



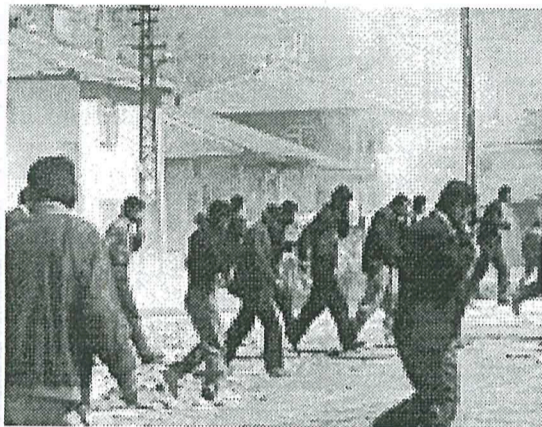
George Gittoes

The Unquiet World

By Moses Iten
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Confronted with images of the world as we don't see it in our news bulletins, the latest **ACCA** exhibition makes **Moses Iten** ponder the power of reportage versus art.

"Sometimes the world does seem calmer, quieter if you like, but at the moment, to me at least, it seems restless and edgy and uncertain and full of white noise and static," feels **Juliana Engberg**, Artistic Director of the **Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA)**, and curator of the current exhibition **The Unquiet World**. "I invented the title **Unquiet World** to represent this sense of disturbance. The exhibition settles momentarily on a number of global places where political, environmental or social unrest occurs. I guess you could call these trouble spots, but in some ways I would prefer to say places in process: some for better and some for worse. While there is trouble there is also a tremendous willingness on the part of the artists to be part of a repairing, problem solving process. Importantly there is a sense of urgency to get information out beyond the mediated and regulated places of network media and sanctioned releases".



Still from Ursula Biemann's 'Black Sea Files' installation
[Images courtesy ACCA]

On first entering **ACCA**, I can feel this sense of urgency emanating from **Ursula Biemann's** work **Black Sea Files**. Multiple monitors line up next to each other with one set of headphones serving the sound for two monitors at a time: one playing a static landscape and the other a mob of protestors. As I sit there eyeing both contrasting monitors with the single soundtrack, I can't help but glance at all the screens at once; also look at how other people are reacting to what they are seeing; and once even turn down the volume of my headphones to eavesdrop on a couple standing nearby.

The details of the narration telling me about the construction of oil pipelines, and pre-Maoist era title-deeds from Kazakh landowners now living in Istanbul sink in – but I can't remember the facts. I react the same way to the news, and find more solace in the cinema. Feel a fiction title impacts me more than a newspaper. As I randomly select a second pair of screens, my ears are still hearing sound from multiple sources – until the third pair captures my attention and suddenly it's just me and the two screens. I don't glance or eavesdrop: my attention is captured. One monitor shows trucks travelling Central Asian roads, that the narrator tells me carry much more than oil. The second screen closes in on the faces of two prostitutes perplexed and uncomfortable about being interviewed in their hotel room, assured by their pimps that it's only for a "home video" - not for the media. This personal nature hooks me – who is this person asking questions? Not a journalist. One of the pimps calls her a "tourist", and later says "this filming is just one of her hobbies".

"Artists have a tremendous ability to make connections with people, because they are unofficial and at the best of times open to discovery they allow us to witness a very personal account of things that are often obscured by the restrictions of commercial interest, government interventions and policy and so forth," believes **Juliana Engberg**. "Artists have always performed this function to some extent, but certainly this group of artists have a strong link to the idea of art and life which spreads through most of modernity, and gained special force in the socially engaged practices of the 1970s – well, post '68 - I guess".

Artists – as opposed to journalists - enjoy more freedom in the way they engage with society and present their work. Blogs are one medium of expression that can carry the potency of reportage and the unconstrained freedom of art. Validity and accuracy are superseded by capturing people's emotions. Back in 2003, a blogger - calling himself **Salam Pax** and dubbed the 'Baghdad Blogger' by the media - began documenting the chaos of war unfolding around him online, and became an overnight media sensation. His work – a video diary – is also part of **The Unquiet World**, but in an interview Pax once admitted that journalists will always be needed to document the world "objectively".

With the proliferation of so much media that we are bombarded with on a daily basis, people tend to switch off and only consume what they want to hear. I couldn't help asking **Juliana Engberg**: how does this danger of saturation affect the contemporary art world? "Art, if compelling, cuts through this media saturation," answers **Engberg**. "In certain ways that's what differentiates art from other forms of visual transmission. **Salam Pax** is a good example of this. He uses visual dislodgings to make us aware of the constructed aspects of his video diary. This means we have reason to remain alert and aware and to remain open with enquiry. Conventional TV and film making try to make seamless information, make it normalised, so that you do not notice the manipulations. Art operates in a very different way".

:: **The Unquiet World** is on at **ACCA** in Melbourne until July 23rd, 2006. In winter, **ACCA** is open Tuesday to Friday 10am-5pm; Saturday and Sunday 11am-6pm; Monday by appointment only 10am-5pm.

ORGANISATION:

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA)



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