

WILL KWAN

Flame Test, 2009
4 of 28 flags
digital study for Bern

Flame Test is an installation of twenty-eight conventional-size outdoor flags printed with images of flagburning protests selected from the photo archives of the Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and the European Pressphoto Agency. The burning flags in each of the news images have been tightly cropped so that what remains is an approximation of the flat, two-dimensional graphic of the flag itself, but captured in a state of disintegration. On the edge of the image one can see the limited details of the original context – the crowd of protesters or the scene of the political rally.

In 2005, the coverage and debate over the publishing of cartoons of Muhammed in the *Jyllands-Posten* and several European broadsheets, was consistently illustrated in the world press with images of protestors in various countries burning Danish or other European flags. *Flame Test* considers how the nation may be more deeply invoked by the desecration of its flag than by any other gestures produced by the propaganda machines of official political culture. I am interested in how nationalism is defined not by those who promote it through naïve and simple-minded gestures of patriotism, but rather by those who confront and antagonize the fixed symbols of the national culture. The 'cropping' of the original images of the flag-burning scenes to create 'cleaner' depictions for the printed flags, highlights the act of cropping and framing as crucial to the project of journalistic reportage and the representation of current events.

bio:

Will Kwan was born in 1978 in Hong Kong. He received his MFA from Columbia University in 2004 and from 2005-2006 was a research fellow at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, The Netherlands. His work has been presented at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, the 2003 Venice Biennale, the 2007 Montreal Biennale, the Duolun Museum of Modern Art and Zengdi Museum of Modern Art in Shanghai, Art in General in New York, The Power Plant in Toronto, Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius, and the Polish National Museum in Poznan. Will is currently a lecturer in the department of Studio Art at the University of Toronto Scarborough and a graduate faculty member in the Masters of Visual Studies Program at the University of Toronto. Information about his work can be found at www.studiowillkwan.com.

