

PRESS RELEASE

## DAVID CLAERBOUT

22 May – 1 August 2009

196a Piccadilly, London W1J 9DY

Opening reception: Thursday 21 May 2009, 6 – 8 pm

Since the mid 1990s, David Claerbout has made extraordinary video installations, often combining moving and still images to unsettle the delineation between past and present. Impacting subtle philosophical reflections, his works are strikingly sensual, using every constitutive element available — pixel constellations, image sequences, speed, speech, music and ambient sound, installation environment and the technologies used to convey these — to elicit new modes of perceptual absorption. Three new projection pieces will be on display at Hauser & Wirth London. Although very different on first appearance, they each have a common concern with sound; for all the painterly and statuesque qualities that Claerbout invests in these moving images, he describes the works as 'audio pieces, embedded in video.'

*Riverside* (2007–2008), installed in the main gallery, consists of a two-channel video installation with stereo audio headphones. One projection depicts the story of a woman, the other that of a man. Set in a valley with a small river below, both characters unconsciously move towards each other, engulfed in their individual stories. They remain separated both geographically and in time, like the projection screens on which they make their journeys. He is moving from East to West, while she starts from the opposite direction. At one point they both cross a river at the same location, where a dead tree trunk traverses it. Precisely at the point where the landscape would geographically join the two characters, the viewer realises with certainty that the man and the woman are in the same valley, in the same place, but at different moments in time. There is no reconciliation but for the sound of the river, which brings the viewer to the subtle protagonist of the work. During the 25 minutes journey, each film has a 'broken' audio-channel. Her film lacks the right channel, while his lacks the left. As they both sit on the tree trunk, the sound of the river unfolds like an open space in our brain. *Riverside* translates the lack of narrative resolution into an audio phenomenon: that of aural completion through stereophony, after an impaired journey.

Downstairs in the vault room, *Sunrise* (2009), an 18 minute video installation, thrusts viewers into near-total darkness, requiring their eyes to acclimatise to the film which depicts a nocturnal scene inside a villa. A maid is seen setting up breakfast, the deliberate movements of this archetypal figure elegantly conforming to the severe geometries and exact proportions of the house. Through its exaggerated sense of composition the architecture presents itself as a sleeping monument to a past Utopia, or perhaps a prison for life. Yet rather than witnessing its stirring to life, the camera follows the girl as she finishes her shift and cycles off into the

surrounding countryside. The darkness gives way to sudden and brilliant sunlight, momentarily blinding the viewer again as Rachmaninov's *Vocalise* is heard. The balance of the film turns in these final minutes from mute perfection to a flood of emotion. Although filmed as a classical end sequence, it feels like a beginning.

Time is suspended in *The American Room (1st movement)* (2009), a single-channel video installation shot and shown in the gallery's eponymous upstairs space. In Claerbout's film a group of people are seated for an intimate concert, yet one that is halted in time with the singer forever about to sing. The perspective is that of a slow camera which roves around the audience, providing lingering motion picture portraits of persons arrested in immobility. In so doing it allows for an almost stereoscopic experience of a single moment, as though the viewer were also there then. In fact, the listeners were not filmed in the room but against a blue-screen and then painstakingly composited to form the assembled group. A three dimensional — virtual — space allows for infinite camera movement, yet this has been purposely constrained to mimic a conventional camera's path. The music travels with each camera position; it connects the spectator to the listener, dictating the movement of the piece and advocating continuity.

*David Claerbout was born in 1969 in Kortrijk, Belgium, and lives and works in Antwerp. He studied at the National Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, from 1992 to 1995, and benefited from the DAAD, Berlin, between 2002 and 2003. A major solo exhibition of his work 'The Shape of Time' opened at the Pompidou Center, Paris (2007), and toured to MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge MA (2008), Kunstmuseum, St Gallen (2008), Morris and Helen Belkin art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (2008), and De Pont, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg (2009). Other solo shows include 'Background Time — Gezeiten' at Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2005); Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre (2005); and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2005).*

GALLERY HOURS Tuesday to Saturday 10 am – 6 pm

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS ZÜRICH:

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JOAN MITCHELL. Sunflowers, Upstairs gallery, 7 June – 25 July 2009

PIPILOTTI RIST, 29 August – 17 October 2009

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS LONDON:

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SUBODH GUPTA, 196a Piccadilly and 15 Old Bond Street, 1 – 31 October 2009

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