Sarah Maple – Brexit

My *Brexit* series, is a staged series of photographs based around the language used during the Brexit campaign. Over the spring/summer of 2016, I began to notice a repetition of particular slogans in the media that spread across the country. Slogans such as 'send them back', 'take back control' and 'I want my country back'. I have collected such slogans, and I am in the process of creating a new humorous photography series including these texts. I am a British Muslim and have always been extremely proud to be born in the UK. 2016 has made me think about what exactly British values are. During the Brexit campaign, many people voiced a feeling of nostalgia for 'the good old days'.
I am interested in what idea of Britain people would like to return to and if this could ever be feasible in the modern age. I would like to explore how when discussing an idea of 'returning to British values' this appeared to be at the expense of immigrants in the UK. In my practice I often use humour as a Trojan horse to get an idea across. This series will be a humorous and ironic twist on the idea of quintessential Britain. The refugee crisis inspired my *Go Home* globe. I was increasingly frustrated by a sense of entitlement many people voiced when it came to accepting refugees. There was an idea that these people were coming to take away something that was 'ours', when we were only born in safe countries by complete luck.

Sarah Maple

(b. 1986, UK) completed a BA in Fine Art from Kingston University, and in the same year won the 2017 '4 New Sensations' award for emerging artists, run by The Saatchi Gallery. Sarah's work has been exhibited internationally including at Tate Britain, London; A.I.R Gallery, New York and AGO, Canada. She has also been invited to speak for the Tate, Amnesty International and Women Inc. In February 2017 she was the artist in resident at KochxBos, Amsterdam for the solo exhibition *Power to the People?* and with the Sky Academy Arts scholarship, she will create a new body of work about 'Freedom of Speech' in 2017. In 2015 she released her first book *You Could Have Done This.*

Marcel Feil

(b. 1968, NL) is Deputy Artistic Director at Foam and Editor of *Foam Magazine.*

Simon Menner

Role Models

Perception is the Battlefield by Kim Knoppers

Our perception has become the most important battlefield of the twenty-first century, and fear in the form of terror might be the predominant weapon.
– Simon Menner

Simon Menner increasingly seems to be becoming an obsessive archivist who, by intently studying existing images, connecting them with other images and focusing on specific details, attempts to get to grips with complex histories and our perception of them. With his book *Top Secret. Bilder aus den Archiven der Staatssicherheit* he became well known to lovers of photobooks and disreputable in the eyes of a handful of historians. In that book he showed, with the aid of archival photos, how the secret services of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990) used ridiculous disguises such as false beards and fake bellies to help them spy on their fellow citizens. Last winter NRW Forum in Düsseldorf presented Menner's extensive project *Terror Komplex*. In it he investigates, based on online footage, the various strategies of self-expression used by Islamist terror groups. The paradox of an invisible war that is continually communicated in visual form is the central theme of *Terror Komplex*. The series *Role Models* (2016), now presented as a portfolio in *Foam Magazine*, is part of that project.

In *Role Models* Menner repeatedly places two images side by side. The first is from an Islamist propaganda video, the second is the result of a quick search of the web for an image with the same pose or gesture. By freezing IS videos and studying them in relation to images from the global media, Menner attempts to grasp the iconography of IS and how it is perceived. Skilfully made propaganda videos distributed online by Al-Hayat, the public relations department of Islamic State, are a mix of heroic gestures from the Islamic vocabulary and poses and gestures from low-brow Hollywood films and Western news items. They terrify those who find the ideas of IS despicable but encourage those who sympathise with IS ideology. They act as one final seductive prod in the 'right' direction. This sophisticated visual language is intended to reach a specific target group, namely Western media and young people who have grown up in the West and are attracted to the caliphate.

Role Models makes painfully clear how ideologically diverse groups are growing closer together in their visual expression via the same medium. This is not to say IS is unilaterally copying Western media. Both groups take clichés and stereotypical behaviour from an extensive visual canon that is anchored in our visual memory – a visual canon in which symbols, meanings, reality and perception are intertwined and nothing can any longer be attributed to the original.





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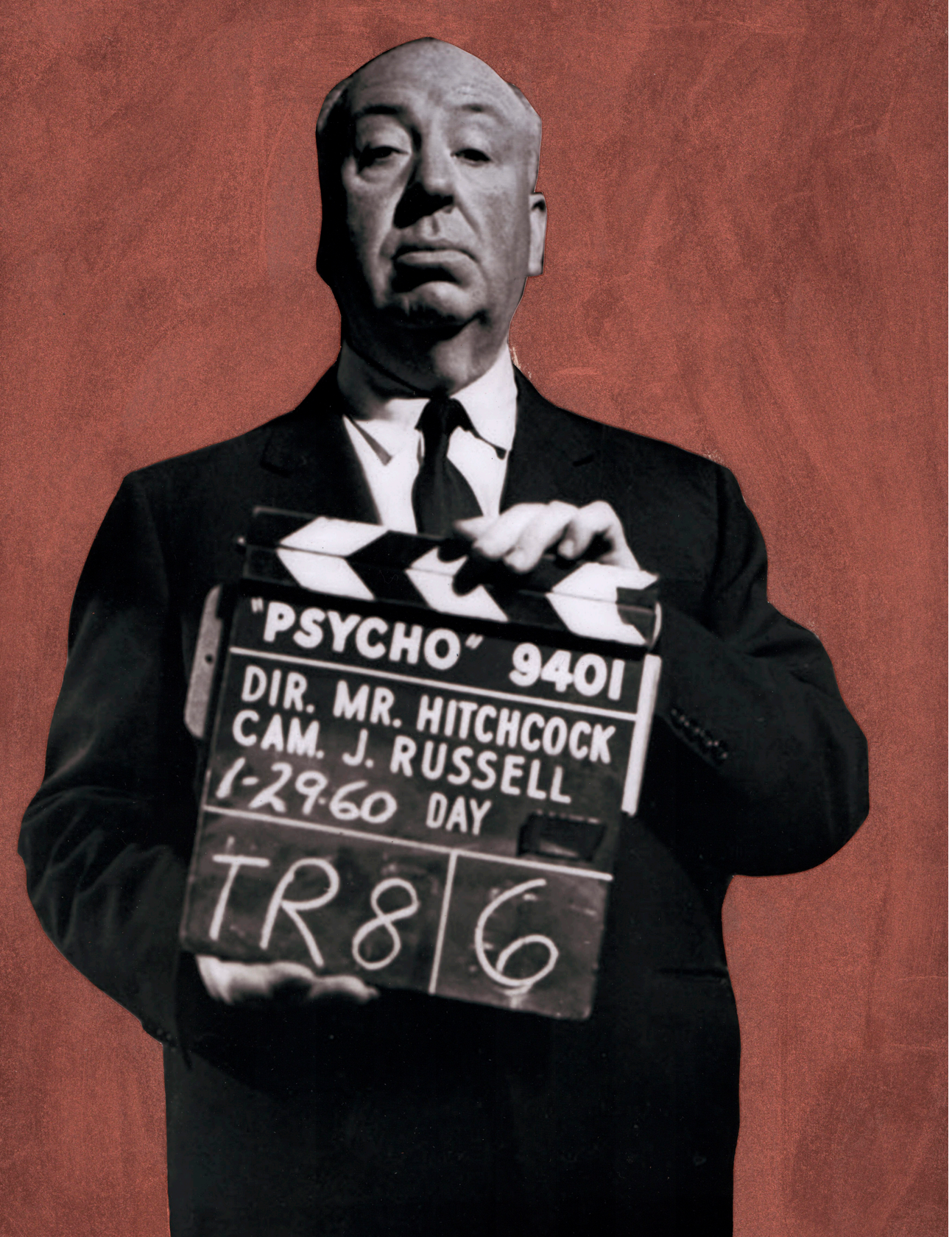











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One of the key elements that interests Menner is how our perception becomes a battlefield. Over the past three years he has not missed a single important video release by IS. According to Menner, the reason why IS produces all these videos has to do with the fact that its actual reach is so limited. The likelihood that IS will kill you is vanishingly small, so the media are deployed to spread fear and to wage war. Menner also looks at online material from the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Perhaps his interest could be compared to viewing open heart surgery or crime investigation programmes on television. By consciously, intensively and repeatedly exposing yourself to something that terrifies you, you can get a grip on it and defuse your own fear. The more you look, the less afraid you are.

As Menner viewed further IS images, he noticed the deliberately blurred faces of Angela Merkel and Hillary Clinton; used consciously as a rhetorical device to show where IS stands morally and politically. Unlike the visibly disguised faces of Western politicians however, what IS does not want to reveal is totally invisible. The videos contain no visual evidence of violence against women under IS control. The most we see is the ominous image of men toying with stones.

The issues Menner addresses in his work are extremely serious and topical: surveillance, media (in)visibility, global conflict and, in that context, the power of fear. Yet through the repetition of visual motifs and the seriality that results, his work acquires an absurdist aspect. It makes you realise that the world is complex and the human lot rather tragic, but this realisation is at least brought to you with a lightness of touch. As Menner says, ‘If you talk about something brutal and then present it in the same brutal fashion, you give your audience the perfect excuse to look away. By working with this material I could easily have produced the perfect cry-and-vomit-machine. People would leave immediately, because there is so much material that people cannot stand. It would never serve as a basis for discourse or for greater understanding.’

With thanks to Simon Menner, with whom I spoke via Skype on 26 January 2017.

Simon Menner
(b. 1978, DE) received an MFA from the Universität der Künste Berlin in 2007. He has exhibited worldwide in group and solo exhibitions including at Goethe Institute Prague (2014) NRW-Forum, Düsseldorf (2016) and Dubai Design District, Dubai (2016). In 2014-2015 he was an Artist-in-Residence at the Goethe Institute Prague, and his monograph *Top Secret* was shortlisted for the First Photobook of the Year Award at Paris Photo (2013). He currently lives and works in Berlin.

Kim Knoppers
(b. 1976, NL) is an art historian (University of Amsterdam) and a curator at Foam. Since 2011, she has worked on exhibitions by Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin, Anne de Vries, Jan Hoek, Lorenzo Vitturi and Jan Rosseel to name but a few. Kim is founder of *Artists' Recipes*, which explores the intersection of art and food. She lives and works in Amsterdam, but also stays in Istanbul on a regular basis.

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Simone Donati

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