

12 February—19 April 2009

Sean Snyder Index





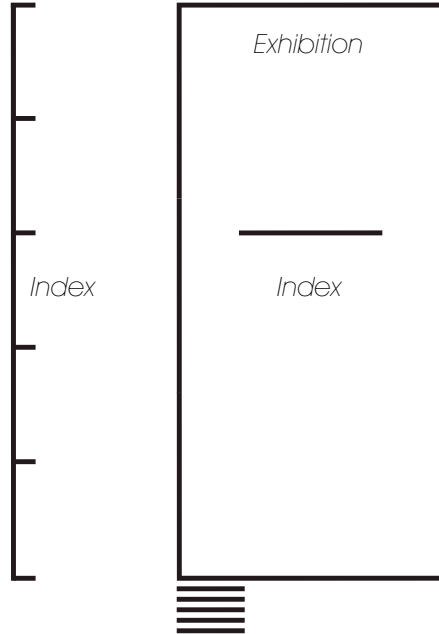
Introduction

Sean Snyder, Index is the first solo exhibition in a British institution by this leading American artist. It contains work from the last five years, including three of Snyder's video installations – works which draw on documentary material from the Cold War to the present day, and which examine the growing complexity of our 'image wars'. The exhibition also features a major new project for which the artist has radically re-worked his own back catalogue – exploring the materiality of information and images, and testing the limits of his own research-based practice.

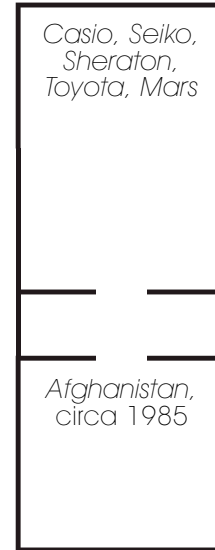
Exhibition floorplan

Concourse

Lower gallery



Upper gallery



Lower gallery and concourse

Over the last year Snyder has been editing and digitising the archives that he has amassed while researching previous works, as part of a project entitled *Index*. One manifestation of this project is a website (for link go to seansnyder.info) in which this digital archive can be accessed in the form of pdfs and jpegs (of materials such as documents, contact sheets and video stills) as well as video files (some of them reached via links to Wikipedia and YouTube). At one level *Index* is a means of providing open access to Snyder's work and its attendant research – and the artist's intention is that all the files should be able to fit onto a single 'memory stick'. However, the project's presentation in the gallery also reveals other concerns.

The lower gallery contains a number of works that have spun off from *Index*, including a large group of photographs taken for the website, depicting storage media and the other physical elements of Snyder's archive that have in fact been destroyed during the digitisation process. These images are in a neutral, documentary style, which, like much of the *Index* material, echoes the aesthetics of conceptual art or forensic science. A further series of photographs depicts tables of thumbnail images, corresponding to the databases of material contained online. These two groups of photographs are complemented by other material, including test prints arranged on white boards – photographic experiments that offer insights into Snyder's working process and formal vocabulary.

The ICA's concourse contains further photographic works that have spun off from *Index*, and which are based on close-ups of different items from Snyder's original archive – such as an image sensor from a digital camera, and blank celluloid frames. These items have been destroyed and the data that they contained has been translated – the viewer is presented instead with abstract forms that emphasise the materiality of information and images. Like *Index* as a whole, and Snyder's work in general, these images are as much about the manipulation or corruption of information as they are about its exchange.

In addition to *Index*, the exhibition also features three video installations, one of which is on display in the lower gallery. *Exhibition* (2008) takes as its starting point a Soviet propaganda film from 1965 (*Noble Impulses of Soul* by director Israel Goldstein), a work that shows the creation of an exhibition of contemporary Mexican art at a provincial museum in the Ukraine, as well as an art history lecture at a local farm. Snyder has re-edited the film, removing its voiceover and disordering its narrative. The resultant work explores the ideological basis of the original documentary, but also emphasises the continuity of the rituals and conventions that surround exhibition culture – and the assumptions of 'universal' value that so often frame the presentation of art.

Upper gallery

The upper gallery features two further video installations that develop Snyder's exploration of political representation. The first is *Afghanistan, circa 1985* (2008-09), which uses footage shot during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan of the seventies and eighties, and that was recently found in Kyiv in a former military academy. This footage, which appears to have had a training function, includes sequences of Soviet troops and Afghans embracing and joining in a celebratory dance. Snyder takes the film out of its original context, slows it down and examines it frame by frame – deconstructing its dubious representations of power relations.

A final installation, *Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars* (2004-05), involves material of a more recent date, incorporating as it does footage and still images deriving from the American-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the subjects of this work is the role of corporations within the colonisation of the two countries: as is made clear by the artist's voiceover, which tracks a long history of brand involvement in the conflict zones. However, the last two decades have also seen the exponential development of communications technology, and the video also explores journalistic conventions, and the staging and manipulation of images, in the era of consumer digital electronics. This powerful work, which combines material from amateur, government and journalistic sources, updates Snyder's analysis of our image wars to the age of Abu Ghraib.



*Casio, Seiko, Sheraton,
Toyota, Mars,*
2004-2005

Biography



Sean Snyder was born in 1972 in Virginia Beach, USA, and lives and works in Kyiv and Tokyo. Snyder graduated from the Städelschule, Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Frankfurt am Main, in 1999. His solo projects include exhibitions at: De Appel, Amsterdam (2004); Portikus, Frankfurt, (2005); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest, (2007); Sala Rekalde, Bilbao (2007); Secession, Vienna, (2005); and Stedelijk Museum CS, Amsterdam, (2007). His group exhibitions include: Manifesta 2, Luxembourg (1998); 4th and 6th Gwangju Biennale (2002, 2006); and 9th Istanbul Biennial (2005).



Events and publications

Artist's talk

Sean Snyder in conversation

Thursday 9 April, 7pm
Nash Room

Admission free, but booking advisable (call 020 7930 3647).

Sean Snyder will talk about his work in conversation with Mark Sladen, the ICA's Director of Exhibitions.

Gallery talks

Marcus Verhagen

Thursday 19 March, 7pm
Meet in Lower Gallery
Admission free

Art historian and critic Marcus Verhagen will give a talk on the exhibition. The talk will be signed in British Sign Language by Roger Beeson.

Kit Hammonds

Thursday 16 April, 7pm
Meet in Lower Gallery
Admission free

Independent curator and RCA tutor Kit Hammonds will give a talk on the exhibition.

Young people's programme Sean Snyder's favourite films

Sean Snyder has selected some of his favourite films especially for young people. All screenings are free, in Cinema 2 at 12.30pm. Children to be accompanied by an adult.

Saturday 7 March: L'Argent

Adapted from a story by Tolstoy, in which the passing of a forged banknote leads to theft and corruption. Here, money truly is the root of all evil. 1983, 81 minutes, PG certificate.

Saturday 28 March: Vai viegli but jaunam? (Is It Easy to Be Young?)

The story of several young Latvians and their struggles to understand the world of confusion that surrounds them. 1987, 83 minutes, no rating.

Please see www.ica.org.uk/education for further details. Films will be screened from DVD.

Limited edition print

To accompany the exhibition Sean Snyder has created a special limited edition print which is displayed in the ICA foyer. For further information or to order a print please contact Vicky Steer on email vicky.steer@ica.org.uk or telephone 020 7766 1425.

Produced on the occasion of the exhibition

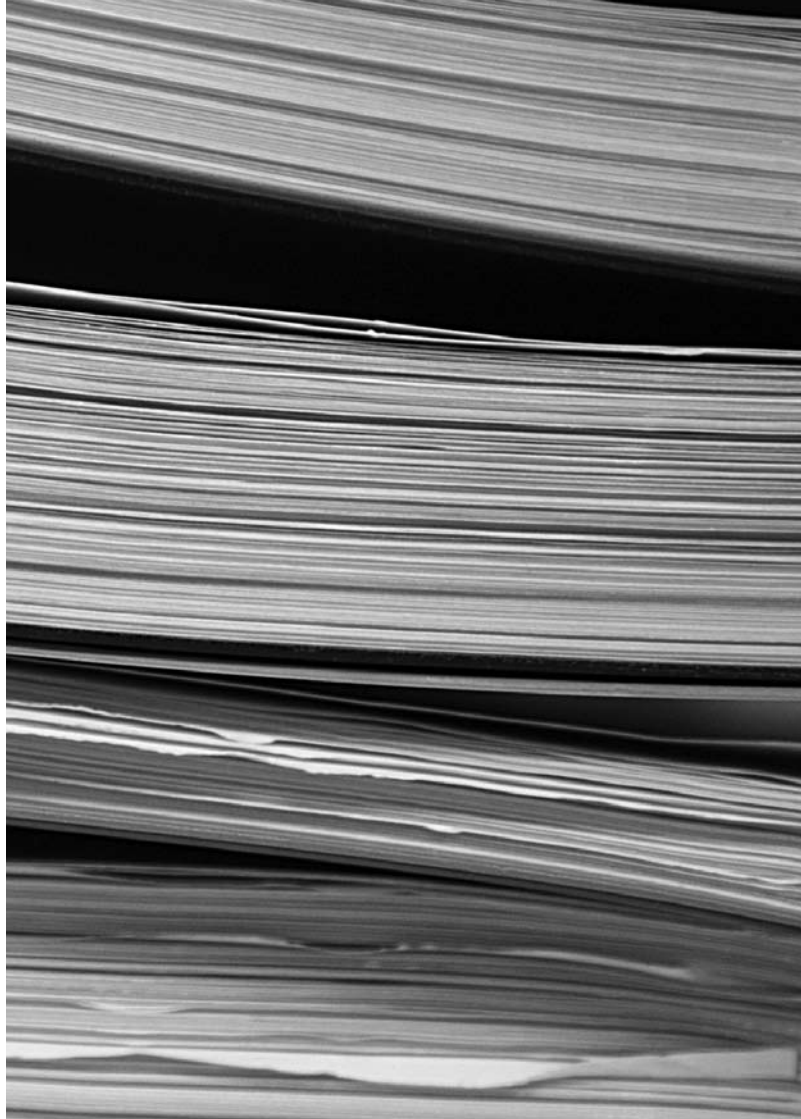
Sean Snyder, Index

Institute of Contemporary Arts
12 February – 19 April 2009

The exhibition has been curated by Mark Sladen (Director of Exhibitions) and organised by Silvia Tramontana (Assistant Curator).

All works courtesy of the artist; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Lisson Gallery, London; and Galerie Neu, Berlin. The ICA would like to thank all of these galleries for their support.

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Institute of
Contemporary
Arts



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