Sean Snyder: Index
ICA Upper and Lower Galleries
12 February – 19 April 2009

Stills from Sean Snyder, Exhibition, 2008, 35mm film transferred to DVD

Sean Snyder: Index is the first institutional solo exhibition in the UK from this significant American artist. Snyder is one of the most important proponents of the research-based and documentary practice, which has been a feature of art in the last decade. In particular, his work shows a pre-occupation with the ongoing re-interpretation of information and images in the news media, from the Cold War to present day conflict. Combining footage and still images from amateur, government and media sources, his works explore such subjects as the ethics of reportage, the staging and manipulation of images, and the changing role of photojournalists in the era of consumer digital imaging. Perhaps best known for his examination of the way that the continuous and global circulation of images has affected all aspects of our culture, this exhibition includes a selection of Snyder’s key video and photographic projects from the last five years.

The exhibition takes its title, Index, from a major new project by Snyder that makes its debut at the ICA. In 2008 the artist began the process of digitising the archives that he has amassed while making his works, and this year has created a website to allow access to this digital resource – which at one level is an exercise in information-sharing. The exhibition contains works relating to this project, including photographs, films and other materials that document the re-formatting and eventual destruction of Snyder’s physical archive – a process in which the artist’s interest in the flux of information and images reaches its natural conclusion.

A trio of film and video installations exploring representation and propaganda from the Cold War to Gulf War Two will be on show within the gallery space. Exhibition (2008) uses a Soviet documentary film from 1965 as its starting point. The original praises the efforts of a village museum in the Ukraine in presenting an exhibition of Mexican art and examines the collective components of an exhibition including its reception, framing of the works and accompanying seminars. Snyder has however re-edited the film, hinting at the failure of educational projects that are based on supposedly ‘universal’ notions of artistic value.
Soviet propaganda also forms the basis of a second installation, Afghanistan circa 1985 (2008-09). This work uses footage shot during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, including an obviously staged sequence of occupying troops and Afghans joining in a celebratory dance.

A third installation, Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars (2004-05), involves material of a more recent date. The video looks at the operation of propaganda and journalistic practice, and the role of corporations and consumerism, in the context of the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Combining footage and still images from amateur, government and journalistic sources, and constructing a loose historical narrative spanning decades of foreign corporate involvement in both countries, this powerful work explores the ethics of reportage, the staging and manipulation of images and the changing role of photojournalists in the era of consumer digital imaging.

Such issues are also at play in a group of works that complement the video installations. Drawn from Snyder’s Optics. Compression. Propoganda. (2006-ongoing), the series of photographic experiments work with the relationship between digital and analogue imaging techniques and political representation.


For more information, images and interview requests, please contact:

Zoë Franklin
Press Officer
Tel: 020 7766 1418
Email: zoe.franklin@ica.org.uk

About the ICA

The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is a multi-disciplinary arts centre; the home of artistic and cultural thinking and presentation of contemporary arts across all its forms. Housing two galleries, two cinemas, a theatre, bookshop, education resources, café and bar and offering an experience that is relevant, provocative, exhibitionist, irreverent, trend-setting, anti-establishment and revolutionary, it has been ahead of the game since its inception over 60 years ago and has presented some of the most radical exhibitions, artists, films, musicians and thought to have shaped our world. It exists today as a committed proponent of now, presenting an international and contextualized programme of work in new and experimental frameworks across the broadest platforms. Entrance to galleries, bookshop, café and bar events is free of charge before 11pm.