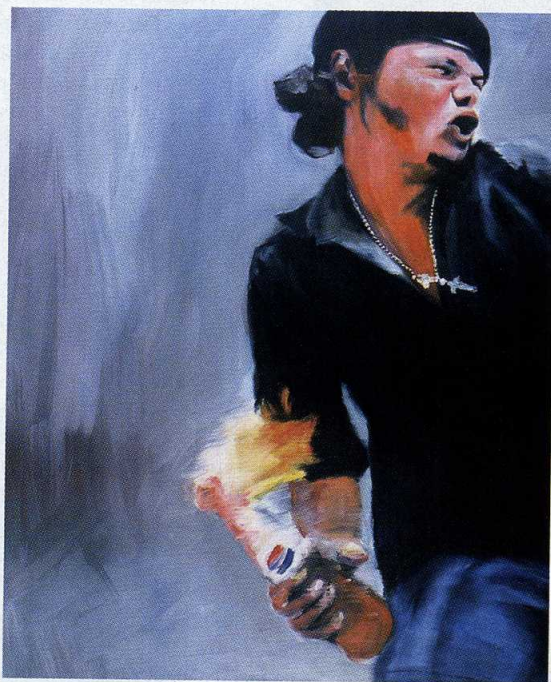


# ON THE RIGHTS OF MOLOTOV MAN

Appropriation and the art of context

By Joy Garnett and Susan Meiselas

**JOY GARNETT:** In the spring of 2003, soon after the United States invaded Iraq, I embarked on a new project having to do with the human figure *in extremis*. It was a project born of frustration and anger. All of my paintings are based on photographs, and so for this project—which I came to think of as the Riot series—I searched the Web for images of figures in extreme emotional or physical states. I saved the most promising images in folders on my computer desktop, and I let them sit for a while so I could forget where I found them. I wanted my choices to be based more on aesthetic criteria than on my emotional attachment to their narratives. Eventually I would look through the folders again to see what struck me.



After a few months of this, I decided to go ahead and make the paintings. A photo of a man throwing a Molotov cocktail grabbed my attention, and he became my first subject. I rendered him larger than life—the painting is nearly six feet tall—and I was sufficiently pleased with the results. I went to work on other paintings: shouting demonstra-

tors, angry skinheads, an Air Force pilot and his girl in an emotional embrace, frat boys jumping over bonfires, screaming punk rockers.

When a gallery in New York City offered to exhibit the Riot paintings in January 2004, the directors and I agreed that the “Molotov” painting was emblematic of the series, and so we chose it for the image on the announcement card.

*Joy Garnett is a painter and the arts editor of the journal Cultural Politics.*

*Susan Meiselas is a photographer best known for her documentation of human-rights issues in Latin America.*

*Both artists live in New York City, and their work has appeared previously in Harper's Magazine.*

*This portfolio is drawn from their conversation at the New York Institute for the Humanities' "Comedies of Fair Use" symposium, which took place last year at New York University.*

