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Introduction to the exhibition

Kirstine Roepstorff
A Handfull of Once

6 May – 2 July 2006

Kirstine Roepstorff's montages combine magazine and newspaper cuttings, fabric, old postcards, paint, glitter, images of trees, flowers and precious jewels and geometric patterns. Amid such decorative imagery however, lie important messages. The works depict events and issues such as the conflicts in Chechnya and Iraq, globalisation and gender roles. Many of the motifs employed are also intended as symbols for everyday concerns and social ideas. The artist calls this process 'appropriarranging.'

Throughout this body of work, Roepstorff explores ideas of absence and the impact loss has on individuals and society. She terms this notion the 'presents of absents,' recognising how things no longer in physical existence can still create intrigue or even act as powerful

motivators. In these ways Roepstorff shows how an absence can act as a stimulus.

GONE (COLLECTION OF ONCE WAS) is situated just inside the gallery entrance. This sculpture is a replica of a display case Roepstorff came across on a visit to the Altes Museum in Berlin. The case contained empty pedestals. A note explained how the vases usually on display had temporarily been removed. Where were the vases? What did they look like? The absent artefacts attracted a fascination and speculation perhaps more powerful than the many vases that were present in surrounding cases.

In this work, a colourful collage sprawls from underneath the empty display case. The vases are missing but the creeping organic forms

suggest something energetic and unstoppable might still be present.

The central hanging piece, **CHESSING WITH LOSS** also uses plant and butterfly depictions. The work features the silver silhouette of an overgrown plant, vast in comparison to the people. Roepstorff often employs organic imagery in her work, using the growth and cultivation of nature as a metaphor for our attempts to control everyday life.

Amongst the photocopies, on the left hand side is a partial image of a Black Widow (also to be found in other works in the exhibition). Many myths surround these enigmatic 'characters.' For example one idea is that they are poor and uneducated Chechen women, who, suffering the loss of their husbands or sons through the conflict, are driven to become suicide bombers. As well as being powerful images, Roepstorff uses them as a metaphor for how people interpret laws and act upon personal values. The Black Widows' complex, personal motives are difficult for outsiders to understand, and remain unknown as they are rarely explored or discussed.

Intricate weaving in the top right hand corner of the work resembles a chess board (also referred to in the title). As with her use of other imagery, the chessboard occurs in several of Roepstorff's works, and is a powerful symbol with its associations of rules, exchanges, conflicts and political power.

The title of **TCHETSCHENIA ON MY MIND** plays with the title of the song 'Georgia on my Mind.' The original is a contemplative, melancholic song, setting the mood for the subject matter in this work. Additionally the title is a reference to how Chechnya and Georgia are neighbouring states.

Within the woven grey paper strips, there is a depiction of an uprooted tree stump. Snippets of images are interwoven amongst the grey, including the image of the Black Widow used by Roepstorff in **CHESSING WITH LOSS**. Additionally she incorporates magazine cuttings of an Arabic freedom fighter, areas of deforestation and European parliamentarians in Strasbourg. The result is a work rich in both texture and references; events and people are woven together.

Each section within the two works **AMNAT AND SATSIT** and **ZAREMA** represents a person. They are abstract portraits of Black Widows, focusing on the women's personal loss and how this has contributed to their identity. These empathetic pieces contain imagery recurrent throughout this body of work. The complex layering of stripes, thorny plants, figures and jewels remain ambiguous representations of equally mysterious women.

As in **CHESSING WITH LOSS**, **BLUE CUT** uses a chessboard pattern. The tree in this piece appears to interrupt the chessboard pattern. It is as if

the conventions and resolutions of an 'ideal' society, represented by the regular, geometric shapes of the chessboard, are overruled by the irregular, dynamic mass of life symbolised by the tree. The tree is missing some branches, but is still alive. Its loss is incorporated into its character.

Almost monochrome, **NIGHT DROPS ON A HANDFUL OF ONCE** comprises delicate, pale leaves of tracing paper, thin paper strips and old black and white postcards of holidays past. The piece has a wistful, reflective nature and suggests how people hold on to memories in the manner of souvenirs. Such souvenirs have the potential to fade, as may be inferred by the sparseness of the piece. But they can remain strong and influential on the present.

FIST OF LOSS displays photographs of stage actors in performance, side by side with magazine shots of the laying out of a dead Palestinian man in the Gaza Strip, Albanian rebels in Macedonia and the looting of the National Museum in Baghdad.

Roepstorff's compilation of photocopied images displays differences in cultural attitudes and opportunities for dealing with loss. While some societies must face issues, such as those depicted, directly, others can afford to overlook the reality of the situation, taking the attitude that crises always happen

'somewhere else.' They can, instead, use fiction such as plays or films to deal with issues. The label 'Ausland' on some of the images, meaning 'the other,' is used here by Roepstorff to emphasise the way in which such news items are reported.

The intricacies of Kirstine Roepstorff's spectacular collages are such that with each fresh look you notice something new. Each work is vivid in texture and colour, combined from a wealth of sources. Whilst the aesthetics of the works are immediately captivating, it is crucial to look at more than the attractive appearance of the pieces. The physical manifestation of the work is the result of Roepstorff's accumulation of thoughts, associations and concerns.

Throughout these works Roepstorff combines seemingly disparate images raising provocative questions. Each work explores the motivation and circumstances surrounding the original imagery. This re-contextualisation of material allows new associations to form. It is possible to make connections between images within works and across different pieces. Roepstorff's works challenge preconceptions and encourage stories to be re-imagined.