

## Art



The video installation "Vested" simulates a suicide bombing

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*transcript of television broadcast - translated from German*

## Terrorism as Art The Exhibition "Vested" in Vancouver

*In two weeks, the 2010 Winter Olympics will open in Vancouver. Extensive security precautions are already being prepared for the athletes, and the Canadian media artist Don Ritter is also preparing for the event. For the cultural program of the Games, the Olympic Committee has selected Ritter's provocative installation "Vested."*

Says Ritter, "My first question to the organizers was, you know what this work is about?" Their answer was: "Yes." Ritter's work is announced on the Winter Olympics web site as follows: "Put on a special vest and walk through world-famous architecture." It could have also added: "and then blow it up." For this exhibition, Don Ritter is presenting a simulated suicide bombing as an interactive video installation – an art exercise in terrorism. While wearing a fake suicide bomber's vest, the audience is just a click away from an assassination. The audience alone decides what gets blown up and when.

### Terrorism in its most deceptive form



Don Ritter, media artist

"At the center of this work is the current rock star of the human tragedy: the suicide bomber," says Ritter. The suicide attack as spectacle. To attack from within a public crowd of people is terrorism in its most deceptive form. By using similar visuals, Ritter leads us towards our enjoyment of human tragedy. "The best way for someone to understand this idea is to have them do it," says Ritter. "No one really gets hurt or killed, and no blood flows. 'Vested' is meant to be a reflection of a certain social behavior. In German, the word is 'Schadenfreude,' which means people being entertained through the suffering of others."

Ritter's art work uses the visuals of a suicide bombing as a method to criticize people's desire for tragedy, how they entertain themselves by watching others die. But is the audience aware of what they are doing? "If they understand what this installation is about, that's fine," says Ritter. "But artistically, it is not important, because they will all demonstrate the concept." Terrorism as art while the fear of terrorism actually exists - a macabre mixture selected by the Olympic Cultural Program. The sad reality that precedes this virtual enactment was witnessed at the 1972 Olympics when Israeli athletes were taken hostage by Palestinian terrorists. The drama ended in bloodshed. Since then, the fear of terrorist attacks has increased.

### **Violence, voyeurism, the media – a vicious circle**



"I think the primary goal of terrorists is not to harm people," says Ritter. "I think their main objective is to get attention from the world." Violence, voyeurism, the media – a vicious circle. The organizers of the 1972 Olympics did not permit terrorists to overshadow the athletic events, and their games continued. During the closing ceremonies, the German artist Otto Piene exhibited a large inflatable rainbow as a symbol of hope. Ritter had studied with Piene at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. "Otto's work was very positive," says Ritter. "My content is a bit darker."

Between the work of both artists is a turning point: the 11th of September 2001. This devastating attack is transmitted live on television screens around the world. Here is destruction being effectively staged by the media. For Ritter, who was living in New York at the time, 9/11 was an influential experience. "The peculiar thing was this event seemed so much bigger on TV than what I was seeing outside my window," says Ritter. "Why is that?" This is the question within Ritter's installation. The work explores how we see tragic events as entertainment, and as tragic as possible. The fact that the Olympic Committee selected Ritter's terrorism art for its cultural program is surprising at first glance, but the work is symbolic of how we confront our fear, in an aggressive and creative manner.

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