

Perceiving the gun: works by Jan Bauer, Alain Declercq & Joachim Seinfeld

How do people perceive guns? To what extent does the packaging or contextualization of firearms influence people's perception? This exhibition features works that parse the very process of perceiving guns and armed violence.

In his series *Images with Circles*, German artist Jan Bauer faithfully reproduces cropped sections of text and images from magazines and newspapers. What unites these paintings are the eye-catching red circles that clearly signal what the viewer is to consider important. On display are two of three works whose red circles lead the viewer's eye to a 9 mm pistol aimed at Pope John Paul II in his popemobile.* The paintings capture the very same moment—the late afternoon of 13 May 1981, a split second before the would-be assassin pulled the trigger, critically wounding the pontiff—from two different vantage points. Both package the momentous event using standardized visual tools. Similarly, in 'Seconds after the Shot', a red circle fixes the viewer's gaze on a fallen person.** Should the viewer not focus on the bystanders, who seem utterly oblivious to the wounded or dying body beside them? Is the viewer capable of deciding what is worth noticing?

In his film *Mike* (2005), French artist Alain Declercq retraces the path of a secret agent in hot pursuit of a terrorist group. Oscillating between reality and fiction, and leading viewers from the Middle East to Washington, this film generated enough confusion to prompt the French anti-terrorist brigade to search the artist's home and investigate his alleged links to Al Qaeda. Struck by the absurdity of the charges, but conscious that his work could mislead the investigators, Declercq sought to defuse the tension. He produced two hitman attaché cases—*Glasnost 1* and *2*—both distinguished by their mock attempt at camouflage. Tailored to suit security forces that level absurd charges, one reveals a blatant imprint of a Colt 1911, a military sidearm, while the other hardly conceals a Colt M4 carbine, whose barrel and buttstock protrude preposterously.

Ego Shooter (2005), by German artist Joachim Seinfeld, requires hands-on audience participation. A strip of red carpet invites visitors to step up to a booth, pick up a gun that is resting on a ledge, and shoot at a target set in a pastoral landscape. Upon pulling the trigger, each shooter will see the target be replaced by his or her mirror image, scarred by a bullet hole. The exercise calls into question whether it is possible to shoot without fearing any self-inflicted damage. Moreover, it begs the question: to what extent does context influence our ability to appreciate the (self-)destructive power of armed violence?

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* (1) 'Wer warum beim Heiligen Geist spioniert' ('Who Spies on the Holy Ghost and Why', oil on canvas, 1.10 x 1.50 m); (2) 'Neue Spekulationen über das Papst-Attentat' ('New Speculation regarding the Assassination Attempt on the Pope', oil on canvas, 1.05 x 1.10 m).

** 'Sekunden nach dem Schuss', 70 x 55 cm, oil on canvas, 2005.

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Senfelderplatz (U2) or Mollstraße/Prenzlauer Allee (M2)



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