



p o n d

Pond: art, activism, ideas

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Unfurled in Estonia: An Exhibition of Flags
MoKS' Summer Symposium (PostSovkhoz5)
August 2005 at Galerii Y (Tartu University)

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MoKS





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participating artists

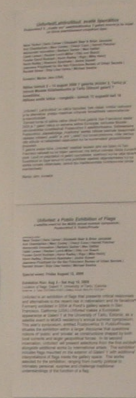
**Nene Tsuboi | Deric Carner | Elizabeth Beer & Brian Janusiak
Ann Chamberlain | Marc Cooley | Cheryl Coon | Harrell Fletcher
democratic innovation | Barbara Garber | Max Hattler
Reuben Lorch-Miller | Otto von Busch
Forster David Rudolph | Kevin Radley | Rigo | Mike Henry
Kevin Radley | Shannon Spanhake | Jackie Sumell
Jeannene Przyblyski for the San Francisco Bureau of Urban Secrets | Randall Sinner |
Sirja Liisa Vahtra | Michael Swaine**

Opening Reception: Friday August 12, 2005
Exhibition Run: Aug 1 – Sat Aug 14, 2005
Location of flags: Galerii Y, University of Tartu, Estonia
Küütri str. 2, Tartu, ESTONIA 51007



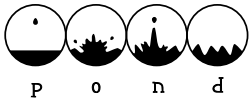


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Unfurled is an exhibition of flags that presents critical responses and alternatives to the recent rise in nationalism and its fanaticism. Formerly exhibited in 2004 at Pond's gallery space in San Francisco, California (USA) *Unfurled* makes a European appearance at Galerii Y at the University of Tartu, Estonia, as a satellite event to MoKS residency's annual summer symposium. This year's symposium, entitled Postsovkhoz 5: Public/Private, situates the exhibition within a larger discourse that questions notions of 'public' and 'private' as constructions shaped by both local currents and larger geopolitical forces. In its second incarnation, *Unfurled* will present selections from the first exhibition alongside additional works by international artists. The exhibition includes flags mounted on the exterior of Galerii Y with additional interpretations of flags inside the gallery space. The works selected for the exhibition, ranging from overtly political to intimately personal, surprise and challenge traditional understandings of the function of a flag.





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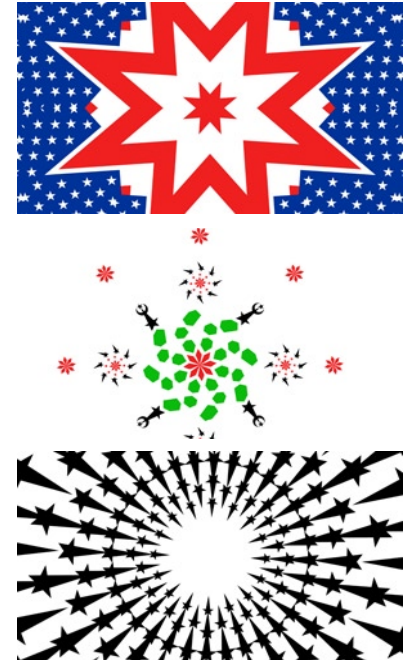
(left)

Barbara Garber
Untitled

(center)

Randall Sinner
Wall: Untitled

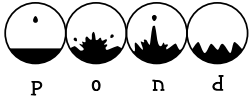
Sinner's decision to rip up the American flag started with the Flag Burning amendment circulated through Congress 5-6 years ago which ignited the artist's memories of Vietnam war protests. The Flag Burning Amendment, still currently being pushed through the United States Congress, has not yet passed but would make it illegal for anyone to burn or desecrate the flag.



(right)

Max Hattler
Collision

Max Hattler's video entitled *Collision* features a frenetic psychedelic kaleidoscope of colors and shapes resembling the United States flag and permutations of the iconography seen on the flags of various Islamic countries. On the one hand, the abstracted patterns and dynamic soundscape proffer a form of aesthetic comprehension to a complex political morphology between the US and the Islamic world—on the other hand, the continually shifting patterns remind us that a static reading is by nature elusive.



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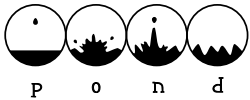


Mike Henry
Untitled

Based on designs of daily photos from the front page of the New York Times, Henry's knitted flags present an open-ended question about the affective role of media. The blue and pink flag, for instance, samples imagery from 2002 headlines of Sarah Hughes (an Olympic Gold Medalist) and the death of Daniel Pearl (the American journalist kidnapped and brutally murdered in Pakistan while investigating a Pakistani militant group) – the juxtaposition of both celebratory and tragic news presents a complicated reaction. While we are tempted to understand Henry's artistic process as a kind of digestive process of dual commemoration and mourning, the presentation of pop and political icons belies instead the complexity of affect in a sophisticated media-saturated culture.

Ann Chamberlain
Burned Flag





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David Forster Rudolph
Filtration Flag

David Rudolph's Filtration Flag, constructed from filter cloth (a material used to sift pollutants and impurities out of the air), will debut in the exhibition as completely white, its stars and stripes largely undifferentiated from the field behind them. Over the course of the exhibition, the flag will both flutter AND filter, catching exhaust and other emissions in its fabric. Because of differentials in fabrics used and their different filtration properties, the stars and stripes may become more legible the longer the flag filters, as parts of the flag darken with pollutants.

By creating the image of a flag from air contaminants, this flag a critique of both the United States (the greatest CO2 emitter), and the current administration (its withdrawal from the Kyoto treaty and weakened pollution controls at home). Rudolph's flag is both mirror and doppelganger, American symbol and its waste product folded into one.



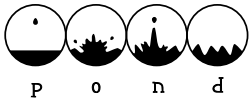
Harrell Fletcher
Untitled

In Fletcher's flag, a forlorn, young girl stands by herself surrounded by a monochromatic color field. Invoking the viewer's sympathy, the image is suggestive of the individual voice alienated from a nation or state's abstracted self-presentational façade.



Elizabeth Beer & Brian Janusiak
Stand By

Elizabeth Beer and Brian Janusiak's Stand By depicts the SMPTE color bars, the television test pattern used in countries where the NTSC video standard is dominant, such as those in North America. As a known standard used to calibrate the color and intensity of video monitors, Stand By's conflation of TV color bars with statehood wryly comments on the role of the television as a means of social calibration, a mode of social formation whose ubiquity supplants other nationalist, political, ethnic, and cultural alliances.



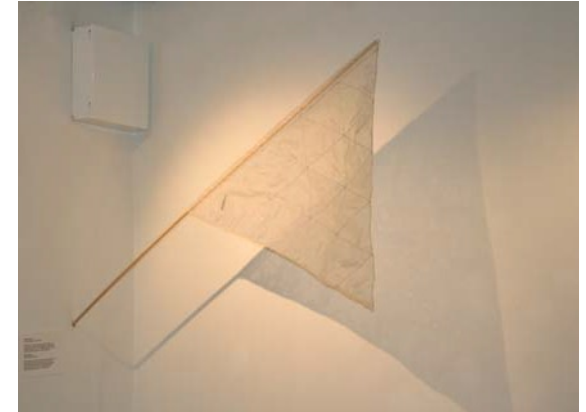
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Rigo
Barely There

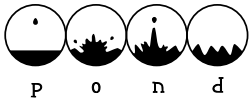
Rigo's flag employs both literal and visual puns to point out the ironic grizzly's presence on the state flag despite the animal's extinction from California in the late 19th century. Further reinforcing this irony, the placement of the bear heading towards the exit reverses our understanding of agency, suggesting that perhaps it was the bear's choice to leave the state.

The story of the last bear of California, given the moniker 'Monarch', takes place in part in Pond's own neighborhood. In 1889, Allen Kelly, a newspaper reporter, received a commission to capture a California Grizzly. Finally captured on Gleason Mountain in the San Gabriel Mountains (California) after four months of arduous searching, the grizzly was transported by railroad to San Francisco, arriving in late October. Exhausted and thin, bruised from chains and ropes, Monarch was trucked to Woodward's Gardens, an amusement park on Mission Street, San Francisco, where he lived for up to four years in a steel cage. Eventually he was moved to Golden Gate Park where he lived for the next 18 years.



Michael Swaine
Flag to Mend Other Flags

Mending Flag is a mending kit composed of needles, thread, and fabric that can be used to patch and fix other flags, eventually self-decomposing and disappearing altogether. Swaine's flag, then, functions as an allegory between selflessness and generosity (or nurturing others).



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(left)

democratic innovation
Paradox of Globalized Nationalism

Replacing the stars of the EU (European Union) flag with various house slippers, Paradox of Globalized Nationalism explores the paradox between an institutionalized nationalism in an increasingly expanding Europe. As comfortable items worn in the comfort in one's home, the slippers question whether the rise of nationalism as either a ground-up (populist) identify formation or a formulaic response to a set of structural conditions.

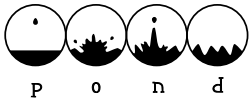
(right)

Siija Liisa Vahtra
Good Old Swedish Time

In *Good Old Swedish Time* by Baltic artist Sirja Liisa Vahtra, a bleached white Swedish flag will be flown alongside an Estonian flag, referencing the two countries' imbricated cultural histories. Occupied by Sweden from 1561 until the early 1700's, Estonians still fondly recall the presence of a centralized authority which resulted in beneficial reforms (peasant-friendly policies, a reduction of taxes, the establishment of the University of Tartu, etc.) Succeeded by a period of strife (heightened class antagonism, plagues, the outbreak of the Great Northern War among countries in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Baltic countries), the previous era under Swedish reign was retrospectively referred to as 'the Good Old Swedish Time.' Faded and tattered, Vahtra's flag is suggestive of an icon that has endured the passage of memory throughout centuries.

An understanding of the artistic process allegorizes the historical problematics of the Swedish occupation: the chemical used for bleaching – chorine – is a greenish-yellow gas combined with nearly all the basic elements. Discovered by Swedish pharmacist Carl Wilhelm Scheele in 1774, chlorine is one of 90 natural elements. Its dual properties to both disinfect or cleanse and, in large doses, function as a lethal toxin to humans invites a discussion about the Swedish occupation's effects on native Estonian culture and identity.





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(left)

Cheryl Coon
Life Lines

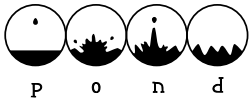
Life Lines is a translucent skin-like panel that reveals the process of drawing and having pigment embedded in the wrinkles and life lines of the artist's hand. Skin is a great indicator of our histories and genealogies – our personal health and experiences as well as our inherited racial information. While flags are emblematic of an historical lineage used to identify groups of people, skin acts as a unique identifier of one individual. Coon writes, "In many ways, the flags that we live under determine our destiny in much the same way as the lines in our hands are thought to reveal our future – both are sustained by belief."

(right)

Otto von Busch
New Skin for the Old Ceremony

New Skin for the Old Ceremony is what von Busch calls a 'counter-garment' that wavers between contemporary pop fashion and vestiges of traditional folk costume. The piece's title, *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*, comments on the celebration of 'folk dress' and the rewriting and re-editing of history inherent in this practice. While we understand 'folk dress' as a signifier of authenticity that captures the uniqueness of a certain region, through time this vernacular expression becomes the unchangeable form of that region, a kind of folk uniform displaced from its original context.





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(far right)

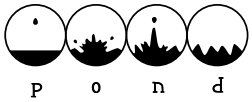
Mark Cooley
White Flag

A U.S. flag painted white, Mark Cooley's *White Flag* plays on various cultural resonations. In the United States white flags signify a surrendering – but exposed to natural elements (sun, wind, rain, etc.), White Flag will crack and fade, eventually returning the artwork to its originary incarnation as a piece of cloth. We are left with an open ended question about the evanescent nature of art and the axiomatic character of symbols in the political imaginary. White Flag also alludes to various monochromatic paintings in 20th century Western art (Rodchenko, Robert Ryman, Malevich, Yves Klein, Rothko) that position themselves as the death of painting, a non-painting painting, a blank slate to which we impute meaning. In Cooley's piece, an actual flag underlies the layers of paint — as if to expose the political and social underpinnings of a Modernist 'neutral field'.



Reuben Lorch-Miller
Give Up

Lorch-Miller's flag was inspired by an early US Naval battle flag dating from the war of 1812 that read "Don't Give Up the Ship." An omission of everything except the imperative ('give up'), Lorch-Miller's adaptation presents an equally ambiguous and direct question – who should give up (the viewer or the presenter)? Does the directive suggest that one should passively (nihilistically) resign or that, instead, the fight is already over?



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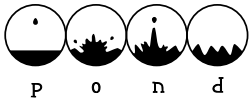
Nene Tsuboi
Untitled Series

The depiction of vernacular icons in Tsuboi's series of flags present a playful, figurative alternative to the normative symbology of hegemonic flags.



Jackie Sumell
Untitled

In replacing the traditional stars and stripes with desert camouflage, Sumell's flag presents a critical reflection of the United States' current political warmongering agenda—as Sumell sardonically writes, 'the supreme symbol of freedom.'

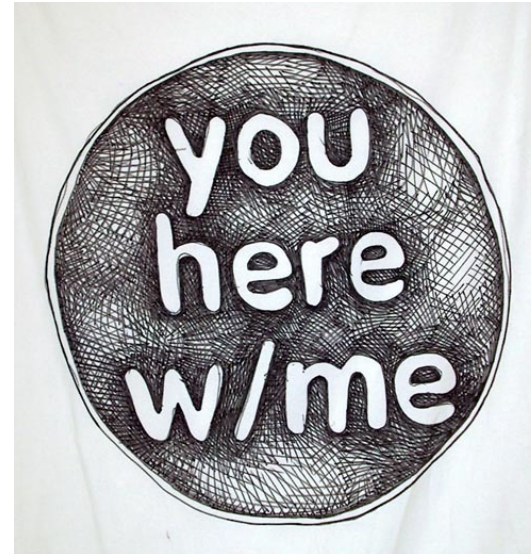


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(on table)

Jeanenne Przyblyski for the San Francisco Bureau of Urban Secrets
Instead Of Flags, Why Not Flowers?



(white flag left, detail above)

Deric Carner
You Here With Me

Carner, a former resident of San Francisco now living in Europe, expresses his longing for his friends through the flag's humorous postcard-like sloganeering. The flag, functioning as a proxy for his former Californian 'self', also self-reflexively addresses the viewer beholding the flag (you!).