

## Locale - Tenses and Tensions

The conundrum of the status of the image has engaged western thinkers from Plato and Pliny to Baudrillard and Blanchot. At the centre of this perennial debate lies the precarious condition of the relationship of the image to its object which, in effect, speaks both of its similarity and its difference. Moreover, this fissure, this gap, is exactly the space in which the image may separate itself away from its object, to endure, to persist. With the invention of technologies to make recordings of experience - visual and sonic images - came the interruption of the inexorable flow of time as the present fell into the past, in effect proposing then as now. Famously, Roland Barthes, contemplating a photograph of his dead mother as a child, noted the baffling and spectral tense of such images: this will have been. Each of the three artists in Locale, each with their own medium - the still photograph, the video, and recorded sound - offer us a rich investigation of what we might call 'the grammar of the image' at the heart of their practices.

Consider Peter Bobby's unpeopled photographs of those immaculately styled spaces in show homes contrived in their every particular to seduce the viewer. Here we have the phenomenon of the doubled image, the image of an image, Bobby's preened photographic surfaces acting as both relays and amplifiers, transmitting these glossy confections with a transparent fixity. For these spaces and the objects which inhabit them are fixed images too, every flower a generic image of a flower, every abstract painting a generic exemplar in a perfect harmony with the untouched and untouchable soft furnishings, all contingencies erased in pursuit of ideal, aspirational spaces. Their glossy perfection is hard won and immaculate - a word which, in its Latin origins, means 'without stain'. The price paid for this condition is the abolition of time itself, since that would

render the spaces vulnerable to the contamination of contingency, the stain of change. No, these vases, we sense, cannot move or be moved, these chairs need their exacting symmetry, the concealed light sources must perpetually regulate and smooth out all possibilities of ebb and flow. In effect, these photographs offer us a tenseless present: this will have been, the future anterior, is replaced by a glacial 'this is'. The stillness of these spaces and the objects within them is best conveyed by the term 'stock-stillness', a term that defies logic in its redundant doubling of the absolute term 'still' but satisfies experience. However, this alluring promise of stasis, this abolition of the future tense, is, in truth, curdled with contingency: for these are in fact photographs of temporary constructions, honed to a honeyed but fleeting perfection. Bobby's photographs would appear to conspire in the seduction as there can be no 'decisive moment' in his delivery of this mythic, perpetual present; he does not wait for the prefabricated unit to be removed from the site or the construction to be demolished or for the unit to be made over in order to sell the next phase of the development.

Yet, just as these photographs offer relish and delight in the perfections they portray, a closer look reveals some ripples disturbing their ostensibly imperturbable surfaces. For Bobby makes the most discreet and precisely gauged interventions: an elided space here, an unexpected reflection there, or a blank walled hiatus separating one zone from another, signalling exactly sufficient to detain and sustain our contemplation. He makes us think about these spaces which have been designed with the intention to undo thinking, to hide their ideology of aspirational consumerism under their artful transparency. Paradoxically, by arresting and stabilising these images, he returns time to them - time to think.

Paul Kilsby 2005