

The Treason of Images 2001

We were invited to submit a proposal for the Imperial War Museum, London, Commission on the aftermath of 11 September and war in Afghanistan. We proposed to install a short section of oil pipeline in Afghanistan, somewhere along one of the intended routes linking the oil fields of Central Asia with the Arabian Sea.

The social process of this project would have encompassed the advocacy and negotiation we would have undertaken to gain approval and realise the physical part of the work. The help of Afghan people and international aid agencies, as well as the military and oil pipeline designers, would also have been necessary for the project’s realisation.

Our photographs of the project would have emerged in relation to news management procedures, as we were aiming this work at the news media as well as visitors to the Imperial War Museum. As the project could only have been realised through practice legitimated as art by official cultural support, and within territory protected by military force, it would have existed as a function of influence and control.

Consumer culture has a problematic and contradictory relationship to other cultures, and to the natural environment. As finite resources become increasingly scarce, competition for them is likely to become more intense. The scale of this competition will be affected by levels of consumption, while its nature will be influenced by factors including corporate communications, diplomacy and military conflict.

Art historical precedent for the proposed work may be found in some of the American Land Art projects of the 1960s, including Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* and Robert Smithson’s *Non-Sites* and *Displacements*.

The Treason of Images (1929) is the title of René Magritte’s seminal painting of a pipe and the words ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’. The work spans surrealist and conceptual art, and highlights the contingent nature of the relationship between language and image, between perceptions of the world and representations of it.



Afghan President Hamid Karzai (right) and his counterpart from Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov (second left) sign deals with Pakistan and India to push forward a multi-billion-dollar gas pipeline. Presidential Palace, Kabul, Afghanistan (2008)
Shah Marai/AFP/Getty Images

Overleaf:
Neil Tudman
Near Herat, Afghanistan (2001)
Courtesy of Médecins Sans Frontières

