



**The Theory of Flight, Johan Thom, 2006**

**Medium:** Single channel video projection on layered glass plates, mound of soil, flour and mixed media

**Dimensions:** 300 x 300 x 250cm

**Photographic credit:** Miguel A. Quintas

'The Theory of Flight' (2006) is wry commentary on the failures and successes of humanities search for mental and spiritual enlightenment. A 9 minute video loop of the artist sitting and meditating in a pose reminiscent of Buddha is projected onto the physical installation (comprising a massive heap of soil out of which 4 large glass plates protrude). To the viewer it seems as if they are in the presence of a ghostly apparition floating just above a small mountain of soil.

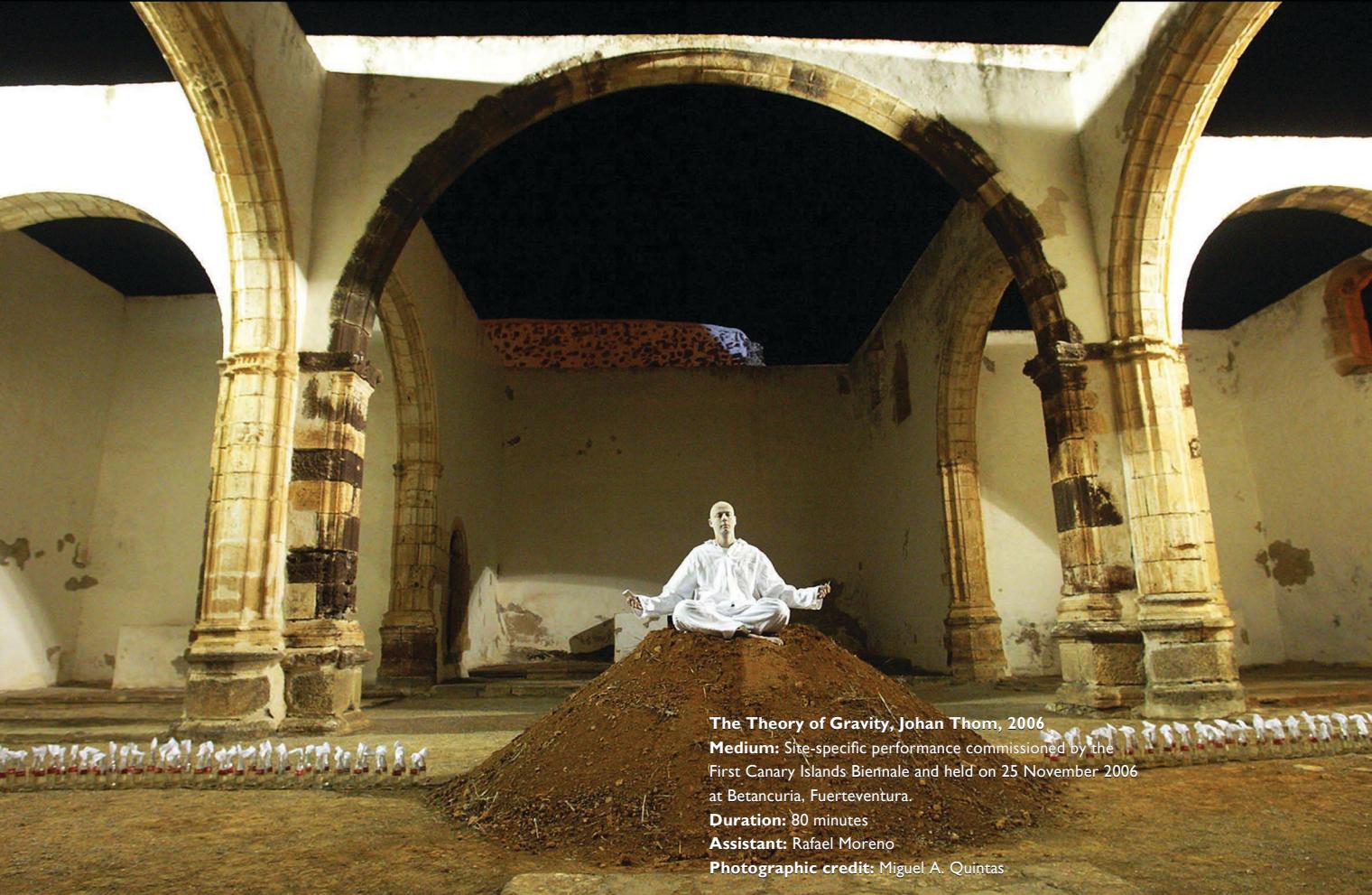
The work immediately reminds one of the everyday sight of live chickens and ducks being carried around by their feet by hawkers, selling them to the general public in Dhaka, Bangladesh (where the work was produced). In the video Thom's arms are progressively weighed down with the carcasses of recently slaughtered chickens and ducks until he can no longer bear the added weight and in a desperate attempt to maintain his equilibrium, he attempts to fly, using his arms as wings. Perhaps it is a reminder of the transfer of energy from one living thing to another – as the flow of life drains from one entity it feeds into, nourishes and strengthens another. However, as the pile of soil (a dug up grave) reminds us, this process is a universal constant, affecting all living things including us.

**For more information on Johan Thom please visit:**

<http://www.art.co.za/johanthom>

<http://www.youtube.com/thomjohan>

<http://wwwkaganov.com/kagablog.com/category/contributors/johan-thom/>



**The Theory of Gravity, Johan Thom, 2006**

**Medium:** Site-specific performance commissioned by the First Canary Islands Biennale and held on 25 November 2006 at Betancuria, Fuerteventura.

**Duration:** 80 minutes

**Assistant:** Rafael Moreno

**Photographic credit:** Miguel A. Quintas



For the 'Theory of Gravity' I appropriated a pose reminiscent of the 'lotus position' commonly associated with Buddhist meditation. Dressed in stark white, I sat on a large mound of soil, taken from a grave dug out in the nearby landscape. In my left hand I held a match and in the right, the matchbox from which it originated. At regular intervals a second figure loaded 180 Molotov cocktails (petrol-bombs) made from small Coca Cola bottles onto my body. This continued until I finally collapsed under the accumulated weight of all the bottles after 80 minutes.

The work refers back, and pays homage to, the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc in Saigon, 1963:

*On June 11, 1963, Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk from the Linh-Mu Pagoda in Hue, Vietnam, burned himself to death at a busy intersection in downtown Saigon, Vietnam. Eye witness accounts state that Thich Quang Duc and at least two fellow monks arrived at the intersection by car, Thich Quang Duc got out of the car, assumed the traditional lotus position and the accompanying monks helped him pour gasoline over himself. He ignited the gasoline by lighting a match and burned to death in a matter of minutes. David Halberstam, a reporter for the New York Times covering the war in Vietnam, gave the following account: "I wish to see that sight again,*

*but once was enough. Flames were coming from a human being; his body was slowly withering and shriveling up, his head blackening and charring.*

*In the air was the smell of burning human flesh; human beings burn surprisingly quickly. Behind me I could hear the sobbing of the Vietnamese who were now gathering. I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered to even think.... As he burned he never moved a muscle, never uttered a sound, his outward composure in sharp contrast to the wailing people around him."*

(Source: [http://www.buddhistinformation.com/self\\_immolation.htm](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/self_immolation.htm))