

Exhibition text by Gavin Jantjes, Henie Onstad Art Centre, August – October 2003

Andrea Lange "First Time We Live"

2003, single projection DVD video with sound (15 min)

Following the successful presentation of her video "Refugee Talks" in 1998, which was acquired for the Henie Onstad collection and shown in last summers "Refuge" exhibition, Andrea Lange has created a new work for the art centre. It is a work in three parts set against the sombre background to our contemporary time in which civilized states are at war with one another and love and friendship seems unable to cross the barrier of cultural and religious misunderstanding. Most of the footage was shot in the weeks of the American and British bombing of Iraqi cities in 2003. The loop of her video celebrates life, friendship, the importance of belonging to a family, a group, and to a nation. Its imagery reminds us that we first learn to love and we build everlasting friendships within the family unit. Our relationship to other individuals and groups radiates from this vital starting point and is able to cross great distances of time and space. We learn to acknowledge this when lives are lost.

The works flip side is suggested by the unwritten part of its title (the next time we die) and its image and sound editing suggest that there is a darker underbelly to the reality portrayed. An atmosphere of unease envelops everything despite the lust for life shown by playing children, a dancing female, singing party goers and a sleeping child. The potential loss of family, friends and children is the inverse side of this work. This duality is emphasized by the singing of an ironic Russian folksong that admires the dead as being the truly free. The juxtaposed reading of Lange's images makes the work fluctuate between sombre background and gay celebratory foreground. Death becomes an innocent game in the kindergarten playground as children throw themselves to the ground. The simple flag waving of children and the playing of the Norwegian national anthem stands in opposition to the Jingoism and fanaticism of political extremes of the day. The peace in which an innocent child sleeps is both real and artificial and emphasizes our vulnerability to the ravages of politically driven decisions of state. An Iraqi lullaby sung in Arabic by the artist over the image of her sleeping daughter restates

the universal mother daughter relationship but it also locates the work in the conflict zone where occident meets orient. It emphasizes the necessity to engage foreignness through language; to discover how others convey emotion verbally.

Dilelol, my child, – my precious one
Your enemy is a weakling
Far away in the desert

The wind banged the door
Was it my dear ones knocking?
It was no one. The wind deceived me

Just as in the seventies when a young generation preached love in the face of military aggression and danced to anti war pop songs, Lange's dancer (her sister) symbolically repeats this love for life, but her performance is shot in the dark using infra red to capture the underlying gloom of the apparently happy scene. The soundtrack hammers home the simple but almost arrogant question "What is happening and how have you been?" When the family gets together for a birthday party they are celebrating a long life that for many years has extended and re-enforced the network of love and friendship of the family unit. The birthday song is followed by a jovial Russian folk song that tells with comic irony, of two friends who die in an accident while on their way to burying a third friend.

Gavin Jantjes is a curator, artist and academic. He is a curator at The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo (2014) and a former director for Henie Onstad Art Centre.