MYRIAM THYES
Himmelgeister Str. 107 F
40225 Düsseldorf
Germany

Tel: +49-211-9053500
myriam@thyes.com
www.thyes.com

FLAG METAMORPHOSES
abstract for lecture with screening   www.flag-metamorphoses.net

1) I briefly explain my background

I'm a swiss / luxembourgish artist and have studied painting and videoart at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf, Germany. I have realised solo projects in public areas with flag installations in Düsseldorf 1996 and Luxembourg 1997. Since 1999, my work focuses on videoart, animation and digital imagery. 2000-2004, I have realised media art projects on public screens as a member of the artists group [Strictly Public]. In 2005, the still growing flash animation series FLAG METAMORPHOSES has received funding from the Swiss Federal Office of Culture.

2) The concept of the project FLAG METAMORPHOSES

A participatory / collaborative art project - a continuously growing animation series with many authors:
The flags of every nation in the world transform into each other through flash animation.
For some hundred years, states and nations are symbolized through their flags and coats of arms. A flag may blow in the wind, but its appearance changes far less frequently than does the country which it represents. Using digital media however, we can make the symbols dance: an exploration into the meaning of imagery on flags, aiming to create interrelated associations through questioning, reassessing, fluidizing and re-mixing of diverse national iconography.
Between each two flags, scenes appear that show an aspect of the relations between the two countries.
Each artist who creates a flag animation expresses such a relation in his/her own way. FLAG METAMORPHOSES lays stress on the relations between nations and identities as changing ones: Only in the permanent re-creation of values, symbols and ways of life, in mixing with others and differing from others, cultures and societies stay alive.

Research
Although the symbols on flags are related to the real history of a country, they often more clearly express specific claims or aspirations - such as strength, independence, beauty or the greatness of the country and its achievements. This makes working with the symbols more complicated, but at the same time elevates the issues under consideration onto a more abstract, philosophical and cultural/historical plane. The Myths hidden in the flags can be revealed through research and be productively employed in the animation. We will also examine relationships between the countries: neighbouring countries, colonial relationships, cultural influences etc. Basis for the visual realisation of the flag transformations: The symbols displayed on the flags and their meanings; the relationships between countries - historical, cultural, political, religious, economic.

Artistic realisation
Whereas most flags have predominantly simple geometric forms such as stripes, circles, stars, moons, triangles and crosses, in the transformation phase figurative, symbolic, irregular, amorphous, and organic shapes can emerge (and disappear again). The aim is therefore to add shapes and figures to it which express some connection to the country of the next flag - a "symbolic narrative". The transition between two flags can vary greatly, depending on which aspect of the relationship between the two countries the authors choose to accentuate. This is then in effect a never-ending project: every flag could be transformed into every other flag, in both directions and in many different ways.

Call for entries / participation
Deadline: ongoing. Invited are any interested parties from all countries to develop an animation for this series.
If you like to contribute an animation, please send me an email saying which flags you would like to animate. I will provide you with the desired flags as Illustrator files, to be imported directly into your Flash project. Each participating artist / author will research the connections between their two chosen countries and independently realise the animation in Flash and send me their Flash scene as project (.fla).

3) Screening: I show and explain some of the animations

4) Finding the international artists / authors and motivate them to contribute
- translation of the concept and call into 7 languages
- I give lectures and workshops (in art events, schools and universities)
- spreading the call through websites, mailing lists, emails (to artists, festivals, universities, art institutions, ...)
- problems to reach artists in Africa, Asia (China), Arabic countries, even South America
- (email) communication between interested and contributing international artists and me; personal contacts
- curating / selection – not every animation is accepted – I explain, why

- project website (and other websites)
- film / video / media art festivals
- art galleries, museums – as installation with selection menu for the visitors, or as multi-screen installation
- on public video screens

This project is adequate for all audiences and contexts, also for the public space and the web, for various reasons:
- the graphical style, strong colours and hard edges look brillant on digital video screens and computer monitors
- the topics of this animation series are about societies, politics, culture and history - genuine public themes
- in short time – duration 30 sec. to 3 min. – statements can be made without words, internationally understandable
- international artists can continue to contribute and react on new developments
- the call for participation can be published on public screens, too, with URL

(Question: how to find out about the audience's reactions?)

6) Discussion about the project and its possibilities, and / or I'll show and explain more flag animations.

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