

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Parallax Views: Multiculturalism – Epic Fail or Not

Curator: Koan Jeff Baysa

Exhibition Period: January 6-29, 2012



- **Christian Bermudez** (lives in Oslo, originally from Costa Rica)
- **Milumbe Haimbe** (lives in Zambia, attended art school in Oslo)
- **Mamta B. Herland** (lives in Baerum, Norway, originally from India)
- **Sabina Jacobsson** (lives in Oslo, originally from Gotland, Sweden)
- **Peter Johansson** (lives in Malmo, Sweden, originally from Salen, Sweden)
- **Paolo Manfredi** (lives in Tingvoll, Norway, originally from Italy)
- **Victor Muteleksha** (lives in Oslo, originally Zambia)
- **Jet Pascua** (lives in Tromso, Norway, originally from Philippines)
- **Shwan Dler Qaradaki** (lives in Oslo, originally from Iraq)
- **Sada Tanagara** (lives in Oslo, originally from Mali)
- **Roghieh Asgari Torvund** (lives in Oslo, originally from Azerbaijan)

On April 19, 1995, a bomber detonated a device that killed 168 people, including 19 children in a day care center, and injured many others. He was a decorated military service veteran, but his stated motives included retaliation for a government siege. He was white, a native of his country, America. His name was Timothy James McVeigh.

On July 22, 2011, a terrorist bomb killed eight people and wounded others. Two hours later a gunman killed 69 people at a summer camp and injured others. The same alleged perpetrator considered his mission saving Europe from the threats of Islam, immigration and multiculturalism. He was white, a native of his country, Norway. His name is Anders Behring Breivik. In the days following the attacks, far-right groups such as Stop the Islamization of Norway (SIAN) and the Norwegian Defense League (NDL) supposedly witnessed a boom in their memberships.

In both cases, the initial reaction was nearly uniform: that an outsider, a foreigner, likely from Muslim fundamentalism, perpetrated the terrorist attacks. Prominent Norwegian artist Lars Ramberg summarizes, "It was also a shock that the terrorist was one of our own, a blond white Christian from Oslo's west-end with higher education. It really shook Oslo as an earthquake, politically, socially, emotionally, and culturally. I would say it changed the identity of Norway . . . a protected rather innocent and peace-loving nation, often supporting healing processes elsewhere in the world. Now Norway has to heal itself." Zambian artist Milumbe Haimbe, who studied in Oslo, echoes, "My immediate assumption upon hearing about the terrorist attacks in Oslo and on the island was that one of the *other* immigrants were responsible, the *other* minorities were to blame."

Oslo's river Akerselva divides the city into a prosperous white west side and a poorer multicultural east side. An estimated 28% of the population is foreign-born. The largest immigrant groups are Polish, Swedish, Pakistani, Iraqi, and Somali. In the past three decades, the rate of increase has been highest for Asian, African and Latin American immigrants. Roughly 40 per cent of the half million of immigrant background have Norwegian citizenship, and approximately 3 per cent of Norway's population is Muslim.

Leading European politicians play on how the swelling anti-Islamist, anti-immigrant movement resonates with public opinion: David Cameron of the UK, Angela Merkel of Germany and Nicolas Sarkozy of France have each given speeches over the past year espousing that multiculturalism has been an epic failure. Globalization and immigrants are blamed for increasing the numbers competing for employment opportunities and social benefits.

This matrix of anti-immigrant sentiments was the kindling that fueled the volatile machinations of an individual like Breivik. Ingrained cultural factors like Janteloven further problematize the situation. Jante Law describes an attitude common in populations in Scandinavia where everyone knows everyone. Its ten rules put into words by Sandemose reflect a mentality that places all emphasis on the community while denigrating individuals who are distinguished for their achievements. At the core its message seems anti-racist but reinforces institutionalized bigotry.

The curatorial approach to the exhibition addresses the tragic events in Oslo on 22 July 2011, both in its menacing foreshadowing and dreadful aftermath, but without gross literality, stark confrontation or heavy handedness. The selection of artists and works for the exhibition, not exclusively from the immigrant perspective, was based primarily on their insightful, allusional, lyrical, metaphorical, even oblique ways of addressing the highly charged and prickly issues. It is the hope that these voices and messages be heard to affect positive change concerning immigrants in the country that, for the last two years, has maintained the highest measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living in the world.

Kóan Jeff Baysa, M.D., November 2011