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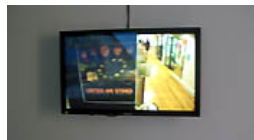
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0100101110101101.ORG
United We Stand
 2005
 Postmasters Gallery



Screen capture from the official "United We Stand" website at www.unitedwestandmovie.com



Live web cam feed for "United We Stand" at Postmasters Gallery, 2005



United We Stand poster outside Antoni Gaudi's Casa Mila in Barcelona, Spain



United We Stand poster outside European Union headquarters in Brussels, Belgium

POP LIFE by Ben Davis

0100101110101101.ORG, "United We Stand," Dec. 10-23, 2005 & Jan. 3-21, 2006, at Postmasters Gallery, 459 W. 19th St., New York, N.Y. 10011

Just what is 0100101110101101.ORG? The group's comically unwieldy name stands for the letter "K" in binary code, and the possible joke reference to the hero of Kafka's *The Trial* ("K.") is perfectly appropriate -- the young artists behind the group, Italian-born Eva and Franco Mattes (both b. 1976), make performances and web art that play on the inscrutable, Kafkaesque power of the corporate media.

For their first solo show in New York, they are presenting elements of their ongoing marketing campaign for a fictional Hollywood-style action film, *United We Stand*. This would-be blockbuster, supposedly produced by the E.U., is set in a near future in which the U.S. and China are spiraling into war over a political crisis on the Korean peninsula. An elite team of European secret agents -- each codenamed by nationality, i.e., the French Agent, the German Agent, etc. -- is the only thing that stands between us and global disaster.

The pitch-perfect poster for the movie, on display at Postmasters, shows the heroic cast, prominently featuring a square-jawed Ewan McGregor and a coolly pouting Penelope Cruz. Below their portraits is a thrilling panorama of war, with a sculptural Hollywood fireball on the left and streaking jet fighters on the right. The backdrop for all this is, what else, a rippling, heroic flag -- but instead of the familiar stars and stripes, it is the E.U.'s circle of stars on a blue field.

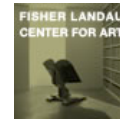
The clash of codes is almost palpable. The jingoistic conventions of American action movies are thrown into relief against expectations about the more arty content of European movies, and vice versa.

At Postmasters, the front gallery also contains displays of different European magazines in which ads have appeared for the movie, a stereo playing Judas Priest's hard-rocking anthem, *United* -- which apparently serves as the film's theme song -- and a kiosk with access to the official website.

The back gallery features a lengthy slideshow of the guerilla poster campaign the group has waged to promote the fake film around the world. It includes images of ads plastered outside Gaudi's Casa Mila in Barcelona, European Union headquarters in Brussels and the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, as well as nestled amidst colorful local movie posters in Bangalore, India. In many slides, you see folks gazing suspiciously at the posters -- or passing them as if are completely unremarkable, which is perhaps even more telling.

Also on view is a screen offering a live, highly pixilated feed of one of the posters set up in a public hallway at NYU, as people pass by and, very occasionally, take note of it and try to make sense of its ambiguous combination of Euro imagery and all-American militarism.

This kind of subtle rabble-rousing is typical of these artists' activities. In 1998, they opened the website "vaticano.org," completely cloning the Vatican's website (Vatican.va), then slowly adding improbable comments from the papacy,



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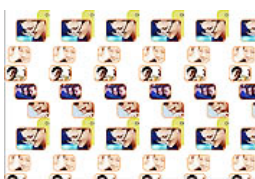




United We Stand poster in Bangalore, India



Kiosk for 0100101110101101.ORG's "Nike Ground" project in Vienna, 2003



One of 0100101110101101.ORG's "Hybrids," 1999-2001



One of 0100101110101101.ORG's "Hybrids," 1999-2001

including heretical statements and a lengthy quotation from an Italian pop group (the Yes Men, an art group to which 0100101110101101.ORG is often compared, performed a very similar stunt with the website of the Dow Chemical Corporation). To date, their most famous intervention was 2003's "Nike Ground," featured recently in the show "If It's Too Bad to be True, It Could Be 'Disinformation'" at New York's Apexart. For that project, they tried to generate the myth, via brochures, a website and a kiosk set up on site, that Vienna's famous Karlsplatz had been purchased by Nike and was to be renamed Nikeplatz.

At Apexart, an essay by Mercedes Vicente argued that 0100101110101101.ORG's project was "to demand freedom of information and bring forward omitted information." But despite the anti-authoritarian innuendo of their activities, it is hard to take them seriously as political artists, because they so clearly don't stand by any real position. In "United We Stand," the group takes a jovial shot at America's inflated rhetoric, just as it pokes fun at the E.U.'s bureaucratic stagnation -- the tagline for the film is the political double entendre "Europe Has a Mission" -- making it difficult to fish out any truly serious intention.

Falling for a superficially critical rhetoric has always been one of the hazards of the reception of Pop Art (see Benjamin Buchloh's elegiac "Marxist" take on Ruscha's *Course of Empire* paintings in the September '05 *Artforum*). And, as in the case of Pop, Eva and Franco Mattes' work is best understood as representing an equivocal fascination with the power of mass cultural codes, rather than as any real oppositional response to them. In the past, the duo has even made online equivalents to Andy Warhol's silk-screen compositions, taking the ubiquitous animated banner advertisements from the web and multiplying them into meaningless grids.

It is a truism in marketing that there is a "crisis in advertising," caused by the over-saturation of the mental environment. With this as background, one might well expect an updating of the classic Pop formula -- after all, the ad formats it drew on have ceased to be effective attention-getters.

And indeed, this seems to me to be what 0100101110101101.ORG represents. "United We Stand," with its focus on rejiggering pop cultural codes in social space, is a canny updating of Pop art for the age of viral marketing, when the mass media has penetrated firmly into the everyday. Pop life.

BEN DAVIS is associate editor of *Artnet Magazine*.

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