

Information

Jens Haaning
Exhibition january 26 to march 18 2007

Institut d'art contemporain
11 rue Docteur Dolard
69100 Villeurbanne

Getting there Bus number 1
(Cité-Nouveau Musée stop)
Metro line A (République stop)
Close to the Lyon Part-Dieu TGV station
Bicycle loan rack (vélo'v) one minute
on foot

Opening hours Wednesday and Friday,
1 pm to 6 pm
Saturday and Sunday, 1 pm to 7 pm
Thursday, 1 pm to 8 pm
Free guided tours 3 pm Saturday and
Sunday or by appointment

Entrance fee Full rate 4 , reduced rate 2.50
For further information call 04 78 03 47 00
www.i-art-c.org

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Jens Haaning was born in 1965 in Copenhagen in Denmark, where he lives and works.

The topic of borders often comes up in Haaning's work, whether in the sense of dividing lines between countries, between different ethnic groups living in the same country, between different social classes, or between the legal and the illegal.

Haaning believes that the artist and the immigrant are in equivalent positions with respect to social norms: the immigrant is shut out

of the realm of representation, or imprisoned in stereotypes, while the artist's work seeks to cast doubt on customary representations in order to stimulate a critical perspective on the world around us. Haaning carries out his projects within the framework of cultural institutions, but at the same time locates them explicitly in the realms of the social and political. He is committed to an economy of materials and methods, and intervenes directly in the real world in the form of actions carried out in public spaces, documented by photographs.



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François Curlet has invited Jens Haaning to the Institut d'art contemporain. Here he presents a selection of his recent work, which questions some national self-representations and overturns or transposes regular ways of viewing and behaving in the world.

FRANCE (2007), a giant stenciled wall painting, straightforwardly announces Haaning's temporary presence in this country. This is the sixth of such interventions, preceded by *LITUANIA*, *GERMANY*, *HOLLAND*, *HUNGARIA*, and *DANMARK*.

However, these works do not form part of any systematic plan on Haaning's part; each one is conceived as an individual item which can stimulate the development of both group and individual histories. What does it mean to live in a place, to be here rather than somewhere else? This is the question he seeks to raise by simply presenting the name of the country.

In *Danish Passport* (2005), Haaning's own passport is on display, under glass, as if it were a work of art. This transformation of everyday items into art objects is one of his recurring themes. Nationality is on show, as if it were a valuable possession, in the form of the passport document, and thus appears as one kind of property

among others in a world where goods circulate in a global marketplace – except that the value added will be different for a nationality produced in a western country compared to a third-world country. Each of Haaning's decontextualizations or transpositions is intended in the same way to highlight the ideological assumptions of the social order.

A substantial number of Haaning's works rely on some kind of transposition and/or displacement, turning standard behaviors and assumptions of privilege upside-down.

Arabic Jokes (1996 in Copenhagen, 2006 in Manhattan, New York) was created in this spirit, as a series of posters with jokes in Arabic, put up in various neighborhoods in major western cities where there are a significant number of Arabic speakers. The "natives" are unable to understand the text unless they happen to know Arabic. Haaning thus humorously turns the typical methods of segregation practiced on newcomers back onto the indigenous population itself.

Haaning's displacements can be subtle or explicit. In **10 Biennial Catalogues sent to Africa** (2006), he took ten catalogues from a prestigious exhibition in which he had been invited to participate and sent them to Africa. The work continues to exist only as a trace, a record, which subtly questions the usefulness of a cultural institution on the global scale, especially in the context of North/South relations.

By contrast, **Afghanistan 5012 km** (2003) is a more obviously political work. This highway sign, showing the distance to the Afghanistan border, was installed in the Netherlands in 2003, after the coalition headed by the US had overturned the Taliban regime. The exactness of the distance shown on the sign is to be contrasted ironically with the vagueness of the European project of common defense in the context of this global strategic initiative.

The border is something that separates many different worlds, but Haaning also works with micro-displacements between regions of the world.

Redistribution (London – Karachi) (2003) is one of a series of "swapping works." Chairs from the café of a cultural institution in London are moved to a street in Karachi, in Pakistan. In the café, a photograph bears witness to the absent chairs and their "offshoring." This work calls into question the codes and cultural values of the West, and points to the difficulty of transposing them to less wealthy countries.

In all the foregoing examples, the transposition or swapping is one-way. In **Kassel – Hanoi (Light Bulb Exchange)** (2002) it becomes truly reciprocal. All the light-bulbs in the lamps in a street in Kassel in Germany are switched with those of a street in Hanoi: the light of Hanoi has been moved to Kassel, and vice versa.

Sydney – Do Son, Hai Phong (Chair Exchange) (2004) works on the same principle. In this case, the chairs from the café of the contemporary art museum in Sydney are swapped with those from the Phuong Tao restaurant in Doson, Hai Phong, in Vietnam.

By decontextualizing two objects or two behaviors in this way, Haaning telescopes two different worlds in ways that are so subtle as to be barely visible, yet they really exist.

Haaning describes his practice as "public art." The methods to be used to create each of his projects are never decided on in advance, but depend on each particular situation. For his appearance in Villeurbanne, he has conceived **Yerevan Time** (2007). Aware of the importance of the Armenian community in the town, he has set a clock in a central public space – in the Pharmacie des Gratte-Ciel, 28 avenue Henri Barbusse – to show the time in the Armenian capital. For the entire period of Haaning's show at the Institut d'art contemporain, this clock will be set forward by three hours from French time, so subtly reminding the Armenian immigrants of their roots whenever they happen to be downtown, and at the same time inconspicuously disorienting the rest of the population.