

# Thierry Geoffroy/Colonel

## Made in Huntly

### ...AND FINALLY

Under my desk is a shallow but large cardboard box that I obtained from a supermarket some five years ago. Its contents consist of a disorderly collection of some of the papers and photocopies that I have accumulated over the past ten years, along with some other stuff. It is one of a number of such boxes whose contents were only ever meant to be there for the sole purpose of moving from one house to another ... I go through periods, sometimes years, of intimately knowing the contents of these boxes, and perhaps more usefully of knowing where to find particular papers ... then there are the other times ... frustrated and unable to find what it is that I am looking for, or alternatively, absorbed in this vortex of paper as if discovering it for the first time—spending the day in an intoxicated and dusty state of surprise, sneezing a great deal. The boxes were only ever meant to be temporary accommodation, but in the seemingly unimportant move from where they were first abandoned (on any available surface in the house) to where they now are, something happened, and not least to the boxes themselves: ‘Amarillo. Canataloupe. Charentais. Galia. Piel de Sapo. Producido en España.’ Most of us have such archives: family photographs, letters, memento mori ... precious things, and they mean a lot to us. Thierry Geoffroy is no different, but he uses his considerable archive in perhaps a different way: he recycles it, into gallery and museum spaces and into the media, searching for new contexts, fresh meaning.

The Huntly Hotel is on the square: I checked in at 1.04 p.m. on Saturday 22nd May and made a telephone call. Shortly after this I had a late breakfast in a café on a second floor above the square. I ordered a bacon roll and a white coffee. Thierry Geoffroy had a cheese melt and a black coffee (the melt came with coldslaw which he didn't eat.) These details may seem unimportant, but within the ambiguous realms of documentation—which this text is a form of—veracity is important: Geoffroy suggests that ‘it is a rendez vous with the hasard ...’

At 3.42 p.m. a car, towing a trailer, pulled into the Square. In the trailer were a group of young people, and a bride-to-be: a blackening was happening: I heard more than I saw—they were shouting and banging on the trailer with what looked like sticks—in fact, from the other side of the square, I saw only from behind, as if searching (for the performance that I knew was occurring) through and inbetween the backs of peoples heads: in the first instance, performance is always a question of proximity to something, even for the artist—a question of choosing to be in a distanced relationship.

What I did see clearly amidst this commotion was the performance artist, Thierry Geoffroy (aka, Le Colonel) move toward the trailer, a local photographer on his heels: I know that he asked the bride-to-be how Scottish she was, though I didn't hear this. I also saw him take her photograph: she would have held a sheet of paper with a percentage number and the word ‘Scottish’ written on it, but again I didn't see this, but I know that this was what he was doing: at the very moment that Geoffroy was taking her picture, the local photographer was taking a picture of Geoffroy—in performance—taking a picture of a local bride-to-be, who was involved in an altogether different kind of performance, and in addition to this the whole thing was being filmed by a representative of the arts organisation, Deveron Arts. From my point-of-view—from what Geoffroy would sometimes call the point-of-view of an ‘oculist witness’—on the other side of the square, this was as close to a performance version of the haunting, perspective ambiguity of ‘Carceri’ (Piranesi's dark and beautiful etching of a prisons staircase) as I could have wished for: at the very moment that the local

photographer raised his camera during Geoffroy's performance, 'Made in Huntly: Self Measurement of Scottishness,'\* Geoffroy, acting as a kind of conduit or catalyst, almost effortlessly exposed the violent trajectory of this vanity of representation; the seemingly casual ambiguity of a newspaper strapline that might have read: KILTED FRENCHMAN AND HUNTLY BRIDE-TO-BE\*, except on this occasion, Geoffroy was not in a kilt, not this time.

(\*Geoffroy's performance consisted of speaking with the local people about the issue of Scottish identity. He asked them how Scottish they were and then photographed them holding a sheet of paper with, for example, '40% Scottish' written on it. Sometimes he took some of their hair. ?? of these pictures were subsequently published as a double page spread in the local newspaper on Sunday 30th May. On Friday 20th May Geoffroy performed wearing a kilt. On the Saturday he refused to do so: his practice is infused with the issue of what it means to be inside or outside; with visibility and invisibility; with questions of integration and marginalisation. And with the immediate (visible and verbal) codes that allow us to navigate these states on a daily basis: he dresses up a lot, going so far in one performance as to swap clothes with his audience in order to tease out some of these issues: "Am I like you now?" he asks.)

(\*On the evening of Wednesday 18th May I watched a short film that the artist made for television. It showed him directing a performance version of Marcel Duchamp's, 'Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors.' It took place in a park in Copenhagen, Denmark.)

I arrived at a hotel in Belfast late on Sunday evening and had something to eat before returning to my room for the rest of the night. Looking for something in my bag I found the small clear plastic bag containing a snippet of hair which Geoffroy had given to me earlier in the day. Handwritten on a white self adhesive label were the words, '100% Scottish.' I have cut my own hair now for as long as I can remember—something to do with a traumatic visit to a unisex salon in Inverness in 1972—and there is something about hair once it is detached from the head which I still find difficult, particularly if packaged in this way. This wasn't a romantic lock of hair gifted by a loved one, carefully braided and secured into a silver pendant, or placed between the pages of an elegy by Rilke. This was a collection of straight strands about a centimeter and half long, the likes of which would set CSI agents running to a forensic lab. My first response was to throw it away: Did I really want to carry this with me for the rest of my life? I put it back into my bag, it was after all a gift, a memento of our meeting. I retrieved it from one of the boxes into which I had placed it when I came to write this: the box—the archive—seemed like the right place for it to live.

The television news space of ...and finally is indicative of the kinds of space that Geoffroy's practice seeks to strategically inhabit. He received ...and finally news coverage of this project as well, which he will use in other ways and in other contexts at a later date. (What characterises such reports is of course the often bland and cool misrepresentation of the artist and their intentions, sleeved as they frequently are through the brittle prism of local interest.) Geoffroy's work, laced with a sometimes filleting humour, strategically simple, temporal yet always with consequence, turns such representations back on the very institutions and media that abuse him (and us) by recycling, re-imagining and re-performing them. Nothing is of much use to him unless it has been, "through the media;" it needs to be tainted in this way before it can be of any use to him in his innocent critique of the politics of representation.

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