



Susan Trangmar
A Question of Distance

Saturday 20th November to
Saturday 11th December 04

Preview: Friday 19th November 2004 6.30-9.00pm

Performance: 6.45pm Bar from 7.15pm

Discussion: Saturday 20th November 2004 3.00-4.00pm

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Waygood
GALLERY & STUDIOS

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Waygood Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Open: 11am-5pm, Wednesday-Saturday or Tuesday by appointment.

A Question of Distance presents two pieces of work by Susan Trangmar: *A Question of Distance* and *Road Map*. In 2001 a British organisation, Multi Exposure commissioned Susan to address the theme of 'art and conflict in the Middle East'. The artist subsequently made a number of visits to the region historically known as Palestine during an intense period following the outbreak of the second intifada. Towards the end of this period, Israel began building a barrier along the entire length of the country, loosely following the Green Line but with many incursions into Palestinian land on the West Bank.

"I decided to locate myself within what is defined as the State of Israel. It seemed to me that I need to understand something from the position of the 'occupier' in order to understand something from the position of the 'occupied'. I did not wish to contribute to a familiar media representation of the face of the 'victim' and was also aware that a present injustice is intimately connected to a historical one giving rise to the creation of the Zionist State. I was also interested in the diverse make up of the population of Israel: European and Sephardic Jews, Muslim and Christian and Druze Palestinian Arab Israelis and a rising number of migrant workers neither Jewish nor Arab." Susan Trangmar

A Question of Distance comprises of a DVD projection of documentary-like photographs, text and sound; a spoken monologue with ambient day-to-day sounds describing an exchange between stranger and host. "My positioning was frequently uncomfortable, as a stranger I was often caught in the chasm between conflicting realities, but it was part of an attempt to avoid a fixed binary logic of 'self' and 'other'". The dialogue is subjective but simultaneously refuses to offer any personal opinion. Instead the work is an exploration, assembled through collaboration and witnessing, asking, 'what kinds of identifications are we able or willing to make in facing another, in facing difference? And how far are we able to recognize the other as that which is already inside ourselves?'

One form of the work is a projection/performance event in which the artist speaks to the audience from within the space of a series of projected images, temporarily occupying them. The still 'transparency' of the image is disturbed by her physical presence as mobile projection surface and her voice as vocal trace. This event will be performed during the preview evening at Waygood Gallery, with an opportunity for discussion with the artist on the following day.



I Photographic images tend to be 'over there'; a separation that distinguishes observer from observed. All the while we are looking at a photograph we inhabit the photographer: our eyes have never physically occupied the position from which the photo was taken. We discover that we are not the one who is looking, and this happens precisely when our eyes are absorbing the scene in front of us. In a photograph we live an alternative life.

A camera, as Wim Wenders observes, points in two directions. As it reveals an image, it also reveals the invisible photographer. Mostly, this is unnoticed. The single lens of a camera becomes the shared eye of a multitude. It slyly offers a point of view, which appears as our own thought. "We are allowed to think," says philosopher Robert Sokolowsky, "by what our thoughts are about". But we are allowed to see by what we are given to see.

Every geography has its own equivalent to this aspect to the photograph. We become the mind of the place. When we are part of a social matrix there always seems to be someone who is speaking for us. Often enough this unnoticed voice gets parroted and begins to sound like our own. What does it mean when someone speaks for us? This is also one of the dilemmas that invades the traditions of art packaging, particularly in cases where someone other than the artist writes a text about a work.

II Using the technique of the floating 'you', Susan Trangmar has constructed a text which brings our emotions to a place so intimate that we experience our own shifting identities. Her photos for the most part frame the text. They establish a distance to contrast and amplify the intimacy we are beginning to feel. The photographs represent what we cannot at first see; they function as 'the other'. The listener, to whom the text is or is not addressed, feels more and more to be inside the work.

It has been observed that we always draw the boundaries of our families too tightly. The desire to belong is a powerful motivator. Nearly everyone knows the experience of being outside, of feeling excluded. There is a prominent art gallery in New York where Lawrence Wiener once altered the identifications on the washroom doors to read 'US' and 'THEM'. Visitors, who moments before were comfortable in the gallery, suddenly wondered which door was for them.

Recent psychological research has looked into something that has been called the 'peak shift' experience; both animals and humans package their memories in a slightly exaggerated form: a red is remembered as a more intense red, a slight rectangle is remembered as a more exaggerated rectangle. The world shifts toward caricature and farce. Reportage, even to ourselves, is a package designed for another. In a similar way there are conversations and constructions that instead of clarifying, create fictions out of original truths. Those who speak for us set the terms of the construction, establish the level of sensitivity allowed, and define us by defining others. So little of the information that is offered to us, even in art, exists without 'spin'. 'Spin' is an alternative narrative that tries to be exclusive, that tries to define our path.

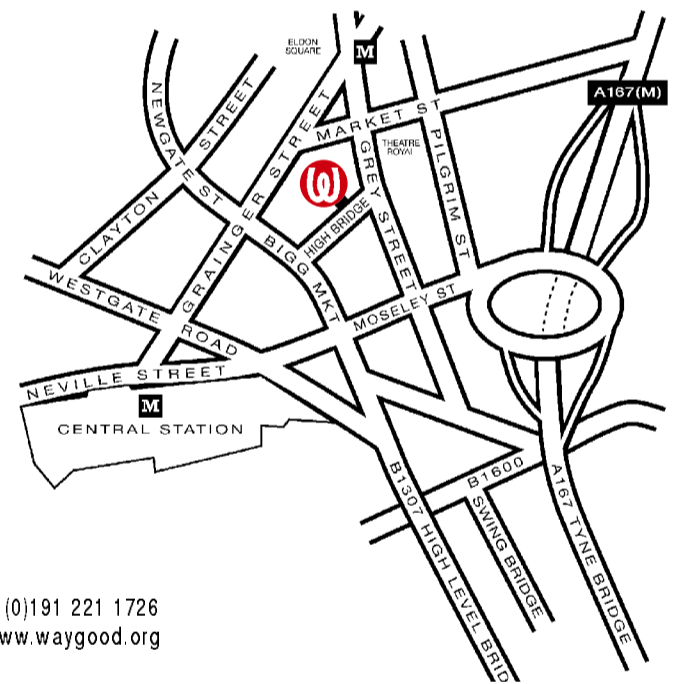
Susan Trangmar's work opens a door for us in such a way that the effect avoids the patterns that others have made. The 'floating you', even when at any given moment it is singular, is generous, open and inclusive. In a stroke of artistry so simple it seems like magic, she includes us by separating us from the narrative voice. The voice speaks to us, not for us. The voice excludes us, directly into a deep sharing, directly into the heart of distance.

Joel Fisher Artist and visiting Lecturer, Fine Art, Northumbria University. October 2004

The second work shown is *Road Map*. The projection shows the view through a car windscreen as it travels along through a rainswept landscape, the windscreen wipers intermittently revealing and concealing as they sweep across the screen. A disembodied voice relates a story of the arrest by soldiers of a young suspect, an everyday event of humiliation with consequences which both literally and metaphorically, lead to impasse.

A Question of Distance was toured to the region of origin in June 2003 and has been performed within the UK. It is also being produced as a 60-page image/text publication to be published by Waygood Gallery in Spring 2005.

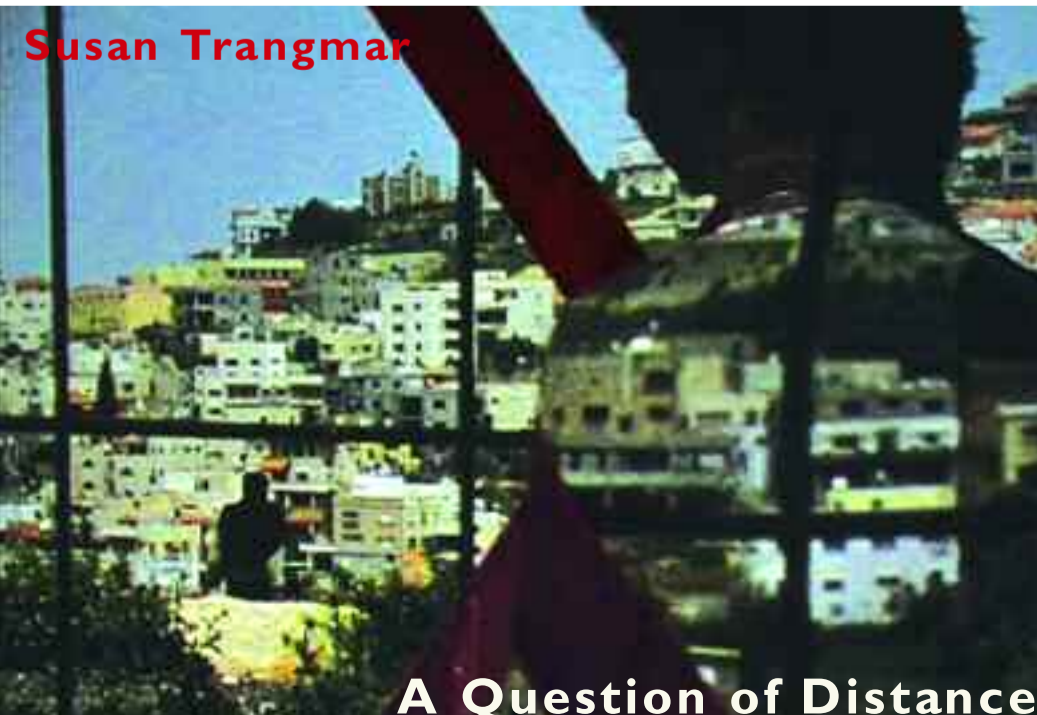
Image Overleaf: Still from *Road Map* 2004



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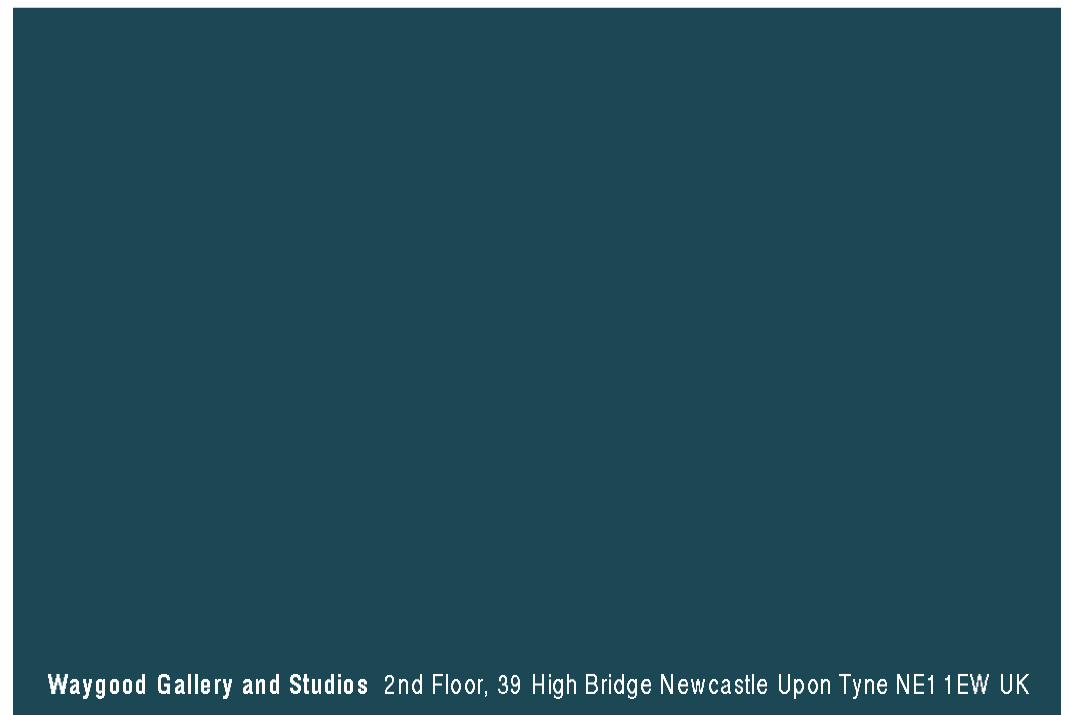


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