



Kirstine Roepstorff  
Kirstine Roepstorff

—  
It's Not the Eye of the Needle That Changed  
—The Time

**Front cover**

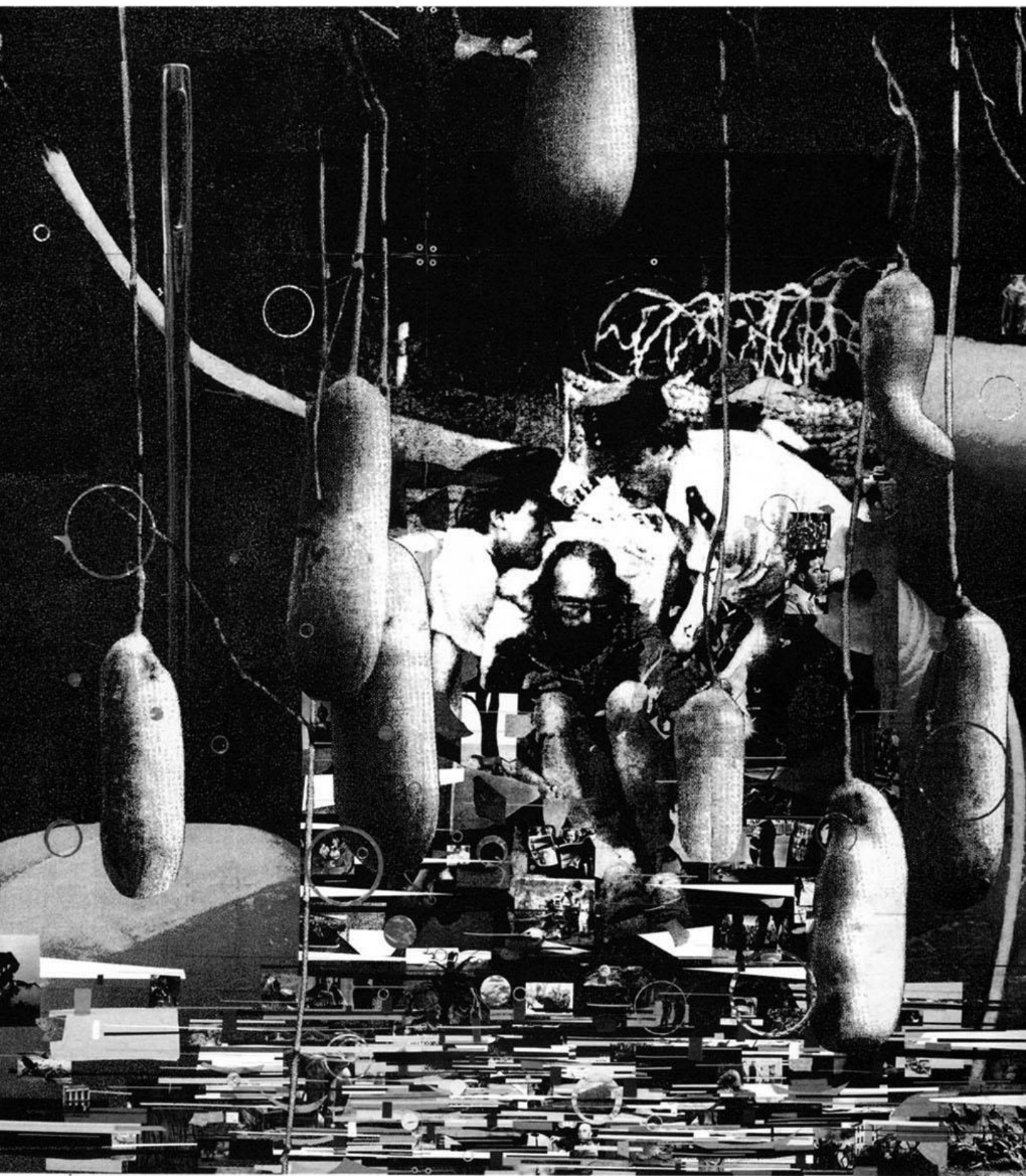
*Three Mute (detail), 2007*  
Mixed-media collage in three parts  
(foil, paper, and cloth)  
Part 1: 30 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches (pictured)

**Below**

*Eight Hanging, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage in two parts  
(paper mounted on wood panel)  
Part 1: 126 x 49 1/2 inches  
Part 2: 126 x 67 inches

**Back cover**

*Eleven Excluded, 2007*  
Paper collage  
29 x 16 inches



This is number 74 of the Drawing Papers, a series of publications documenting The Drawing Center's exhibitions and public programs and providing a forum for the study of drawing.

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- the Needle That Changed  
—The Time

#### Drawing Papers 74

November 9, 2007 – February 7, 2008

Curated by João Ribas  
Essay by Daniel Kunitz

Daniel  
Daniel  
Kunitz

The Power  
of Weakness: Kirstine  
Roepstorff's Collage

There is in the West a prohibition—often unspoken though widely felt—against mixing “pretty” with politics in art. Aestheticizing political ideas or political inquiry marks one as unserious, trivializing, or frivolous. In this, as in many aspects of her work, Danish artist Kirstine Roepstorff relishes breaking with convention.

A collage artist, Roepstorff first experimented with the method in India, an experience that, as she says, opened her eyes “to the power of ‘weak’ materials” such as fabric, glitter, or foil. These materials tend to be thought of as weak because they are pliable but also pretty, in other words feminine and thus frivolous, mere decoration. Yet our notions of beauty, of what is pretty or ugly, evolve as ineluctably as our sense of what is weak or feminine. And it is at these mutations—of ideological and societal values, like beauty but also good and evil, right and wrong—that Roepstorff’s new series, “It’s Not The Eye of the Needle That Changed,” takes aim. The series is tripartite in structure: the portion on view at The Drawing Center (tagged as “The Time”) focuses on how values, in the broadest sense, change over time; the other two parts will focus on how values change through geographical space and, over time and space, within the self.

One work from the series, *Seven Who Rest*, which repeats seven times the yellow-tinted image of a hanged and handcuffed black man, puts us in the American South, where, we’re reminded, lynching continued to take place as late as the 1960s [p. 5 bottom]. That the young girl to the side grins up at the hanged man with evident satisfaction—rather than, say, turning away—poi-

gnantly underscores just how commonplace such a response once was. Like bits of autumnal straw, the strips of yellow paper adorning the surface of the piece add a melancholic, mournful, and—characteristically for Roepstorff—ornamenting touch. Although one might be tempted to react to these images with the smug assurance that things have changed, that lynching of this sort remains well in the past, the curtain of starkly black-and-white foliage to which the lynching images are affixed grounds us in the fact that our world continues to be as cruel as a jungle. The scenes of lynching are historical, but the images of nature signify a permanent condition of the world. Our nature hasn’t altered; it remains, like the jungle imagery, as the screen upon which our actions take place; only the context changes, and thus the equivalent of lynching today is likely something of which we’re not yet aware.

A similar shift of contextual frame occurs in *Eleven Excluded*, where a large image of a tree, scored in places and woven through with strips of yellow paper, supports a photograph of black people in Apartheid-era South Africa [back cover]. They stand excluded on one side of a gate, guarded by a dog. Yet it’s not at all clear which side of the gate they’re on, whether, as the artist says, “they’re trying to get in or just hanging out.” Knowing which side of the gate we’re on is never as easy as we might think.

While Roepstorff doesn’t address them explicitly, our notions of artistic practice modify over time as surely as the mores and ideologies that would, for example, cause us to tolerate Apartheid in one decade and reject it in another. One has only to

Next page, left

*Ten Who Aim*, 2007  
Mixed-media collage  
(photocopies and lithographic  
print mounted on cardboard)  
64 1/2 x 41 inches

Next page, top and middle right

*Two Desire*, 2007  
Mixed-media collage in two parts  
(foil, paper, cardboard, and cloth  
mounted on unstretched canvas)  
Part 1: 17 x 81 inches  
Part 2: 17 x 76 inches

Next page, bottom right

*Seven Who Rest*, 2007  
Mixed-media collage  
(photocopies, lithographic print,  
and foil mounted on cardboard)  
38 1/2 x 43 inches

remember that the history of collage itself, as a fine-art method, goes back a mere century: before Cubist collage, it was seen as nothing more than a craft. Although *Seven Who Rest* follows the conventions of collage rather neatly, much of Roepstorff's work overflows its boundaries as they have been traditionally conceived. Indeed, though her work entails cutting-and-pasting in one form or another, one might argue that the word "collage" is at once too vague and too encumbered by specific art-historical associations to fully encompass Roepstorff's oeuvre. One mark of her compositional intricacy is the array of textures, weights, and densities to be discerned in her pieces; they are not merely photomontages and are in no way restricted to cutting and pasting paper or photographs. Both compositionally—within the work—and in the support, Roepstorff exploits the varying pliability and luster of materials such as silver foil, glitter, sequins, tinsel, colored vellum, newspapers, iron-on fabrics, and silver leaf, as well as other types of paper and fabrics. Consider, in this regard, the parti-colored shingling of textiles, foils, paper, and photographs layered on a stretch of patterned fabric in *Twelve Disturbances*. Some pieces also marry harder, denser materials like window glass and aluminum plate with weaker substances.

The range of materials she employs serves also to push Roepstorff's collages beyond the picture plane and into the realm of sculpture. Granted, "It's Not the Eye of the Needle That Changed—The Time" does not venture far into the sculptural field; as we shall see, its concerns lie elsewhere. But a thorough understanding of Roepstorff's expansive sense of collage is not possible without a brief excursus into her sculptural practice. For instance, a writhing riot of paper strips dangle, twist, or crest like narrow waves in the work *Silencio—The Road to Excelsior* (2006), forming something like a 3-D scribble drawing on paper. Similarly, square pieces of cloth extend beyond the edge of the rectangular gray fabric support of the mixed-media collage *Blue Cut* (2006), and a piece of silver foil hangs off its bottom edge, at once denying the lateral, two-dimensional boundaries of the piece and—in the way a square bit of fabric folds over on itself, rising slightly from the support to which it is affixed, or the way the silver foil juts off the support as it hangs—indicating the third dimension. However, the two examples above are only shallowly sculptural, pushing up out of the picture plane about as far as a relief. Other pieces do more than gesture at the sculptural; they are actual collage sculptures or include sculptural elements. One section of an earlier series, *Old Lady with the News* (2007), consists of a plate of painted window glass, with a newspaper clipping pasted in the center, leaning against a collage hung on a wall, while *Gone (Collection of Once Was)* from 2006, pairs an empty, oversized museum vitrine, with a collage arrayed on the floor in front of it.

Within the series "It's Not the Eye of the Needle That Changed—The Time," one can look to a piece like *One Dictator* [p.8].

Swathes of black and gray fabric hang like mourning veils over the edge of a *New York Times* obituary of former Yugoslav Leader Slobodan Milosevic; their torn borders also suggest the rending of garments common in some cultures during periods of mourning. Next to them, a vortex of black construction paper is built up on the newspaper ground, while over and around it stand pasted images of oblong fruit on vines. The combination of black drapery and the 3-D hole aid in creating the illusion that the fruit are hanging in front of the newspaper and thus that the sculptural space of the work is much deeper than it in fact is.

Roepstorff's own attempt to define her expanded notion of collage resulted in the lighthearted term "appropriarranging." In her words, "I use the method of collage to appropriate and rearrange the already existing world." Thus appropriarranging is "an act of gathering, reconstructing, and cultivating the growth of meaning." As Solvej Helweg Ovesen has noted, Roepstorff's method makes her what curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud calls a "postproduction artist," someone who samples, recycles, and reconfigures preexisting products.

According to Bourriaud, the artist communicates by charting a course through this shared culture, whether it be the culture of music, the Internet, or, as in Roepstorff's case, the media: "The recycling of sounds, images, and forms implies incessant navigation within the meanderings of cultural history, navigation which itself becomes the subject of artistic practice." Roepstorff uses a strikingly similar vocabulary to describe what collage means to her:

Collage is just like walking in the forest or in a city. You have houses, you have trees, but you don't walk *into* the houses or the trees, you navigate according to the defined measures...you walk in between in the yet undefined...I care mostly about what is going on in between—this is where I see the dynamics...It's partly why collage is so convenient for me, because I have all the images: they're your images, they're our images, everybody's, and I make them relate to each other.

Roepstorff does not simply remix images: like a hip-hop artist she also adds a rap over the beats, though in her case it is a narrative that is partly symbolic and partly discursive. She tears images from their original contexts and inserts them into new ones, which, she hopes, suggest new maps of our culture and politics, new pathways through the world.

Of course, before she can chart a course or overdub a narrative, she must begin the work, and here again the metaphor of recycling seems apt. Roepstorff saves all of her cutouts—the parts of a newspaper or magazine page that aren't used in a given work—and stores them in small boxes separated by color, paper texture, etc. "After many years of doing this," she says, "I realized that every time I started a new piece, I would go to

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s a superstate? Not yet  
PAGE TWO



Human oddities,  
with a dash of science  
CULTURE & MO

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in playing to win  
BUSINESS 9

**Report calls  
on Europe  
to move on  
warming**  
Draft analysis seen  
as 'wake-up call' for  
advance planning



**Hotel**

...d at U.S. targets. Despite heavy security at the hotel, the suicide bomber was able to enter the lobby and blow himself up there. Bodies of the dead and wounded were scattered across the shattered lobby.  
"It was a great breach of security because there are three checkpoints, one outside and two inside," said Saif al-Rabihi, 28, a hotel employee who witnessed the blast.  
...h Bayli, north of Tripoli, the bomb killed at least 20 people, including 10 women and 50 children, and a tank was destroyed. Buildings were damaged or burned. Five U.S. soldiers were killed with the attack. The American military is in southern Iraq, near the city of Hillah, a coalition of U.S. and Iraqi forces.

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**Rome: The smashed tourist**



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**Can the iPhone deliver?**

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the cutaways, take something from there, and start a new line. It's the same way you make old-fashioned rye bread: saving a bit of the dough for starting the next batch. It's a ghost story, it's souvenirs, and, in a way, the inherited memory of what was there before."

If Roepstorff has an elastic notion of collage, it is because collage for her is better understood as an ethos or way of viewing the world than merely as an artistic method. It's an ethos that says nothing is ever wholly lost and everything is connected. Thus collage for her is inherently political. But in her hands it doesn't seek to make statements; her work has no political message. She's not so much trying to change the world as navigate through it, and her art approaches the world with questions rather than with slogans.

One question seems paramount to her: it is the title of the artist's book she published in 2004, *Who Decides Who Decides*. The book is itself a collage of sorts, mixing texts, both found and commissioned, with images—and this uncommon use of the method again highlights her expanded sense of collage. We read the title primarily as a rhetorical question, which she paraphrases as, "Who makes the rules that we are supposed to adhere to throughout our lives?" However, one can also hear the title as a plaint, a melancholic repetition of the question *Who Decides?* echoing throughout all of Roepstorff's work.

That sense of uncertainty, the instability of the quest, pervades all her work. For instance, we don't know what the bearded, balding hippie in *Eight Hanging* is protesting [inside front cover]. We only know he doesn't want to move, that "he's being carried away by the system," represented here by the police. Below the hippie are smaller scenes from "the military world, people making rebellious acts against various entities," as well as animals involved in violence—"lions eating lions or lions eating birds." One can take these smaller images as elaborations of the larger picture, footnotes to a rebellion against our bestial nature, or, in a sweeter mood, one might see the policemen as carrying the bearded man "over the brutalities of the world." Such multivalent intentions—the essence of irony—are typical of Roepstorff's collages, even at their most pointedly political.

If Roepstorff's is not a politics of ideology, statements, and slogans, it is a politics of symbol and metaphor, a politics of pliability. In the realm of symbols, consider the strange fruit (and the pun is fully intended) that reappear throughout Roepstorff's work—at times literally, as in *Eight Hanging*, and at times metaphorically: the dead men in *Seven Who Rest*; the bulbous, silvery teardrop forms in *Twelve Disturbances*. In *One Dictator*, the funny-looking fruit dangle over images of Milosevic. In all these pieces, they might stand as figures for the weight of conventions or values, the baggage society accumulates, as well as what results from those values: the weight of the dead.

Still, though the subjects of her works are not explicitly stated, and her use of imagery tends toward the poetic and the symbolic, Roepstorff consistently engages the real world in her

work. This is nowhere more apparent than in her newspaper pieces. In fact, even when newspaper isn't employed as a material, Roepstorff gathers her imagery from news sources. As she explains, "I never steal from lady magazines or art magazines—they don't appeal to me. I steal mainly from newspapers and news magazines—that's just the world, facts."

*Ten Who Aim* inserts images of women aiming billiard cues into various newspaper articles, including one about Iraqi "insurgents" attacking a Baghdad hotel [p. 4]. That these dated photographs feature women playing pool is significant, as billiards has long been a male-dominated sport and pastime. So at what are the women aimed? War, too, has traditionally been a male activity, and one of the distinguishing aspects of the Iraq War has been the unprecedented role (at least for American forces) women have played in combat. Compare this piece with the other newspaper piece in the series, *One Dictator*, which features the obituary of Milosevic. Multicolored confetti-like pieces of paper and fabric run like tears down a border of each of the works, and fittingly, each article in some way memorializes horrific political circumstances: the Baltic wars and Milosevic's complicity in genocide in the latter; in the former, accounts of global warming and various European issues—in Paris and Rome—surround news of the Iraq War.

In each piece, areas are tinted: the nine women are purple, while a pink screen overlays parts of the images of Milosevic. The tints, like "rose-colored glasses," remind us of the ideologies, conventions, and unexamined values that color our perceptions of the world. There can be only *one* dictator in any country, but who is seen as a dictator and who a legitimate leader—and by extension, who is seen as a terrorist or insurgent—depends on the color of the screen through which you view things. The women taking aim with billiard cues might have been seen as rebels against civil authority in their time.

And the men in *Two Desire* [p. 5 top], the pair of Middle-Eastern prisoners forced to assume the shape of the cross on the ground: are they terrorists or freedom fighters? It depends on your desire. If you want Iraqi oil while pretending to desire "Iraqi Freedom," then you would probably try to, in Roepstorff's words, "manipulate consensus" by calling them terrorists. It is clear that the artist wants to call attention to the perceptual problems, the inherent ironies, in our situation vis-à-vis those in her work. In a sense, she proposes, through the montage, different versions of reality.

Call hers a soft politics then—one made softer by the fact that Roepstorff produces such beautiful objects. Whatever the ideational content of her work, it fits like mortise and tenon into an aesthetic scheme. Her fringes, weavings, rays of color, and compositional arrangements are meant to seduce one into thought. "I always make sure my projects have many handles to grab onto," she says. The shiny gold leaf circles and planes surrounding the mushroom cloud-shaped plants in *Three Mute*, to take one example, are meant to catch the eye [front cover].

Indeed, all three of the panels in *Three Mute* contain these curious-looking plants. For Roepstorff, botanical or garden imagery, like the aforementioned plants, tends to signify “how we conserve, how we crop,” with “crop” in her usage meaning at once to cultivate and to cut out, excise. Cropping here, in *Three Mute*, takes the form of questions: what do we choose to focus on or what do we allow ourselves to see? These queries are reinforced by the gold areas in the piece, which frame—and thus focus on—particular images: the bare legs of three women on a bench, the torso of a man in a tuxedo. Such questions and such actions—cropping, cutting out, cultivating—are exactly what one does in collage; they are how one sees through collage. One might choose to see the beauty in things or the ugliness, or one might use beauty to frame and highlight ugliness.

Perhaps it is because she so often deals with violence and inequity in her work that Roepstorff chooses to emphasize the aesthetic power of weakness. She charts a course through largely unseen relationships. And those maps of reality are composed of weak materials: paper or fabric—things that break down, that tear, and which, unaided, do not last. Part of her works’ “identity is that they’re fragile,” she says. “You can totally trash them; they fall apart, and I kind of like it that way because, as with anything in the world, if you care about it, if you believe in it, then you take care of it. Otherwise it breaks. Love, democracy, whatever values bring us together are only strong if we decide to believe in them,” to conserve them. “If we decide these things are not important anymore, if we become too arrogant or too careless, they will break apart.”

## Notes \_ Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Author interview with Kirstine Roepstorff, June 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes come from this interview.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all dates for works mentioned are 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Interview by Nikola Dietrich and Scott Weaver in Kirstine Roepstorff, *Who Decides Who Decides* (Frankfurt: Revolver 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Solvej Helweg Ovesen, “Exploding Realities” in Kirstine Roepstorff, *Who Decides Who Decides* (Frankfurt: Revolver 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Kirstine Roepstorff, *Who Decides Who Decides* (Frankfurt: Revolver 2004).

# Slobodan Milosevic, 64, Former Yugoslav Leader Accused of War Crimes

ARLISE SIMONS  
ALISON SMALE

On March 11 — Slobodan Milosevic, a former Yugoslav leader whose policies of Serbian nationalism set in motion a decade of Balkan war.

Mr. Milosevic was indicted in 2001. He was 64 years old when he appeared in The Hague, where he was charged with war crimes. He said they were natural causes, but he said they were not.

Mr. Milosevic had violated the spring of 1991, when he started the war. He was a nationalist, meaning he was through the ranks.

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*One Dictator, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage  
(fabric, paper, and foil  
mounted on cardboard)  
67 x 43 inches

*Two Desire, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage in two parts  
(foil, paper, cardboard, and cloth  
mounted on unstretched canvas)  
Part 1: 17 x 81 inches  
Part 2: 17 x 76 inches

*Three Mute, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage in three parts  
(foil, paper, and cloth)  
Part 1: 30 ½ x 23 ½ inches  
Part 2: 31 x 23 ½ inches  
Part 3: 30 x 23 ½ inches

*Four Who Clean, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage  
(thread, tape, and digital  
print mounted on vinyl)  
35 x 30 inches  
Not exhibited at The Drawing Center

*Five Who Want  
and One Who Gives, 2006–7*  
Mixed-media collage  
(paper, lithographic print, cloth,  
and foil mounted on wood)  
66 x 8 inches

*Six Who Observe  
and One Who Suffers, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage  
(paper mounted on cardboard)  
38 x 21 ½ inches

*Seven Who Rest, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage  
(photocopies, lithographic print,  
and foil mounted on cardboard)  
38 ½ x 43 inches

*Eight Hanging, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage in two parts  
(paper mounted on wood panel)  
Part 1: 126 x 49 ½ inches  
Part 2: 126 x 67 inches

*Nine Hunters, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage  
(paper and fabric mounted on vinyl)  
76 x 54 inches

*Ten Who Aim, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage  
(photocopies and lithographic  
print mounted on cardboard)  
64 ½ x 41 inches

*Eleven Excluded, 2007*  
Paper collage  
29 x 16 inches

*Twelve Disturbances, 2007*  
Mixed-media fabric collage  
17 x 23 inches  
Not exhibited at The Drawing Center

All works from the series  
"It's Not the Eye of the Needle That  
Changed—The Time"

List of  
List of  
works

#### Opposite

*One Dictator, 2007*  
Mixed-media collage  
(fabric, paper, and foil  
mounted on cardboard)  
67 x 43 inches

