

By combining image of war with images of untroubled leisure, Randa Mirza constructs scenarios that disconcert us. But why are they so disconcerting? On the most basic level, her works present nothing but a condensed version of what we experience every day when, peacefully sitting on our sofas, we are confronted by the television or the newspaper with new images from war zones. The artist's oeuvre thus places her between two great traditions in photography: documentary and reportage that bears witness on the one hand, photographic collage and agitprop art on the other hand.

In the series *Parallel Universes* (2006-08), she uses found footages imagery from the Lebanese civil war between 1975 and 1990 as well as the 2006 hostilities, which she montages with touristic snapshots, as e.g. in *Untitled 01*. A young woman wearing a striped top, her blonde hair tied in a ponytail, turns towards the camera, a cheerful grin on her lips, and two fingers of her left hand raised to form a V for victory. The gesture seems to be a cynical response to the scene behind her: tanks block the street, with soldiers posted in front of them, some of whom also look towards the camera. Next to them, a wearied (war-weary?) elderly lady bends down toward a jerry can she uses to carry water. The absurdity inherent in this meeting is heightened by the contrasting colors; the figure of the young woman, in luminous colors, is silhouetted against the clayey tones of the background.

In each of Randa Mirza's photograph, it is the gaze of the protagonists that becomes a source of imitation; thus, with particular intensity, in the montage *Untitled 03*, which shows two elderly men in casual apparel and leisurely poses. They turn their backs to the camera, loosely resting hands on hips, and look down on a person lying on the ground between shrubbery and a car. As though from the second row in the audience, the beholder looks past the two men at a scene in a peep box.

The misunderstandings surrounding the 2007 World Press Picture by Spencer Platt illustrate the fact that no photograph can transmit information beyond the moment it records. Platt's award-winning photograph, which shows a group of young Lebanese driving through a destroyed neighbourhood in South Beirut, initially met with outraged criticism as a cynical representation of catastrophe tourists; the images was subsequently revealed to be a snapshot of residents who wanted to find their own apartment amid the rubble. Only such external knowledge transmitted by commentary or additional images from the same series or sequence can provide context.

By synchronizing imagery from different times, places, and situations, Mirza addresses the constant question that has moved photojournalism since the political photomontages about the Paris communards Ernest Eugène Appert

published in 1871; (to what extent) may the artist manipulate a photograph in order to offer a striking visualization of an event? One artistic model for Randa Mirza's work is Martha Rosler's cycle of antiwar photomontages *Bringing the War Home* (1967-72). Not Unlike Rosler, the young artist reveals the construction of her images. The beholder is called upon to become aware of his own act of looking: "Looking at this work makes us watch ourselves watching. [...] It wants to reveal the absurdity of human existence in this world we're sharing."\*

\* Randa Mirza, quoted in <http://www.sfeir-semmler.com> (11/24/2009)

Ausstellungshalle zeitgenössische Kunst Münster / 20. 2. - 25. 4. 2010  
Revolver Publishing, ISBN 978-3-86895-067-0