

Elisabeth Ballet, exhibition at Matt's Gallery, London, 11 April - 10 June 2001

Subtle and minimal, Elisabeth Ballet's work always invites a closer look from the viewer. At Matt's Gallery, behind the dry appearance of industrial materials and static videos, a self-restrained sensibility transpires.

In the first space, one large sculpture expresses the duality that marks the whole show. A shiny chrome gate finds a response in a mat and rough concrete brick wall. Both elements that compose this closed territory are outlines of familiar structures, but yet do not directly refer to anything precise. Whereas one element is vaguely reminded of a crowd barrier, the other one suggests foundations that chase their own tails instead of building up.

In the same room, bringing about another direction in the sculpture's interpretation, two parallel television monitors are showing a succession of empty shop windows in Berlin, one at night, one by day. From the architecture only a discontinuity of void spaces remains. Dealing with the conjunction of time and space, the videos also reveal Ballet's recurrent interest in the Sculpture's physical properties: a catalyst of the relationships between inside and outside.

The other space is an offshoot from the main space a corridor by the windows that have been screened off. This gives the strange feeling that the landscape stops at this point, then may continue further on.

Two videos follow on from each other, this time linearly instead of simultaneously - another perception of time. They show the same static view of a courtyard, one shot by day, the other shot in the early hours. Like in the sculpture and in the Berlin videos, it is a subtle shift that alters the symmetrical resemblance of the two scenes. Behind one of the windows, in the semi-public sphere, a man draws a curtain, appears naked in front of us, and stays there for a while, immobile. We are part of the private space where the camera is situated, hearing the noise of the artist at work going back and forth into the flat. The apparition, strangely theatrical in its very humanity, does not actually deal with voyeurism, but with time passing. In this dead time, the exhibitionist's obsession meets the artist's activity. As in much of Ballet's work, finding the degree of human existence inside non-objects or non-places is the main subject. Even if the interrelation between the different sources has been part of an unconscious process from the artist, there is an extreme rigour in the way the works have been installed in the space. Elisabeth Ballet apparently wanted to avoid the site-specificity, familiar to Matt's exhibitions. Actually, once marked by the strong presence of these works, the space appears even more tangible. One begins to notice the gallery's windows, the columns or the ceiling's concrete cast. As a result, our perception has been affected enough by the works so that everything around appears acutely significant.

Marie Anne Lanavère