

Interview with photographer Jason Murphy, participant in Art Against War

Clare Hurley
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In preparing the review of the exhibit Art Against War, this reviewer interviewed (via email) photographer Jason Murphy, who lives and works in South Korea. The poster he contributed to the show was "Time to think outside the Box," created online in collaboration with Daniel Scheffer. He also was responsible for one of the web versions of the show: http://retiform.ath.cx/modules.php?set_albumName=album21&op=modload&name=gallery&file=index&include=view_album.php

Clare Hurley: Why were you interested in exhibiting in this show? What effect do you think it will have?

Jason Murphy: I was interested in exhibiting in this show as I feel it is a good step for artists to once again be actively critical of the social order and social injustices—in fact I feel it is our responsibility. At this point in time there appears to be very little critical response to some very groundbreaking historical events such as the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq, where, as you know, countless innocent people have lost their lives. The sheer one-sided, aggressive and imperialistic nature of these conflicts is very alarming. Although there was massive objection across the world to the attack against Iraq, this still does not seem to have resonated into artistic practice.

I feel that this show will have the effect (as previous shows organized by Frank Shifreen, such as *Ground Zero*) of saying to artists 'it's okay to stand up and be critical and make art in response to events such as these.' There almost seems to be a climate whereby a person feels apologetic about openly criticising the actions of their governments these days. Although I feel there needs to be more clarity and in some cases less literalism in approaching such political themes, it is definitely positive for artists to begin moving in this

direction. I certainly want to be a part of this.

CH: What influence do you think art has or can/should have in social/political movements? How important is this in your own work? What should artists strive for in this regard?

JM: I feel that art is a means whereby we can all understand social and political movements and events in a clearer way. We are constantly barraged by media coverage on all manner of events. Artists ought to be disseminating these events with the aid of historical knowledge and interpreting them into meaningful and thought provoking utterances. I feel that art and social/political movements are inextricably tied together. This is a fact which appears to have escaped many contemporary artists lately. For whether they realize it or not, whatever art they make—whether it openly criticizes society or not—it makes a certain political statement about that artist, his values and our societal and political makeup.

For example, the fact that most films made in the West these days do not address the great social injustices and imbalances firmly in place, makes a strong social/political statement that certain layers of the population (and the artist) in the West simply do not care or worry about this at all. Therefore, without perhaps wanting to be political, they have inevitably been political. So much better to be conscious and actually attempt to say something directly through the work, than be asleep and have no power over what it is you inadvertently communicate.

CH: Have you been active as an artist in this way before recent events? What about other artists you know?

I was involved with an online version of the *Ground Zero* show which Frank Shifreen, Daniel Scheffer and Julias Vitali organized. I know a few other artists who

are working in this way, but we are generally spread across the globe and are reliant on email as a means of communication—which is okay, but far from ideal.

CH: Can you tell a little about your work (as I saw only the one poster in the show of the little white walking boxes).

JM: I've been working with photography for a few years now and have also experimented with film. At the moment I'm involved in two projects in Korea. One where I am attempting to document life in South Korea through photographs and some text. I am doing this as I feel that in the West where a lot of conflicts are justified via the mainstream news media, little can be known or is typically revealed of the places and people in question, whose lives are hanging in the balance as they await international aggression. As Korea is becoming highlighted more and more lately, and it is possible that a conflict may escalate here—I feel it's vital to communicate the fact that there is an incredibly complex and dynamic population and culture here. Life is tremendously complex, horribly imbalanced; but people are incredible and beautiful and never deserve to be lowered to “sound-byte” politics which could determine their lives and the lives of their families.

The other principal work in Korea is a film that is in production at the moment. The story was written by Mark Seniuk and Andrew Covey, two Canadian artists. We've been working on this film together. The story is a criticism of the trafficking of people for prostitution. It's a part of life here in Korea and often goes uncommented on.

I have also been involved in an experimental, long-distance collaboration with Daniel Scheffer. In fact the poster at the show is a collaborative piece made by both of us.

CH: Who are other artists influencing your work and/or your approach to these issues?

I would have to say that the movements of Dada and Surrealism have had a positive influence on me. I don't feel that elements of these movements have bridged over into my work, but their spirit of criticism and questioning is something that I have drawn on for strength at various times. Much is made of being very singular these days in the art world. There do not appear to be many “groups” operating who have made positive or considerable impact. It's been my experience, however, that working in a group can be a

powerful force for one's own practice. Having worked together with Daniel Scheffer and Frank Shifreen has had a strong positive impact on me and my work. However, I feel that I have a lot to learn and a long way to go and have by no means achieved my goal of addressing the issues I feel strongly about, politically: in an artwork.

CH: Frank Shifreen mentioned that you were a reader of the WSWS. If so, would you care to comment on the relevance of this particular perspective to your work?

It's been a strong influence on my understanding of political events and I feel that it has in turn greatly influenced how I approach other artists work and my own. I find that the art reviews on the WSWS are great and the film reviews by David Walsh are very inspiring. In fact, it was through a review by David Walsh that I first heard about and came into contact with Frank Shifreen and Daniel Scheffer. This is something I am very grateful for and the WSWS has been instrumental in this process for me. It's certainly difficult these days to find an organization which has a firm and principled objective, which is to deliver the truth. It's been very reassuring for me to have this aid in understanding current and historical political events.



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