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The Voyage, or Three Years at Sea, Part IV
Sydney Hart

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SYDNEY HART

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PHOTO: SCOTT MASSEY

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The Confidence-Man, as a machine, giving the impression of infinite possibilities in dialogue from a limited number of settings. The two scenes of verbal exchange between Møller and Graham have been synchronized to five parallel dialogue tracks, so that with the recurring settings only the audio changes, giving the characters a kind of dubbed speech justifying the same movements in different ways. Through the interweaving of different audio tracks within select scenes, the film can run for more than six days without repeating itself. These dialogues are framed as ethical debates while referencing historical shifts in international trade over the last decades, such as the fluctuating value of gold or oil. While Graham tries to ensure that her ship safely reaches its destination, Møller tries to delay the ship's arrival at its port in order to reap benefits from a subsequent $75-million devaluation in the cargo company's stock value. Møller cynically tries to convince Graham of the tangible benefits of his proposition by claiming to emblematize the boldness required of a risk economy.

The artist has built Journey Into Fear on the pillars of crucial filmic and literary sources: its screenplay has one timeline derived from two name-sake thriller films (one from 1942 and one from 1975), both based on a novel by Eric Ambler, and four from The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, a novel by Herman Melville (1857). In addressing the setting of The Confidence-Man, Douglas has observed that "the story is set in a place where people may briefly assume fictive identities ... and in an era when relations between people could for the first time be converted into monetary relations." It is this interchangeability that is also evoked through Douglas' method, reshuffling both his own material and that of his sources to explore how the discussion of economic and ethical questions can evolve in the isolation of the sea. The use of these sources also charts a course historically, from industrialization to the oil crisis of the early seventies, where patterns of regulation in international trade were themselves reinvented.

Exploring the recent history of international relations through another lens, Uriel Orlow delves into its fictionalization through a panoply of artefacts and historical allusions, from photographs to slide show displays, videos, and drawings. He specifically explores tensions between the documentary form and the romanticization of history by focusing on the sixties and seventies in the region of the Suez Canal.

For instance, in a display case he presents newspaper clippings and historical artefacts documenting the conflict of the Six-Day War between Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in June 1967. As a result of the conflict, fifteen ships were left stranded in the Yellow Sea until 1975. These ships became known as the "yellow fleet" because of the sand accumulated on their decks. Orlow also presents stamps issued from the ships, as well as various ephemera related to this period and the region for the viewer to slowly piece together a historical and geographical context. The aesthetic of the archival is echoed in video and photographic documentation, in which idle play under the sun belies the highly sensitive nature of its geo-political context.

Through an exploration of the historical shifts in international relations, the three artists of the exhibition probe into how life at sea is represented, and critically examine obscured aspects in the dynamics of international trade. These depictions of socialism at sea, at the fringes of the jurisdiction of nation states and beyond conventional moral compasses, question the familiar representations of the sea as a sublime space of risk and escape, pointing instead towards how it is inscribed in the sublime of globalization with its attendant effects of social fragmentation, misrepresentation, and invisibility.


Sydney Hart is an artist and writer based in Vancouver. He is a founding co-editor of livedspace, a research and publishing organization investigating the social production of space in relation to contemporary cultural production. He holds an MA in Aesthetics and Art Theory from the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, UK.