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## Lemusan Adaptations:

### A Rain Forest Project by Andrea Loux and José Maria

Andrea Loux has made a name for herself with what she terms as her "adaptations." These are works in which the artist penetrates the realms of certain persons, adapting her body to make it fit into a crate, closet, bookcase or any other piece of furniture and then taking a picture of herself there using a delayed-action shutter release camera.

The artist wanted to extend this approach to the rain forest of Santa Lemusa, but she could find no loopholes amid the island's lush vegetation into which she could fit her entire body.

### On the End of Reality in Fiction

#### Or why art, along with Saddam Hussein, is going to the dogs

The scene, ostensibly in northern Iraq, shows several Kurdish fighters running for cover behind a parapet. Crouching down along with them is an American woman journalist. We see her unflinchingly continue to speak into a microphone that is barely visible at the bottom edge of the screen. Then we hear someone scream, and everyone temporarily flattens down onto the ground; a few people protectively fold their arms around their head. At this point, the reporter has also flung herself down, turning her head sidewise to gaze out at the camera, which continues to be aimed in her direction. In an undertone, she explains that they are caught in the shooting. Then the all-clear signal rings out, and everyone – the fighters and the reporter – scrambles to their feet. Some point with outstretched arms towards a room to the rear as the apparent source of a round of artillery fire. Probably, the shots whizzed over the heads of the small group. But we do not really know anything, nor do we learn anything more, and the camera continues to stare fixedly at the reporter as she practices her art in the form of a torrent of words as endless as it is redundant.

Or again, the fade-in of a scene bathed in a flickering green light. With a little imagination, our straining eyes gradually distinguish a shadowy figure moving about. Against heavy background noise, we listen to a report supposedly transmitted by a videophone-equipped reporter calling in from the front lines. From all we can tell, however, he might just as well be somewhere on Mars, or else sitting in his hotel room in New York or

This obliged her to first transform herself into a lock of her own hair, so as to find room in the orchid blossoms. José Maria followed her into the woods and photographed her in this niche, while protecting her from the insatiable tongue of the sambal-toad.

Andrea Loux: "While sitting as a ball of hair inside the orchid blossom, I had to think of Tom Thumb – how the thumb-high little boy sits in the downy ear of the horse, whispering the right way to him. I, too, tried to do the same..."

Kuwait City and filling us in on what he himself has been watching of the 24-hour transmission of front line news. In short, he is communicating the fiction of a reality to us, and, through the delivery of his report, reality is turned into fiction.

One journalist made the following comment in a recent newspaper article: "Were the toll of casualties not so tragically high, in Baghdad last week we might have fancied ourselves spectators at a production by the theater of the absurd. Thursday morning still, street cleaners were sweeping the streets." What does the toll of casualties have to do with whether or not we are attending the theater of the absurd? The fact of the matter is that the population of Baghdad has indeed been experiencing an absurd situation during these wartimes: The city has been under occupation by an army, while at the same time public life is supposed to go on as normally as possible. Until the collapse of the government, stores were open and people clung to their everyday habits. Meanwhile, too, the government went on broadcasting its fictitious success reports. The journalists reporting on all this, on the other hand, have truly been at a theater, looking out at the action from their 15th-story hotel room window. The stage is the small excerpt that they get to see when pressing their noses to the window, with the stage players appearing on – and exiting from – the scene at varying speeds. For the first days, a stagehand in the background constantly lit up the stage sky with fireworks. Meanwhile, this or that journalist would explain the proceedings at a far remove, assessing the

fireworks or the strength of the tremors, and generally trying to make some sense of all the activity on the portion of stage within sight. From time to time, the lights would go out and the city sink into darkness: a curtain drop enabling a smooth change of scene. Left somewhat perplexed, the reporter would give us all sorts of incidental details, using the intermission to join the stage setting, among the stagehands, and resorting to a makeshift little platform (a photographic reporter's workbox could do the trick). The spotlight could thus capture the purposefully guileless gaze he or she directed straight at the camera. At the moment, we were told, no specifics were available. Instead we were treated to the reporter's view of the film director's intentions and the performers' condition – all in the guise of reality. As if it had eluded the reporters that they themselves were part of the performance, members of the cast in this theater of the absurd.

At the same time, we in Berlin, Zurich and Paris have been sitting in front of our televisions, channel-surfing between sportscasts and feature films, every so often checking in on CNN to get the latest intermediate results: How many kilometers left until Baghdad? How many casualties? How many planes shot down and tanks destroyed? Back to the feature film. The nervously fidgeting reporter experiences his public, schooled in the likes of Big Brother and the Osbournes, as a sequel to some reality show with different rules: Let's see, he worries from time to time, who gets eliminated today... It is unthinkable what would happen should the viewer rating drop (maybe the war would be cancelled for lack of an audience)!

Never before have we been able to experience the reality of war so close to home without being affected by it. We get to witness the killing and dying even if, admittedly, we are shown

but the barest minimum. Never before has reality been subjected to such extensive media coverage, to the point that we follow a war in the same absent-minded fashion with which we enjoy a feature film or talk show. As spectators, we too belong to the theater of the absurd entity.

Is what television transmits reality? Or is it fiction? No doubt neither one nor the other. What happy times, when authors still wrote either works of fiction or accounts of true events out of their own lives. What quiet contentment when readers could distinguish between the two: When something hurt, it was real, whereas when it hurt but somehow differently, it was fiction. Nowadays our political party leaders warn us to beware of "a fictitious fiscal equality that is nonexistent." Sancta simplicitas! Nonetheless, that is how things stand today: Fiction is everything that is not the case. But, too, everything that is the case. Not that reality itself has fallen by the wayside, but it is the possibility of distinguishing between reality and fiction that has gone astray. Today, everything is at once real and fictitious, and we are at a loss to determine in which world we find ourselves – the world in which we exist or the world staged by the media. As a result, not only has the ground upon which we had a footing – no matter how tenuous – given way, but the space housing our imaginary worlds has also been reduced to nothing. Reality is evaporating into thin air and, by the same token so is fiction, or art.

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Translated from the German by Margie Mounier.