

The Venice Biennale: Teleportation and a Cold Morning

53, Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, Venezia, Italy, 6 June to 22 November 2009

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CANADA, FOR THE 53rd VENICE BIENNALE, PRESENTS
 THE WORK OF THE FILM MAKER, MARK LEWIS, WITH FOUR
 COMMISSIONED MOTION PICTURES, TWO MAKING USE OF
 THE CINEMATIC TECHNIQUE OF REAR PROJECTIONS.
 TWO ARE STRAIGHT DOCUMENTARIES.



THE VENICE BIENNALE

Teleportation and a Cold Morning

By Julie Oakes

The Canadian Pavilion, designed by Enrico Perussutti in 1958, references a seashell that curls in upon itself. To facilitate Lewis' projections, the design team of Mark Wasitu and Jennifer Leung incorporated a series of variant gradations of darkening devices and reversed the flow of visitors so that the shallow entry becomes a hallway of transition between the Venetian light of day and the gallery space. Mark Lewis' *Cold Morning* presents four large projected pieces, all silent. Like pictures in a gallery, they co-exist without interfering with one another.

Lewis' work is flat footed, basic, non-dogmatic – cinema that relates to the spectacle of place in a non-theatrical relationship to the situation. Yet the work dislodges a practical rendition creating a paradox of plasticity akin to teleportation.

The position of the viewer is that of the third plane of action. The result of the rear projection is that the action seems to take place in a protected, dream-like, slightly alienated atmosphere. In *Nathan Phillips Square, A Winter Night, Skating*, the romantic motion of the whirling skaters seems more like a memory than an actual experience. It is truly an atmosphere conducive to romance for it is

an uninhibited space in which the action between the skaters can be developed without the attendant distractions of virtual reality.

In *The Fight* engaged pugilists are immersed in personal interaction heightened by the tension that is criss-crossing between them. Lewis had seen just such a fight in France when a racial imbalance had set off the tension. His response was to watch, entranced by the violence, for a fight can only end in a shift in the involvement. Although in viewing *The Fight* we are placed in optimal pivotal time, we are left suspended for we never understand the outcome, unlike in the movies where action leads to a resolution.

For *Cold Morning*, the piece that centers on a homeless man, there was a negotiation and a man who was not entirely in possession of his faculties became the focus of the gaze of the camera, raw material to be considered by the art world. His humanity is made clearer as he folds his bedding, moving his things about and this attribute of ordering brings him into our range. Lewis has said that he makes films about what fascinates him in ordinary life hoping to bring forth a sympathetic interest. The film attests to this man's humanity. He is abject but he has his own logic.

On the edge of a building (TD Centre, 5⁴th floor) from behind a vague frame, the movement pans while below the action changes. Through the use of a shallow perspective in the foreground, we are looking out of a floor to ceiling window, (which is really

the floor of the Canadian pavilion), looking down. There is a potential for vertigo, (Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* used rear projection), which is balanced by the other three pieces co-existing in the same place, on the same wall, in the pan of a sweep of the eye, for they neutralise the unnerving illusion.

Cinema was built upon illusion and by its slight of hand we have been tricked into believing what is virtually impossible. We have participated in the fakery, willingly dispensing with reason and going along with the deception in order to take the ride. Lewis, by representing what is perceived in an unreal way, takes us on small journeys where believability is kept balanced just enough to allow for the trip.

Barbara Fisher, the Canadian Commissioner, in summing up the path she has been on since the inception of this project said, "To be able to plan and commission a project by an artist whose work I believed in and to be able to bring it forward in such a context was a privilege."

I felt much the same, being there, in the Canadian Pavilion with Venezia as my rear projection, standing in front of Mark Lewis' *Cold Morning*. It was a privilege to be virtually on the third dimensional plane. □

Mark Lewis
Back Story, 2009
 35 mm and 4K Digital
 Dimensions variable
 Courtesy: Galerie Serge Le Borgne, Paris, Monte Clark Gallery, Vancouver, Clark & Faria, Toronto, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Le Grand Café, Saint-Nazaire, BRITDOC Foundation, London, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Cologne

EXHIBITION

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