

'THIS IS CAMP X-RAY' BY JAI REDMAN

In an article especially commissioned for Don't Cross the Line, Dave Gledhill discusses the artistic context of the work.

We live at the receiving end of an agenda driven media industry that, unlike the arts community, can locate, contextualise and relay information within a matter of minutes. The morning papers, the television and the internet provide us with filtered and linguistically conditioned representations of events that become conversational currency the very same day they occur. A gun in the stomach on the other side of the globe translates as a row at the pub over here in the West.

There's a vital sense in which political events both within and beyond the U.S/UK axis are commodified and sold to us as a form of culture. What you choose to call this process is of no account. What matters is that anything that can be turned into culture can also be marginalised and removed from the sphere of the actionable. What we actually do every day is work for pay and play for relief. Hypnotised by the means/ends equation of our daily routines we have neither the time nor the will to turn what remains of freedom of thought into action. This is the unoccupied space that artists are uniquely able to negotiate. We still need them to do that for us.

It's a commonplace of Marxist cultural theory that art is an autonomous sphere outside of the praxis of life. Within this ambiguous condition reside a number of intriguing potentialities. As TW Adorno pointed out, "culture is only true when implicitly critical". Artists are free to underscore particular issues that are conventionally mediated and served up cold, thereby retuning us to the sensory immediacy of injustices we may be Governmentally complicit in. Whichever end of the spectrum of endorsed views one may sympathise with, it's just possible that a first hand experience of the sights, sounds and looming menace of the political hot zone could further inform or even revise one's convictions. At any rate, all we stand to lose is our utter obliviousness of the specific acts that continue to be perpetrated in our name, with or without our consent.

Jai Redman, in conjunction with the UHC Collective has devised an extraordinary intervention that fully exploits the potential of art practice to de-generalise the particular scenario. 'This is Camp X-Ray', one part of a group project called 'Don't Cross

The Line', is a replica of the infamous Guantanamo Bay detainment centre, complete with armed guards and watchtower. The site, in the midst of a residential development in Hulme, could hardly be more conspicuous or central and for the 9 days between October 9th and 18th we are free to witness a process that flouts the principles of justice, literally outside our own front doors: "Most people in the country when they're told the truth react with a great deal of anger and sympathy, but if they're not they think that the political makeup of Britain is one of apathy and disinterest".

The camp holds 9 'prisoners,' comprising a larger number of individuals working on a shift system. The 9 represent the number of British citizens amongst the 300 detainees. The minimum stretch is 24 hours and whilst volunteers are not chained in the kind of open air cages that constitute 'accommodation' at the real camp, the crude hut that serves in Cuba as the interrogation centre makes for a pretty grim billet. The camp is surrounded by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, the entrance sandbagged and flanked by a sentry post and the entire installation is lit and rigged for tannoy broadcasts. Entry and of course exit, is forbidden.

Redman's work encompasses painting, assemblage and graphics, and describes a journey into a big-picture political consciousness and an aesthetic strategy that maximises the possibility of effecting grassroots change. Between the photographic work derived from his first hand experience of the Twyford Down protest in the early 90's, to 'Camp X-Ray', he has pulled back from domestic ecological issues to address international social justice in a manner that is both potent and sophisticated. Fully aware of the 'don't tell it, show it' axiom that precludes the danger of didacticism, his intention is to inspire activism by example rather than indoctrinate by dogma. 'This is Camp X-Ray' recruits a piece of fallow urban territory to draw a parallel between the marginalisation of art and the suspension of basic human rights by internment as functions of western imperialism. The most powerful nations are free to extend their narrative of supremacy by disposing of contradictory evidence however and wherever they please, even in contravention of their own avowed principles. The responsibility for the illumination of this twilight of unaccountability lies with all of us. With this installation the machinery of social containment, Guy Debord's 'Society of the Spectacle', is turned against itself. This is

theatre where you write the script and the very nature of the piece is collaborative. As Redman points out, "each of the individual prisoners and guards will have their own story to tell. That's the only way that political change can now be realised in this country, because voting and marching don't work".

UHC understand that the perpetual present day of our working and consuming lives is the only available forum in which to register dissent and raise political awareness. Anything that isn't directly in front of us, either on the way to or from work, can simply be ignored. Whilst we maintain our art galleries with public money, we can also feel mildly relieved that we've swept all that uncomfortable stuff into a corner which we seldom have time to look into. Educational programmes notwithstanding, art galleries as specialist environments are both forbidding and an indivisible part of the synthetic material of state, designed after all, to keep us happily compliant. Outdoors is different. Whilst some may maintain that art need have no more purpose than to amuse or divert, one doesn't have to be a Marxist to realise that it can do much more. Beyond the gallery and on its own terms it can engage, inform and inspire. Which of us, given the tools to make a difference, would lay them down and walk away?