

## A Conversation with Jojakim Cortis and Adrian Sonderegger

Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier



FIGURE 1. Jojakim Cortis and Adrian Sonderegger, *Making of Abu Ghraib*, 2014, photograph, courtesy of the artists.

SBG: The ‘Hooded Man’ is an iconic photo, and it is also ‘perpetrator photography’ in the sense that it recorded abuse and was taken by the ones inflicting this abuse. Did the use of such a heavily loaded image for *Icons* raise issues different than those associated with the other ‘re-takes’ of the series (for example in terms of ethics, or your own position as photographers)?

JC: It is quite an interesting question about perpetrator photography, as it seems to be the only one in our work. We have images that were made by professional photographers, amateurs and tourists, but not by perpetrators. Of course, there could be some examples where the photographer might be the accomplice. This is an interesting discussion, but in the end, what is important is what the image shows. The pose of the prisoner shows a Christian figure/symbol. And that is where the original meaning of an icon comes from. The issue with an image

like that – as with others – is that it shows suffering. But it is part of our collective memories, and that is why this image is in our work.

SBG: In this specific context, does the deconstruction/reconstruction you propose in *Icons* have a further meaning? How is it connected to the idea of ‘re-making the events’? To what extent does it challenge the documentary (even evidentiary) dimension of the original ‘Hooded Man’ picture?

JC: It is not our aim to say that this happening wasn’t real. We believe in photography, but we should never forget that photography is always a construction of reality. Our reconstructions should work like a tripping hazard sign. When you take a look at our image, it seems as if you knew it, but you become aware of the studio environment, and you realize that it is not the image you know. It is more about gaining a more conscious look.

SBG: This photo was one of the Berlin exhibition’s promotional posters. Of course, the Abu Ghraib pictures are in the public domain and as such have been displayed and circulated in countless outlets, from social media to books and exhibitions. Still, it is something a bit different to see the ‘Hooded Man’ – even in the deconstructed/reconstructed form of *Icons* – in such a size in the public space. I was wondering: 1) whether it is one of the pictures you usually choose for the exhibition’s promotional posters? 2) in which case, whether this generates different reactions from/discussions with the institutions in which you present the series?

JC: We normally discuss something like that with the curators of an institution like C/O Berlin. No, there is not one image we always use for promotional posters. The purpose of a promotional poster is to attract attention, and it should be known by many viewers. I think another one they used was the Tsunami image: also a well-known image in recent history. So they didn’t use any images that you would only know if you are familiar with the history of photography. I believe that there are different reactions and discussions when people see these images in public, but I think this is a good thing.

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**Jojakim Cortis** is a freelance photographer and university lecturer. He completed a degree in photography at the Zurich University of the Arts, where he began collaborating with Adrian Sonderegger and has been working as a technical assistant and lecturer since 2009.

**Adrian Sonderegger** is a freelance photographer and university lecturer. He studied photography at the Zurich University of the Arts along with Jojakim Cortis. He worked as an assistant to artist Jules Spinatsch from 2007 to 2011.