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Jill Magid at Honor Fraser



JILL MAGID, "FAILED STATES," INSTALLATION VIEW, 2011, COURTESY HONOR FRASER GALLERY, PHOTO JOSH WHITE

AKIN TO THE PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER DYNAMIC IN THE WORK OF Sophie Calle, Jill Magid's presence and observational power are integral to her works. Calle's *The Shadow* (1981), where she followed a stranger and hired a detective to follow her, is a clear reference for Magid's earlier work and her current installation and book, "Failed States." In Magid's *Evidence Locker* (2004), she used closed-circuit video from Liverpool's surveillance system to track her own movements. In *The Spy Project* (2008), commissioned by the Dutch Secret Service (AIDV), she interviewed AIDV employees and used data culled from these personal interactions to show a more human side of the agency.

Magid has a knack for being in the right place at the right time and making connections between seemingly incongruous elements. In 2010, when visiting the Texas State Capitol in Austin, she witnessed shots being fired into the air from the Capitol steps and the subsequent arrest of a 24-year-old man named Fausto Cardenas who refused to explain his actions. Magid was in Austin to research the connection between snipers and their targets for a project, and quickly took on the role of witness, later becoming a vivacious spokesperson about the incident for the local TV news stations. This event and its development over time became fodder for her installation and book, "Failed States," where she linked Fausto's dramatic act with Goethe's *Faust*.

The installation unfolds as a narrative where art objects function like stage props, creating a path through the gallery. On the wall are written directives: [enter FAUSTO] [Enter MAGID] [Shots fired skyward] [lights fade] [silence]. The silence that concludes the narrative parallels Fausto's silence as his unwillingness to speak about the incident allowed Magid to insert her voice. Magid's installation imbues an elegance to the story. She re-presents the events and objects associated with the shooting with a conceptualist's eye, adding and subtracting information to enhance the story she chooses to tell. Using the media as a primary medium she infuses popular culture (TV news) with literary references (Goethe's *Faust*).

Dynamic and static objects are presented in concert within the space. She brings in a live web-cam projection that focuses on the sky surrounding the Capitol, an old family Mercedes Benz station wagon, which has been armored to B4-level resistance but with no visible changes to its exterior, from which emanates an audio work. Excerpts from her role as an eyewitness play on a flatscreen TV. These dynamic elements are supplemented by a vitrine embedded into the wall at floor level containing 6 empty shells and another vitrine that contains a letter written by Magid to Fausto coupled with a copy of Goethe's *Faust*. Prints with excerpts or collages from Goethe's play dot the walls.

Magid weaves her drama through the lives of others, pulling in real-world events, yet creating a fiction. In "Failed States" Cardenas' name and actions become the catalyst to meditate on the theatrics of random violence, sensationalism, and how the media distorts and reports events before all the facts are in.

- Jody Zellen