

Daniela & Linda Dostálková: Dan Walwin: Relief

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Curatorial statement for the exhibition Dan Walwin: Relief.

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It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality.
(Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 1986)

Imagine waking up in a world yet to be discovered, a world where a whole new language has to be invented to express your observations. A world that is both unknown and familiar, but without drama. And yet it stands or falls with individual values that are grounded in a new community. A community that is somehow already familiar, and even though you are a newcomer, you become a calm and focused observer.

When writing her essay *Three Guineas* (1938), Virginia Woolf made a written note that to tell a different story, she would have to reinvent language. Dan Walwin's cinematic language defines not words, but primarily new communities and arrangements of things, coordinated into precisely crystallized systems subject to their own logic. Speech separated from language and used by members of a community does not demand to be mastered; on the contrary, we are given a great number of impulses towards developing our sensibilities. If we adopt an attitude of our own towards fictional entities and are willing to accept mysteries, we can experience feelings of closeness, connection, and kinship.

In *Relief*, Dan Walwin uses video, sound, sculptures, and installations to create fictional reconstructions of seemingly familiar environments. His world offers a set of personal narratives that create a world of logic for themselves. The works made over the past few years and especially for this exhibition have an

enduring pervasiveness and a remarkably consistent impact. Tension is a key component of our response, no matter what exactly is unfolding before us. The stuck-ness, the breakdown, the collapse, or the anticlimax are all kinds of romantic impulses that lie not in an implicit explanation, but in the meaning that we investigatively search for in the small revelations, the sand piles, the cavities, the inscriptions on the doors, the actions of the characters. Stories without stories and without endings lead to universality. “I hate endings. I just hate them,” said Sam Shepard in an interview with *The Paris Review*. “The beginnings are definitely the most thrilling, the middles are confusing, and the endings are a disaster.” Apparently, Shepard is not the only one who dislikes endings. Dan Walwin also avoids them, his endings are slippery and offer unspoken potential.

It is the *incidental* mise-en-scene that becomes the object of our attention in order to trace its essence in the overall non-plotted composition of the film. Dense and authentic in appearance, the combination of objects, installations, props, costumes, make-up, lighting, casting and staging of the actors in space follows a hidden logic and its own rules. The artist stages in unwanted (abandoned, not used by developers) or currently unused places – close to suburban zones and far from the centre, in places of decay and ruins. In his text *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, the French anthropologist Marc Augé coined the term *non-places*. He refers to them as spaces of transience where people remain anonymous and which do not have enough meaning to be considered as ‘places’ or spaces for encounters and identification with the community. In his work, Dan Walwin uses such forgotten and marginal corners as alternative settings in which to experience sense of stability and coexistence in this unprecedented world.

We are given enough clues to gradually build up a complete picture and derive from it the nature of the works themselves. The aim is not to analyse developments or to tell a story, but to find a form that reflects the present or the near future. And although narrative is generally considered to be the main product of audiovisual output, it can be said that its absence sustains our imagination. Facts may be presented truthfully, but their explication may be misinterpreted; what is more interesting than veracity at the moment, however, is the nature of the place, the time, the community, the human and non-human actors being studied – and, above all, the compelling nature of the recording. The impression is that the apparatus that captures all this is a thinking apparatus. Its presence is perceived because its mechanical and robotic movement can replicate those of the object being recorded. Thus,

when we observe a technical structure (scaf-folding, slats, clamps, dams, barriers, fences, screens) in the image, it is as if the camera were also attached to a similar device. The smooth, jerky, clumsy movement from side to side is then enhanced by the frequent phenomenon of an image within an image or a sudden change in scale. Perhaps this is why we can abandon the integrative and reflective dimension of the narrative and concentrate on revealing what is hidden in the footage.

We are now entering a space. Get ready for near-absolute darkness. The gloom will slow us down immediately. Even though the sensitivity of the eye's retina is very high, when passing from light to darkness we can only distinguish individual works after a certain time. Navigation within the gallery is enabled by illuminated signs, hanging textile surfaces, and accompanying texts on the walls and stairs. The large-scale photographs and television screens that serve as sources of light not only guide us, but also play with the reversed roles of function and form – forcing us to rearrange established patterns, and perhaps, at the same time, to glimpse the complex mechanism of exhibition making. The bright, large-scale projections draw our attention – we sit down to watch them on comfortable benches covered with a soothing, mint green fabric; while at other times we wander through the space with headphones on, eager to find the source of the broadcast. The visual image often doesn't match the sound, but if we are willing to accept a broader, indirect interpretation of the term “storytelling,” we can arrive at a fascinating new meaning of the word “symbiosis.” If we think of the exhibition as a medium demanding our attention, then we can expect an experience full of possibilities.

Daniela and Linda Dostálková

Dan Walwin (***1986**) creates fictionalized spaces through intricate combinations of mediums, such as video, sound, sculpture, writing and installation. Between literal and imaginative spaces, they create a world of logic for themselves, carefully staged to form encounters with an audience. The resulting works might be playful or charged with intensity, but are always appealing to heightened senses, to offer a sense of rewarding disorientation.

Studied at Goldsmiths College, London, and was artist-in-residence at Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam. Presented exhibitions and screenings at Kunstverein Freiburg, Glasgow International, CCA Prague, Whitechapel Gallery, Rennes Biennale, Frans Hals Museum, KM21 Den Haag, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Cell Project Space, South London Gallery, Rencontres Internationales, European Media Art Festival, Wexner Center for the Arts, LIMA, and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Dan Walwin was born in the UK, lives and works in Amsterdam.

