



SAM TAYLOR-WOOD,
PENT-UP, 1996, FILM STILL

essays, as parts of a growing whole. At Galerie Paul Andriess, the latest work consists of a collection of sober fragments in which you seem to recognize architectural forms while at the same time you know that this recognition is a purely illusory fiction. Components like stairs, windows, and corners are arranged around an open center, or mirror functional units along the horizontal axis. Their shapes reflect their function, but the end result is not functional. Van de Pavert willfully creates confusion with the clash of the implausible proportions and impossible orientation points: they model a space that bears little connection to the possibilities and restraints of built architecture. Yet, past the confusion there is a message to this work that is in fact hopeful: things may be upside down or unrealizable, but art can still function with social significance, we can strive (as van de Pavert says) "through art to formulate the possibilities of an ideal."

Frank-Alexander Hettig

Sam Taylor-Wood

Chisenhale Gallery, London

September 11 - October 27, 1996

It's often forgotten that the pre-title to "When Attitudes Become Form," Harald Szeemann's mythical 1969 group exhibition, was "Live in Your Head": a very trippy, overt connection between then-contemporary art and modish psychedelia. Youth and style culture are similarly close relatives of the raving new British art, and Sam Taylor-Wood's monumental, five-screen film installation at the Chisenhale Gallery, *Pent-Up*

(1996), is somehow its epitome. It is photogenic, intelligent, and it talks back, emblemizing a certain expansive side of the youthful London art scene, post-Damien Hirst.

In *Pent-Up*, five giant "screens" sit seamlessly side by side, like a giant pixilated racing stripe, illuminating one very long wall of the gallery. Each screen provides a frame for one of the work's five, bigger-than-life performers: three men and two women, all set in noticeably varying locations (interiors or exteriors), each separately consumed in a different soliloquy or confession—*Repent Up*, it might be called. Their words, however, cut across and overcome the screen barriers, resulting in a single script: "Did I embarrass you the other night?", asks screen four; "No more than usual," replies screen two. But the dialogue often abandons linearity, deliberately lapsing into non sequiturs and repetitions which suggest that we are witnessing five isolated strangers living in their heads, talking to some unseen object of their desire or frustration. Unlike the perfected, flattering dialogues we all compose in our minds when there's no one there to appreciate them—so different from the tongue-tied nonsense we usually do utter—these five continue to murmur the usual monosyllabic cliché ("Me?"; "You'll get over it ..."), even when they're on their own. The result is oddly musical, as Taylor-Wood orchestrates each voice with pauses, syncopations and recurring motifs that elevate the personal into the public with a rhythmic, lulling continuity.

The text, written by the artist, is edgy, intriguing; the performances, however, are uneven—some excruciatingly theatrical. But this flaw somehow makes little difference: in *Pent-Up*, form becomes attitude, so the actual narrative or the delivery are finally beside the point. Another alternative title for this pentagram of images could have been *Five Easy Pieces*: almost anything trapped in these frames would probably have worked the same miracle. The sensational look of the whole and the massive scale that Taylor-Wood handles without intimidation are the steam driving *Pent-Up*.

Taylor-Wood draws on contemporary culture with easy confidence, plucking at mass media (TV in particular), style (the casting and clothing aptly describe recognizable urban types) and cinematic references (say, Robert Altman's overlapping stories in

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Short Cuts, or *Taxi Driver*'s unforgettable "You talkin' to me?" monologue), as if it were all an open bin at a rummage sale, completely at her disposal. Look for big things from Sam Taylor-Wood: it is evident that this overnight star has been working steadily for years, and she's inching unstopably toward the Big Picture. Godard said it's easy to make a movie, all you need is a girl and a gun; would someone please hand this talented young woman a big budget and a pistol?

Gilda Williams

Richard Wilson

Serpentine Gallery, London

August 15 - September 15, 1996

That one discipline should display a belated appreciation of another should come as no surprise (I am thinking of the influence of the early work of architect Frank Gehry on Richard Wilson's installations). That a discipline should display a belated appreciation of itself is likewise unsurprising—though at least occasionally more worrying.

Many will no doubt remember Gordon Matta Clark's exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 1993. It consisted of "fragments" removed from sites exterior to the gallery space, as well as photographic information which documented the original context, and thus the nature of the intervention or "cut" that had been made. Matta Clark "expanded" (to borrow a term) what sculpture could be by instigating an engagement with either the immediate environment or (as with Robert Smithson's *Non-sites*) with the typologies of vernacular architecture. Indeed, Matta Clark stressed a complex relationship with architecture—was perhaps inventing a new kind of architecture.

In his own recent show at the Serpentine, Wilson doesn't contaminate, nor is contaminated by, the architectural. He is neither subtle, nor barbaric enough. This results in unsettled (no, not "uncanny") gallery sculpture. In the entrance to the gallery where his *Jamming Gears* was on view, the artist made a neat cut into the floor. Fine: through the rest of the gallery, he placed portacabins (previously located outside the gallery) which were straddled to fit into variously shaped and sized interior spaces, which themselves were accented with more of those neat cuts—that's it.



RICHARD WILSON,
JAMMING GEARS, 1996,
INSTALLATION VIEW.
PHOTO HUGO
GLEDINNING.

To repeat, Wilson's work—as is painfully evident in this exhibition, more so than elsewhere—participates in no real dialogue with architecture. Indeed, the only dialogue that exists here seems to have been with the planning committee working on behalf of the soon-to-be-undertaken refurbishments at the Serpentine.

I can just imagine it: "Richard, make a hole here," says the chief planner while pointing at a section of the gallery floor that is to be dug up anyway; and "Maybe you could leave this part be," indicating a section of wall that is not to be disturbed. The site of the Serpentine, after six months of renovation, promises to be a more interesting sight than what we have here. A final irony: Wilson holes through, and subsequently destroys, the section of the wall in the Serpentine bookshop containing texts on art, architecture, and their historic relationships.

Alex Coles

Martin Kersels

Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York

September 7 - October 19, 1996

Before he earned his MFA in visual art, Martin Kersels spent a decade in the Los Angeles performance collective Shrimps. The troupe's signature style was a blend of slapstick comedy and modern dance—but most often it came off as a kind of goofy freneticism. Similar energy shows up in Kersels's solo art work, though restrained by the cool cynicism and logical triangulation of Conceptual art.