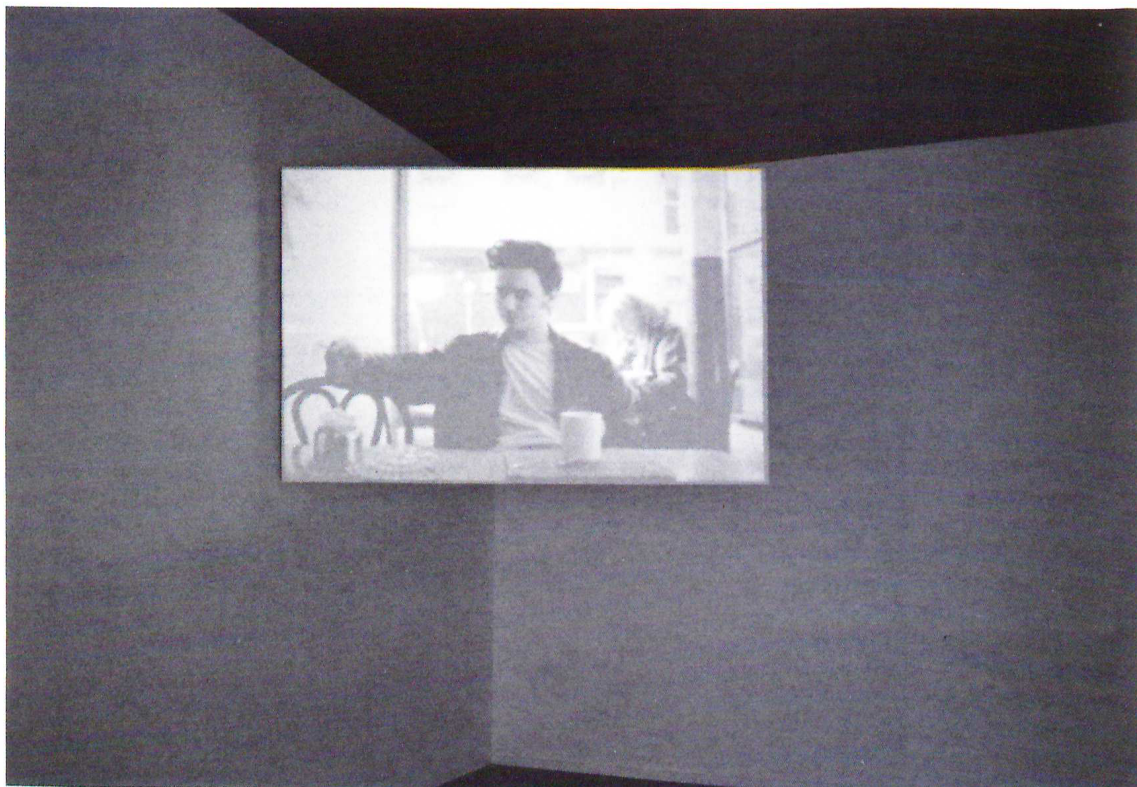


Mark Lewis

A Sense of the End
1996



that fail to coalesce, leaving an open-ended, and disturbing situation.

Joachim Koester's series of photographs, *Day for Night, Christiana*, 1996, is also intended to be disturbing, but relies rather too much on cosmetic effect. The photographs all show virtually deserted houses and buildings in the 'alternative settlement' of Christiana in Copenhagen, but they have been shot through a blue filter used in the film world to make daytime shots look as though it is night-time. But even then, nothing much seems to be happening. Sharon Lockhart's photographs also, I'm afraid, seem to suffer from the same lack of purpose. Carefully posed, lit and shot, these would-be cinematic photographs are all too static and inconsequential, lacking the recourse to semi-familiar coding that characterised Cindy Sherman's early work with film stills.

The vocabulary of film has clearly influenced a new generation of artists in ways that differ importantly from the Structural Cinema of the 60s and 70s. Playing with the codes of cinema rather than of film, these artists also manage to reference a wider range of concerns than the merely formal. In so doing, they often succeed in not only tampering with but also restoring the power of the cinematic experience. ■

Michael Gibbs is an artist and critic based in Amsterdam.

■ Jane & Louise Wilson

Lisson Gallery London February 18 to April 1

Until about 60 years ago, Greenham Common near the Kennet River was one of the Berkshire Commons; it grew heather and supported rough grazing. In 1938, the owner, Lord of the Manor Baxendale, put 880 acres of his Greenham Lodge Estate up for public auction, on sale with its ancient manorial rights and privileges. In 1939

the local Newbury Corporation (now District Council) purchased most of it at about 25p an acre. Local councillors announced that full privilege of access and use for Newbury inhabitants had been secured, and that the Common would be preserved.

In 1941 the Air Ministry requisitioned Greenham Common, and an airfield was soon constructed. Commoners' rights, they claimed, were 'suppressed' though not 'extinguished'. Although in 1947 the Common was in fact derequisitioned, the Air Ministry refused to restore its original status, and offered the Newbury Corporation a cash compensation. Sometime thereafter, the Common became a US Air Force base, filled with planes on constant 'Reflex Alert' and loaded with nuclear bombs ready to fly to the Soviet Union at a moment's notice.

On February 28, 1958, an American B-47 bomber perpetually awaiting take-off on the runway and packed with nuclear weaponry caught fire. The aircraft was engulfed in a fireball when a wing-tip tank, carrying 1,700 gallons of fuel, was accidentally dropped from another aeroplane flying overhead. The bomb aboard burned, releasing deadly uranium and plutonium oxide powder several miles around the base. The conventional explosive in the warhead also blew, helping to scatter radioactive particles. The magnesium-based chemical fires of both the aircraft and its payload burned vigorously for five days; it is reported that service personnel were killed or injured during the accident.

Since 1960 scientists have detected unusually high radioactive readings in the area, centring on the Greenham Common runway. The findings were written in a secret report that has become the object of a suspected cover-up. It is claimed that 10-20 grammes of uranium were released, and government studies have confirmed an unusually high incidence of radiation-linked cancer among local children.

In 1979, NATO decided to site 96 Ground Launched Cruise Missiles at Greenham Common, which signalled the birth of a mass citizens' protest. In 1981 women set up camps, and fierce confrontation and litigation

steadily ensued, leading to evictions, arrests and imprisonments. After a lengthy legal battle reaching the High Courts, on March 24, 1997 the land was sold to Greenham Common Community Trust for £7m, with a 144-acre, £2.3m 'Enterprise Centre' to be jointly developed by the Trust and Newbury District Council. This has been much opposed by the Women of Greenham, still determined to preserve the Common and the countryside. The debated proposal for the site includes a Museum, infrastructure for technology-based businesses, as well as leisure and entertainment facilities themed around a water park. The Common, in any case, remains part of an INF treaty which allows for Russian Military inspection at any time until 2001.

This forms the indispensable background to *Gamma*, 1999, Jane & Louise Wilson's four-screen video projection shot at the Greenham Common buildings which is among the few redeeming moments in the airbase's sad 60-year history. The Wilson twins have portrayed themselves stalking the abandoned, yellow-grey office architecture wearing sensible shoes and sexless uniforms, mechanically signalling red alerts on broken machinery and flirting with the double-entendre signage ('No Lone Zone', 'Two-Man Policy').

Not long after the Lord of Greenham Manor casually sold his Berkshire grasslands and unwittingly set the countryside on a long, dismal path of contamination and conflict, in the US artist Edward Hopper painted his famous *Office at Night*, 1940. Hopper's painting has the

same filing-cabinet chill of the empty airbase, but was replete with the tantalising suggestion of pre-Cold War sex between the male boss, seated powerfully behind his dingy desk, and his busy, curvy secretary. This pre-feminist, pre-video, pre-digitalia world has been thoroughly replaced by the Wilson twins' high-tech, wall-sized, girls-on-top picture of the same dreary, empty offices, transformed some 60 years later. Hamming it up in the command centre and zooming in on top-security control panels, the irreverent Wilson sisters are effectively enacting their own disarmament policy. All the history that exploded around Greenham Common and art across the bulk of the century is what gives meaning to *Gamma*, a fin-de-siècle work brimming with revolution and spirit. ■

Gilda Williams is a writer and commissioning editor at Phaidon Press.

■ Janet Hodgson

Bluecoat Gallery Liverpool March 5 to April 17

During a quiet period at the gallery, Janet Hodgson employed a film crew and technicians to convert the white walled space into a set, recreating the sort of decor you might have found in the same building last century when it was a boarding school. Using eight cameras, the



Jane & Louise Wilson
Mirrored Figure 1999

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