SRI LANKA, 2005
197X128 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION

NIELS BONDE

Bad days

HEIDELBERG KUNSTVEREIN

ISBN 87-991524-2-8

© Niels Bonde, 2007
nielsbonde.com

ISBN 87-991524-2-8

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Dick Bengtsson og Lucas Golén.
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Courtesy Galerie Asbæk
Bredgade 20, Copenhagen Denmark
www.asbaek.dk

Supported by
the Danish Arts Council's Committee
for International Visual Art.

KUNSTRÅDET

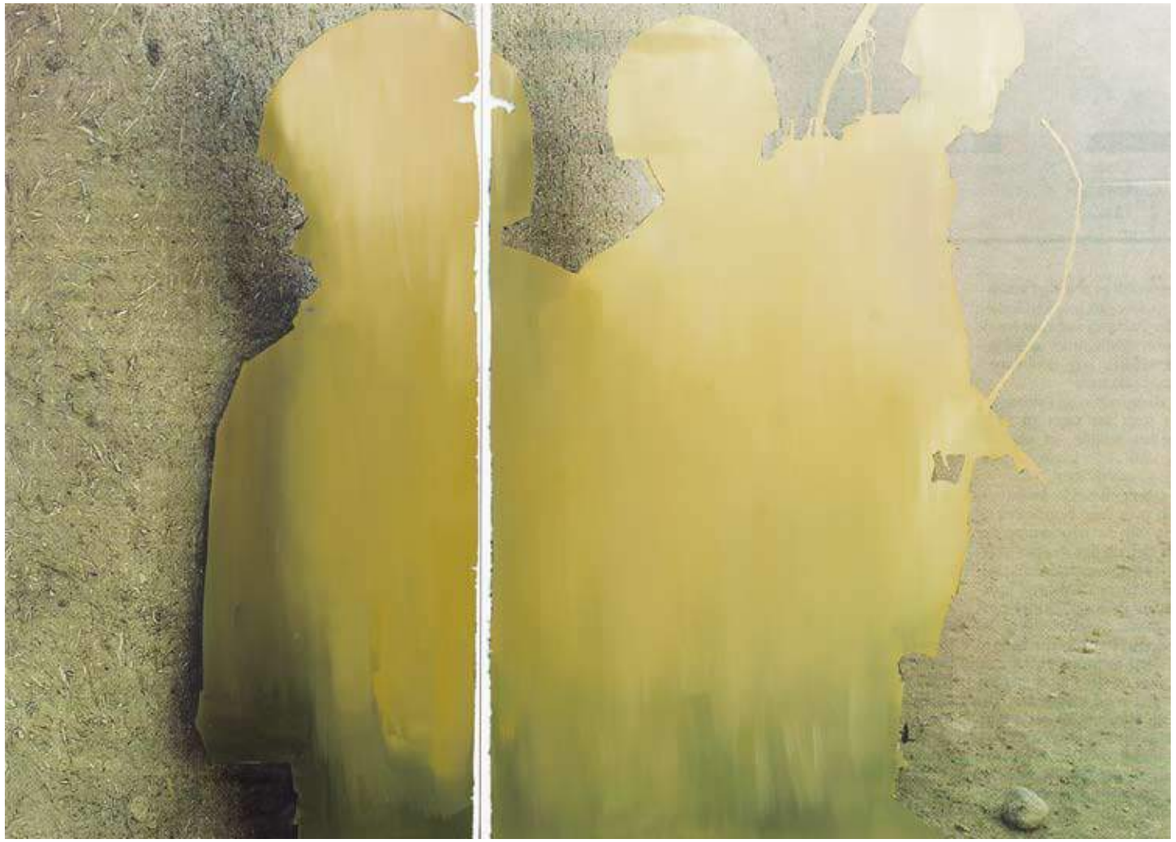
NIELS BONDE

Bad days

BLACK HAWK, 2006
169X140 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT

EAGLE, 2006
154X140 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT

GHOST RECON, 2006
72X128 + 105X128 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT



INSTALLATION VIEW
GALERIE ASBÆK, 2006

NUCLEAR TEST, 2006
132X144 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT

et vil indstille sit atomprogram, som en del af ikke-
illade besøg af våbeninspektører.

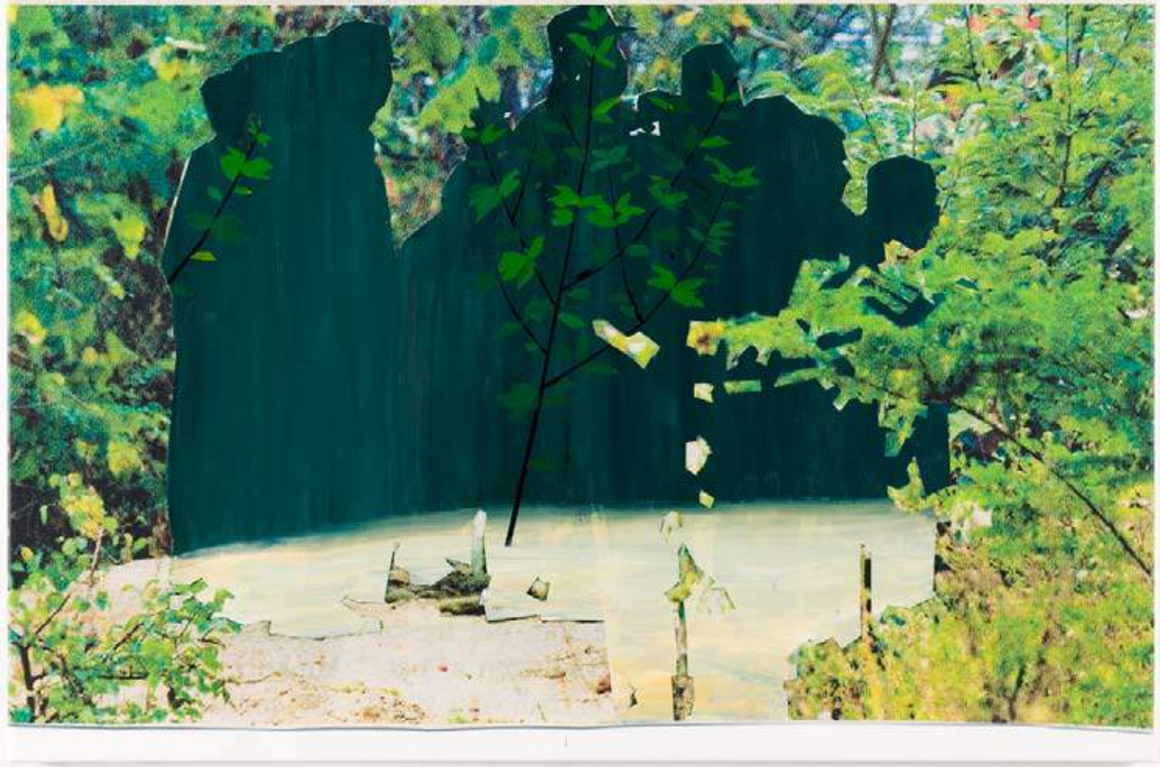
Kim Jung-Il bliver underrettet af en af sine øverstbefalende

KIM JUNG-IL, 2006
136X165 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT

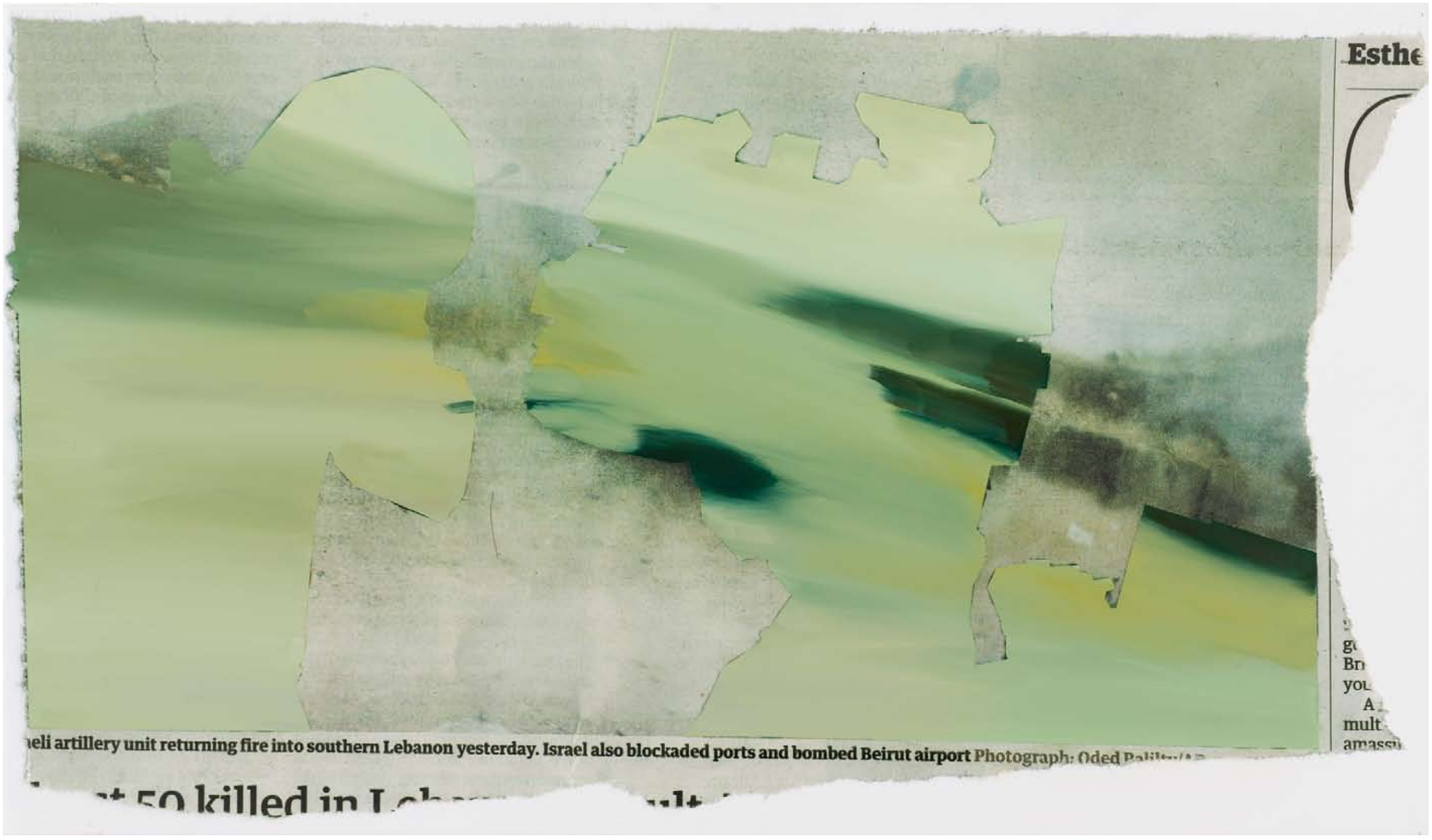
GÅR DRÆBT en bombeeksplosion i Filippinerne.

set af atomtest

ledere er et totalt kollaps i Nordkorea.



GREEN DAY, 2006
140X80 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION



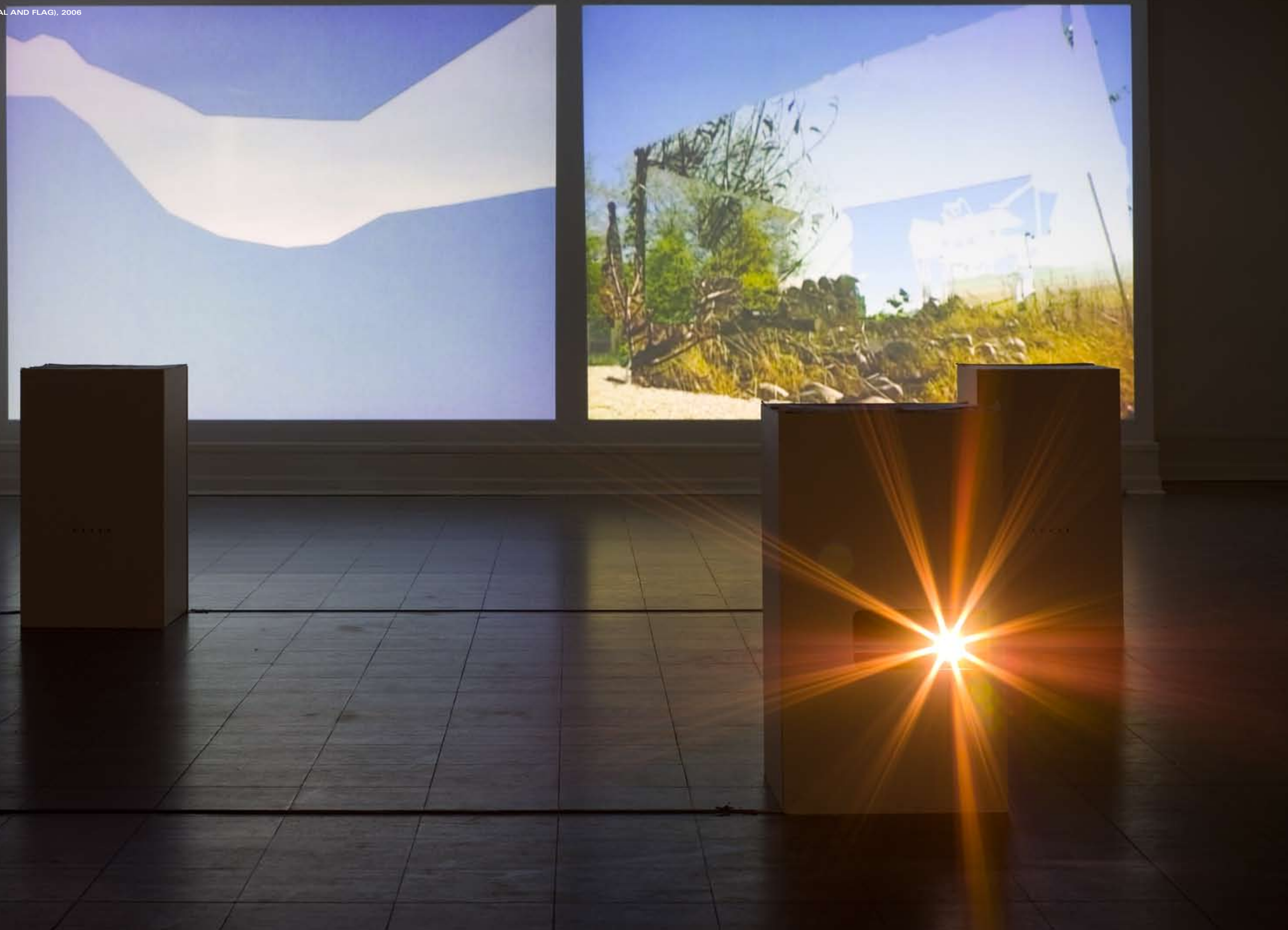
BEQAA VALLEY, 2006
175X138 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT

INSTALLATION VIEW
GALERIE ASBÆK, 2006

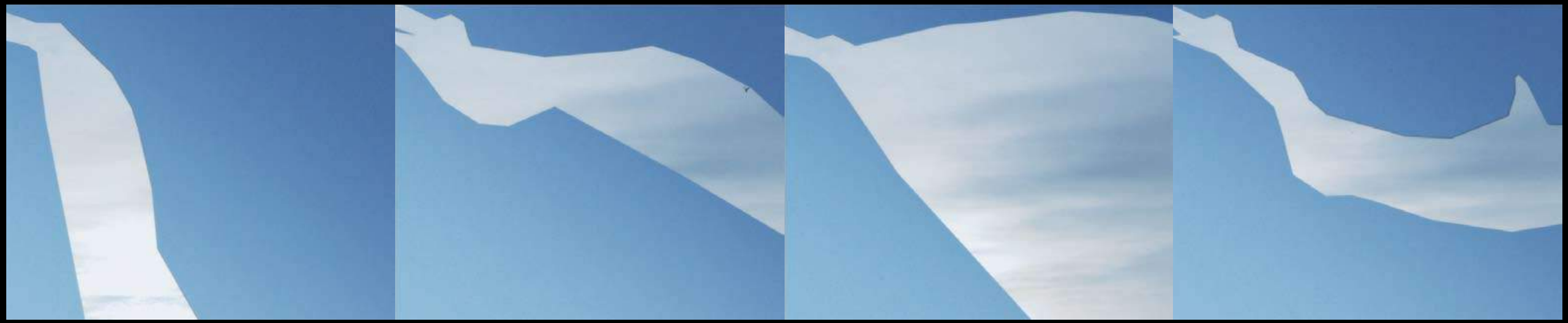
INSTALLATION VIEW
GALERIE ASBÆK, 2006

SWINGING LONDON, 2006
100X140 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT

A PORTRAIT OF PIA K (TOTAL AND FLAG), 2006
VIDEO PROJECTION
GALERIE ASBÆK



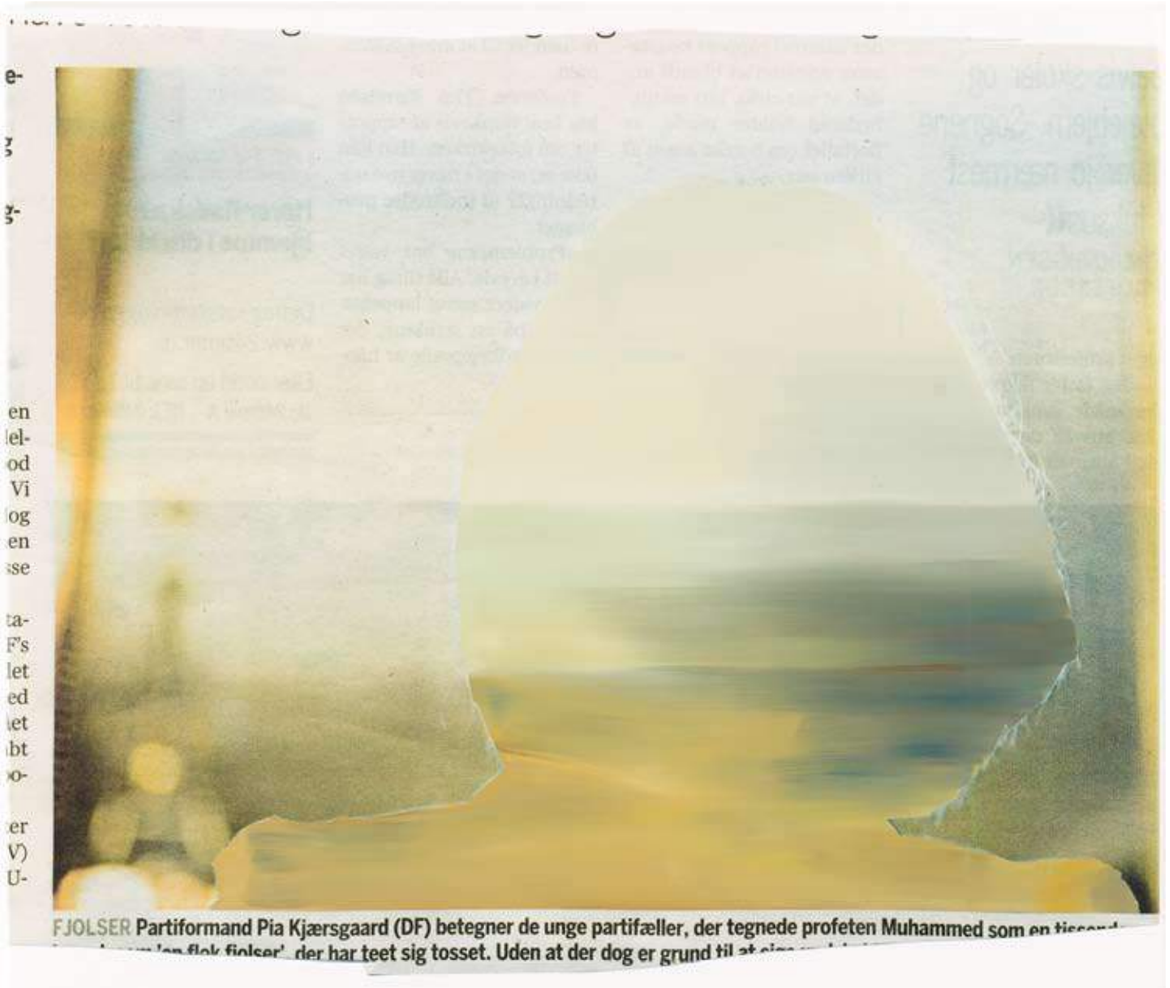
A PORTRAIT OF PIA K (TOTAL AND FLAG), 2006
VIDEO PROJECTION
GALERIE ASBÆK



Video 6:20 min. Soundtrack (voice of right wing populist Pia Kjærsgaard):
(…) "I wonder whether any of us a year ago had imagined that we would come to see the Danish flag, the Dannebrog, trampled underfoot in fanatical hatred against ou…our peaceful freedom's tradition. I still have to pinch my own arm and ask: was it real? But it was and is real. Really it all started with a Danish author during a private gathering complaining that no one would do illustrations for his children's book about Muhammad." (…)

(…) "On this list of prohibitions everything that is truly Danish will be found. This applies for example to Holberg who calls Islam fraudulent and Muhammad a fake prophet. This applies to Karen Blixen who compares Islam to Nazism. It applies to Grundtvig who accuses Muhammad's teachings of chaining Muslims to a lie. It applies to the bible, which in the eyes of Muslims is pure heresy and an insult to Muhammad's writings. It applies to the established church and all the church's symbolic books. And it applies to Hans Christian Andersen who so movingly and therefore dangerously has described the difference between the sword's Islam and Christianity." (…)

PIA K, 2006
132X114 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT



JACOB LILLEMOSE

Hard realities and software processes

"There's not a problem that I can't fix, 'cause I can do it in the mix."

– Indeep, "Last Night a DJ Saved My Life" (1982)

"Contemporary art thus presents itself as an alternative editing table that shakes up social forms, reorganizes them, and inserts them in original scenarios. The artist deprograms in order to reprogram, suggesting that there are other possible uses for the techniques and tools at our disposal."

– Nicolas Bourriaud, Postproduction (2002)

An often used saying in common language and professional discourse is that we live in a 'media reality'. The exact meaning of the saying, however, seems a bit unclear, perhaps because this 'reality' is of an elusive and complex character? To come to a more precise understanding of the phrase is not only a question of words but fundamentally concerns our perception of and involvement in the world around us. First of all we might ask if there exists another reality besides or outside the media reality referred to. If so, what is the relation between these two – or more? – realities and can we inhabit both? Or are we referring to the idea that the media is our primary channel of access either through transparency or distortion to that other reality, a real – non-mediated – reality? Or do we mean that the media simply is our reality, that we live in a world where physical phenomena and events are completely transformed into the images and bits of a digital information flow? Finally, it seems reasonable to ask, how this media reality influences our sense of reality – socially, politically and culturally. These general questions constitute an implicit frame of reference for Niels Bonde's new series of videos from 2006 exhibited under the title "Bad Days". As the title indicates, the videos explore the specific version of media reality that depicts the world through natural catastrophes, wars, extremist politics and other unfortunate events. The mainstream mass media tends to exploit the spectacular value of the 'bad' to generate the impression that the world is out of our control and reach and that the media is our only (and last) possibility to connect to and access this 'bad' world, basically to make us believe that the media reality is our reality. Opposed to this strategy, the videos offer us a subtle alternative to deal with the media reality of the 'bad' as well as with the 'bad' itself and not least to question our own concept of reality in relation to the media.

Documentation as an abstract model

An essential step in this tactic is to anticipate a heightened awareness of the media reality situation, its relation to the world and to the person 'in

front of the television'. Based on ready-made footage from news reports and self-made footage from a media event, Bonde thus presents us with three examples of media reality that challenge our understanding of what we see and not least how we see the world through media. The challenge is both formal and conceptual and incites us to comprehend 'seeing' in an expanded sense as a form of thinking with and about the world, rather than as a mere visual relationship. He addresses how news reports and media imagery in general, besides documenting specific events in the world, construct abstract models of mental involvement that 'code' how the 'end user' 'processes' the information about the world. In the mainstream mass media these models function as a means to manipulate and control the end user, to reduce him/her to a passive receiver, whereas Bonde in his videos works with art's ability to speculate and imagine alternative models that empower the end user as a critically engaged media subject. Through the use of aesthetic means and effects he aims to turn our acceptance into ambivalence, consumption into reflection.

Media in the age of software

Another essential step is to anticipate a heightened awareness of the technological premises of current news media. Due to the general convergence of media most of today's news is produced on computers and the imagery that is presented on our television (and to a greater and greater extent also computer) screens and in our papers is produced (recorded, edited and broadcasted) with various kinds of software. This practical introduction of software in the media represents fundamental and wide-ranging changes in our relation to media, changes that pose political problems as well as hold aesthetic possibilities.

Generally speaking, media imagery after software transforms the physical world to digital information that in principle can be presented – visualized – in any imaginable way. Digital information in itself is nothing but a series of numbers and in order for it to take the form of televised or screened images, digital information needs to be 'interpreted' by a piece of software. Although the software interprets the digital information automatically according to a pre-programmed algorithm, it is far from a neutral or an objective act (nothing technology ever does is). Rather, the interpretation is a radically coded act that involves manipulation and control on the one hand, while on the other hand it is open to all sorts of critical and playful experiments; and the media ambivalence that this double-sidedness signifies is an important point of departure for Bonde's videos.

Remove and replace

Instead of returning to a pre-software media situation, Bonde works with the software. As mentioned above, the basis for the videos is footage appropriated from ABC and BBC and some footage he shot himself. The footage from the news channels shows an interview with Chechen insurgent leader Sjamil Basajev and a report from a massacre in a village in Kenya. In the footage shot by himself Bonde turns the lens on the flag of his home country, Denmark, as it flutters in the wind on the backdrop of a clear blue sky; and on Pia Kjærsgaard, leader of the nationalistic Danish People's Party that since 2001 has been the supporting party of the government, as she holds a speech on Constitution Day in an idyllic setting by the sea (the two shots are projected adjoining one another and make up a single work). Using the common software After Effects, he has removed the central figures of the footage – Basajev, the bodies, the flag and Kjærsgaard – and substituted them with his own footage of different landscapes from the area around his house in southern Sweden. In most of the videos the 'pasted' footage kind of blends in with the rest of the image and functions almost like camouflage, but in the video with the Danish flag the effect is a graphic contrast. However, in both cases Bonde distorts footage of one (dramatic and people-related) recognizable world with footage of another (quite and ambient) recognizable world to create ambiguous imagery that is part documentary and part computer processed; part identifiable and part abstract; part news report and part aesthetic expression.

The ramifications of this rather simple gesture of removing and replacing are many. On a basic level it challenges our perception of the world through media in the age of software in terms of visual access and conceptual understanding. We are provoked into discarding the notion of the media as a transparent window onto the world and replacing it with the notion of a political matrix that changes the world as it records it. From there the gesture connects to questions of politics, technology, aesthetics and the way these questions are interconnected in media.

Software: Now you don't see it, now you do

In this context Bonde's use of technological software to manipulate the footage implicitly comments on the so-called ideological software that informs most of our media reality. Ideological software is the politics behind the television screen that determines what, when and how we see the world through the different media. Most often, we are not aware of the manipulative and controlling workings of this latter kind of software because they are not directly visible on the screen, in the imagery; rather ideological software uses the imagery as a screen to exercise its power in the hidden, behind the scenes. The workings of the technological software that Bonde uses are, however, visible in the imagery of the videos. The manipulation is done openly to make clear and express a critique of the role of ideology in the media and to make equally clear the difference that art can make. We are presented with the possibility that all imagery is run by a program, whether technological or ideological, and that every program is coded by a programmer with a political agenda; as well as with the possibility to de- and recode the imagery under non-ideological – aesthetic – conditions.

The way the videos make us aware of the manipulative tactics of the media allows for critical reflection as well as alternative ideas of media imagery. On the one hand, the videos have an alienating effect in the sense that they deny us essential visual information to make up the whole picture and invalidate our normal perceptual abilities, our automatic visual response. On the other hand, this 'blindness' slows down the information flow of the media and invites us to look behind or rather beyond the surface of the visible. In fact, the videos comment on another more common blindness in the media, namely the blindness created by the overflow of information. The high rate and extensive volume of imagery in the media might allow us to recognize what we see but leaves no time or space for us to realize what we see. If we relate to the information through mere recognition we reduce the events of the world to visual sensations, detach ourselves from the realities of the world and become easy prey for the manipulation tactics of ideology. To counteract this latter blindness Bonde uses computer manipulation to obstruct the superficial recognition and lay the foundations for a more profound realization. With a subversive gesture he uses one kind of manipulation against another kind of manipulation to question the content and authority of the imagery and asks the individual viewers to reflect on how it mediates our view of the world and our sense of reality. He addresses us in a way that anticipates our use of mental powers that are not limited by the visual information that the footage presents us with. We are invited to open our eyes on the world through the use of our mind. Thus, the focus of the videos is not just the concrete information about what is happening in the world but how we (represented by Bonde's personal footage – his own reality – far from events) relate to, interpret and discuss, this information as a collective of individuals not defined by the media.

Evil vs. evil

Bonde's choice of political subjects is highly significant in this regard. The news footage from ABC and BBC deals with terrorism and civil war respectively while his own footage from the Constitution Day celebration point to nationalistic tendencies in Danish politics and the Danish public; all subjects which indicate that we currently live in a world of animosities. Although there are fundamental differences between the use of weapons and words, between armies and politicians, the 'use' of an enemy in both cases is definitely comparable. The militia in Kenya, Basajev and Kjærsgaard all justify their fight through the articulation of a threat from some evil other party, the Russian government or non-Christian immigrants and refugees. The brutal irony is that their fight inflicts violence – physical or structural – on that other party and they become evil themselves.

Bonde's videos suggest an alternative to the mainstream mass media's usual sensationalistic and perfunctory stagings of this double evil and present us with more nuanced and open-ended ways to deal with it. By editing the evil figure out of the narrative and substituting it with footage containing no central figure, Bonde both literally and metaphorically allows the background to come into the foreground. From this 'neutral' ground – i.e. without the actual news – the narrative can be reappropriated and retold anew by us, rationally as well as emotionally, or rather encourage us to find a new balance between our rational and emotional involvement in the events we are confronted with.

In the case of the news footage from Kenya we may ask if we need to see the blood and corpses to relate to the conflict or if the imagery actually prevents us from relating to the conflict? Certainly, the extreme exposure to explicit violence both in the news and in the movies has numbed our visual sensitivity. Generally, we do not react with feelings of outrage but rather with indifference when we see people getting killed, suffering or being mistreated in the media. It is simply too much for us to deal

with as real events and instead we (with the help of the media's stagings) see it as a piece of fiction, a daily TV series. But the violence is real and it still takes place, maybe even to a greater extent than before; and we live in a globally interconnected world where it is irresponsible to pretend that is does not concern us. Perhaps, if the media left out the imagery of the violence we would be able to deal with the real again? This is the question that Bonde's videos speculate about – in the form of a piece of fiction.

Bonde's edited version of the ABC interview with Basajev raises the question of whether Basajev's face and person really are essential to our understanding of the conflict between Russia and Chechnya; whether the conflict can be identified with him or if the focus on him diverts our attention from and reduces our understanding of the conflict. Of course, Basajev conceives and organizes the attacks against Russian interests and civilians but no conflict of that scale is ever just a question of one person, no matter how evil he or she is. Instead of just labelling him as the 'bad guy', 'mad man' or 'master brain' responsible for the conflict, the video allows us to view him as a symptom of a general system of violence and geo-political war in the former USSR. It removes the face of the conflict or rather presents the conflict as faceless and encourages us to 'listen' more carefully.

Facelessness and listening are also part of Bonde's third video in the series. By removing party leader Pia Kjærsgaard, the video defaces her speech (even though most Danes immediately will recognize her voice) and allows us to listen to it word for word, to focus on the content and not on the person. The effect of this facelessness is, however, different than in the former video. Whereas Basajev poses in front of cameras dressed in his military uniform to show his preparedness to fight, Kjærsgaard plays the role of the ordinary woman that the common Dane can identify with to give her aggressive politics a human and sympathetic – a normal – face. The video denies her that role and face to expose the radicalism of her nationalistic and xenophobic (if not downright racist) agenda. An implicit reference in – and the visual backdrop of – Kjærsgaard's speech is the Danish flag, Dannebrog, which Bonde has removed on an adjoining projection. Thereby, he denies Kjærsgaard's politics a central symbol at the same time as he reappropriates the flag (as a reversal of Kjærsgaard's appropriation of the flag) and presents it as an empty or open sign. With the imagery of the 'faceless' flag the video invites us – the public – to question what Dannebrog stands for vis-à-vis Kjærsgaard's speech. Do her words represent the feelings we identify with the flag? Of course, on another level the video also removes the flag as an 'evil' symbol that leads to politics like Kjærsgaard's and in that sense it is a true iconoclastic act.

Update your software

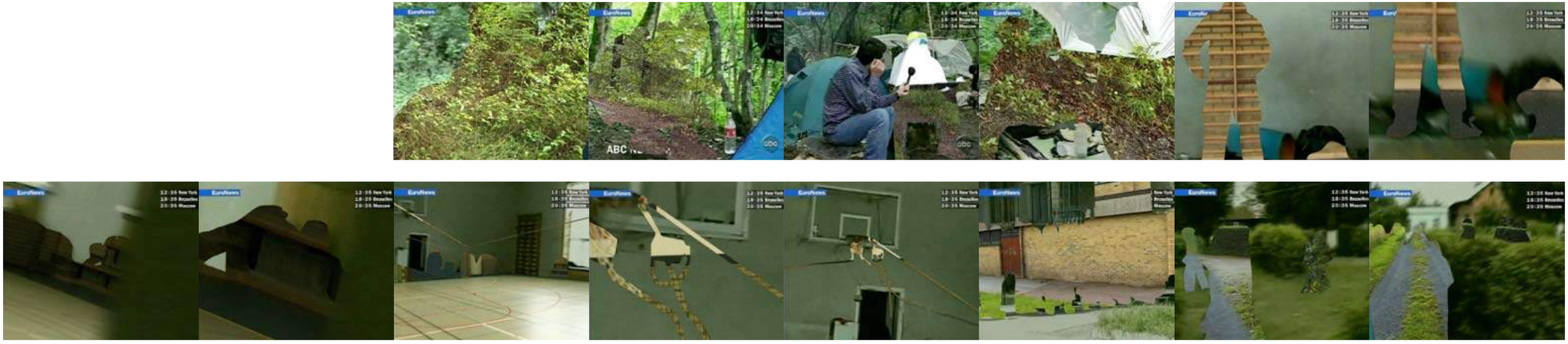
An obvious counter response to all of the above would be to ask if not Bonde's videos express the naive, romantic or utopian idea that if we just pretend that the evil doesn't exist it will in fact disappear, like the ostrich who believes that dangers will cease to exist if it puts its head in the bush or in the ground? Of course, the removal of the evil elements does point to a 'disappearance', but of a kind that has more to do with our relation to the events than with the events themselves. The videos do not attempt to erase the events and make us forget them like they never happened. Despite the removals the evil is still present in all the videos as a visible absence or as audio. Rather, the videos attempt to 'erase' our preconceived ideas about and accustomed reactions to the events when presented through the media in order to make us reprocess the information about the hard realities using different mental software.

Jacob Lillemose
art historian and PHD candidate based in Copenhagen.

KENYA MASSACRE
1:23 MIN
GALERIE ASBÆK, 2006

Video 1:13 min. Soundtrack (voiceover):
(...) "Survivors of this village massacre preparing a mass grave to bury their dead. Dozens died after the village of Turbi, came under attack Tuesday morning. Several hundred raiders armed with guns, spears machetes, swept through the community, before making off with cattle and livestock.The attackers are thought to have come from a rival tribe from across the border in Ethiopia. *'Their only aim was to kill'* this villager said *'they wanted to remove human life, even women, children and the aged.'* More people have also died in revenge attacs on a separate tribe which locals blame for the killings." (...)

BASAYEV, 2006
VIDEO PROJECTION
GALERIE ASBÆK



Video 1:20 min. Soundtrack (voiceover):
(...) "The Russian Government reaction to the airing of an interview with the Chechen terrorist Sharmijl Basajevs has been very sharp. *'A tooth for a tooth philosophy: OK I admit I am a bad guy, a bandit, a terrorist, but what are then the others? How would you then define the Russian Putin Government? Keepers of constitutional order?'* The questions was asked by the Russian journalist Andrej Babitsky and it was published by OSCE and ABC. A bloodthirsty terrorist has here been given a platform, criticized the Russian Foreign Ministry. Basajev has amongst other things been made responsible for the Beslan hostage taking. In the raid on the school, about 400 civilians lost their lives, most of them children." (...)

KENYA MASSACRE, 2006
VIDEO PROJECTION
MALMÖ ART MUSEUM

KENYA MASSACRE, 2006
VIDEO PROJECTION
GALERIE ASBÆK

AL-FATTAH 2004,
180X130 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION

...nvina till väst

...år
...r. En
...botagen
...ningar-

...N STRÖMBERG

...ngdes den sto-
...n från Kirkuk i
...lelen av Irak till
...amnen Cey-
... Pipelinen fick
... Det var långt,
... första sabota-
...ler lär vara att

...kerna mot ol-
...allationer av
...at kraftigt un-
...re-fyra åren.
...at på hur sår-
...or för världs-

...ra pipelines
...24 april i år
...mordsbom-
...två snabb-
...akiska ol-
...delen av

En oljeledning i al-Fattah brann efter ett sabotage på tisdagen. FOTO: YAHYA AHMED/AP

die om sårbarheten i den saudiska oljeproduktionen. Rapporten hemligstämplades

spridda områden som i Georgien, Tjetjenien, Azerbajdzjan Indonesien Indien

antal många fall av kapningar av bogserbåtar i Malacka-

lell gasledning vara klar.
En attack mot dessa skulle

GREEN BLUR (LYNDDIE ENGLAND), 2004
164X196 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT

...Okänd ringvakt på väg till förhör

FOTO: CHUCK BURTON/AP

▶ 21-åriga soldaten Lynndie England, till vänster, anländer till militärdomstolen i Fort Bra...

travats i högar. På en bild håller hon en fånge i koppel. Ofta småler hon på bilderna, ibland med en cigarett i

THE BEACH (PHI PHI), 2006
250X144 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL
PRINT PRIVATE COLLECTION

Leichen am Strand der thailändischen Insel Phi Phi, Bergungshelfer

LUIS ASCUI / REUTERS

ATH, 2004
117X85 CM
OIL OG ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT

FOTO: AFP

HAPPY REFLECTION (DIAGNOSE: MACHTMENSCH), 2004
227X153 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT

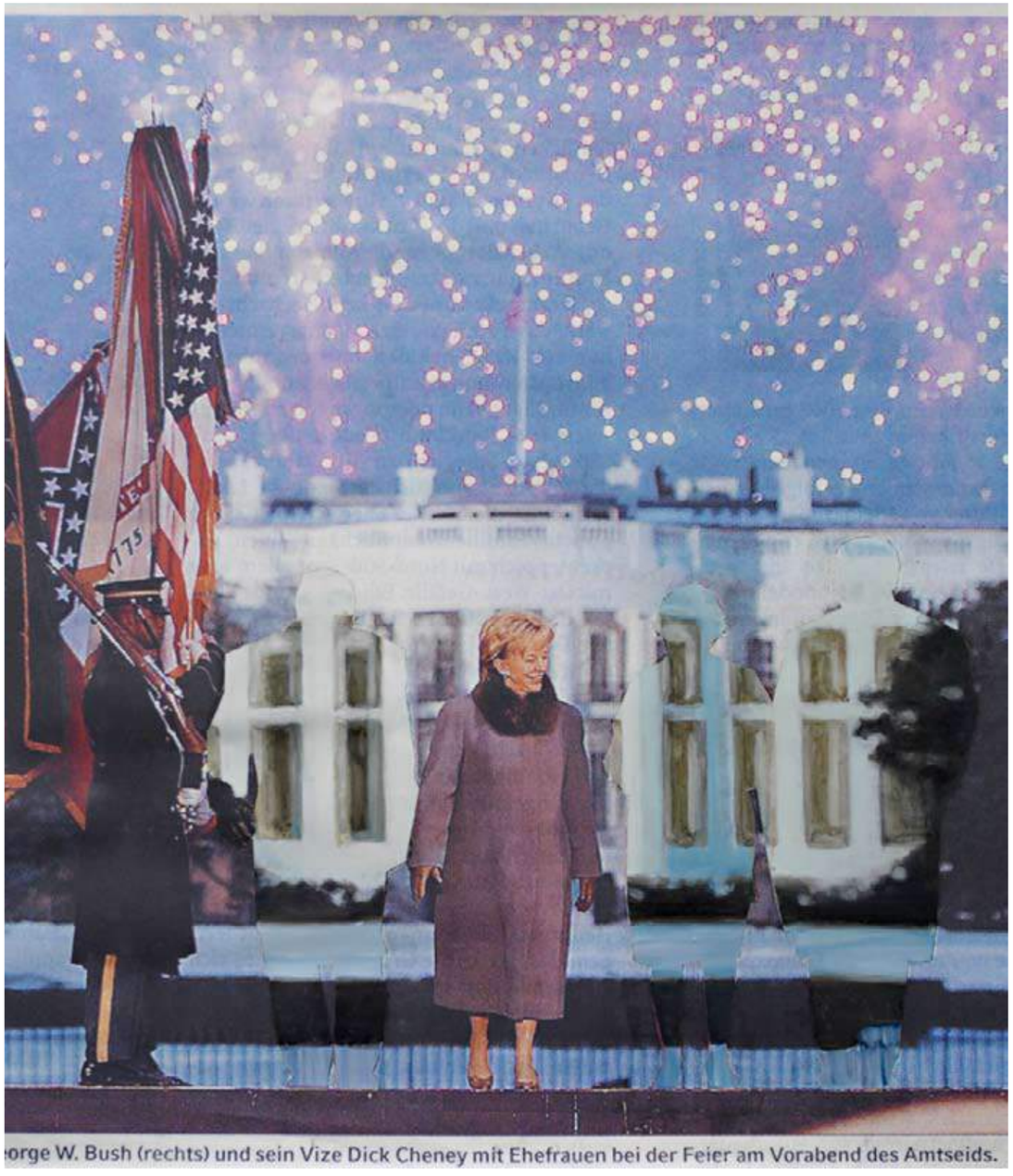
Franz Humer mag es, seine öffentlichen Auftritte zu inszenieren.

Diagnose: Machtmensch

Seine Therapie hat gewirkt: Franz Humer hat den Schweizer Pharmakonzern Roche wieder auf Vordern

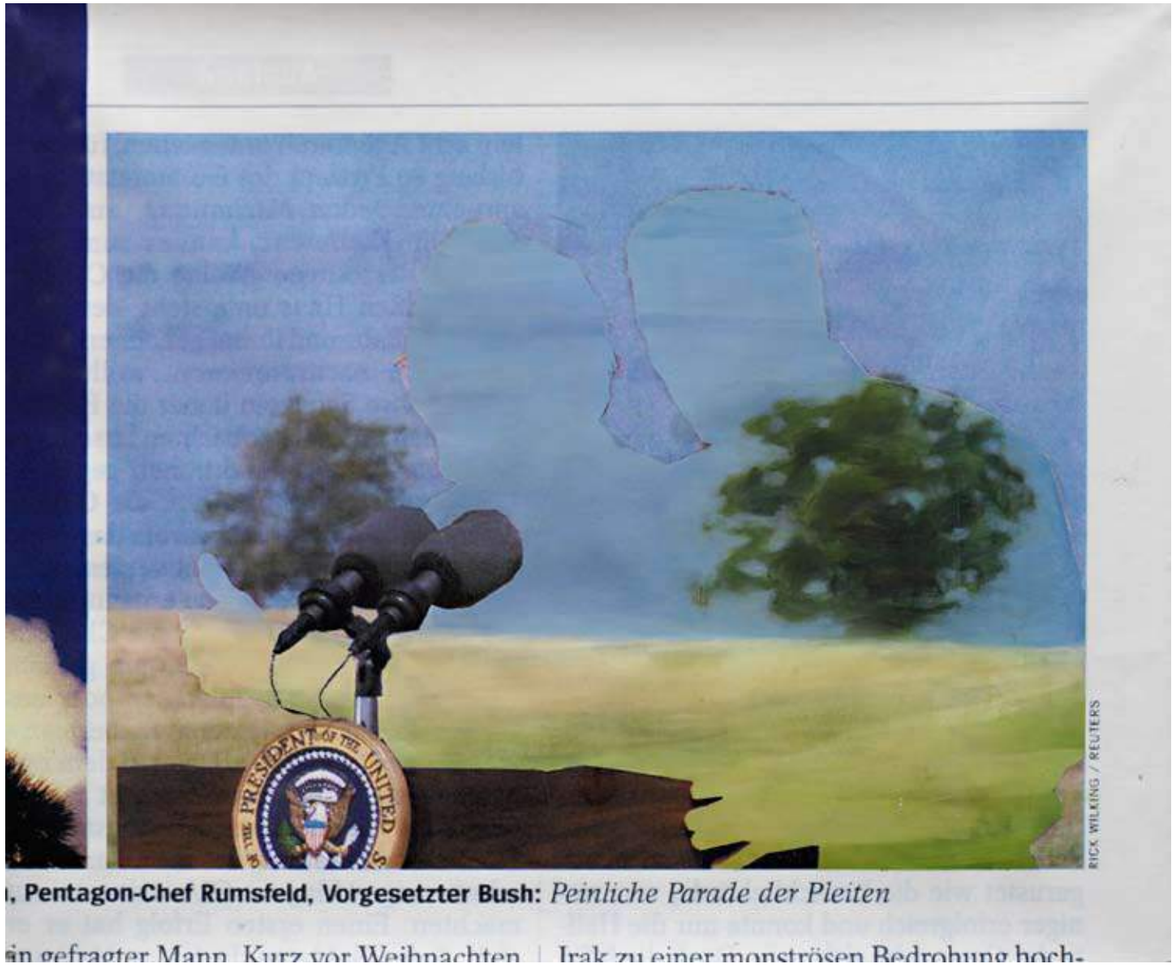
POOL, 2005
130X100 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT

PARTY, 2005
120X130 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT



orge W. Bush (rechts) und sein Vize Dick Cheney mit Ehefrauen bei der Feier am Vorabend des Amtseids.

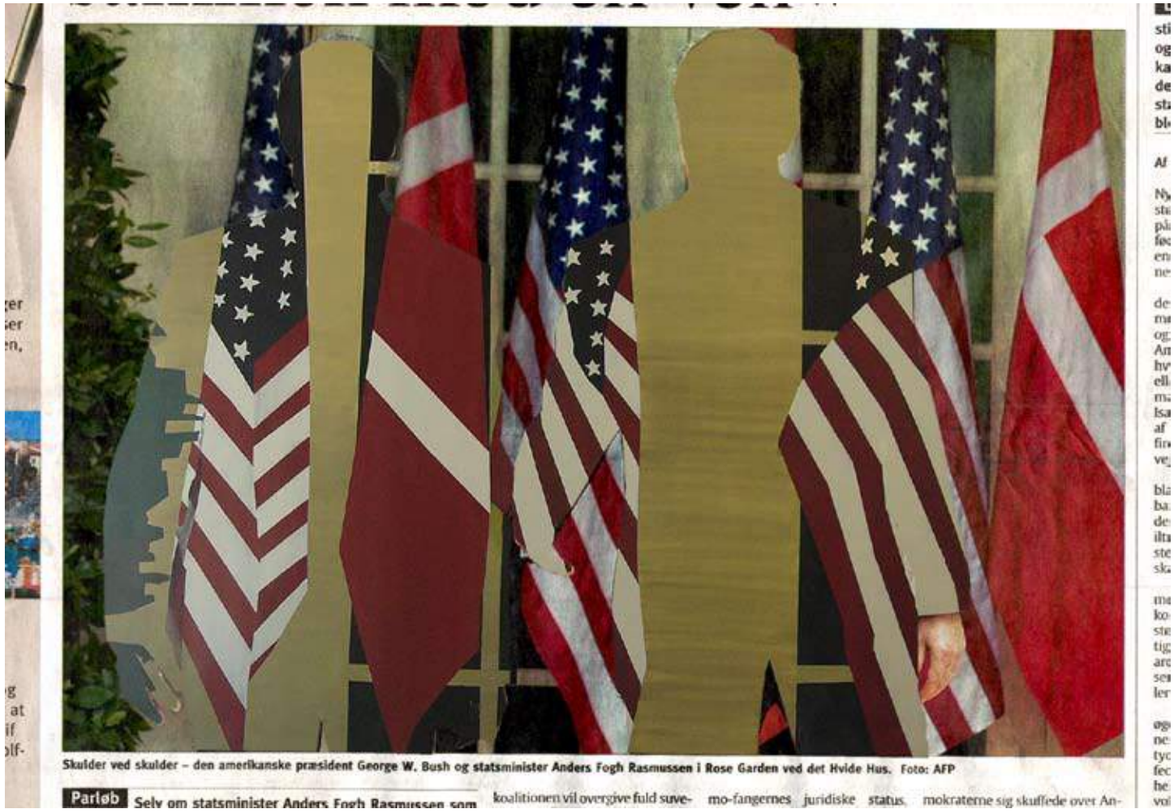
SAD PARADE, 2005
120X100 CM
OIL ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION



, **Pentagon-Chef Rumsfeld, Vorgesetzter Bush:** *Peinliche Parade der Pleiten*

in gefragter Mann. Kurz vor Weihnachten | Irak zu einer monströsen Bedrohung hoch-

SHOULDER BY SHOULDER 2004,
271X188 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION



Skulder ved skulder – den amerikanske præsident George W. Bush og statsminister Anders Fogh Rasmussen i Rose Garden ved det Hvide Hus. Foto: AFP

Parløb Selv om statsminister Anders Fogh Rasmussen som koalitionen vil overgive fuld suve- mo-fangernes juridiske status, mokraterne sig skuffede over An-

TWINS, 2005
32X48 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION

Redigeret af Anne Ravn

VALG 2004

lægger kursen mod hø

Foto: AP

SEJRHERREN – En stolt præsident Bush efter valgsejren med sine lige så stolte tvillinger, Jenna (til venstre) og Barbara i baggrunden. Bush er klar til at tage fat på yderligere fire år i Det Hvide Hus og løftede torsdag sløret for sin fremtidige

GOOD FRIENDS 2004,
189X118 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY (BUSH), 2004
83X175 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT
PRIVATE COLLECTION

N-Vollversammlung über Fehler im Irak-Konflikt

„Gerechtfertigtes Anliegen der Welt durchgesetzt": US-Präsident Bush Foto: ap

TURQUISE HEAVEN (PÄDOFILI IN ST. PÖLTEN), 2004
194X273 CM
ACRYLICS ON DIGITAL PRINT

DRENGESTREGER. Sankt Pölterns biskop, Kurt Krenn, slog fundet af børneporno-fotos på byens præsteseminarium hen som »drengestreger« og kaldte de homoseksuelle orgier »lidt for kærlige fester«.

INSTALLATION VIEW
YSTAD ART MUSEUM, 2005

BAZAAR (IRAQ), 2006.
210 X 136 CM.
OIL, DIGITAL PRINT ON CANVAS.

NIELS BONDE

MALMÖ KONSTMUSEUM

ISBN 87-991524-0-1

MALMÖ KONSTMUSEUM

NIELS BONDE
Souvenir

Malmö Art Museum's F Gallery is Scandinavia's oldest project gallery. It is centrally located, and most of our visitors pass through the exhibition space.

Over the years, many Swedish and foreign artists have exhibited in the gallery. Niels Bonde now returns to the F Gallery with a new project for the second time. His first exhibition in this space was in 1996.

Niels Bonde was born in 1961 and received his formal training at the Royal Danish Academy of Art and Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. Recent years include a number of exhibitions abroad.

In an intrusive, almost brutal manner, Niels Bonde explores the relationship between the private and the public sphere. The present works in the F Gallery show the way we reject, eliminate, and abstract the information flow, before recasting it in a new form to conform to the way we seemingly want to manage it.

Existential questions have always been of decisive importance to Niels Bonde. This is also the case with his exhibition in the F Gallery.

I would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in the realization of this project.

And to Niels Bonde, I would like to say: Welcome back to Malmö Art Museum!

Göran Christenson
Director, Malmö Art Museum

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nielsbonde.com

ISBN 87-991524-0-1

Layout: Mette Salomonsen
Photo: Anders Sune Berg,
Nicole Werner, Dorte Krogh
Print: Frederiksberg Bogtrykkeri A/S

Courtesy Galerie Asbæk
Bredgade 20, Copenhagen Denmark
www.asbaek.dk

BATTLE OF WILLS (NEPAL), 2006.
2 X 135 X 180 CM.
OIL, DIGITAL PRINT ON CANVAS.

PRIVATE RESORT (CONGO), 2006.
249 X 142 CM.
OIL, DIGITAL PRINT ON CANVAS.

Krigene i Den tredje Verden har deres egen logik: alt taler for at fortsætte, intet for at standse dem. Derfor fortsætter de da også, uden afgørende slag, men med stadig mere brutale massakrer.

Krigsscenarier. På den ene side krigsherrer, der har gjort krigen til en forretning. På den anden side Private Military Companies, der arbejder for nationale regeringer – eller for FN.

BASAYEV, 2006.
VIDEO PROJECTION.

SKI RESORT (SARAJEVO), 2006.
150 X 130 CM.
OIL, DIGITAL PRINT ON CANVAS.

ANDREAS SCHLAEGEL

Nothing Happened

"bete comme un peintre"
stupid as a painter

french proverb

*"**Perhaps there are** certain ages which do not need truth as much as they need a deepening of the sense of reality, a widening of the imagination."* Susan Sontag writes in her 1963 review of Simone Weil's book of essays.
Since the times of the Renaissance has painting has been considered a tool to explore the truth, to render the present. A near scientific means to reveal the inner working of things, as reflected by their outside, an opportunity to take a step into the direction of the real, with all implications, ideological and religious. In this respect it is a stupid medium. The French painter Gustave Courbet knew, he considered his realism to bury the romanticism of his days. This is tangible in his paintings, particularly in the way he structures his paint evenly, as if paying little regard to the importance of details, the depth of vision or any symbolic value of the motif. Courbet's unwillingness to resort to any form of idealism in his depictions of people and landscapes, preferring to focus instead on real scenes and their inherent dynamics, reflect his pursuit of truth as represented in the reality of the everyday, even in the faintest details or strange irregularities of nature. The importance and dignity the painter assigned to ordinary events, without romanticizing his subjects, was perceived by his contemporary critics as a lack of refinement, and finally literacy: what was truth to the painter was repugnant and common – plain stupid to them.
"Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error... Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral..." Marcel Duchamp hated the French proverb, and it is rather ironic that he links the stupidity of painting to the very painter who coined the phrase realism. But Duchamp's criticism is that painting since Courbet had merely copied itself in self-reflection, thereby oversimplifying and reducing itself to little more than a recording device, much like photography.

Photography owes a lot to painting, and vice versa. Photographers, who depict newsworthy events, often in a very spectacular manner, employ consciously or not art historical blueprints, often dealing with the heroism of the figure, the pathos of passionate expressions, violence, bodies caught in extreme displays of power. On the other hand many contemporary painters draw their inspiration from found photographic source material, like Gerhard Richter and Peter Doig. Gerhard Richter actually put his subject into focus by painting a photograph as

MUNCHOPHILIA, 2005. INSTALLATION. DIGITALPRINTS, PHOTOCOPIES, DVD. MUNCH REVISITED. HENIE ONSTAD ART CENTER, OSLO.

if it was out of focus – banking conceptually on the simplification of the image that occurs when details are lost in the blur. His work shows that images and the ideals they represent are static and superficial, therefore questionable, while reality is a process of imagination and revision. His blur-effect, achieved by simply wiping the contours soft with his brush, gives the image a photographic appearance while at the same time maintaining visible and simple painterly qualities that in their simplicity disrupt the motif, penetrating the subject, by depicting the fragility of the construction of its illusion.

In her essay Susan Sontag goes on: *"The truth is balance, but the opposite of truth, which is unbalance, may not be a lie".* Hard facts make the daily news, as well as news require hard facts. It is a reciprocal relationship, with an inherent dialogue between the interests of those who shape our world, culturally and visually, with all consumers' desires and preferences. News media define the prominence they are going to give to a story by a variety of factors: the expected impact on their audience, for example if dramatic events unfold unexpectedly, and if they fit well with the news organizations schedule. Consequently, developments occurring over long periods of time, will hardly receive a larger coverage.
The entertainment value of good news is far smaller than that of bad news that can shock and receive more attention by fuelling discussions. For this they need to be clear and unambiguous, requiring as little interpretation as possible. This effect is increased if the news can be told as a story, connected to a person, preferably of cultural proximity to the audience. Power, money, fame or notoriety on every scale, from the individual to nations, will increase audience's attention even more. Thereby the role of the image is of prime importance, as viewer's attention spans grow ever shorter, the transport of messages relies increasingly on images. However that an item of news is considered a story, removes it from the realm of truth and pushes it towards negotiability and into the realm of the narrative, and the fictional...

Niels Bonde's source material is as everyday as it gets. He paints the events out of the images in newspaper clippings. He enlarges clippings and has them printed on canvas, with fragments of the accompanying article, supposedly leaving little to the viewer|s imagination: the news deal with major catastrophes. But missing in his paintings are the actual protagonists: victims and perpetrators.
In his painting "Ski Resort", a raw landscape of open and bare earth is covered by a fragmented white glacial surface, with some snowy hills in the background. The near abstract quality of the painted landscape bears reminiscence to the reductive imagery of backgrounds in video games, such as ego-shooters. There the animated graphics need to be extremely simplified and to be constructed from the most basic geometric forms, for quicker processor reaction and faster game speed.
Yet the two people missing from the image are identified only by the remains of the newspaper's image subtitles, the former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander Ratko Mladic, who are accused of genocide and ethnic cleansing, particularly the Srebrenica Massacre, Europe's worst atrocity since WW2.
Cynically both are currently at large, and have factually been hiding for several years, refusing to appear before the UN tribunal in The Hague to face charges. That it has been possible for both to escape justice, despite international pressure on the Serb state, has made them popular national heroes within right-wingers, apparently a rather large and powerful community. The idea of a large group of people in Europe, who actively support suspected war criminals, thereby placing themselves outside of the law is rather unsettling.
Bonde's paintings portray several unsolved situations, and the complex problems that come with them – as reflected in the locations that provide the backdrops of social unrest and war: Iraq, Sharm-El-Sheikh, Nepal, Congo, every single one is like an open wound. But his work can't be reduced to mere social commentary, it has other qualities. As paintings, they are hybrids of artistic craft and digital technology, the mere painting over of the unpleasant hard fact reveals the actual flatness of the news image. The really hard fact is that the consumer of news hardly knows anything about the soft facts – the location, the people involved, the historic roots of the conflict. The images of the places without the main protagonists appear interchangeable, turning the images into a cynical game of Karaoke, letting the viewer fill in what happened where. In earlier paintings Bonde applied this treatment to a variety of well known public figures in an act of artistic elimination, as if to ask: wouldn't the world be a better place without these people?

Bodies are removed from the scene. The viewer in a kind of reflex tries to reinsert them into their context. What Bonde manages to make visible is something that lies beneath the images themselves, the way history is constructed in a process of collective canonization of the past, in an ongoing process of erasure. Producing a story of heroes and villains, history is reduced to a spectacle, much in the sense of Guy Debord's paradigm that it is empty at its core, ready to be filled with a new unified idea of history.
Dealing with erasure and disappearance, Bonde's work is also about forgetfulness and memory, raising the issue of how shadows of historic images shape the consciousness of the present. With the figures removed, the background of the news images turns into a landscape, the backdrop of before and after an event, with an occasional spectator in the image watching a non-event of ghostly outlines, paint textures with slightly different colours and the odd "lost" detail. Questions of historical visibility or invisibility are addressed, but they also point out the power of a culture based on images, and the desire to find the eminence of the "real" in the human body of the protagonist. The practices of image making in the news take this into account, and the artist invites his audience to reflect on the conditions that define both spectacle and spectator.

The artist Niels Bonde can look back onto a body of work that ranges from surveillance installations featuring fluffy toy animals with eerie camera eyes, to diagrams and flow charts of mental processes on an architectural scale, to computer designed carpets reflecting the way lives are lived in specific surroundings, as well as internet-based projects reflecting basic questions of interactivity. With his latest projects Bonde has returned to some of the most traditional tools in art. But this is by no way a departure from the basic interests that inform all of his work. A uniquely empathic perspective on subjects, and social frameworks in relation to systems of control, caught in between surveillance and paranoia – the portrayal of a society of neglect and self-denial, hiding in the spotlight of full media attention.

I NEVER HAD HAIR ON MY BODY OR HEAD, 1995. INSTALLATION. PLUSH ANIMALS, CCTV, CAMERAS. VOGES + PARTNER FRANKFURT/MAIN.

A culture of alienation based on collaborative interaction of the individual with representations of society perceives alienation as the flipside of the coin of freedom. This invention of romanticism suppresses the idea of alienation as a psychological strategy to avoid deep existential questions, freeing the individual to perform in everyday life, without weighing the consequences of every tiny decision

THE CONVERSATION. 1996. INSTALLATION. SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS, MONITOR, CLOSET. MALMÖ ART MUSEUM.

against a worst-case scenario. Subjectivity requires alienation, it allows the individual to stay intact as a whole without cracking up, without dissolving into a mere blur of many tiny individual problems and decisions. Another layer is constituted by distractions, consummation or entertainment, alienating the individual from his actual alienation process. Here culture reveals a self-destructive element, since at this point the process of alienation is prone to manipulation.

Repetition is attractive – it produces comfort, because the outcome is always the same. For example, by reproducing familiar images that we count on recurring. Psychological conditioning by repetition is a basic element of education, encouraging memorization. The spectacle is not simply visual, it's psychological: it conditions the viewer, and thereby sets limitations to his capability of imagination of possibilities. The almost religious ritual of reading the papers, the internet or watching the evening news on television is an important act of connecting to the nucleus of society, participating in a program of historical conditioning of the human consciousness. The media environment is inseparably connected to our consciousness by doing everything to stage our everyday lives. Media spectacles seep into the private realm when we think about identity or our political self in terms of certain media forms. Technology plays an important role in this, producing a symbiosis of innocence and moral authority, dividing the world into a safe inside and a hostile outside.

Niels Bonde's art offers the conceptual possibility of a different picture suggesting an alternative reading in a mass-culture context. International economic relations, in terms of resources and power structures have expanded the reach of capital and its image culture on a global scale. Sustainability is a key problem in the way things are going – however this only appears to increase a desire to maintain the illusion that things are going on as always. Immersed in media culture, as we are, there is hardly any communication happening that is unmediated. But what does the viewer comply to by communicating these channels of specific media? Commodity culture presents a variety of media forms and formats, primarily as an occasion to satisfy desires, be they individual wishes or political concerns.
News images play a significant role in what could be seen as a kind of self-inflicted conspiracy to repress global developments. They can be regarded as representations of a common desire to feel that things are going well, or at least under control. Even when it is increasingly becoming clear they are not, for example in terms of ecological devastation, the big puddle of mud of repressed information, of a common shared bad consciousness. Supporting a culture of complicity and non-intervention the news actually inform and shape the future - by generating images of the present, in the form of images of the past. The audience has been educated to suspend disbelief and play along in a next level of hard core Karaoke. The erasure of the villains can make visible, that the problem is not in the foreground. This painter sure ain't stupid.

Andreas Schlaegel
Mr. Schlaegel is an artist and writer based in Berlin.

SEA, SEX AND SUN (SHARM EL SHEIKH), 2006. 169 X 258 CM. OIL, DIGITAL PRINT ON CANVAS.