

# ARTFORUM

Mark Sladen: Tue Greenfort, in: Artforum, New York, January 2006.

## First Take

## MARK SLADEN ON TUE GREENFORT



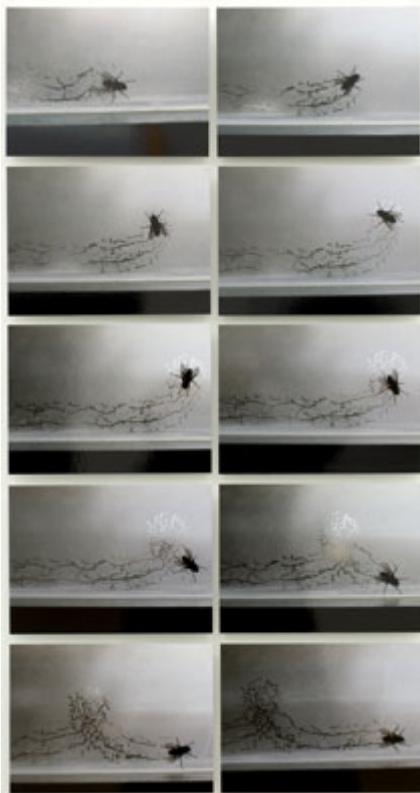
Tue Greenfort, *Social Organism*, 2001. Installation views, Technical University, Istanbul.

**LATE AT NIGHT**, in an industrial wasteland on the edge of town, a camera is rigged with a trip wire attached to a sausage. Unsuspecting foxes, lured to the site by the smell of the tasty *wurst*, snag the bait and trigger the camera. The creatures, caught in the camera's flash, look a little surprised in the resulting photographs. But clearly the foxes are not to be underestimated, as by the end of a week they have learned to take the sausage without being caught on film.

A group of eight images titled *Daimlerstraße 38*, these autoportraits were instigated in 2001 by Danish artist Tue Greenfort while he was still a student of Thomas Bayrle at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. Such a work could easily become a little cute—art involving animals does seem to invite that kind of reading—but it is also based on a beautiful conceit that invokes a whole history of photographic portraiture. The trip wire that extends out of the picture frame could be compared, for instance, to the cable release that is featured in some of Cindy Sherman's self-portraits, while the flashgun aesthetic invokes Philip-Lorca diCorcia, not to mention a whole history of paparazzi snaps.

Greenfort has often appropriated existing artworks and representational formats, and animals have appeared in other of his works employing this strategy. In *Partitur einer Fliege* (A Fly's Composition), 2004, a series of photographs reveal an insect gradually creating tracks in the condensation on a windowpane. The work was inspired by the ideas of early twentieth-century biologist Jakob von Uexküll, who developed theories related to the interaction of individual organisms within larger groups, or "compositions," but it also suggests other sources, including Hans Namuth's famous action shots of Jackson Pollock at work. Greenfort's appropriations conform to the ecological concerns that pervade his practice: He appears to simply see cultural history as so much material for recycling.

There are other works by Greenfort in which animals appear as stand-ins for human subjects. For the installation *Social Organism*, shown at the Technical University in Istanbul in 2001, he led ants from a garden into the exhibition space, using a string bridge that guided them to a table laden with a variety of sweet foods. The work's title suggests that the piece can be read as a metaphor for human society, and the presence of magnifying glasses for use by viewers might imply a dystopic twist—bringing to mind a cruel childhood pastime. Looking again at *Daimlerstraße 38*, we could argue, similarly, that the foxes are metaphors for human subjects in consumer culture, caught in a loop in which consumption and identity are conflated.



Tue Greenfort, *Partitur einer Fliege* (A Fly's Composition), 2004, ten color photographs, each 7 x 9 1/2".

In all of these works Greenfort demonstrates that he is less interested in animals per se than in an expanded notion of ecology, one that encompasses cultural history and sociopolitics as well as natural resources. It is also apparent that he plays with notions of ecology at the level of the site, appropriating strategies from site-specific art. To make the fox portraits, for instance, the artist created a shelter for his camera out of materials found nearby. Greenfort often makes use of resources that derive from and draw attention to his immediate environment, gently pushing viewers toward a more reflexive understanding of the world around them.

The artist's interest in ecology becomes even more apparent in works that do not contain such obvious natural references. An example of this is *BONAQUA*

*Kondensationswürfel* (BONAQUA Condensation Cube), 2005, which references Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube*, 1963–65. As in Haacke's work, a clear box is partially filled with water, creating a sealed environment that evaporates or condenses as the room temperature changes. However, Greenfort's box is filled with BonAqua, a branded drinking water marketed by Coca-Cola, thereby opening up Haacke's closed system to issues such as the privatization of public resources.

Greenfort, who is currently developing a work for the Arts & Ecology project (a program organized by the Royal Society of Arts in London), is not the only contemporary Nordic artist to address environmental themes. Olafur Eliasson, for instance, looks at the enculturation of nature through the lens of the sublime, while Henrik Håkansson's studies of birds and other animals adopt models from laboratory science and fieldwork. Greenfort's practice is distinct from both of theirs, however, in its more integrated approach. "I don't observe nature as an external phenomenon," he recently stated, "but play and interact within a space—call it a habitat or a certain environment—where other organisms are present besides me."

Greenfort's art evokes a world in which animals, humans, nature, culture, science, and industry, as well as the artwork and its site, are connected by a web of relationships. In *Les trois écologies* (Editions Galilée, 1989), Félix Guattari proposes an expanded version of ecology involving three different registers—the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity—and argues that in order to understand the interactions between them we will need to cut across such categories and think "transversally." It is just such a complex and contradictory notion of ecology that Greenfort adopts, and it is one befitting our times—in which foxes are our urban neighbors, and water is not as transparent as it seems.

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