

Peter Friedl

(Oberneukirchen, Austria, 1960)

The strategies of politics, power, and media representation are some of the themes Peter Friedl investigates. Inventing unexpected expressive solutions that sometimes intentionally employ the same codes they are criticizing, the artist probes the contemporary world, exposing its fragility and contradictions.

Failed States, 2010, appears like a large composite flag that, in turn, is made up of a series of twenty fabric flags, sewn to one another and arranged in four overlapping rows. From the top, the sequence of nations represented in alphabetical order includes, in the first row, the flags of Afghanistan, Austria, Belgium, and China, continuing in the second row with Colombia, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, and Iceland. The next row contains the flags of Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, and Libya, while the fourth row concludes the work with Mexico, Holland, Somalia, and the United States. Closer examination reveals the presence of flags of states that are currently not recognized, such as the Basque Country in the first row and Palestine in the last.

The title *Failed States* refers to a well-known index, published since 2005 by the Fund for Peace, an American organization, in collaboration with *Foreign Policy* magazine, which sets out to measure the vulnerability to collapse of the more than 150 nations it analyzes annually. According to its authors, the index is drawn up through the critical evaluation of millions of pieces of data taken from news items, articles, and research, including both governmental and non-governmental sources. This information is then triangulated, cross-referenced with twelve indicators of risk related to social, economic, and political-military factors. Since its first publication, the index has included in first place a preponderance of African and Near Eastern countries, indicating them graphically with different gradations of the color red. Composing a new list, which instead deliberately adds numerous European countries as well as the United States, Friedl exposes the degree of arbitrariness intrinsic to the analysis the Americans have compiled. He in turn, without stating the method on the basis of which he has drawn up his own list, seems to expose the fallaciousness of the presumption of evaluating the failure of others and the fallaciousness of the entire process.

Following the artist's instructions, inmates and former inmates of the Le Vallette prison in Turin, collaborating with the Papili cooperative, created the work. This methodology, which in some ways evokes the procedure employed by Alighiero Boetti to create his maps, involved the collaboration of women belonging to fifteen different nationalities, adding another level of meaning to the work. (MB)