

FLAG METAMORPHOSES

www.flag-metamorphoses.net

lecture with screening

1) Explain my background [Caribbean Carnivals plays]

I'm a swiss / luxembourgish artist and, studied painting and videoart at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf, Germany. 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.

For the last 15 years, **my projects always question the meanings of symbols in their cultural and socio-political context and function.**

Collective memories, internalised history and values, the subconscious of a society are all reflected in its images and symbols. (We often don't remember consciously, WHY we believe in certain values and traditions. Many contemporary mainstream cultural products insist on and reproduce these values without questioning their present truth – if they make any sense in the present situation of a society.)

I work with and transform religious symbols, images from Hollywood films, believed „objective, factual“ images like world maps, and political symbols like flags.

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.**

Static symbols get LIFE through animation: 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 express specific claims or aspirations – such as strength, independence, beauty or the greatness of the country and its achievements.

The Myths “hidden” in the flags can be revealed through research and be productively employed in the animation.

Examine relationships between the countries: neighbouring countries, colonial relationships, cultural influences etc.

Artistic realisation:

The aim is not only to transform the visual composition of flags but also to add shapes, figures, scenes to it which express some connection to the country of the next flag. The transition between two flags can vary greatly, depending on which aspect of the relationship between the two countries the authors choose to accentuate. **A never-ending project: every flag could be transformed into every other flag, in both directions and in many different ways.**

3) Screening: I show and explain some of the animations [screening of Flash films]

Korea - Japan (religious symbols), 0:32, stereo, Myriam Thyes, 2005

first animation, short and simple

Korea - Japan (beauty+occupation), 1:28, silent, Nicola Tauscher DE/KR, 2006

same countries, different approach

Stars'n'Stripes Gun Crazy, 1:11, stereo, Max Pohlenz DE, 2005

war theme, MORE flags, concept broken

Brazil – China, 0:42, stereo, Myriam Thyes DE /CH, 2006

economical relation, present

India – Scotland, 1:20, stereo, Rona Innes UK, 2006	economical relation, past
Cuba – USA, 0:36, silent, Barry L. Roshto USA / DE, 2006	politics / cold war
Laos – Canada, 0:39, stereo, Peter Chanthanakone CA, 2005	personal story of flight from war
Thailand - Sri Lanka, 0:40, stereo Natalieann Rich USA, 2008	cultural connections
Ethiopia – Israel, 1:13, silent, Alex Schneider USA, 2008	religious connections (3 tried, but failed to do Palestine - Israel)
Ex-Yugoslavia, 0:44, stereo, Irena Paskali MK, 2007	a country breaks in pieces - melancholy
Bosnia & Herzegovina, 1:49, silent, Ajdin Pajevic BiH/DE, 2006	war creates new country, hope
Congo – Belgium, 1:05, stereo, Myriam Thyès DE / CH, 2005	neo-colonial exploitation remains

The scenes often deal with colonialism and wars; this is natural when it comes to **flags, as war was the purpose they were made for** (to distinguish the fighting parties from each other), and the system of flags we know today was spread by the colonial powers. (I have decided not to create animations directly about wars, but about economical (neo)colonialism, symbolic / religious systems and cultural influences.)

Many animations realized for the project are longer and include more than two flags – they are almost short stories. Therefore I cannot, like intended in the beginning, combine these scenes in order to produce one long animation, but it will **remain a SERIES of animations**.

About the **formal solution** of the flag animations: What I have in mind, is generally **"one changing image", not a "film" with scenes and cuts**: I prefer morphs and transformations, a scene that develops by metamorphoses and replacements of objects and shapes, in order to avoid the change of the complete image at once – an animation without "cuts".

Idea for „**futuristic**“ **flag animations**, for example: Ireland sells rain water to desert countries.

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, South America
- (email) communication between interested and contributing international artists and me; personal contacts
- curating / selection – not every animation is accepted – I explain, why

5) Public presentation - the project / animation series can be watched on various platforms and in all kinds of places [images of exhibitions, screenings, festivals and outdoor presentations]

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