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## IAN TWEEDY

### Interviewed by Marco Scotini

The repertory of images which make up the work of Ian Tweedy can be placed somewhere between the delirious painting of Neo Rauch and the black and white photographic inventory of Hans Peter Feldman; even though the work makes reference to the recent past, order and context seem completely lost. He started out as a graffiti and street artist, with an accumulation of images in the streets of Frankfurt, Weisbaden, Hamburg and Dusseldorf; Germany was his adopted territory, after America. His tag, Dephct, appeared in the Thames and Hudson bestseller *Graffiti World*. Currently, Ian Tweedy intervenes upon geographic maps of the Cold War, on old book covers, and on documents from the past, provided that every square centimetre of their surface contains memory, or has a story. Yet as before, Tweedy continues to work on city streets and in public spaces. However, now as a muralist, using stolen images from social history, collective portraits borrowed from popular magazines such as "Life", "Storia Illustrata" or other illustrated magazines: a strike by Chrysler workers from the 50's, a demonstration for the liberation of Sacco and Vanzetti in Chicago, a Fordist system of arms production for the war in Vietnam.

Like a kind of historical hacker, Tweedy invents his own "time machine", a crossover through space and time, a series of cut-up associations of geography and identity. Like many contemporary artists - from Narkevicius to Baladran, from Borremans to Victor Man - the large quantity of photographic material that Tweedy has collected in the last few years forms the base for both his painting and mural projects. In *Monument #1*, already shown at the Prometeogallery in Milan, a mix of acrylic painting, geographic maps, historical photographs, and Constructivist signs, took up the entire wall of the exhibition space. His work *Plots*, also assembles information, archival photographs and drawings in an immediate and precarious way that is part of a unique project that - at every exhibit - shows different strategies of intervention in public spaces; hypothesising illegal murals and attempts to create a history within the urban landscape. The work of Ian Tweedy punctuates the gap that exists between a past made up of National stories, different cultures and social identities, and the amnesia of the present. Like other emerging artists, Tweedy looks for a "root" in time, instead of within a space and in a precise location. But his search is within an imaginary biography, by way of an optional assemblage instead of one determined by real events. His latest project - *A History Out of Context* - is a video in which he appears ripping blank pages out of old books that later become the support for his drawings. One table is covered with a series of works made with pencil and oil paint on paper; images torn out of the news, traces of a new history without a context.

**Perhaps I'll start with your latest, so eloquently entitled, project. I know that *A History Out of Context* refers to your autobiography as a rootless person as well as to a larger social history that we all have in common. Would you tell me about your past?**

I am American, but I was born in Hahn, near Frankfurt on an American military base. I spent several years moving between Frankfurt, Berlin, Wiesbaden. I also lived in Fort Meade, Maryland, but I always felt I lived on foreign territory, moving from one camp to another. After twelve years of military life, and as many years living in various different countries, I now live in Italy. As a result, it is difficult for me to take on a particular type of cultural past. I was forced to adapt continually to different cultures, and this lack of roots led me towards the challenge of recreating a personal history.

**But your story is made up exclusively of juxtaposed images, without narrative order or personal memories. For years you've worked on an archive, subdivided by theme, that by now must be made up of thousands of photographs taken from daily life, but a collective daily life, not your personal daily life. What were the forces that drove you to create this photographic atlas, and what criteria do you use – if any – in collecting the images?**

Well, really the archive started out as a few unrelated pieces that I carried around for years for no specific reason other than personal attachment. For example, among these images were an old book on the Olympics, a map and some prints by unknown artists. It was later that I began to cut photographs out of publications from the 50's. It could have been any type of magazine or newspaper, as long as a black and white photo presented an objective historical situation, a specific pose, which at the same time had something mysterious about it. Now there are many images and they are categorised under titles such as travel, production, war, architecture, politics, geography, masses, etc.

**In your work, not only the historical photos, but all the elements you use have been previously used by someone else, have been passed from one person to another and already have a story. What is the meaning of this for you?**

Like a graffiti artist takes his space from the larger public space, I too want to go further, not only occupying public space but also using personal belongings like objects or documents that have passed through various peoples' hands before becoming mine. A wall is always layered with posters, writing and spray. In the same way there's no big difference between a wall, a book or a map. You know that in a project began in 2004 I applied oil paint to the covers of the various books I found, stole or bought. This is my way of speaking by using images which eventually end up totally erasing the writing.

**So there is a strong tie between your present work and your initial work. How did you pass from the preceding graffiti approach to a new conception of making murals?**

At a certain point my graffiti had become only a sort of strategic design, almost abstract, and more and more flexible, without ever reaching a higher level, or becoming a form of art that was without the clichés or definitions provided by the pop culture. So I felt the necessity to move towards something else, to leave behind the bad habits and the tendencies of the graffiti art scene for something that was riskier. I wanted to free myself from all the technique that governs the style of the writer. I moved towards a new situation that brought me to Milan where I began new kinds of action and developed new approaches to my work. Then I looked at Neo Rauch or Barry McGee, and mixed in some Ben Shahn and Robert Motherwell. Afterwards I came to understand that the wall had an objective importance in my work, and my images once again put themselves on wall space. This is my challenge now.

**What are you working on now?**

It is no coincidence that I am now working on the temporary construction of a department of urban murals for a collective. But it certainly isn't Siqueiros that I have in mind.