

USA USE US

When creating a work, Gauthier Hubert always starts from a particular question. He then provides an answer on the basis of various types of image that form a sort of chain. The question he asked at the very beginning of USA USE US was whether Rubens painting Four Negro Heads is a political work. The way this work is currently displayed means it takes up a rather anti-Semitic position that replaces the more social message it contained in the past. This portrait of slaves, who are probably on their way to the American continent, is encircled by the title in seven languages. This not only internationalises the work, but also makes its anti-Semitic position clearer. Directly linked to this picture is a portrait of a black Nazi (I had a dream) which takes an ironic look at socio-political life in the USA. The title and image refer to Martin Luther King, but also to the historical and dictatorial position of George W. Bush's government. The reference to the dictatorship is found on the Nazi's armband, on which the SS logo has been replaced by that of Texaco Petroleum (n.b. George W. Bush is a former governor of Texas and an oil-well owner). This image refers in any case to a dream that remains unachievable – the renowned 'American dream'.

This notion of the dream is emphasised by a watercolour of a white eagle, the symbol of the USA. It is in fact dreaming of being a different eagle, stricter and more austere: the eagle of Nazism. Michael Jackson's dream of being white looks like social manipulation. After all, just like the black Nazi this looks like an attempt to become white by adopting a particular style of dress that was originally intended for whites. The black Nazi is carrying a book with an oil well on the cover and with the title 'seduction of the innocent', originally the title of an American book from the Fifties which warned against young people reading comic strips. The photographic work I had a dream takes us to a painting done in the 'old way' and is based on El Greco's Funeral of Count d'Orgaz. However, every figure in the painting has been replaced by a so-called superhero and the Count d'Orgaz here being carried to his grave is in fact Uncle Sam. What happens if the dream turns against us, if marketing products become a 'virus' in society? The fading of the dream, which thereby fails, is illustrated by, among other things, Michael Jackson, the colour of whose skin has remained stuck in the grey stage. The painting in which he is portrayed is combined with the text that explains how to obtain a medium grey starting from black, by adding white (it is normally done the other way around, which is much easier). The other shocking, destructive dream is a product by Microsoft, their 'Flight Simulator', which realises man's old dream of being able to fly and enables us to do this in front of our computer at home. A video, in real time, simultaneously shows the four 11th September flights from the pilot's position. It follows the flight paths of all the planes. The game becomes a dubious weapon. ('Game over').

Another ambiguous dream: the drawing of one of Rubens' Negro heads in black ball pen, looking up to heaven under the motto 'I'm dreaming of a white Xmas'. Its ambiguity is accentuated by the presence of the KKK in his dream bubble. The other three Negro heads are combined in a drawing that symbolises a nightmare: one is vomiting petroleum, from another's mouth emerge 'black widows' and the third has a mouth full of black worms ('black gold, black widows & black worms').

In the Black series we also find Black House, a drawing of the White House in black ball pen, which takes us back to the idea of the negative, a reference to Michael Jackson and to I had a dream. This drawing takes us to the heart of the seat of power. The 'Bush dynasty' is presented here: a photo of two large bushes with the title Like father like son. It is the introduction to the third chapter. This chapter, which gives the title to the whole work, USA USE US, is a short film that shows a president (very much reminiscent of an American president), ending an inaugural speech for the unification of the three nations: the United States of Art, the United States of Aesthetics and the Urban Services. These three will together form a superpower. The content of the speech is reproduced through the questions asked by the journalists present. They represent cultural papers and art magazines such as Art Forum, Flash Art, Beaux Arts, Art Press, etc. The film ends with a caricature of a love story. The president runs through a pinewood in slow motion and in the end embraces a valuable wooden bomb to the sound of American Trilogy by Elvis Presley. This image symbolises a patriotic spirit, but also that which the unification project conceals.

This film is the Grey Chapter – USA – of USA USE US and is preceded by the Black Chapter – 'Cape Kennedy' – and the White Chapter – 'I had a dream'. An earlier version of USA USE US was shown at the Living Art Museum in Reykjavik from January to February 2004, together with a presentation of work by Gudny Rosa Ingimarsdottir. The Grey Chapter

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was created for the presentation in the White Hall, not coincidentally simultaneous with the American presidential elections. In addition, Gudny Rosa Ingimarsdottir is organising her performance by Enzo Piccinato, who sings his own version of David Bowie's *This is not America*.

- Edith Doove