



Maryam Jafri, *Costume Party*, 2005, still from a three-channel video installation, 14 minutes 38 seconds.



Carl Michael von Hausswolff, *Alamut (Eagle's Nest)*, Iran (detail), 1986, seven black-and-white photographs, 7¼ x 11¼ each.

Raymond Pettibon, Bjarne Melgaard, Jonathan Meese, even Joseph Beuys and Martin Kippenberger are said to operate to some extent in the same realm. Their artistic energy derives from an infantile attitude—not from innocence and purity but rather from a polymorphous-perverse essence. This forces these artists into a game in which they constantly change from the role of perpetrator to victim and back again. Never growing up means constantly showing others that you have no boundaries yet never being able to master this boundlessness. One is condemned to be a child forever, just as the Wandering Jew of legend was damned to life without death.

—Wolf Jahn

Translated from German by Sara Ogger.

MALMÖ, SWEDEN

## MARYAM JAFRI

MALMÖ KONSTMUSEUM

In *Costume Party*, 2005, history becomes a chamber play. Written and directed by Maryam Jafri for her first solo museum presentation, the three-screen video installation features nonactors along with film and theater professionals. Other recent works hybridizing video art with film or the live arts come to mind—for different reasons, Yinka Shonibare's *Un Ballo in Maschera*, 2004, and Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij's *Mandarin Ducks*, 2005—but *Costume Party* is an altogether more satirical project.

The party guests have been invited to come dressed from their favorite historical period, and so the characters—ranging

from a crusader and a monk to a cowboy and a Victorian widow—reflect defining moments in Western civilization since antiquity. Between cabaret performances and anxious talk among the guests of a violent uprising taking place “outside,” it transpires that some breach of the law—a murder?—has taken place at the party. Police in trench coats arrive on the scene, bungling their investigation yet finding a credible culprit; at the end a merman in a wheelchair restores good feelings with a consoling speech. The burlesque undertones of *Costume Party* leave you with the impression that the angel of history, as Walter Benjamin evoked him, could be waiting in the wings ready to take the stage as the Red Baron.

The fifteen-minute video plays in a loop, and its seven scenes seem slightly detached from the ostensibly linear plot. The characters do not embody redeemed images of the past but rather represent scraps of myth that continue to be visited upon civilization as our “common heritage.” But *Costume Party* also introduces some of history’s marginal figures to upset the period archetypes: a park flasher, a leather fetishist, and an aging hippie chick scramble signification vaudeville-style. In a purple outfit on an impressive golden stage, the Hippie lip-synchs Doris Day’s “Que Sera, Sera.” The Park Pervert and the Leatherman deliver monologues on the nature of love. The actors’ accents—Danish, Spanish, British, and American—unmoor the narrative from any geographical specificity and lend it a twist of perversion. Their gestures and timing are often ostentatious: *Costume Party* is theater played for the camera, exploiting the

gaps between theatrical and cinematic conventions.

In her fictionalization of the search for foundations and the desire to idealize the past, Jafri brushes history against its grain by camping it up. In this way she uses narrative excess to dissociate her work from history and its rulers but also to tentatively mess with her own discursive obligations—multiculturalism, the borders between fact and fiction, and identity as a garb. In this double strategy, *Costume Party* is best when it goes bonkers, reveling in the pleasures of its own visual impact and surprising dialogue. When the Merman is reprimanded by a man in an eighteenth-century costume for not being from any part of history, the Victorian Widow retorts, “But the imagination is part of history.” By enacting the same argument, Jafri presses *Costume Party*’s allegorical charge against the Western world’s desire to exercise control over history.

—Lars Bang Larsen

LONDON

## CARL MICHAEL VON HAUSSWOLFF

BEACONSFIELD

The steady but almost imperceptible pulse of the sound track and the uncanny images of Carl Michael von Hausswolff’s film *Hashima, Japan* (made with Thomas Nordanstad), 2002, spark the same quickening of adrenaline and awareness as when you’re finding your way in the dark. The film is a tour of an abandoned island off the coast of Japan that for years was