



4. John Hitchcock

John Hitchcock had what he describes as ‘an intercultural hybrid American upbringing’, coming from mixed Kiowa/Comanche and German/Northern European stock. Born in the Wichita Mountains, he studied in Oklahoma and Texas, and now teaches printmaking and installation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His work has been exhibited widely, both in the United States and internationally, and he has also been involved in numerous public-art projects and national printmaking events. His childhood experiences of living close to the US Army base at Fort Sill and of being close to the wildlife refuges in the mountains remain powerful sources of inspiration for his work. He has memories from the early 1970s of the tanks rolling past his home at night, of helicopters overhead and military exercises in the woods, and of how he thought the television images of the Vietnam War were coming from outside his window across Highway 49. ‘It was,’ he admits, ‘somewhat confusing.’

ABOVE *Crusade, Wanted* Screen prints/digital prints; 2002 (installed as part of the ‘Terminal’ exhibition of work by John Hitchcock at Joseph Gross Gallery, University of Arizona, August–October 2004)

INSET *Wanted* Screen print/digital print; 111.8 x 76.2 cm (3 ft. 8 in. x 2 ft. 6 in.); 2002

Crusade Screen print/digital print; 111.8 x 76.2 cm (3 ft. 8 in. x 2 ft. 6 in.); 2002

The issues with which Hitchcock deals in his work emerge from this background and from his close engagement with the politics of contemporary America. He is profoundly aware of his tribal inheritance and the manner in which the nature of armed aggression against native peoples in the past is reflected in current international conflicts. It is his belief that ‘The foundation of the

United States was built on assimilation, relocation and genocide', and that 'We need to look at American history and ask serious questions now. We need to question the notion of progress, including the influence of technology on society.' In both his individual prints and in his exhibitions, which use a full range of media in their installations, he deals with the problem of consumption as well as 'the proliferation of images in popular culture and mass electronic media that inundate our lives daily', using these as starting points for a broader questioning of political and social systems. In his manipulation of images and devices in the installations he presents to the public, Hitchcock is sharply aware of how ideas and concepts become inherently political, particularly when they deal with issues of consumption that have a direct bearing on everybody in society. He believes that 'It's highly important for citizens to speak up about social, political and personal concerns. We need as many perspectives as possible to operate as a democracy.'

More than a Thousand (installation of screen prints as part of the 'Exit Strategies' exhibition at Macalester College Art Gallery, St Paul, Minnesota, November/December 2004)

In *Ritual Device* (1999/2000, at various venues), an example of his exhibited installations, John Hitchcock presents the viewers with an interactive game. A wall is covered with a cut-out bright-yellow wooden chicken, derived from the logo on commodity food items distributed by the US Department of Agriculture to welfare programmes and indigenous peoples, and there are buckets of balls, a video projection on a wall of white balloons with darts, a military blanket covered with prints, bottles and hoops and giveaway bags containing small prints. The intention is for the balls to be thrown at the chicken, the darts to be thrown at the balloons, the hoops to be thrown over the bottles and the giveaway bags to be taken home by the viewers-cum-participants in this *Ritual Device*. The references are to carnivals and tribal ceremonies involving the giving of gifts, as well as to the giveaway culture of mass marketing. Underlying the installation and its constituent parts there are the political and social implications of the imagery of the commodities on which society increasingly depends for its survival, a deeper, subversive message which is shared with those who choose to take part of the installation away with them.



In the 2004 series of prints for the exhibition 'Frenzy Feeds Addiction', Hitchcock uses images derived from plastic toy cowboys, soldiers and Native Americans, combined with targets and word labels. The implications of each pair of prints in 'Crusade' and 'Wanted' are multi-levelled. On the surface are simple references to the innocence (and its subsequent loss) implied by the plastic toys of childhood, and the equally simple and naïve assumptions about the goodies and baddies of childhood games. The deeper intentions and meanings are suggested in the carefully chosen words and their positioning on the prints. In all John Hitchcock's work the viewer is compelled to consider the wider meanings of such apparently innocent depictions.

5. Redas Diržys

Born in Alytus, a small city west of Vilnius, Redas Diržys occupies a prominent and controversial place in the contemporary art world of Lithuania. He graduated in metal crafts from the Tallinn Art Academy and is currently the Principal of the Alytus Art School. His artistic activities cover many forms including printmaking, installation, performance and writing, and his work has been exhibited widely throughout Europe and in the USA. The activities he pursues follow his aim of 'establishing

an independent artistic strategy of how to act in society (that is very close to the concept of the "construction of situation")'. In recent years he has developed a method of working that is based on his 'Drilling Manifesto' – the act of getting beneath a surface to allow an image to emerge. Diržys's original approach to printmaking is utterly consistent with his highly idiosyncratic attitude to the role of art in contemporary society. His work in recent years has followed two interlinked themes, both of which reuse the familiar element of the newspaper photograph. One theme is based on notorious leaders such as Pol Pot and Alexander Lukashenko (the current President of Belarus); the other on a friend who works in television. In the first case he seeks to 'humanise' those who, for most people, exist only in terms of a mass-media image; and in the second case to promote an ordinary person to the status of celebrity. In both cases, by transforming an image from a newspaper photograph into an art work he 'extends its evolution'. His working method for producing prints is to take a newsprint image and enlarge it greatly using a photocopier, thereby exaggerating the screen dots. The paper matrix is then fixed to a wooden panel, and holes are drilled by using drill bits of different sizes to match the white dots in the

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT *Pol Pot #16 (Ireland)* Woodcut from drilled woodblock; n.d.

Ryskus #13 Woodcut from drilled woodblock; n.d.

Post Pol Pot #6 (Lithuania) Woodcut from drilled woodblock; n.d. (studio photograph)

