponymous gang logos, which take codes of subversion and strip them of their rawness, elevating them to a purely aesthetic level. There is certainly something pure and appealing here; yet, like cleaning up your biker boyfriend to meet the parents, you’re

left feeling that perhaps the authentic version was what fascinated you in the first place.

—AMANDA COULSON

## BUCHAREST STEFAN CONSTANTINESCU

MNAC

Though comprising various projects dating from 1998 to 2007, this exhibition is best understood as a single large installation underpinned by the notion of the artist as witness. Photographs and texts taken from a diary of Stefan Constantinescu’s student days in suburban Stockholm punctuated a series of documentaries, which in turn gave way to the film and accompanying book *Dacia 1300, My Generation* (2003). Here, Constantinescu considers the significance of the Dacia car (dictator Nicolae Ceausescu’s answer to the Trabant), first produced in Romania in 1968—the year of the artist’s birth. The exhibition’s title, “Thanks for a Wonderful, Ordinary Day,” originated in the 1974 song by Agnetha Fältskog that forms the sound track to *El pasaje* (2005). This film, documenting the lives of three Chileans who fled during Pinochet’s 1973 coup d’état and settled in Romania, only to flee to Sweden because of Ceausescu’s regime, highlights the common experiences of refugees. But Constantinescu also attends to the personal via the main character, Pedro Ramires. Now a night watchman on a train, Ramires muses on his days as a student filmmaker in Romania. It is as a filmmaker that Constantinescu himself seems most at home. And in telling the stories that matter to him, he’s an extremely convincing one.

—JANE NEAL



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