

elizabeth : turk

airplane installation

3.2003 — 4.2004

cal state fullerton  
grand central art center



# a conversation

March 2004

with **m**ike McGee & **a**ndrea Harris  
[curator] [director]

**a** The one thing I was thinking about when you were working in the studio on the airplane pieces and we began talking about an exhibition is that I never **expected** what came out. One of my favorite parts of the show is that you look at the paper airplanes on the floor but once you look at them on the walls, the white walls, they almost become camouflage. They give you this texture it's almost like being in a leafy forest... the walls become textured and you have a sense of space | At first the work felt so separate, each object had its own presence and then it all came together and flowed. They fed each other.

Why we invited you? What we try to do is to **connect people** and do projects that are about ideas at the Art Center, you're work is about that, about **what is human.**

**m**

**a** Your mark making is **intense** but, also, you are researching and analyzing. You're very thoughtful in the decisions you are making. It's not like you are just taking something and copying it to the paper and going at it. You will have books out and images and all these things that go into it, yet nothing is directly coming from that but it is processing through you. It's like you are a scientist breaking things down and creating something that is totally you. It's totally unique, yet I like that analytical side. You break things down and then you create the newness.

This is why I like your piece. This piece is about things that are very important to the human race and culture, and, ultimately really important because if we continue on the path we are on in terms of imposing this hierarchy of power and money on the rest of the world we will only succeed in **further alienating ourselves.**

**m**

**a** when you are in that space you have a sense of what the future holds but also a sense of a memorial of what has passed. I think that is what causes people to be so emotional once you are drawn into it...there is a sense of time. In the end there was this sense of timelessness. **Will we be standing in a memorial for our loved ones?**

It was a very contemplative space, very welcoming, very comfortable with all the white and gray tones. It was an interesting juxtaposition.





It's hard for me to remember what I was thinking when I saw that installation. It seems like it was so long ago and so much has happened since then. When I look at the images tonight, I am thinking more about what I am thinking about now, relative to that. I remember liking being in the space and I liked the texture of it all. The tactile and the smell were great experiments. Now, I am researching this essay on Satan, the history of this concept. Satan as we know it was certainly developed after the death of Christ and primarily developed **to fulfill the social and political needs**

of early Christians and some specific Jewish groups in relation to Cesar, the Romans...it created this sense of 'other' that we know. I have also been reading the "Powers that Be", by Walter Wink, in that book, he says that even though today we don't think of Satan or God as real things

because since the age of Enlightenment we have become so focused on materialism, that we look at those things as being more symbolic –

**we rely on the material evidence to experience life,** yet every thing has another

level of existence which is the spirit and if things are not serving humanity

then that spirit becomes demonic.

**m** We try to bring in Artists in Residence who are very human who have a concern about people in general.

They have this kind of concern with human issues...and if you look around in the world right now, that is one of the main things that is askew. The sense of hierarchy is all messed up. The hierarchy that America tries to impose on everybody else—

and primarily lives by—is based on power and wealth. I think that it does that at the sacrifice of **hierarchical structures based upon on humanity and ideas.**

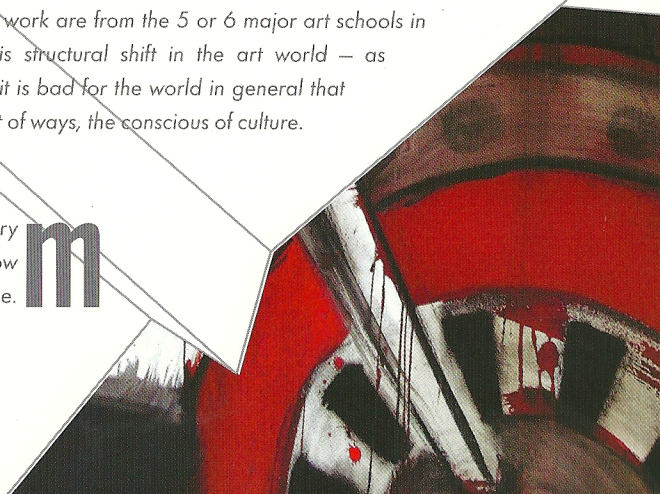
And that is a really unfortunate thing for the world and I think that is one of the main reasons why most of the world resents us. And we don't recognize that. When you are in that mode of thinking where you are in structures that are based on hierarchies that are fueled by wealth and power then you see everything differently. And we, as a country, see everything in that way. I think that is one of the greatest weaknesses of our country at this time. And, to me when you do a work like this it shines a light on that. I think too, that is one of the problems of the art world right now is it is becoming increasingly a hierarchical structure. When you think about the art world, you basically have collectors, who are powerful and wealthy, and then you have museums with boards of trustees and the members who are on those boards by virtue of their power and wealth. What they want and what they do, is hire curators who come up with structures of hierarchy that are based on, or rely too heavily upon a reflection of that system of power. I was so energized by that show "Helter Skelter" in the '90s, by Paul Schimmel. I was so excited because even though it was a real angst laden sort of show... it had an energy of the world, of the "street" so to speak. Now with his show "Public Offerings", he has insinuated that the only people doing important interesting work are from the 5 or 6 major art schools in the world and he dismisses everything else. The difference symbolizes this structural shift in the art world — as inappropriate as I think it may be, it is the way the art world is going. I think it is bad for the world in general that artists are leaning that direction, because historically the artist has been, in a lot of ways, the conscious of culture.

**They are the "antennae" for the culture,** as Ezra Pound said.

The wounds of 9/11 were very fresh at the time of the exhibition and this made it very emotional for people. It is ironic that now we are in the political hearings of 9/11. You know what today is? Today is the day that people pulled over the Saddam Hussein statue.

**Exactly one year ago.**

**And, we are still there.**





VIOLENCE / ESCALATION

Can voices of reason / of hope



The New York Times

SEARCH

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March 23, 2003, Sunday

WEEK IN REVIEW

CREATOR

The Pentagon's "Shock and Awe" was the inspiration for the writings of Sun Tzu, the 16th century Japanese bombing of Japan

In 1996, Harvard University, "Shock and Awe" an adversary's

Concerned the destruction of not to fight nuclear

Published Page 2

"If the safety of America's citizens is so important that its army will come 10,000 miles from home to fight in Iraq, then what about us?" said Erdogan Boz, a lawmaker from Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party. "Don't we have a right to defend our own interests in the country next door?"

spring 2003





be heard?



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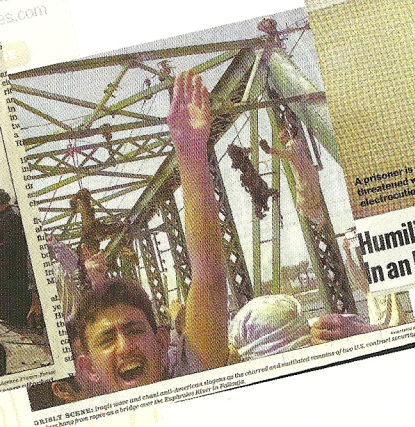
OF 'SHOCK AND AWE'

Shock and awe" strategy of quickly overwhelming Iraq of a military analyst guided by the 2,500-year-old

**Civilians' Bodies Are Mutilated by a Cheering Crowd**

spring 2004

DEADLY ENCOUNTER: In a chaotic and dangerous scene, one of two vehicles in which four American soldiers were killed is being towed away from the wreckage of the Baghdad airport.



**Humiliation In an Iraqi Jail**

A prisoner is threatened with electrocution.



**U.S. Businessman Be Iraq as Militants' Victim**

Where do we go from here?





a christian

without police shown  
at moments later.

headed in  
otape Rol

How is the right to security, justice,  
an 'established order of things' defined .... by whom?



# an voice

For the past ten thousand years, civilization has depended upon a dominant tribe or nations to create the possibility of peace. Peace has always been of limited duration and geographical scope, but those who have enjoyed life under peaceful circumstances have tended to glorify the leader whose military might kept antagonistic ethnic groups from destroying one another. For example, both Alexander the Great and Caesar Augustus were celebrated as sons of God. In more recent times powerful leaders – such as Stalin and Mao – have not used such titles, but they have followed the same pattern. They brought peace through victory over warring tribes.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, only one nation has the power to contemplate enforcing a global peace. Those who believe that the United States of America bears the responsibility for bringing universal peace think in terms of empire, peace through conquest.

Elizabeth Turk's Airplane Exhibition calls into question the assumption that only warfare can establish peace. The airplanes remind the visitor of the formidable power of today's dominant nation. The chapel-like atmosphere evokes feelings similar to those experienced in a small temple erected to the memory of a great conqueror, such as Caesar. But what of the bronze figures on poles: some bearing candles, some with arms outstretched, some headless. Are these the vanquished doing obeisance to the conqueror whose might is symbolized by the airplanes? Or do these figures suggest the possibility of another way?

John Dominic Crossan, a leading scholar in the field of historical Jesus studies, has suggested that the followers of Jesus shocked the first century world with their claim that Jesus offered an alternative to Caesar.



Instead of peace through conquest, Jesus proposed that peace could be established through justice. The justice that Jesus put forward was not the usual retributive sort, which aims at the punishment of offenders, but rather was distributive, intended to see that every person receives fair treatment at the hands of society and of the state.

Since the fourth century, when Constantine adopted Christianity as the official religion of his empire, most people who claim to be followers of Jesus have shown little interest in the promotion of peace through justice. The same can be said of the other religions of the world. Each has within its tradition the possibility of emphasizing distributive justice as an alternative to violence, but those in positions of influence in each religion usually have placed their hopes for peace in the promise of domination through conquest.

Anyone who enters the Airplane Exhibition embarks upon an experience of theological ambiguity. Each visitor who takes the time to reflect on the images may leave wondering if the way to peace is victory through air power or if the time has come when human beings are ready to turn away from violence in pursuit of that cherished goal.

**James R. Adams, President**

The Center for Progressive Christianity



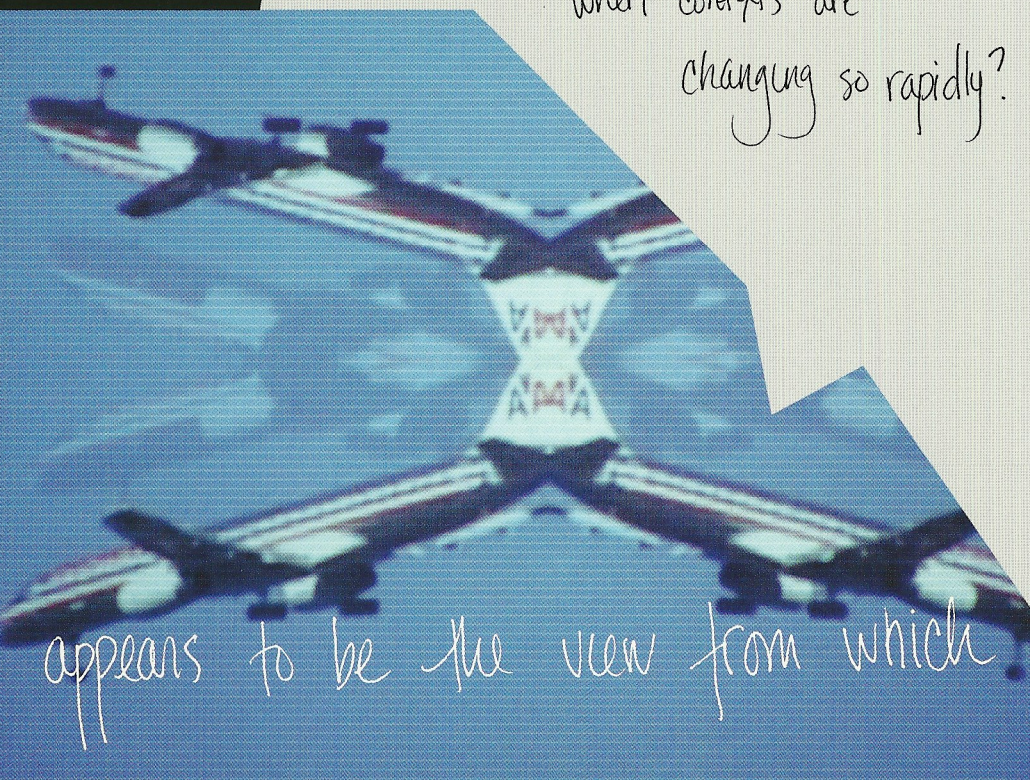
"God is on my side"



When I saw broken concrete after the Berlin Wall came down,  
I was full of hope and inspiration.

Now, broken concrete is 9/11, Iraq -

How does an artist choose symbols/vocabulary  
when contexts are  
changing so rapidly?



What do

appears to be the view from which much of the CV



danger and sadness

airplanes bring?

current activism is initiated. How can "god" have such

