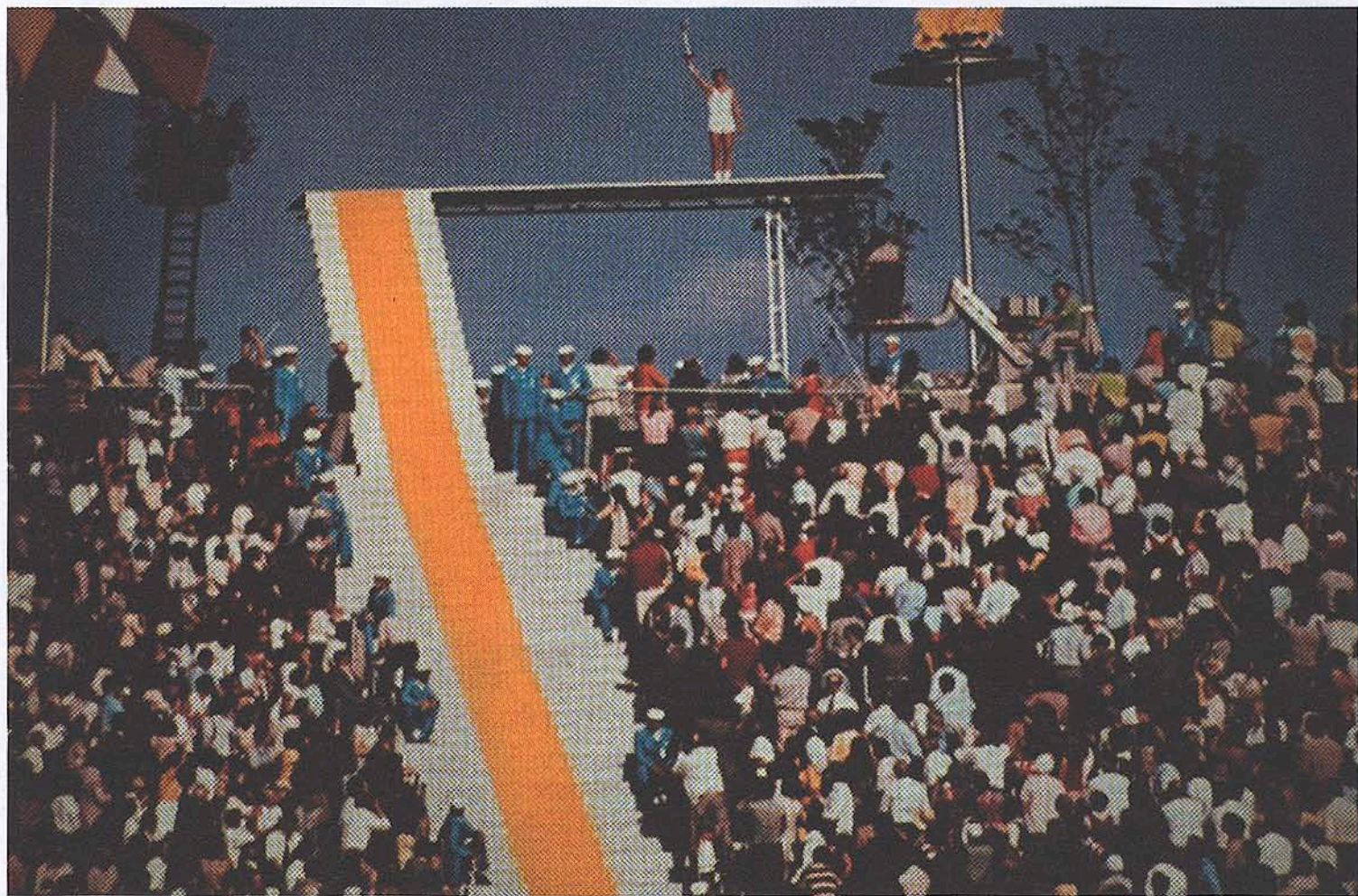


# SARAH MORRIS: LESSER PANDA

WHITE CUBE MASON'S YARD, LONDON

18 JULY - 6 SEPTEMBER

1972, 2008, 35mm/DVD,  
38 min 12 sec.  
© the artist. Courtesy Jay  
Jopling/White Cube, London



Though Olympic 'themed', Sarah Morris's latest body of work is no celebration. Both her new film and paintings seem to question the event's claims for international unity (a timely criticism, given what is occurring in South Ossetia as I write this), yet they also go beyond to query the root cause: people and the construct of their own history.

Dominating the lower gallery is a large rectangular painting, *2028 (Rings)* (2008), in household gloss, stretching across two adjacent walls. The Olympic rings are presented mostly in black against a multicoloured grid. Instead of harmoniously interlocking, they are in a hysterical frenzy. Opposite lie three smaller works from the *Origami* series (2007–8), this time with cooperating triangles and no rings. Upstairs, a 38-minute interview with Georg Sieber is shown on a vast screen. Sieber was the German psychologist hired before the 1972 Munich Games to come up with worst-case terrorist scenarios. Scenario #26, in which Palestinian terrorists would take hostage the Israeli sporting contingent, was to play out with tragic consequences.

Yet take away the Olympic Games and how does this all fit together? The film is certainly engaging. When Sieber claims that it was the Israelis who were in charge of the wildly unsuccessful counter-operation, not the German authorities, as widely accepted, it is almost, well, *fun*. The who-said-what-and-when has the intrigue of a spy thriller. Yet Morris

goes beyond merely adding to the numerous retellings of the incident (including Steven Spielberg's 2005 *Munich*), and this is possibly the most interesting thing about it. The intended subject matter is that there is, in the concluding words of Sieber himself, no "historical truth in a sense of reality, more just a series of recollections". We spin narratives based on no more than a few loose 'factual' pointers. Do we believe Sieber? Does it matter? Morris herself seems to question him by the incongruous presence of a large Pinocchio statue in the background of his office.

The paintings are an extension of this musing on history and the form it takes, presenting two opposing views of historical narrative. The *Origami* series suggests the human ideal; neat and logical, representing the onward progression of the human mind from the ancients to the modern. *2028 (Rings)*, with its apparent nod to the infamously polluted ring roads encircling Beijing, depicts the messy reality of a sullied history. Yet there is one further aspect to the exhibition that can't be ignored, and where it succeeds: the presence of a personal history within the universal. Georg Sieber will forever be linked to 1972. Perform an Internet search and there is his epitaph in electronic form. This effect of the personal on the universal is echoed too in the paintings. Which version of history do you or I take? The cooperative *Origami* or the damaged *Rings*? The latter's domination of the gallery seems to indicate where Morris's opinion lies. *Oliver Basciano*.