

Whether something is true or not – for Stefano Cagol's "Lies"

"It is not the fear of madness which will oblige us to leave the flag of imagination furled"
André Breton, *Manifestes du Surrealisme*

In the late 18th century the national flag of the United States of America symbolized independence and freedom. Two centuries later, in the early years of a new century that we all welcomed with hope and anticipation for a new future and a new era of peace, the same flag has become a flag that is probably the most often seen in the media worldwide that questions a new war waged by mankind.

Through its dynamic image of the Star-Spangled Banner, Stefano Cagol's *Stars and Stripes* questions the world situation in the new century. Despite only minimal digital manipulation of the image by the artist, much is conveyed by the simplicity of Cagol's ploy. What I saw initially was the first version of *Stars and Stripes* (2000-2002). As the flag flapping in the wind is depicted as a mirror image divided by a line down the middle, my first impression was men's boxer pants with a pattern of the stars & stripes. A Japanese economist once described humans as "apes in pants", while pants also represent an upgraded version of the fig leaf that Adam wrapped around his loins when he first became aware of good and evil in the world. The adoption of the concept of good and evil by the human race also produced the naked emperor and the hypocrisy of the masses.

Cagol has also been producing a series of videos such as *Digital Wind* (2000-2002) and *Horizon* (2001-2004) featuring double images of cityscapes and natural phenomena. In each case, the real image is depicted with its mirror image, making the observer consider issues of reality and illusion and truth and authenticity. It is, however, unclear whether either image represents the 'true' image. 11:9 represented a moment in which reality transcended films or novels, and the ever-changing images of Cagol's works conveys to us that, regardless of the times or reigning attitudes, the authenticity of an image and good and evil remain variable and continue to fluctuate. Alternatively, our world can be described as being 'surrealistic' as expressed by Breton - "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, if one may so speak."

In the new version of *Stars & Stripes* created for this solo exhibition "Lies", there is a greater subtlety in the movement of the flag, which emphasizes the changing nature and dynamism of a world that becomes increasingly complex and diverse as it is affected by significant internal and external events. At intervals of between ten seconds and five minutes, *Stars & Stripes* is interspersed with five seconds of darkness as the image changes in slow motion. Distorted and linked images of modern society are superimposed onto the flag as it moves eerily like a jellyfish or a ray, while the constantly changing image at times resembles a mask worn by a man who is plotting evil. The Stars and Stripes glimmering in the sunlight as it flutters against a background of clear blue sky could also be a symbol of what the Americans call 'justice'. In contrast, as the flag becomes a shadow against the grey sky, it is also reminiscent of a dark cloud looming over society. The soundtrack has been recorded in the streets of New York but as the recording has been adjusted to play at low-speed, rather than representing the cheers and applause rising from a festive parade in Manhattan, the soundtrack conveys a sense of foreboding. At the end of the film, the Stars and Stripes, which represents both truth and lies, begins to move towards the observer. It is as though Cagol is asking us to consider how each of us can remain autonomous and continue to raise the 'flag of imagination' in this world which we are all part of, a world in which truth and lies continually change and in which good and evil have many faces.

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Lawson which shows work by artists from abroad and
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