

SIGNS

Saatchi Gallery

13 10 2007

By Lupe Nunez-Fernandez

Reading the slogans filling Texan public spaces as captured on Peter Granser's photographs reveals a darkness lurking within the conservative Southern kitsch. 'Signs II', the latest installment in the artist's ongoing documentary project, opens at Kaune, Sudendorf gallery in Cologne today.

A smiley-faced stick figure scribbled on a dry erase board hanging under clocks showing the time in Texas and Iraq. An enthusiastic, makeshift 'JOB WELL DONE!' marked out in all-caps patriotic red and blue through the wire fences of what might be a military training zone, under a mercilessly sunny sky.

An image of a grassy patch landscape dominated not by the immensity of the terrain, but by an unequivocal statement, a symbolic territorial warning: 'NEVER HILLARY'. The wonkily-spaced hand made billboard text, held up by three wooden stakes surrounded by a row of old tyres as if to prevent potential damage by

collision, doesn't tell us where we are.

Dominating the anonymous, flat country fields, placed exactly in the middle of a context that's equal parts earth and sky, and huge, the rhetorical economy of this negative proclamation reflects not only the size of Texas' influence on national politics, but an update on the stereotypical unambiguous stubbornness for which the state is renowned - ie, don't mess with Texas. A million debates and battles reduced into two words.

Granser's photographs of the words boldly sprinkled throughout Texas' open zones, cleverly edited, anecdotally comical, disturbingly straightforward, are drawn toward a central question, or a few - perhaps, how does the expression of majority opinion affect the idea of democratic ideals? What is the real source and meaning of overwhelming patriotism? Are puritanical morals and economic interests ever disconnected?

For the second part of his ongoing series titled 'Signs', Granser continues to do what he does best: show the world in a way that appears both ordinary and absurdly exaggerated - like his now almost classic image of a couple taking

a break from strutting their self-fashioned personas on the Coney Island boardwalk, 'Signs' makes us consider the meaning of the obvious by putting metaphorical brackets around its subjects.