

ART  
WORLD  
*Review*

*Books · Magazines · Poetry · Exhibitions*

Conrad Bakker's **Untitled  
Project: Commodity  
[Capital]** (2007) – a  
handcrafted wooden limited  
edition of Karl Marx's  
*Capital: Volume One*  
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*Jim Dine · Starling & Long · Le Printemps de Septembre · Frieze · Xmas art gifts*

## Poetry

INSPIRED BY: JOHANN JULIAN TAUPE

### Blue Planet

after Johann Julian Taupe

by Fiona Sampson

Deep blue –

Dream

of the corrugated European skyline –  
a clock-wise horizon

that rises and falls between mountain-pass, snow-melt,  
rainbow pasture and steeple

Flock-flight, history

winging through an astonished iris –  
threads and rays of colour

Thick colour,

heavy on brush, on palette-knife –  
almost-corrupted by what's below

Or else stone-and-glass Vienna is pagan forest,  
shamanic jewels shine in each tree,  
code and key

to an early paradise

no longer imaginable –

But here,

luminous in violet and gold

The fabulous home-coming –

That face under the paint,  
with its turned, innocent chin  
or swagger of moustache,  
is both nursery story  
and mirror:

Here come the oils

slick-rich

jewelled with detail

lengths and folds of colour  
to dress yourself

Like Yeats said,

or the other dream-keepers, ethnographers,  
archaeologists of the soul –  
This giant world being full of mystery



Johann Julian Taupe, *Untitled* (2006)  
oil on canvas, 70 x 50cm

#### ABOUT THE POEM:

"I met Julian Taupe in 2002 in Andalusia, where we were both working on artists' fellowships. I was immediately drawn to his work, with its combination of rich colours and eruptions of narrative detail. It has always seemed to me the portrait of an imaginative world, where place is reinvented when it's given new meanings. Taupe, who is a Professor of Fine Art in Vienna, characterises for me a visceral yet cerebral Central European tradition. We've collaborated in various ways over the last six years, and I have written on his work."

Fiona Sampson

#### ABOUT THE POET:

Fiona Sampson trained as a concert violinist before studying at Oxford University. Her most recent collection of poetry, *Common Prayer* (Carcanet, 2007) was shortlisted for the TS Eliot Prize. A selection of critical essays, *On Listening*, was published by Salt in 2007. She is known for her pioneering work in creative writing and health care, and is editor of the magazine *Poetry Review*. She has worked with printmaker Meg Campbell on the artist's book *Birth Chart*, with stone-carver Alec Peever, and with the Coull String Quartet.

image courtesy the artist

## TAKE FIVE CAPITAL OBJECTS

### Conrad Bakker

Artist

Long before the credit crisis, Conrad Bakker was experimenting with capitalism: laboriously hand-crafting copies of mundane objects, then transacting with them in a variety of unorthodox ways. Books are a favourite subject, pointedly chosen for both content and title: *The Gift*, *Capital*, *Empire*. Often their prices reflect not the hours spent on them, but an aspect of the original – for instance a carved, painted edition of Marx's *Capital* was offered for just £25 (the cost of the real book) while on display at a Tate show. The volume of orders which resulted took him six months to fulfil.

"Books have always been one of the things that I've made," says Conrad Bakker, "because they function as natural containers of content.

A book has this ideology or set of ideas inside, but it's still an object. I was interested in how a book could represent a set of ideas even when you couldn't open it. Coffee table books signal something more than their content. They say something about the owner, they say something about the room, so my work goes into that territory as well."

Bakker admits to being complicit in the problems and systems he highlights. "I'm a book collector," he says, "and there are so many books I have that I've not had much time with. So there is some guilt about not reading them, but the books still talk about my desire to be affiliated with them."

Bakker constructs his simulations in a deliberately painterly and, he admits, clumsy way: "That has to do with having it be close enough so that it sits in space just like the real thing, but at a certain point it falls apart. And when it does that, it points to the question of 'What is this thing, and if it is not the real thing, then what is my relationship to it?'"

Bakker's diverse ongoing activities are grouped under the name *Untitled Projects*. "It's a way of organising a variety of objects and events. I came up with it when I produced a mail order catalogue, and needed a 'company' for that. But then I thought it could function almost like my real company identity, in the way that artists use their names as their tax ID."

With so much of his work operating as a critique of advanced capitalism, recent events in the global economy have been of particular interest to Bakker. "It's interesting, but it's preventing me from knowing exactly where to go, too," he says. "What happens if the economy shifts and everyone starts bartering? Does my work lose its relevance?"

Exhibition: *Wall Rockets: Contemporary Artists and Ed Ruscha*, Flag Art Foundation, New York, until 30 Jan 2009; [www.flagartfoundation.org](http://www.flagartfoundation.org)  
Artist's website: [www.untitledprojects.com](http://www.untitledprojects.com)



## Five capital Conrad Bakker book projects

### 1 Untitled Project: THE GIFT [Marcel Mauss] (2008)

Bakker made a carved and painted version of a vintage paperback copy of Marcel Mauss' anthropological text *The Gift*, which deals with the problems inherent in gift-giving. Bakker then gave the work to artist Ted Purves, the author of *What We Want Is Free: Generosity And Exchange In Recent Art*. Says Bakker: "By making that book, I was trying to think about extending that, by giving it as a gift to this person who understood the problem of the gift. I was trying to create a sense of obligation, not that I expected something back – it was a self-referential object, referencing the dilemma of itself as a gift."

### 2 Untitled Project: RUSCHA | eBay (2006)

Bakker produced a set of six oil paintings to use as "product photos" on an eBay auction he created in order to sell a copy of Ed Ruscha's collectable book, *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* (1968). The paintings were offered at the same price as the Ruscha book. "I have done other eBay projects, where I've made paintings based upon other objects, like Eames chairs – small paintings based on the photographs on eBay – but this was the first where I repeated my own gesture," he explains. "The hand in the photographs is my own hand, so there is a slight self-admission in the process. I do like Ruscha's work, and I like the way it was inserted into some of the circuits of commercial and popular culture."

### 3 Untitled Project: COMMODITY [Capital] (2007)

For Tate Modern's exhibition *The Irresistible Force*, Bakker created a copy of Karl Marx's *Capital: Volume One* and offered editions for purchase at the same price as the original Penguin paperback (£25) through a mail-order form at the exhibition site. "I like the difficulty of placing an order, the hesitance of putting cash into an envelope and mailing it overseas. It's old-fashioned. Nowadays you pay for things online and that quickness helps us not to think about those physicalities and those difficulties. So part of the project was that I was a real person, collecting and receiving orders and making objects. The low price was pretty absurd. It meant people didn't want to become complicit in it."

### 4 Untitled Project: BACK ISSUES

#### [Artforum, Summer 1967] [Newark Riots] (2006)

This work is part of a series of simulated back issues of sports and leisure magazines whose dates coincide with social turmoil in the US. This work depicts a now-collectable issue of *Artforum* containing Michael Fried's important 1967 essay on minimalism, *Art and Objecthood*. "I was interested in that particular issue because of the Michael Fried essay, about space and minimalism and theatre, as a discussion that was going on at the same time as these other, real contestations – dramatic and physical contestations of space in urban and impoverished cities in the US... There is a strange relationship with the way that we might think about those historical moments, and how a detachment is embedded in both those activities."

### 5 Untitled Project: BORDERS [Empire] (2005)

This project features a carved and painted Borders bookstore bag that is constructed to create the illusion that it contains a paperback copy of the book *Empire* by Michael Hart and Antonio Negri, an important text in debates around advanced capitalism and globalisation. "I began thinking about the transparent bags. They reveal what you purchase but also brand everything – the way a watermark in Photoshop indicates that an image is owned by someone else. I show it in the gallery space on the floor, echoing the perimeter of the space, but it's common in gallery spaces to deposit your bag outside the area of the other objects so that you don't have to carry it with you."

