

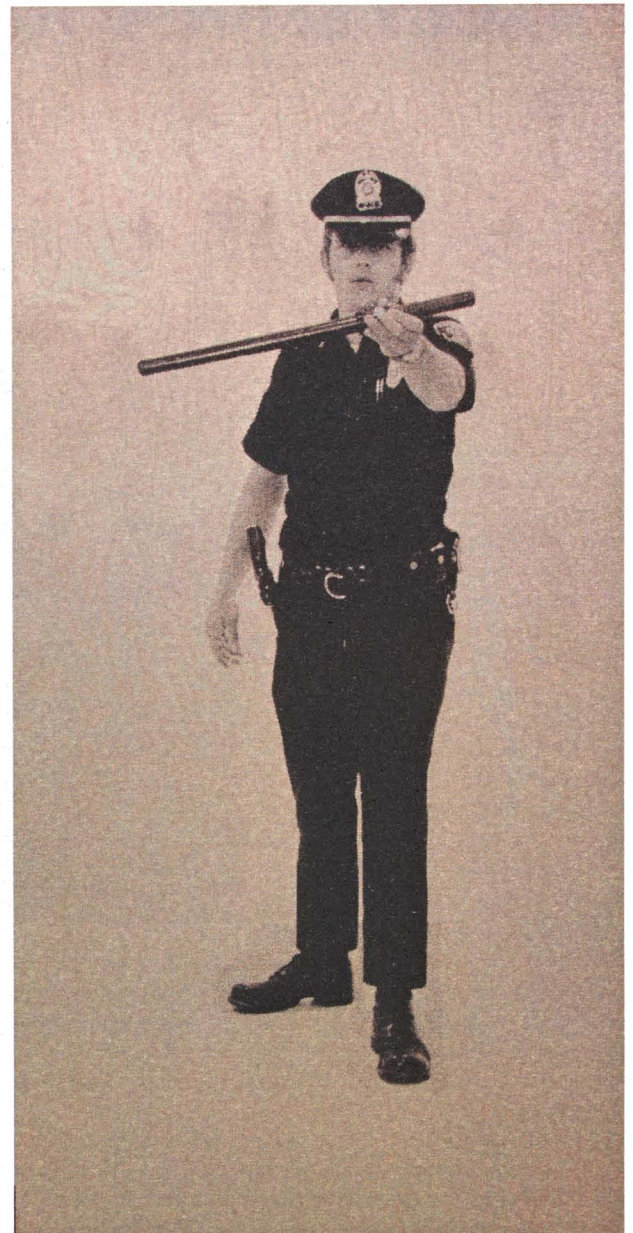
GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON: ALL MY FRIENDS ARE DEAD

HONOR FRASER, LOS ANGELES
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Around 1966, in response to the Black Panther Party's call for black power, the American Nazi Party introduced the term white power into the political lexicon. Since then, the phrase has become the menacing slogan of white supremacist groups like the Aryan Brotherhood, neo-Nazis, proponents of Nordicism and the Christian Identity movement. While it's doubtful that Gardar Eide Einarsson's signature palette of black and white is intended as a didactic for racial divides, his minimally rendered images, puns and references, which surface in *All My Friends Are Dead* (the inaugural show at Honor Fraser's striking new space), toy with the structures of racial privilege, hegemonic organisations and social indoctrination to call out the subtler strains of 'white power' within Western culture.

The most transparent of these moves is the series *Baton Exercises 1-9* (all works 2007), nine large sheets of plywood propped in a line against the gallery wall, each silk-screened with the image of a Caucasian cop wielding a nightstick in a different manner. The repetitive lineup of figures, taken from a 1960s police training manual, seem mechanical but nonthreatening, demonstrating a schema for institutionalised violence in innocuous gestures. Such works reveal Einarsson's efficient ability to take certain authoritarian ideologies and dilute them into palatable signs. This is quite literally achieved in *White Tower*, an electric sign that, plugging into the wall it hangs on, illuminates the words 'white tower' in an oversized typeface redolent of hipster branding. While the writing on the wall could speak to the elitism (or 'ivory tower') of the gallery space or to boutique marketing impulses, the piece, in proximity to Einarsson's cops, could also function like a seductive catchphrase for a nationalist seat of authority. For another series, *Untitled (Hood 1-4)*, the artist fashions four head coverings, with hastily cut eye and mouth holes, from the legs of tracksuit bottoms. Preserved in thick black frames, the objects look like the relics of a frat-boy hazing ritual or a do-it-yourself KKK meeting.

While the subtexts of these works are not immediately apparent, as a whole, Einarsson's citations and source material – from the Turbonegro song from which his show takes its title to his use of political slogans from Weimar Germany or the WASPY biography of American cult novelist Frederick Exley – build a composite sketch of whiteness in the popular psyche. Yet it's questionable if the artist is being at all critical of these belief systems or simply highlighting a collection of obscure and oblique references within which xenophobic thought is concealed. Perhaps my own bias begs the question; on the day I visited *All My Friends Are Dead*, I also spent time at MOCA Pacific Design Center's remarkable exhibition of political posters by Emory Douglas, the artist who served as the Black Panther Party's Minister of Culture in the radical group's heyday. While the differences between civil-rights era agitprop and slickly fabricated art objects are too obvious to name, contrasting these depictions of power, militarism and social control (Douglas's capitalist pigs vs. Einarsson's effectual cops) was all too edifying; whereas one displays the sophisticated and utilitarian use of images, the other runs the risk of empty simulation. *Catherine Taft*



Baton Exercise 8, 2007, inkjet on wooden panel, 244 x 122 cm. Courtesy the artist and Honor Fraser, Los Angeles