

We are proud to inaugurate with *Associations* on June 20, 2013, John Smith's first solo exhibition in the Rhineland. Most recently he was shown here in 2009 in a group exhibition in the Temporary Gallery, Cologne. In 2010 he participated in the Berlin Biennial.

Besides *Lost Sound*, a video that was created between 1998 and 2001 in collaboration with Graeme Miller, we will show two earlier works, *Associations* (1975) and *The Black Tower* (1985-87).

In *Lost Sound* we see fragments of audio-tape that are lying in gutters or hanging on fences and trees in Hackney, a borough of London that has many immigrants amongst its population. The images of the audio-tapes are accompanied by popular music, mainly from Africa or Asia. However, we have no guarantee at all that the sounds are in fact taken from the pieces of tape that are shown in the filmed images. On the contrary, "*Lost Sound* [...] playfully separates signifier and signified" (Ian Christie, *English Eccentric*, p. 64). While at the beginning of the video the "documentary", authentic character prevails and while – thus – it is at first suggested that we are looking at images (and hearing sounds) that are true to life, the esthetic alienation, the rhythm, and the manipulation of image and sound gradually become more and more visible. With the supposedly documentary, but ever more intensely structured images and sounds, Smith creates a quasi-narrative sequence of images that have to deal with the location and its population.

Associations does not play with associations that are brought to life by music (and that let us think of the immigrants that lead a new life in London's East End), but rather with the associations that are triggered by the English language in its multi-significance, especially when it is spoken (for example in the pairings of words such as "to / two" or "generally / general"). A didactic monotone voice reads out loud a text by the American psycholinguist Herbert H. Clark, which dwells on the principles of the associative play on words. Smith illustrates this text with an ever faster sequence of images that are related associatively to the single words and the syllables from which they are composed, exploring the ambiguities of language to suggest alternative meanings for these fragments of speech: "Smith sensuously stages the interaction of sound and image levels, producing hilarious combinations of words and images that do not always explain themselves immediately, for example when an ass, a sewing machine, or a horde of warriors on horseback appear in the film. The high speed of the image sequence causes the viewer to quickly lose track of the content and increasingly concentrate on the audiovisual stimuli of the association game" (Ingo Clauß, *Association Games*, p. 13f.).

The Black Tower, the third film we are showing, has a – in comparison with the two works described above – conventional structure. A black tower seems to hunt the narrator and to force him into a

state of paranoia: "The story is as simple as it is sinister: a man notices a black tower, seeing it again and again from different locations all over London; to his dismay, he realizes that the tower is visible to him alone. After an especially eerie encounter with the tower, he decides to stay home to avoid its presence" (Kathrin Meyer, John Smith's *The Black Tower: Close-Up Views of What Cannot Be Shown*, p. 21f.). This psychodrama is created by simple images, mostly shot with a static camera: "I collected a series of images and then wrote a story around them. ... I wanted the film to play with the edge between immersion in a psychological narrative and seeing the film for what it is – a material construction, an assemblage of assorted parts. So there are gradual movements between totally abstract manipulations of images and very straightforward narration" (John Smith in: John Smith talking film with Cate Elwes: *Trespassing beyond the frame*, p. 67).

Special thanks to Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin

Literature:

Ian Christie, *English Eccentric*, in: John Smith, ed. Tanya Leighton and Kathrin Meyer, Mousse Publishing, Milan / Sternberg Press, Berlin 2013, S. 47-70.

Ingo Clauß, *Association Games*, in: John Smith. *Worst Case Scenario. Filme von 1975 bis 2003*, Exhibition catalogue Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen 2012, S. 13-15.

Kathrin Meyer, John Smith's *The Black Tower: Close-up Views of What Cannot Be Shown*, in: John Smith, ed. Tanya Leighton and Kathrin Meyer, Mousse Publishing, Milan / Sternberg Press, Berlin 2013, S. 19-33.

John Smith in: John Smith talking film with Cate Elwes: *Trespassing beyond the frame*, in: John Smith. *Film and Video Works 1972-2002*, ed. Josephine Lanyon and Mark Cosgrove, Picture This Moving Image / Watershed Media Centre 2002, S. 64- 71.

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