

artist bios

Culture & Conflict Group includes Ayreen Anastas, Shane Cullen, Emily Jacir, Cynthia Large, Conor McGrady, Kevin Noble, Frankie Quinn and Nasri Zakharia. Trained as an architect Anastas creates works in video, sound and sculpture. She has exhibited at Rampe 003 Berlin, Bunker in Reinhardstrasse, Berlin and Artbunker, Nuremberg. Cullen has exhibited widely in Europe and North America since 1989 at venues including Secession, Vienna; Zacheta, Warsaw; PS1, NY and New Langton Arts, San Francisco. In 1995 he represented Ireland at the *Venice Biennale*. Jacir has exhibited in *Greater New York, P.S. 1, NY; Uncommon Threads, Johnson Museum, Cornell University; and Unjustified, Apex Art, NY*. Large works primarily in painting and sculpture and has explored the parallels between Irish and Palestinian histories in her recent work. She has exhibited widely including at Ann Nathan Gallery, Chicago. She currently lives in New York City. McGrady is a 1998 MFA graduate of the School of the Art Institute. He has exhibited at NFA Space, Chicago; City of Chicago Cultural Center; Coventry Gallery, London and in the 2002 Whitney Biennial. Noble has exhibited since 1975 including one person exhibitions at Artists Space, NY (1980), White Columns, NY (1986) and Féile an Phoblacht, Belfast (1999). Quinn has exhibited in Belfast, Dublin, Australia, Italy and Philadelphia. Zakharia is a filmmaker and video artist. His feature length production, *The Three Mohammads*, exploring racism against Arab-Americans is currently in progress at NYU.

At the Edge: Innovative Art in Chicago

The Culture and Conflict Group's exhibition is one of six in the series At the Edge: Innovative Art in Chicago, running from August 27 to December 21, 2002. At the Edge unveils newly created works that are difficult to show in commercial spaces, that extend a working artist's practice, and/or push the boundaries of art experimentation. Marked by inquiry, experimentation and ingenuity this years artists' projects are the first in annual At the Edge exhibitions intended to encourage the most innovative aspects of Chicago's art community's current dynamism.

Credits

Gallery 400 is supported by the College of Architecture and the Arts, University of Illinois at Chicago and a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency. The Daryl Gerber Stokols and Jeff Stokols Voices Series Fund provides generous support to Gallery 400 programs.



Culture & Conflict Group

Settlement

November 19-30, 2002

University of Illinois at Chicago

GALLERY 400

College of Architecture and the Arts
School of Art and Design

Culture & Conflict Group

1

Cultures assimilate the world's conflicts between peoples. Mass media and popular literature are the dominant means of transmitting information about specific political conflicts. The commercial media's inevitable reduction of the complexities inherent in any conflict leave a reduced vocabulary in place: 'ethnic' and 'religious strife,' 'terrorism' and 'centuries-old hatreds'—for most Americans these are the kinds of terms which broadly apply to the conflicts in the Palestinian territories and in Northern Ireland. The dominant visual language is every bit as limited and repetitive: clearing the rubble from the last bombing, uniformed men patrolling a poor residential street, another wailing mother. The understanding presented is one of endless conflict between people who simply cannot get along, punctuated by extremist acts of violence. The artists comprising the Culture & Conflict Group reject this understanding. They see in it a camouflage for those who would press their (often considerable) military and political advantage, and for that reason recognize culture itself as a terrain of conflict, a theater of operations. Since cultural productions are never neutral, cultural producers themselves cannot pretend to be, either. But if the artists comprising the Culture & Conflict Group confess themselves partisans, then they also seek to expose the partisanship of others.

2

Struggles between peoples for land, for political representation, for human rights, and for security, are nearly always also struggles for histories. Partisans in the struggles over Palestine and Northern Ireland return to historical tropes as needed, because in relationships saturated with antagonism histories also are weapons. The advocacy of a particular historical narrative, especially when coupled with the denial of an opposing version, qualifies as an exercise of power. The Culture & Conflict Group create and

deliver histories using the spectrum of vocabularies available in art: texts, images, materials, spaces. Think of their work as a daring and needed deployment of creative history-telling. Daring, because the deeply entrenched partisans of the world's most intractable conflicts stake issues of life and death on their respective understandings of history, and in the process construct orthodoxies against which loyalty and antagonism are measured. Needed, because Manichaean systems of available histories severely limit the imaginable political solutions. When the only available histories are mutually antagonistic, ongoing war logically results. The Culture & Conflict Group aims to enlarge the available histories in order to enlarge political possibility, since any stable political agreement between long antagonistic actors requires that they also reach some sort of minimal agreement on historical understanding. The Culture & Conflict Group enlarges the available histories not by presenting novel historical narratives, but rather through creating unusual modes of delivery and reception. Their focus on the delivery and reception of history is the critical point from which their efforts depart polemicism without denying partisanship; that is to say that the narratives of struggle either calcified by reductionist delivery, or anticipated and therefore dismissed when conventionally received, are brought to life when delivered in creative forms and received without anticipation.

3

Conflicts between two opposing camps demand that peoples adhere to a static, unchanging identity. Unchanging identities form the basis for the loyalties so needed by the authorities who steer conflict. Identification as a process of tactical assertion, by contrast, undoes static identity. Every act of disloyalty to static notions of people, race, and nation weakens the basis for warring. To question what makes a person Irish, or British, or Israeli, or Palestinian is another way of enlarging the field of political possibility, of refusing to accept the imperially sanctioned identities. The facts of cultural mixing and human migration support identification as a process.

Static identity therefore depends on a form of internal repression which becomes increasingly obvious over time: the elevation of a single identity (most often either national or racial, and sometimes interchangeably national and racial) as not only more important than all others, but as the essential quality which separates one group from the other. As this primary identity becomes ever more ambiguous, opportunities for tactical identification reveal themselves more frequently. The Culture & Conflict Group seeks to occupy these openings, to bring into question what constitutes a loyalty based on the values of life as opposed to those of nationalism, and to interrogate the constructs to which authorities demand allegiance. The Culture & Conflict Group recognizes the fragility of identity as the Achilles' heel of those who perpetuate conflict. Actively, tactically, and with deliberation, the Culture & Conflict Group attacks this weak point. The goal is to unleash the process of identification, to open the possibilities for alternative loyalties based on the myriad commonalities now excluded and denied by identities defined by nationalism and racism.

4

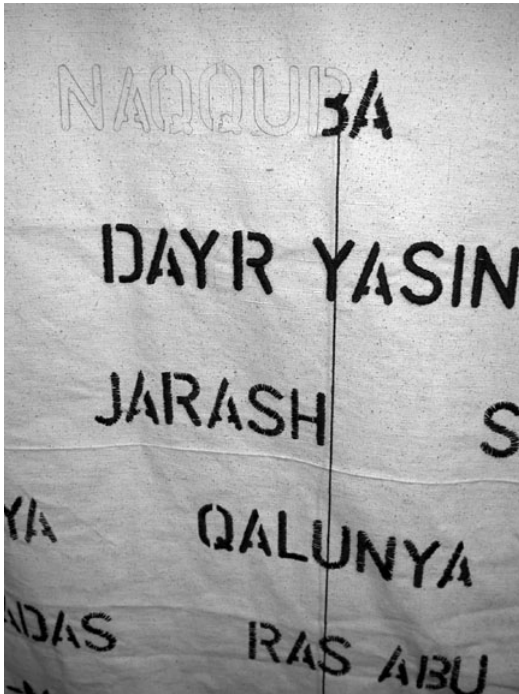
The forces of transnational capital now insert themselves into every struggle for justice as added complexities, and transform formerly regional struggles into ones with global reach. The actors of global capital—the funding agencies, the private investors, the consumer retailers, the currency speculators—expertly determine their interest in any given situation. Voracious appetites for new markets, cheap labor, and above all energy resources propel their involvement. Self-serving as they are, the forces of transnational capital have nevertheless become indispensable, because the fixed colonial mindsets of internally dominant powers like Britain and Israel will not be turned without pressure from them. How to manage transnational capital's perception of Northern Ireland and the Palestinian Territories, and to use the interests of capital to further the cause of self-determination while resisting its dominance becomes the latest challenge facing those who struggle against occupation.

Settlement: A project of the Culture & Conflict Group

The Culture & Conflict Group know that the stability and investment needed for schools and humane social infrastructure must not be confused with the reduction of a population to the status of potential consumers. A Starbucks on every corner, maquiladoras along every border—that is not the Irish and Palestinian future for which these artists lend their energies. The Culture & Conflict Group see in this challenge an emerging condition of political struggle, one which not only forces partisans to adjust their analyses, but in the best cases also creates opportunities to highlight heretofore invisible alliances with peoples in all different parts of the globe.

—Dan S. Wang, 11/22/02

—Dan S. Wang is a writer, artist, and activist who lives in Chicago



This exhibition brings together the work of eight artists from Palestine, Ireland and the United States. The work of these artists explores the impact of military occupation, faltering attempts at settlement, and the importance of history and memory in both regions, drawing comparisons and parallels where necessary. The project acknowledges that artists are not 'neutral' beings divorced from social and political realities, but often hold partisan viewpoints that are articulated through numerous and complex strategies. Public space, such as that which is characterized through the format of the exhibition, is often shaped through debate and conflicting views; it is the aim of this exhibition to forge public space by raising questions on issues of history, war and representation. Through focusing on the work of artists who are responding to colonization and dispossession, we hope to broaden the scope of debate through the presentation of alternative viewpoints to those that currently dominate.

The Culture & Conflict Group was formed in 1998 with the intent to explore the intersection between art and politics in contemporary society and to challenge the assumption that art is neutral any given context. The group has organized a number of exhibitions specifically focusing on the Irish conflict. *British Architecture in Ireland* was shown at the Puffin Room in New York in 1998. In 2000, *Ambiguous Authority*, a group show featuring artists from Ireland, Britain and the U.S. was held at Beacon Street Gallery in Chicago. *Unlimited Partnerships: Culture & Conflict Group* was shown at Cepa Gallery in Buffalo, New York in September of the same year.

—Culture & Conflict Group

...culture is sort of a theater where various political and ideological causes engage one another. Far from being a placid realm of Apollonian gentility, culture can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another...

—From *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said

