

# David Claerbout

## Exhibition Information

### Exhibition Events

#### Thursday 27 October

7pm, Gallery 1

Pernille Spence, course tutor for Time Based Art at Duncan and Jordanstone, will lead a gallery tour and explore the nature of time in Claerbout's work.

#### Thursday 17 November

7pm, Gallery 1

Join artist David Claerbout in an informal talk about his work.

These events are **free** – just turn up.

### Dundee Contemporary Arts

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Supported by Scottish Arts Council and Dundee City Council

This exhibition brings together six video installations by the Belgian artist David Claerbout made between 1996 and 2005. Transforming the visual impact of both photography and film his work utilises high-end technologies and digital media to stunning effect. By animating still images, and filming everyday natural phenomena such as the movement of wind through the leaves on a tree, and the consistent movement of the sun, his large scale video installations offer a sense of 'timelessness', an almost continual present.

Claerbout's work can be understood as situated at the threshold of photography and film, the point at which the boundaries between the two media become blurred. His installations often intertwine specific qualities of both media - the stillness of photographs and the movement of film – but they are never quite one thing or the other. Using new digital techniques he is able almost to 'slow' down time redefining our relationship with the conventional narratives of films or images.

8 October –  
3 December 2005

Closest to a feature film in appearance *The Bordeaux Piece*, 2004, relays a short dramatic episode between three characters, a woman and two men, set in the grounds of a stunning villa designed by Rem Koolhaas. The action in the work would at first seem to be based on a conventional narrative structure, that of the dialogue – voices – of the main characters. However, this part has been largely severed from the ambient soundtrack which places the action within a specific time and place and can only be heard through the headphones provided. By separating the soundtracks in this way Claerbout presents two very different measures of time within the same work – that dictated by the speed of narrative, and that dictated by the speed of nature.

This is further enhanced by the realisation that this work is not an ordinary repetition or loop and that although the main characters, camera shots and story stay the same, each time the scene is replayed it is at a slightly later time in the day. Our concept of time in this work is dictated by our awareness of the slow and steady movement of the sun, the changing sounds of the birds and insects and the constant rustle of leaves in the breeze. In *The Stack*, 2002 it is also the cyclical nature of the sunlight (or truly of the earth around the sun) that allows us to see any

action occurring in this almost still image. Shot underneath a network of freeways in Texas this 36 minute film remains focused on a single view point of concrete pillars and it is only the light provided by the sun that allows us to see more clearly different parts of the entire image.

The earliest work in the exhibition and perhaps one of the most hypnotic is presented on a monitor on the floor offering a more intimate sense of scale in relation to the larger projections. *Cat and Bird in Peace*, 1996 portrays an incredibly poignant moment between two animals, a cat and a bird, the artists' pets. When the two animals are placed side by side in the box there is an almost sickening tension as to the possibility of violence or destruction. However, in the end they seem to be totally unaware of each other and even of the camera placed in front of them. They are happily at peace. Filmed in real time the camera acts as a witness to this event and presents us with a documentary which is both frightening and fascinating. The tension created was actually triggered by our anticipation of how the animals might react to each other rather than anything that took place.

*Kindergarten Antonio Sant'Elia*, 1932, 1998 is one of a number of works that Claerbout has made using found

archival photographs or postcards. Normally photographs arrest the passage of time by fixing an image firmly in the past. It is only through our imaginations that we are able to animate a scene to bring it back to life. This particular image has been blown up into an almost life size video projection and portrays a group of children all wearing white pinafores in a playground (a Kindergarten) outside on a late summer's afternoon. Slowly it becomes evident that a subtle transformation has affected the surface of the image, the leaves of two small saplings are moving as if by a light breeze. Claerbout has '*nursed the image back to life*' and in doing so invokes a poignant sense of innocence and loss.

This sense of nostalgia is also evident in *Shadow Piece*, 2005 another black and white photograph which has been digitally altered. Looking down the steps of a large, empty public building the camera is focused on the wide glass doors which look out onto a sunny street. Every now and then a person walks towards the door, and tries to get in, after rattling the handle they each give up realising that the door is locked. This extremely atmospheric piece is set in the 1950's and serves as a metaphor for the failed utopian dreams of modernism – the promise of a clean, orderly and brightly lit future. The first

work in the exhibition this piece creates an entrance way to the rest of the show, providing a door through to Gallery 1 which is almost hidden by the false wall constructed to hold the projection. In this sense Claerbout's installation makes us aware of our own personal struggles and our search for a more optimistic future.

**David Claerbout** (b.1969, Kortrijk, Belgium) lives and works between Antwerp and Berlin. He has exhibited world-wide in recent years to increasing critical acclaim. This is the first time his work has been shown in Scotland.

**For more information about the artist please visit the Information Room just outside the gallery entrance where you will find books, articles and reviews of his work.**

This exhibition has been organised in collaboration with Lenbachhaus, Munich; DAAD, Berlin and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and there is a catalogue to accompany it with two essays by David Green.