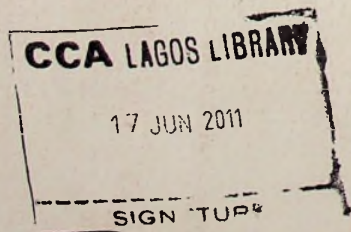


# MOTHER TONGUE

FORMED AS A COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE TO  
INDIVIDUAL PERIODS OF RESEARCH IN NORTHERN  
SCANDINAVIA AND WEST AFRICA, WITH THE  
REALISATION THAT EXISTENCE UNDER MULTIPLE  
IDENTITIES IS A UNIVERSAL CONDITION OF THE  
GLOBALISED WORLD. VISUAL ARTISTS'  
PREOCCUPATION WITH THIS REALITY AND THEIR  
EXTERNALISATION OF THE CONFLICTS IT PRODUCES,  
ARE CENTRAL TO OUR PRACTICE. THE RESEARCH  
PROCESS IS A CONTINUAL EXPANSION, TRAVERSING  
GEOGRAPHIES, HISTORIES AND POLITICS.  
BROUGHT HOME TO MUTUAL SCOTTISH TERRITORY,  
MOTHER TONGUES'S RESEARCH HAS THE POSSIBILITY  
TO EXIST ACCROSS MULTIPLE PLATFORMS, SUCH AS  
EXHIBITIONS, EVENTS AND TEXTS, AND IN DIALOGUE  
WITH ARTISTS, CURATORS, WRITERS,  
RESEARCHERS AND THEORISTS.



# MOTHER TONGUE INTERVIEW GRAHAM FAGEN

GRAHAM FAGEN BORN 1966 IS A SCOTTISH ARTIST, LIVING AND WORKING IN GLASGOW. HIS WORK AND RESEARCH IS LARGELY CONCERNED WITH AN INVESTIGATION OF SCOTTISH HERITAGE, IN PARTICULAR THE LEGACY OF SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL POET, ROBERT BURNS. PREVIOUS PROJECTS, ALL INTER-RELATED, INCLUDE 'RADIO ROSELLE' FOR SWANSONG[2002], 'CLEAN HANDS, PURE HEART' TRAMWAY GLASGOW[2005] AND 'DOWNPRESSER' GOMA GLASGOW [2007].

Q. When you address the issue of 'inherited' culture, in what ways do we inherit our cultural identity - is it taught to us, do we observe it?

A. What I'm really interested in are things that i have been calling 'cultural formers', things that form our culture, and in turn form us. So for me, that was one of the reasons for addressing the use of language, cultural inheritance and legacy. Partially I wanted to address the cultural understanding between my own heritage-Robert Burns- and a new area of music i was buying at the time, which was Jamaican Reggae, which were polar opposites. What was interesting to me was how in my own cultural heritage the language was difficult and hard to understand - whereas a language that was someone else's meant more to me and i understood more about it.

Q. Was your appropriation of music to facilitate a navigation of the cultural specificities of dialect and slang?

A. In a work I made for the Imperial War Museum in Kosovo, titled 'Theatre' I got the 'players' to make up their own language. The language was used almost as a rhythm to help narrate or guide the viewer in terms of what was actually being communicated between players. People would come to me after they had been to see the exhibition and say 'that was really interesting how you used Serbian and Albanian to show the contrast' so people understood something from this language that was not actually a language. One of the values of music is that there is some sort of universality of rhythm in a sense, of sound as an aesthetic.

Q. A subsequent project 'Downpresser' at GOMA, Glasgow, also involved taking your practice out with Scotland, as a means of exploring the mutual territory between two seemingly disparate cultures?

outside analysis and reflection that we can see the true picture of cultural identity?

A. For the 'Downpresser' project at GOMA, I told them I would like to further examine the idea of asking people of Jamaican descent, and by that slave descent, to perform or to embrace a Burns song. Lots of poor people went to Jamaica to work on plantations that were owned by rich people from Scotland, the Empire was made through the slavery of African people. I felt the only way to test that idea properly would be to take that idea to Jamaica and see what kind of reaction we would get. But it was also an attempt to make people understand a bit more about - not just Burns at the time - but also our own Scottish history at that time.

I took the idea to Jamaica with Holger Malpauht, who does all my video work, and after a lot of very hard work - and a lot of frightening situations - we got a band together. The band appreciated the lyrics, and understood what I was trying to do with them. They ended up performing 'Slaves Lament' in Negro, which is near to Savana Lamar, which was the very first port Burns would have sailed to if he had taken the first sailing on board 'The Nancy' from Greenock; I took his idea to where he would have arrived had he gone to Jamaica.

Q. At what point did you invite the reggae artist Ghetto Priest to become involved with the 'I Murder Hate' project? How did you introduce the band to Burns and how did they respond initially?

A. The main organisation of who would perform was discussed and agreed upon between Adrian Sherwood [music producer] and myself. I first started to use Adrian's recordings in 'Radio Roselle', and then worked with him again on a project for the Victoria and Albert Museum called 'Art Of The Garden'. The curators gave ten artists, designers and architects a garden shed in the centre of the V&A. I called mine 'Blood Shed' and made a pirate radio station that played four songs repeatedly, one Burns song and three Jamaican reggae songs, which were from Adrian's label. When I talked to Adrian about the idea [for 'I Murder Hate'], I described the sort of feel and sound I thought would be right for the song. This was based on both the way the song had been performed by Scottish players, but also thinking about the African/Caribbean influence that I wanted to be present in the song. I know a lot about Adrian's singers and players as I have been buying their records since I was a young guy. It came down to two singers in the end; a guy called Little Roy or Ghetto Priest. We thought a lot about these two, and in the end we decided the energy that Ghetto Priest would bring to the performance - as a younger artist - would be more suitable to what we were trying to do.

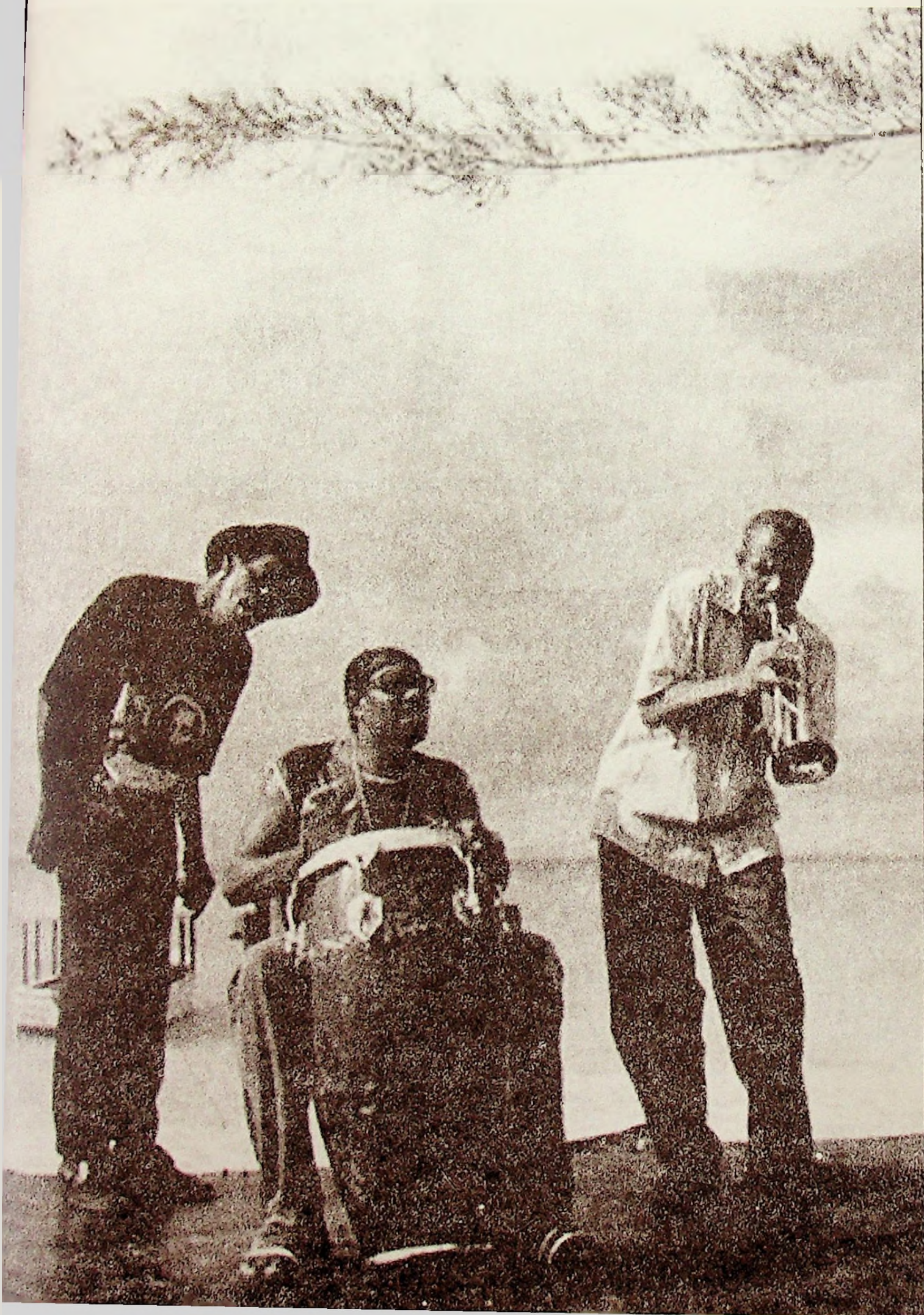
Q. How much input did you have in composing the performance? Do you feel it was a very different process to making visual artwork?

A. On one level it is and on one level it isn't. What we ended up with was something like a collage, with 'Auld Lang Syne' at the start, 'Slaves Lament' in the middle and 'Auld Lang Syne' again at the end. If the guys were doing it they would never have squashed two bits of songs together in three segments, so that was really me thinking about what it would be like as an artwork, how it could be read and understood as an artwork.

"The creation of the work spans generations and geography, artistic media and cultures, songs of lament and dissent united to rewrite, reflect and reconnect. Graham Fagen has brought these different languages - musical, verbal, political - together, using one to articulate another and finding intellectually what he understood instinctively as a teenager - that cultural identity is determined by the personal as well as the political, by chance as well as strategy and that music as a vehicle for both, transcends geographical and language barriers".

- Lorraine Wilson, Curator of 'Clean Hands, Pure Heart' Tramway

Graham Fagen 'Downpresserer' 2007, Production Still, courtesy of the artsit.



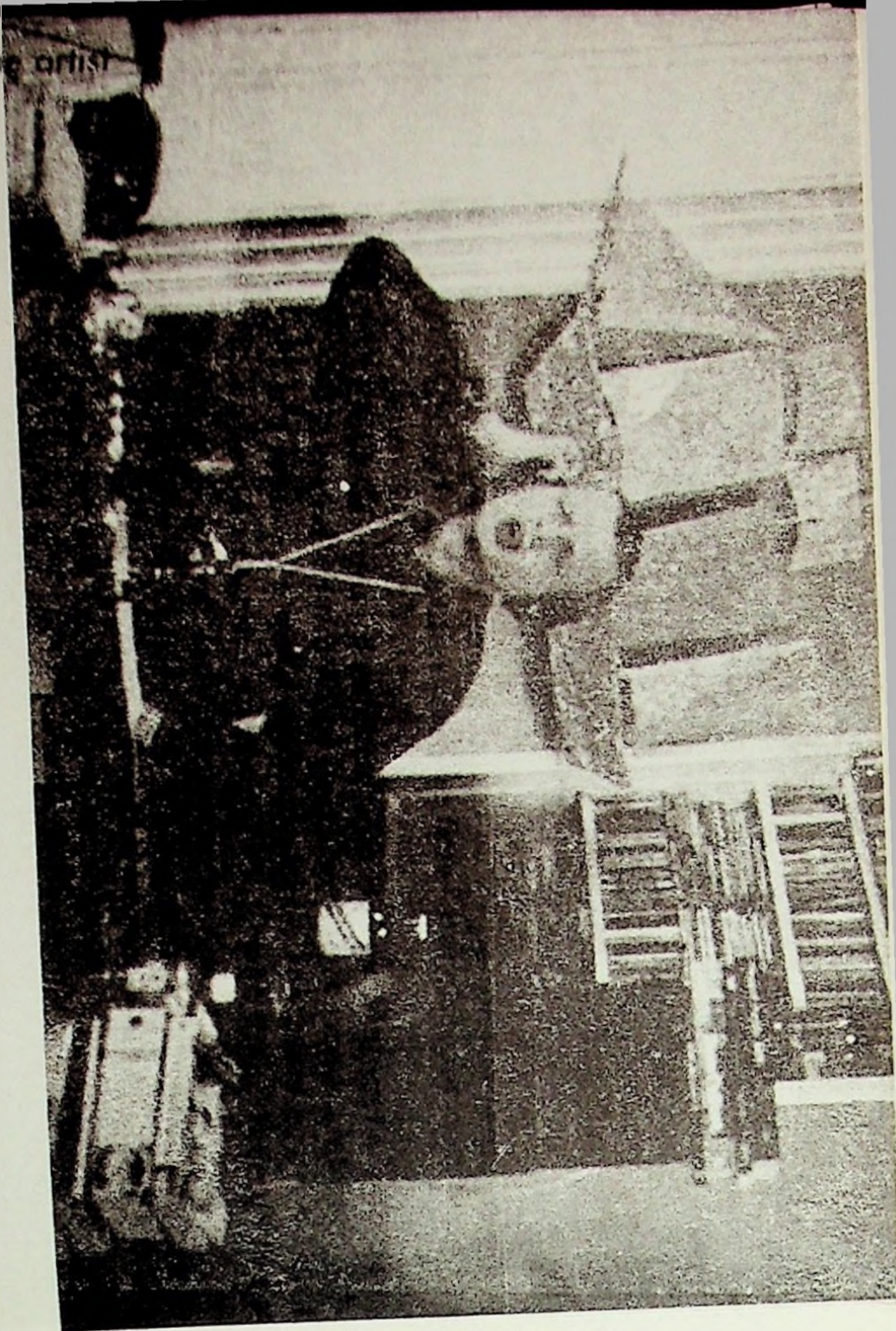


# MOTHER TONGUE

TIFFANY BOYLE + JESSICA CARDEN

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Graham Fagen, Radio Roselle 2002, DVD Still, courtesey of the artist



EXOTICISM

CULTURE

SOCIAL REALISM

EXILE

POVERTY

HEARTBREAK

IDENTITY

RACIAL AMBIGUITY

NATIONALISM // PURITY // POST-COLONIALISM // GLOBALISATION

CLASS // AUTHENTICITY // HERITAGE // OTHERNESS // MIGRATION

INHERITANCE // COLLECTIVE MEMORY // LOSS // ROMANTICISM

INDIGENOUSNESS // LINGUISTIC PURITY // DIASPORA // HYBRIDITY

*"Ethno-Aesthetics is something unclean, a subdivision of the ethnic which connotes the cross breed, the domesticated wild. Ethno-Aesthetics is concerned with the art of placing oneself between two chairs, an art or a series of feats that we cross breeds must perform at all times. If we are something, we are both something else and the same. If not we are neither one nor the other. In a way, we are talking about something political and something aesthetic at the same time, because the ethnic, the cross breed, indicate that which is nothing in itself, that which is something only by virtue of something else, which is not the case itself, but an image or rewriting. And we who perform our cross breeding all the time - have the possibility of becoming good examples; examples to be followed by others who fumble in search of their identity. In some way, we have a better, clearer, less private case."*

*- Erik Gant, Ethno-Aesthetic by Pia Arke [1995], ARK*

**Kling & Bang**





## THREE REGIONS

# SCOTLAND/ SAPMI/ NIGERIA/ ARTIST'S USE OF LOCAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL SIGNIFIERS IN THE DECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND HERITAGE

MOTHER TONGUE RESEARCH PAPER [EXCERPT]

'ART IN TRANSLATION' CONFERENCE, NORDIC HOUSE, REYKJAVIK 2010

*Between these different regions, there are strong parallels between artists work as they attempt to balance traditional culture with their role in modern society. Each region's respective artist attempts to deconstruct and rebuild their culture through an investigation of their heritage, a realisation of their own personal identity, in relation to their national identity. Languages - including indigenous languages, regional dialect or slang - are used as a method by which to critique the hybrid nature of their multi-layered identities.*

*In addressing this balance, the artist's examine common stereotypes and histories romanticised interpretation of events and icons, often combined with strong political undercurrents. The contemporary Scottish artist Graham Fagen deals with our own Scottish national heritage, in particular the legacy of Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns. Fagen employs radio broadcasts as a means of merging the rhythm of Burn's poetry with reggae music from the seemingly disparate region of the Carribean.*

*While Fagen inserts extracts of Burns poetry directly into reggae music, the Nigerian artist Olu Oguibe uses Pidgin English in a much less obvious example of cross-cultural overlaps. Pidgin English originated out of a need for a common language between English, French, Portugese and Dutch traders along the West African coast during the colonial period. Both a symbol of the uneducated working class and a disillusioned youth, Pidgin English is used by Oguibe in his critique of the polociies of the*

Nigerian government. For the 'Re-Thinking Nordic Colonialism' exhibition [2005], 'Colonialism Within: Indigenous Rights and Multicultural Realities' the Sami artist Geir Tore Holm contributed the concert recording, 'Mun Rakkistan - In Mun Ge'. The video is a translation of Serge Gainsbourg's 'Je T'aime - Moi Non Plus' in to Holm's native language. His practice embodies aspects of history, place and time; shared issues that exist beyond regional boundaries to drive these artists to forge a cultural renaissance and reawaken a national identity.

Living on the borders of multiple cultures is reflected in Sami contemporary artists dynamic and open concepts, creating works in the cross currents of many diverse influences and split identities. Sami artists have had to break through the art forms defined by Western cultures and reinstate their own culture as a modern day movement.

The Sami artist Geir Tore Holm was involved in Act IV of the 'Re-Thinking Nordic Colonialism' programme. His practice embodies aspects of history, place and time and studies the meaning of belonging, applying nationality, hybridity and ethnicity. His practice often acknowledges and draws upon his minority Sami culture, and refers to, or incorporates food and more recently blood. Through his interest in social relations and power structures, he discusses individual identity, connecting to a larger cosmos, and then addresses difficulties in ethnic representations.

"'Vara addit!' means 'Give blood!' in Sami language. Blood seems to be more than a red bodily fluid. Due to its importance to life, blood is associated with many beliefs. A basic one is the use of blood as a symbol for family relationships; to be 'related by blood' is to be related by ancestry or descent. This bears closely to bloodlines and sayings such as 'blood is thicker than water' and 'bad blood'. To be 'of Sami blood' has a positive value, or not, depending on the context this is expressed in. Of course you can be proud of your blood and your ancestors, but on the other hand your pride can be reason to hostility and conflicts, even wars. Millions have given their blood because of the madness of warfare. I found it interesting to make a stand that can inform about blood and simply serve as a stand for the blood donation service in Rovaniemi, recruiting donators among the exhibition's visitors, especially addressing potential Sami donators by information material in Sami language printed for this occasion."

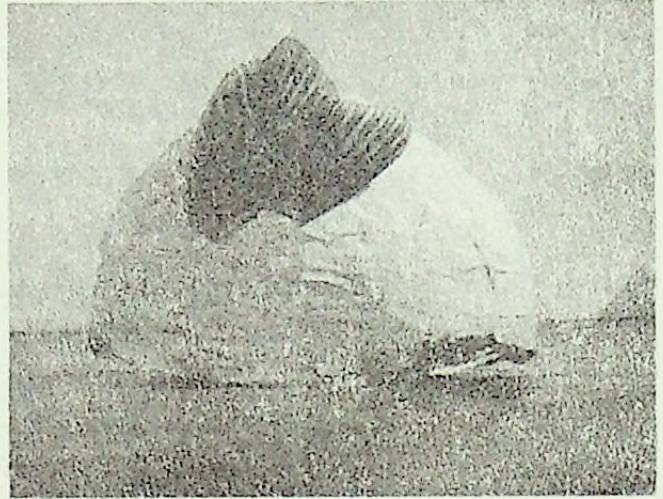
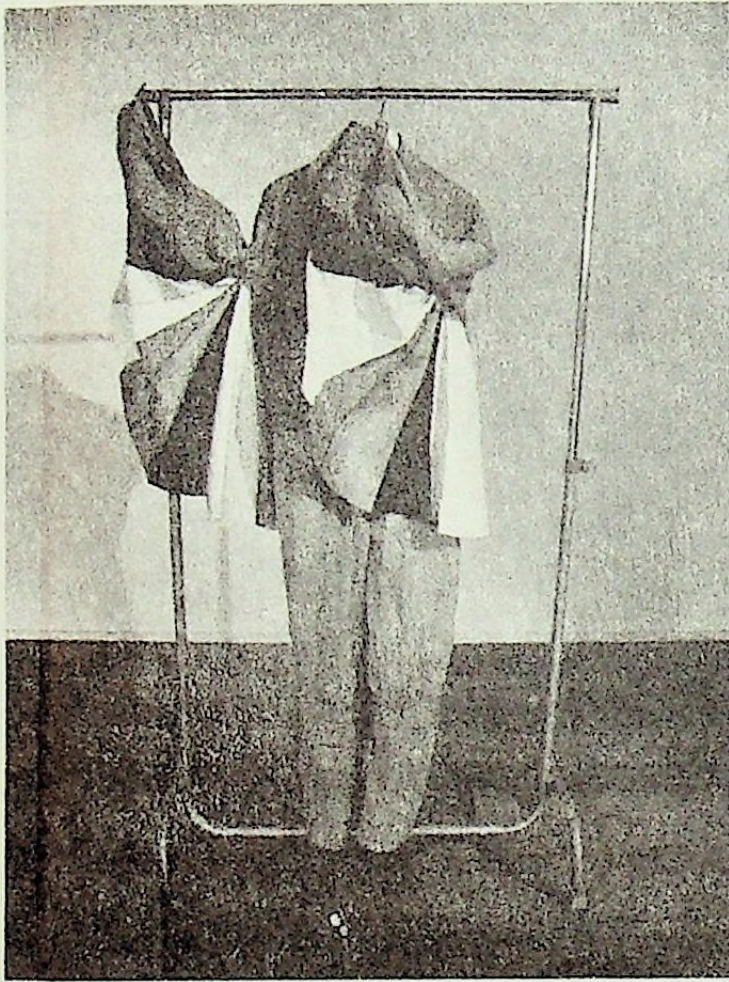
- Geir Tore Holm, Artist, In relation to his work 'Vara Addit!'

Pidgin English originated out of the first contact between tribes along the West-African coast and European traders; Nigerian Pidgin is largely based on English and Portuguese with French influences. Reclaimed by both the working classes and the urban youth, it has become a signifier for patriotic pride and socialist politics, and is used frequently in contemporary music.

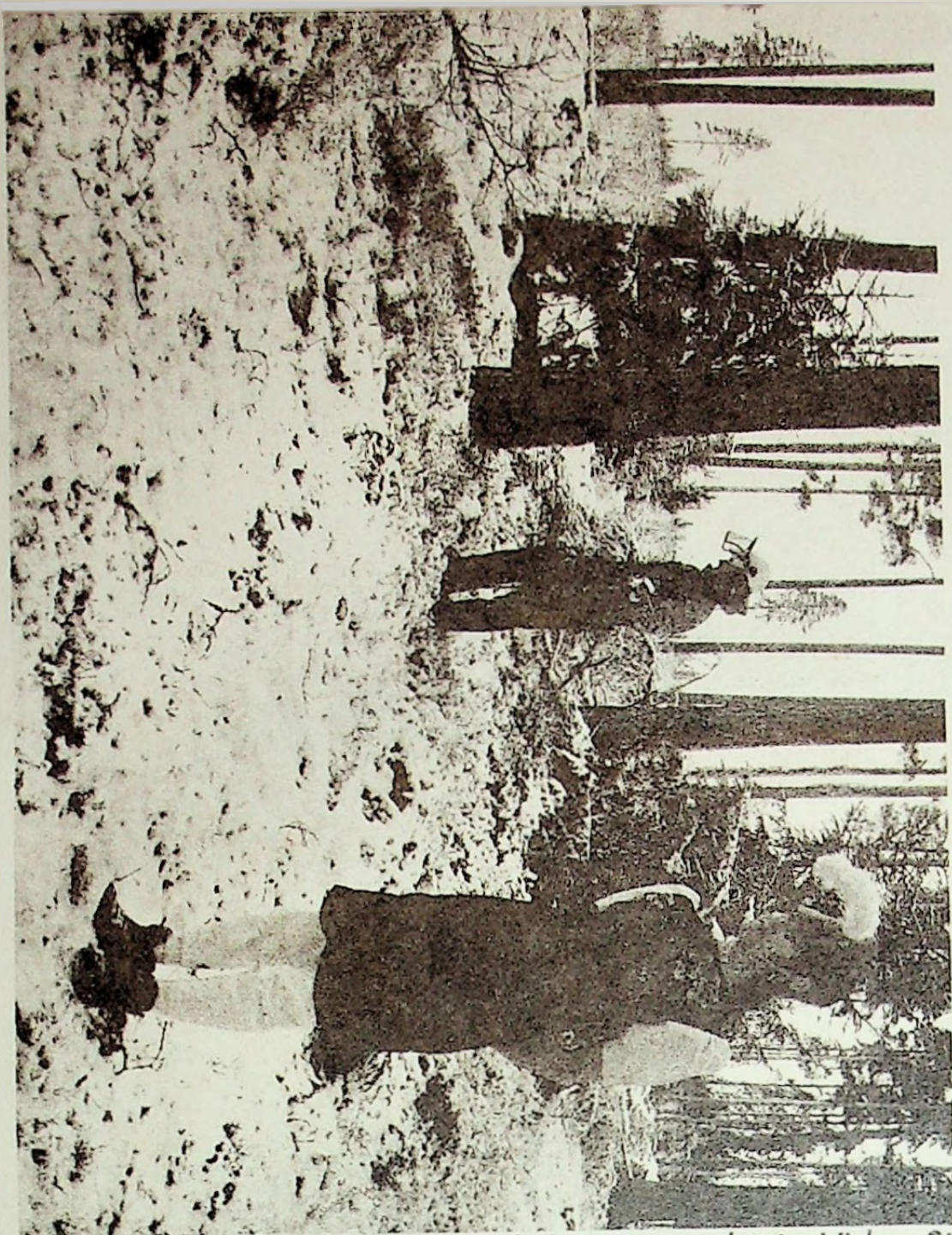
'National Graffiti' a series of prints by the Nigerian artist Olu Oguibe, were produced during the rule of the dictator General Babangida. The wave of optimism post-independence had shifted to a mood of Afro-Pessimism, as democratic elections failed to materialise and with corruption rife. In this work, Oguibe prints directly on to woven mats; a cheap material found through-out Nigeria. In using this surface, the artist aligns himself with the average Nigerian citizen, which is further suggested by his use of Pidgin English and his deliberate misspelling of words to suggest the local pronunciation and accent. In a previous interview with the artist, he has said of his use of Pidgin, "many of the quips in the paintings are mere variations on popular sayings from the period... Pidgin is an active and dominant language of communication among Nigerians, so it is [felt] appropriate for a work about the Nigerian State".

Oguibe's choice to use Pidgin is with the realisation that with so many tribal languages, Pidgin is the language that unifies the politically fragmented Nigeria. His appropriation can also be seen as a direct reference to the legendary Afro-Beat singer Fela Kuti, who sang in Pidgin English about the realities of modern life and the remnants of colonialism in Nigerian society in a gritty and uncompromising manner, and who was also openly defiant against the government and police authorities.

E  
Drawing from our individual periods of research in Nigeria, Sapmi and our homeland, we have identified the mutual preoccupations, among visual artists with existence under multiple identities. The weight of cultural responsibility is evident in each of the artist's practice, a burden to hold close or rebel against. They have not only shed light on issues previously unrealised but have questioned their inheritance and selective historiography it relies upon. Their work reveals that cultural responsibility does not lie solely with politicians or national figures, but also with the individual; it is the collective responsibility of all. The alignment of these seemingly disparate regions highlights the universality of this condition, and its continued relevance in an increasingly globalised world.



Erla Silfa Hordvik, *Proposal For a National Costume* [2009]  
Courtesy of the Artist.



Lumberjack [Performed wearing The Phallus Uniform], Erla Silfa Hordvik Porgrimsdottir, Video Still, 2008..  
Courtesy of the artist.



MOTHER TONGUE, AT THE BIG TABLE, NORDIC HOUSE, REYKJAVIK



# REYKJAVIK / ICELAND 2010

## ITINERARY/

23 MAY/ ARRIVE IN REYKJAVIK /  
VISIT TO THE CENTRE OF ICELANDIC ART / NATIONAL CENTRE OF  
CULTURAL HERITAGE

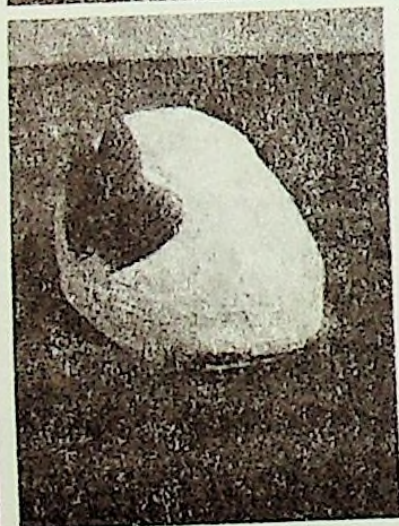
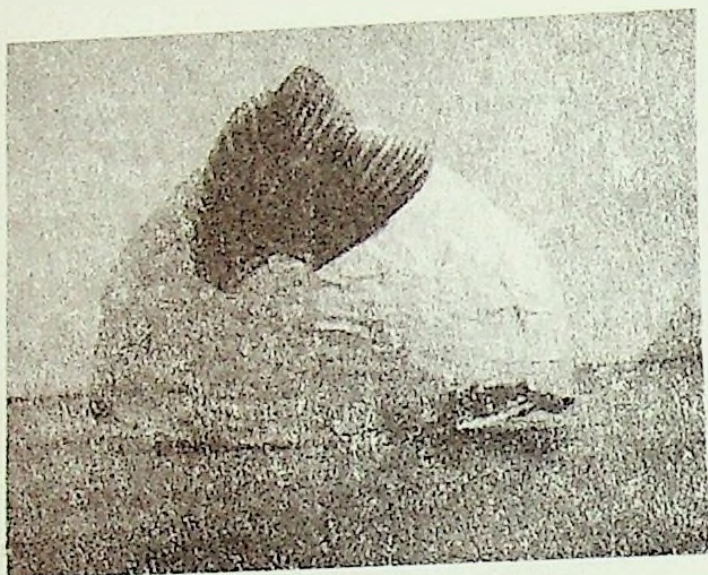
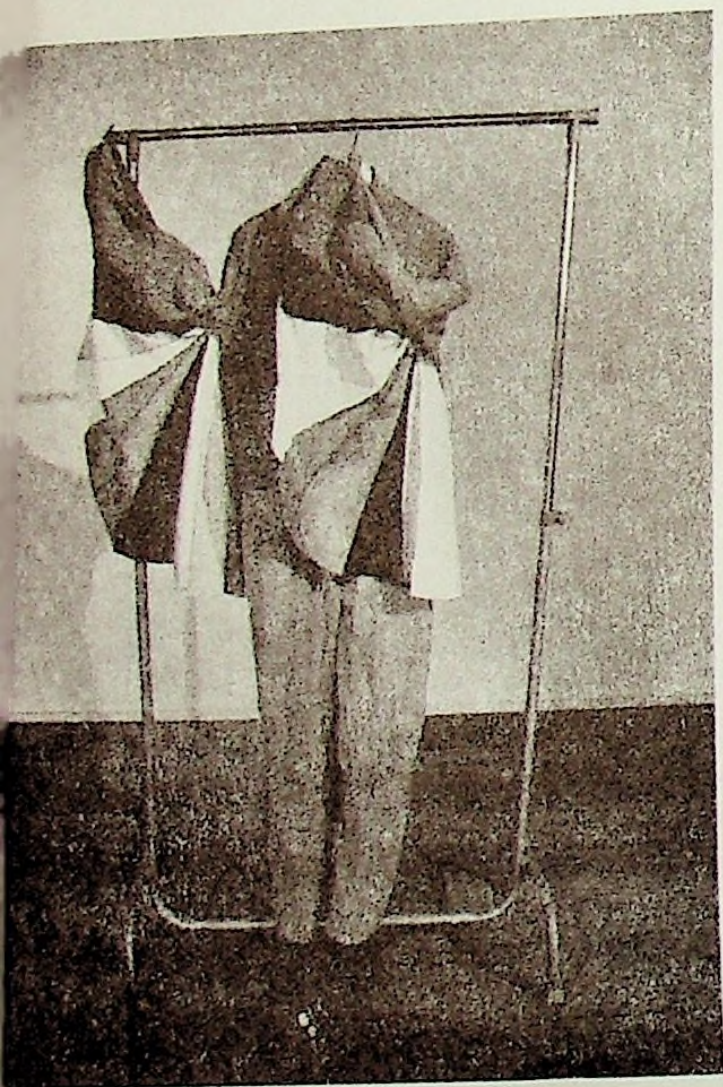
24 MAY / KLING&BANG / 18 /GALLERI AGUST /  
REYKJAVIK ART MUSEUM

25+26 MAY / REYKJAVIK ARTS FESTIVAL /  
BREIDHOLT - AT THE MOMENT /  
/ Friðgeir Helgason, Gerðuberg Cultural Centre /  
Friedericke von Rauch, Hafnarfjörður Centre for Culture and Fine Arts/  
NEW PHOTOGRAPHS / Ólöf Nordal, ASÍ Art Museum's Ásmundarsalur/  
REALITY CHECK – An Outdoor Exhibition, Reykjavik

27+28+29 MAY / ART IN TRANSLATION CONFERENCE /  
NORDIC HOUSE / REYKJAVIK  
PRESENTATION

30 MAY / MEETING WITH Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir /  
[DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, ICELAND ACADEMY FOR THE ARTS]

31 MAY / BLUE LAGOONS /



la Silfa Hordvik, Proposal For a National Costume [2009]  
purtesy of the Artist.