

Sarah Morris

WHITE CUBE

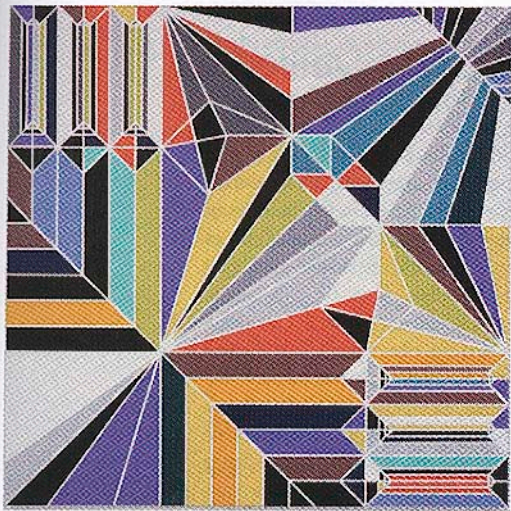
Artforum, 2008

Tommie Smith and John Carlos changed my life. Beamed in monochrome from Mexico City to a white boy in the nowhere provinces of England in 1968, the athletes' silent gesture of graceful resistance under pressure—raising their fists in a black power salute at the Olympic medal ceremony—spoke loudly of the power of images to signify politically, economically, and ideologically. The Olympics matter. Four years later, everyone's eyes were on Munich when a hooded member of the Palestinian Black September group peered over the balcony of an apartment in the athletes' village. Inside were eleven Israeli hostages, all of whom would be dead by the end of the day. This incident is the subject of Sarah Morris's latest film, *1972*, 2008. It features an extensive interview with Georg Sieber, the head psychologist of the Olympic Police at the time. Over the course of a number of sessions shot in a car and in his study, Sieber offers a description and analysis of the event that differs markedly from the widely accepted account. A large model of Pinocchio stands behind his desk throughout, the unchanging length of its nose suggesting, perhaps, that what we are hearing is the truth.

But Sieber insists that the desire for historical truth, for certainty about what really happened, can never be satisfied. All we have are varied points of view, experiences, and narratives. His own compelling version, delivered in an urbane, evenhanded style, is contextualized by Morris with police surveillance footage of demonstrators, archival photographs of the 1972 games, and panoramic shots of the Munich Olympic Stadium. Sieber (who had once been a member of the socialist German Student's Federation) and his colleagues in the police had developed a range of possible scenarios to prepare security forces for every conceivable problem. The Palestinian attack was "Scenario 26," and in its initial stages it played out pretty much as predicted. Very soon, though, Israel assumed operational control and Sieber, realizing he was now both impotent and irrelevant, resigned, went home, and watched the tragedy unfold on television.

1972 was shown in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics as part of Morris's exhibition "Lesser Panda." Alongside it were paintings from two concurrent series, one based on the Olympic rings and the other on origami patterns. Hitherto each of the canvases in the "Rings" series, 2006–, has referenced a particular past Olympiad. Here, in the eight-panel *2028 [Rings]*, 2008, which wraps itself around two walls of

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Sarah Morris, *Falcon [Origami]*, 2007, household gloss paint on canvas, 84 1/4 x 84 1/4".

the ground-floor gallery, the artist is looking ahead. Taking its cue from the manically proliferating fabric of the Chinese capital, with its system of concentric ring roads, 2028 [*Rings*] plunders the past—Balla's Futurism, Constructivist design, Stella's "Protractor" paintings, Warhol's flowers—for the forms with which to exponentially extend this frenzy into a contested future. A sense of portent is also a feature of the "Origami" paintings, 2006–, whose grids form the crease patterns used in the folding of various creatures. One thinks of Gaff, the character played by Edward James Olmos in *Blade Runner* (1982), leaving his sinister origami calling cards. Stella resonates here, too, this time as the painter of concentric squares and mitered mazes, generating complexity and dynamic spatiality out of unremitting flatness. In *Falcon [Origami]*, 2007, and *Swan [Origami]*, 2007, for example, zones of intensity and openness, of compression and release, lay out instructions that, while in themselves traditional, map an outcome whose shape is not obvious in the present. What is sure is that as it evolves it will be complicated, and we will be implicated.

—Michael Archer