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Jose Caruci
Jim Gleason
David Handschuh
Harry Hamburg
Srdjan Ilic
Laura Pedrick
Joe Petrella
Humberto Pradera
Susan Regan
Andrew Savulich
Apichart Weerawong
Andrew Wong

apexart curatorial program

291 church street
new york, ny 10013

212 431-5270 ph

212 431-4447 fx

info@apexart.org

www.apexart.org

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Cover Images:

Top: Apichart Weerawong / AP/Wide World Photos

Bottom: Joe Petrella / NY Daily News

Gesture, Posture and Bad Attitude in Contemporary News Photography

Curated by
David Byrne



The Dance of Politics

These are news photos. Taken by photojournalists as part of their jobs. These particular photojournalists do not, I believe, see themselves as artists - they are, for the most part, given their assignments - a speech or event to cover - and they provide their newspaper or magazine with a usable image. They are working within strict parameters dictated by what is expected in daily press coverage. A shot of two world leaders meeting, a controversial politician making a point, a demonstration of a new technology. They've got dead-



Harry Hamburg / NY Daily News



Jim Gleason / Viscom

lines and many other pieces to file before the day's out. Self-expression and artistic license are kept to a minimum. In this case, these limitations are good because the photographers have not, at least in an obvious way, inserted their personality into the image - we receive a sort of purer, cleaner transmission of the events. Although, to my eyes, these are beautiful - they are not taken with beauty or aesthetics as a consideration.



Susan Regan / AP/Wide World Photos



Srdjan Ilic / AP/ Wide World Photos

The photos I have chosen represent a documentation of a sort of choreographed performance. A dance of politics. The photos reveal a grammar of movement determined by an unseen choreographer. A master who has worked out an elaborate modern or contemporary dance performed by a dance company located all over the globe. The piece takes place simultaneously in over 100 cities. Hands hold the head, the whole company then leans to one side, quickly all glance briefly to the upper right corner of the room, then a woman is dragged out from under a tarpaulin, as if a giant creature were giving birth to a full grown human being. It is a dance whose only documentation is in the photos assembled here.



Jose Caruci / AP/Wide World Photos



David Handschuh / NY Daily News

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Harry Hamburg / NY Daily News



Harry Hamburg / NY Daily News

Just as singers have stereotypical moves and gestures, so do those whose profession is the art of politics. It is learned by studying one's peers, one's predecessors and countless hours of TV viewing. Viewing with a special eye - for the ordinary member of the public seems to be completely unaware, at least consciously, of the staging and work that has gone into their news programs.



Andrew Savulich / NY Daily News



Srdjan Ilic / AP/Wide World Photos

However, students of quotidian movement, dysfunctional neurologically damaged patients and now ourselves - are aware of the conspiracy. An aesthetic conspiracy so vast that even its originators are no longer aware of its existence. The deception, if that is what it is, has even deceived the deceivers. Perfect. It is as it should be - even the choreographer, the artist, is charmed by his or her own work.

Some technical notes

All these images were taken with various kinds of cameras, a variety of film stocks and digital technologies, which have been processed in a variety of ways. Therefore, I have decided to put them all on a level playing field, so to speak. They have all been printed in black and white -

although not all were originally taken that way. And they have all been printed, almost all of them, as the same-size prints (17 x 24 inches) by



Agence France-Press



Harry Hamburg / NY Daily News

Pamphleuse, the better to reveal their similarities rather than pointing out their differences. The differences are a distraction, which has been surgically removed, but only temporarily.

As a side note I must comment that these images, most of which were taken over the last decade, reflect the transition from film to digital imagery in news collecting. It is, at least initially, a sad story. The rush to digital picture taking, while convenient, cheap and transmittable, is aesthetically inferior.

Although digital film in a portable camera can take fairly high-resolution images these days, these pos-

sible hi-res images take ages to process by the camera between shots - 45 seconds at the minimum the photographer must wait between shots! Not an option when a politician is gesturing or gunfire is involved. So the photographers opt for a faster, lower-resolution, more "compressed" image.

These look just fine in a 4 x 5 inch format in the daily paper, or on a website....but when blown up they just fall to pieces, and not in an always enjoyable pixel-like pattern. The prints made from 35mm film are far superior, but maybe take an hour more, at least, to process, scan and transmit - so you do what you can, you can't always take the scenic route.



Laura Pedrick



Humberto Pradera / Archive Photos / Reuters

To further accommodate this variety in the images we decided to print on newsprint, the same medium these pictures are intended to be viewed on. The paper, like any newspaper, will yellow - probably visibly by the end of this show. And soon after that will crumble and turn to dust.

David Byrne
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Andrew Wong / Archive Photos / Reuters



Andrew Savulich / NY Daily News

and distract from the subject, from the text. Movements which say either what they mean, or exactly the opposite - sometimes the movements are the true content, and the speech or text is a mere distraction, a diversion.



David Handschuh / NY Daily News



Andrew Savulich / NY Daily News