

MODIFICATIONS 2010

In 2010 the Aarhus Art Building takes the first step in the implementation of a whole new strategy, where each year the exhibition program will be planned on the basis of an overall theme. The chosen theme must be challenging and topical and lend a voice to central issues in the world of art right now. In 2010 the theme is *Modifications*.

Modifications is a reference to the Danish artist Asger Jorn's exhibition of the same name in Paris 50 years ago, where he presented a series of kitsch-paintings on top of which he had painted his own additions. With the exhibition Jorn attempted to once and for all dispel the notion of art as something sublime and autonomous. The members of the international artist group Situationist International, which Jorn along with the French theorist Guy Debord had founded a few years earlier, held a firm belief in the revolutionary potential of the artistic process. Art was seen as a possible way out of the meaningless and empty pseudo-society that the members of the group referred to as the 'Society of the Spectacle'. Although the group

ended up dissolving itself rather than art as such, contemporary art in many ways still stands on a similar bastion: between destruction and construction – or between partial displacement and pure action, one might also say. This state of the art, so to speak, within contemporary art, plus its historical source, forms the basis for the theme *Modifications*. It is the intention of the 2010 exhibition program to shed new light on the issue and to raise the question of whether art presents a way out of the all-encompassing grip of the Society of the Spectacle. A question that is just as relevant today as it was 50 years ago.

Shezad Dawood

INTENSIVE SURFACES

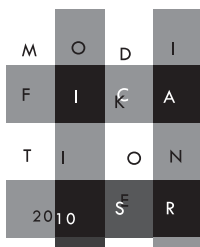
26. JUNE – 15. AUGUST 2010



The English artist Shezad Dawood (b. 1974) graduated from the Royal College of Art in London. He has exhibited at a succession of art institutions all over the world in both solo and group exhibitions. *Intensive Surfaces* is his first exhibition in Denmark. Dawood works with explorations of cultural and national identity – explorations that among other things may reflect and be traced back to his own Indian/Pakistani background.

The exhibition *Intensive Surfaces* presents a composite, artificial 'western' universe. With bales of hay, western-like wooden houses, animal skulls, paintings of traditional western landscapes and ceramic statues of cowboys an overall picture arises of the Wild West. This overall image does not stay intact, as elements that do not have roots

in this universe are mixed in and create a more complex symbol-laden scenario. The works *Sister Kali's Soul Temple* (mixed-media installation), *The Black Sun* (neon ring on a black background), and *The Hidden City* (slides, video and figure) depart from the western theme and take the exhibition out into a multifaceted symbolic universe. Shezad Dawood treats cultural, ethnic and religious elements unconventionally and humorously by placing a number of different symbolic stereotypes and mythologies in the exhibition. The mixture comes to clearest expression in the major work, the film *Feature*, where the artist among other things appears himself as 'Billy the Krishna' – a bizarre hybrid of the Hindu god Krishna and the outlaw Billy the Kid from nineteenth-century America.



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FEATURE

In the film *Feature* (55 mins.) a mixture of different film genres arises. The western genre is combined with zombie sequences and elements of opera. The Wild West, as we normally know it from western films, has been removed from its 'authentic' landscape in 19th-century America and transferred to Cambridgeshire in England. The relocation creates a sense of placelessness and at the same time the concept of time is set aside when various historical periods and styles are mixed.

Amongst battles between cowboys and Indians and bloodthirsty zombies the Indian chief Sitting Bull (played by the artist Jimmie Durham) appears as a kind of narrator who directly addresses the audience. The narrator speaks from a wooden house where recognizable props from the events of the film appear.

The figure of Billy the Krishna is the silent protagonist of the film who moves like a supernatural personality through the plot of the film, in the end forming an alliance with the Norse Valkyrie.

THE HIDDEN CITY

In the work *The Hidden City* Soviet Moscow is combined with the Medina of the 11th century in Marrakesh. The cat Behemoth, which comes from Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*, appears in both cities, as if teleported from place to place.



SISTER KALI'S SOUL TEMPLE

Sister Kali's Soul Temple was created in collaboration with the British artist, curator and author Peter Lewis. The installation consists of the figure Kali – the Indian goddess of death –, club-like scenery and posters for artists and their projects. The statue of Kali is a smaller version of the demonic idol that appears in the film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. The work appropriates among other things Hollywood's use of archetypes and symbols. Around the figure a mixture of soul music and posters from the Surrealist avant-garde is gathered.

The work was originally presented at the exhibition *Go Between* at the Bregenzer Kunstverein in Austria in 2005. The installation functioned as a DJ setting during the opening of the exhibition.

THE WASTELAND

In the Rotunda hang the three large paintings *The Great Outdoors I-III*, which Shezad Dawood got Pakistani scene painters to paint versions of typical pictures of the Wild West. The paintings are accompanied by the works *The Wasteland* (animal skulls), *The Black Sun* (neon ring on a black wall), *The Ages of Krishna I-II* (ceramic statues) and the photograph *Ghost Dancing*, which recalls a Red Indian scene from *Feature*.

The work *The Wasteland* consists of 33 rams' skulls on which the Hindu symbol *Om* has been painted in a violet-red colour. The symbol refers to the 'Purple Om' acid tabs that were handed out during the 'Summer of Love' wave in London in 1989. *The Waste Land* is at the same time the titles of T.S. Eliot's poem cycle from 1922, which begins with the section "The Burial of the Dead". In a space between acid trip and death Dawood's work confronts us with possible liberations from the life cycle – whether the liberation is to be found in the consciousness-distortions of the acid trip or in death.

