

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Darren Almond

Press Packet

Sholis, Brian. "Darren Almond" *ArtForum*. May 2013, pp. 326-327.

"Darren Almond, Fullmoon@TheNorthSea" *High Line* (online). October 2011.

Russeth, Andrew. "Darren Almond" *ArtForum* (online). 17 June 2010.

Ward, Ossian. "Time and Emotion" *Art World*. December-January 2008-2009, pp. 36-41.

Rushton, Susie. "Captain Moonlight" *The Independent*. 17 January 2008, pp. 12-13.

Kastner, Jeffrey. "Darren Almond" *ArtForum*. October 2005, p. 272.

"Darren Almond" *Modern Painters*. July - August 2005, pp. 109-110.

Slyce, John. "Transport Medium" *Flash Art*. January-February 2002, pp. 70-74.

Smith, Roberta. "Darren Almond" *The New York Times*. 20 October 2000.

Birnbaum, Daniel. "Openings: Darren Almond" *ArtForum*. January 2000, pp. 102-103.

Bush, Kate. "Doing Time" *Frieze*. September-October 1998, pp. 72-75.

Darren Almond

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For nearly two decades, British artist Darren Almond has demonstrated a fascination with the particular ways in which we chart and divide up time. Some of his earliest and best-known pieces involve retro-style flip clocks, including one the size of a cargo container. He has made films and photographs about trains, which are governed by precisely calibrated timetables, as well as about mines, which operate in unchanging shifts. The sixteen large-scale landscape photographs in this exhibition seem to exist outside the choreographed nature of much of Almond's other work. The pictures are part of his "Fullmoon" series, 2000–, and their varying exposure lengths are determined by the available moonlight. Yet they, too, are subject to a particular cycle: As Almond has noted, "every four weeks, there's another chance to make a photograph."

To create the images, most of which were made in the past three years, Almond traveled to all seven continents. Filled with the tropes of Romantic painting, the photographs demonstrate his preference for dramatic landscapes and are rendered with an expertness that betrays their careful construction. *Fullmoon@N. Sea*, 2009, for example, an enormous wide-screen view of snow-dusted peaks receding into the distance, has a vantage point that seems impossible. The land drops off so sharply beneath Almond's camera that you suspect he has taken the image from a helicopter—before remembering that each of these photographs must be exposed for at least fifteen minutes to gather the moon's light.



Almond has been at work on this series for some time. Early pictures mimicked the formats and trod the same ground as Paul Cézanne, Caspar David Friedrich, and J. M. W. Turner. In recent years, the artist has suggested his environmental concerns, which one can intuit obliquely with the works presented here. The show included several photographs taken at locations near where land meets water, including a somewhat disorienting, horizonless view of Cape Reinga on the northwest coast of New Zealand that is a lush rejoinder to Frederick Sommer's 1940s pictures of the Arizona desert. This subset of the show's images—made in Hawaii; the Orkney Islands; Wester Ross, in the northwest Highlands of Scotland; the mouth of the Yenisey River on Russia's Arctic coast—might hint at the precariousness of our position in these liminal spaces, a subject that is certainly at the forefront of public consciousness, given the ever-increasing threat of hurricanes and rising tides.

Yet is such interpretation overinterpretation, a form of wishful thinking? In an art world that cherishes "criticality," one often attempts to look through artworks in search of confirmation of one's own rightful thinking. The extended exposures of Almond's pictures smooth over what might be roiling waters, creating a sense of serenity that is best exemplified by *Fullmoon South Pacific*, 2012, and that might repel political readings. Here it is useful to understand the "Fullmoon" photographs in the context of Almond's other bodies of work. Many of his videos and installations, in particular those made around Auschwitz and the nickel mines in Norilsk, Russia, address the human pain absorbed by the land, and the atmospheres they create are appropriately melancholic. While these photographs do not conduct as explicit an inquest and might tempt us simply to marvel, as Almond obviously does, at the splendors of the landscape, in 2013 such sustained attention inevitably has a political dimension.

—Brian Sholis

Darren Almond,
*Fullmoon South
Pacific*, 2012.
C-print face mounted
on Perspex,
55 1/4 x 119 1/4".
From the series
"Fullmoon," 2000–.

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DARREN ALMOND, FULLMOON@THENORTHSEA



“Darren Almond’s Fullmoon@The North Sea” was the third and final installment in Landscape with Path, a series of images selected by photographer Joel Sternfeld and presented on a 25-by-75 foot billboard next to the High Line at West 18th Street.

Almond’s photograph portrays the Huangshan mountain range in China, a landscape that is synonymous with Chinese Buddhist pilgrimages, on the evening of a full moon. The image reflects Almond’s interest in geographical limits and points of arrival and departure with cultural significance. Since 1998, Almond has been making a series of landscape photographs known as the Fullmoons. Taken during a full moon with an exposure time of 15 minutes or more, these images of remote geographical locations appear ghostly, bathed in an unexpectedly brilliant light where night seems to have been turned into day.

Darren Almond’s work addresses notions of time, place, personal history, and col-

Darren Almond's work addresses notions of time, place, personal history, and collective memory. He makes sculptures, films, photographs, and works on paper based on his extensive travels, which often take him to remote locations. Many of Almond's works are filmed in wide-ranging – and often inaccessible – geographical locations such as the Arctic Circle, Siberia, the mountains in China, and the source of the Nile.



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DARREN ALMOND

June 17th, 2010



“Sometimes Still”

Matthew Marks, New York

Through June 26, 2010

I was confused from the moment I arrived at British artist Darren Almond’s new show, “Sometimes Still” on the second floor of Matthew Marks’ 24th Street gallery. The entrance to the gallery’s large exhibition space has been moved farther down the hall from its front office, and I almost crashed into a drywall when I absentmindedly went to enter. Finally spotting the new doorway, I walked down the hall, stepped through the new opening, and was engulfed in darkness.

Throughout the room, Almond has installed six video screens, though it will take a few minutes for viewers to see them: the room is otherwise devoid of light, and it takes time for even the sharpest eyes to adjust. Walking blindly around the room and staring at the video screens, one begins to spot trees, and a man in a long white robe running briskly among them. He climbs a hill, runs through a tunnel, and then disap-

pears, replaced by views of the forest. Sometimes, there are sounds: quiet chanting or the repetitive patter of the runner's feet as they step on leaves and branches.

The man is a Tendai monk (as the press release explained), and he is hiking through the black forest as part of a Buddhist ritual called kaihogyo, a seven-year series of brutal, death-courting endurance tests — 50-mile-a-day runs, a lengthy fast — that are designed to induce enlightenment. Only 46 monks have completed the course in the past four centuries, and those that quit are required to kill themselves. On a video screen in the back of the room, one of the rare monks who has completed the kaihogyo ritual sits quietly tending a fire.

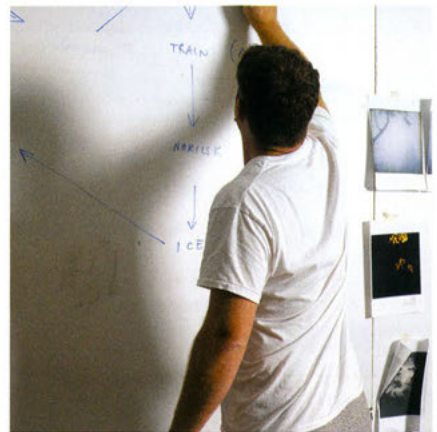
Many of Almond's previous works have played with viewers' perception of time. He has made photographs of lush landscapes using long exposures (three are on view at one of Marks' spaces two blocks south, though Almond's blurry prints look like bland souvenirs for collectors without the real estate or the cash to acquire his installation) and gigantic functioning clocks. One loses track of time in his new work, watching the stolid monk sit nearly still by the fire, surrounded by videos of the scurrying novice, who may have years of running and suffering in front of him. Obsessions — whether the kaihogyo, art, or a career — are simultaneously consuming, comforting, and inexplicable from the outside, the piece argues concisely. Formally, the work is a masterstroke, combining the bewitching phenomenological phenomena of James Turrell's darkest rooms with a sui generis piece of video art. First walking inside Almond's space, I was afraid I would lose sight of the narrow entrance and become trapped in the pitch-black room. However, some time later, as my eyes acclimated to the darkness, I began to realize — with some terror — that I didn't want to find my way out.

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FEATURE DARREN ALMOND

"While it doesn't appear, from afar, that the work has any political agenda, there is definitely a political investigation that I undergo in order to make my work"



IN THE STUDIO

DARREN ALMOND

TIME AND EMOTION

From his unprepossessing base in west London, ex-trainspotter Darren Almond orchestrates uncomfortably beautiful work addressing extreme sites: concentration camps, nuclear wastelands, toxic mines. And, like many a traveller, he finds reassurance in the regularity of trains, clocks, timetables – and the full moon

WORDS: Ossian Ward PHOTOGRAPHY: Jan Stradtman

Darren Almond has occupied a space in the same west London studios ever since leaving art college, yet there's no sense that this place holds any particular importance for him. It might be where he sits down to make his allusive and elusive art, but it's not where the magic happens, as they say.

Almond spends months at a time travelling abroad, so it's fitting that all you can see and hear out of the studio windows is the Westway, an arterial road that incessantly spews people in and out of London. An unprepossessing concrete underpass beneath this famous dual carriageway was also the unlikely site for *KN 120* (1995), Almond's first work as a "real" artist (a label his itinerant practice tirelessly resists).

"You close the door and you're faced with the conundrum of 'what do I do now?'," he says of his first steps after studenthood. "I had to start somewhere and that was how the fan piece popped up, because I'd been dragging this fan all around with me, it was like my one possession." He then took the odd decision to make a scaled-up, working version of this bog-standard KN-model ceiling fan and attach it to the underside of the motorway. "I climbed up, drilled the holes and connected it to the power with 200 metres of cable. I turned it on as a signal that I was in the building, that I was present."

For his first exhibition a year later, Almond made *A Real Time Piece*, in which he transmitted a live broadcast from a static camera inside the studio, this time proving the opposite – that he wasn't there. "I went from being an abstract sculptor who spent ages asking myself these really formal questions like what shape and colour to make things, to pondering movement and time." It wasn't so much what was in the studio (notably two more fans and one of Almond's now



1 *KN 120* (1995), film footage of *KN 120*: aluminium fan, motor, UV light & cable, 30 minute loop

2 *A Real Time Piece* (1996), live video broadcast with sound, dimensions variable

3 *Tide* (2008), 600 digital wall clocks, Perspex, electro-mechanics, steel, vinyl, computerized electronic control system and components

Opposite: Scenes in and around Darren Almond's studio



trademark flip clocks on the wall above his desk), as what was possible outside this immediate, closed frame of reference. Almond was looking for precisely those things beyond the artist's laboratory that he couldn't grasp or control.

Instead of being a factory for churning out works, the studio functions as Almond's production and planning base, as well as a familiar point of return after every expedition. When we meet, he's just come back from Japan and a visit to the distance-running Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei, who build up to 100 consecutive days of back-to-back circuits of their mountain: "They pass out and then jump back up and start again; it's the mist that rehydrates them. I only did one day of staying awake and it was shattering, delirious." So, like a snail or a camel, he carries everything he needs on his back – usually still and video cameras – but portability isn't the overriding concern. "The main ingredient of a film is time; not light, not image, not narrative – but time."

For someone seemingly so obsessed with time (in addition to the flip clock, his work features time-lapse photography as well as pneumatic, digital and electric timekeepers), Almond's is no particular hurry, with no hectic schedule to keep. He thinks more than he makes and, as he admits, "Things gestate over a long period of time and sometimes just hit a dead end. Often the only way to enable me to make work is to start another body of work."

Take his epic tripartite series of films about railways for example: the first, of the Sky Train in Wuppertal, Germany, was made in 1995; the second, of the ghost train in Vienna's Prater park, came in 1999; and the last work, set in Tibet, was only finished and exhibited in 2007, after a lengthy hiatus of looking, literally, for the right track. "And then all of a sudden I hear about this railway being built five kilometres above sea level across Tibet,

DRAWN TOGETHER

and 'ding!', – Almond mimes a light going off in his head – “I was there within a month of its opening. Railways are always implemented by nations that have just invaded another nation, as happened in America and in Africa. But when you make a journey you are confronted by things that you're totally unaware of, and they start to seep into you. So while it doesn't appear, from afar, that the work has any political agenda, there is definitely a political investigation that I undergo in order to make my work.”

He then relates his epiphany during a four-hour chanting session at the Samye monastery in Lhasa – the same human chorus that provides much of the soundtrack to the final film in the railway trilogy, *In The Between* (2007). “This amazing primal sound does its job remarkably. You sit there and start to reflect.” And reflect you do, watching his 15-minute meditation on the thorny Tibetan situation. “It's an ancient kingdom that has been totally shattered by these steel tracks and it's becoming this hotspot way up in the clouds, right in the middle of China and India.”

Almond's train trilogy has much deeper roots, because he still has all the timetables and notebooks he amassed as a trainspotting youth on the platforms of Wigan. This lingering interest feeds an ongoing series of commemorative trainplates – in which he interchanges train names and numbers for enigmatic phrases such as “Isolation”, “Drawn Together” or the name of his latest show – but has also led him to an altogether darker destination. “I had my fascination with the railway, which was a very liberating experience, seeing streams of consciousness flying by in the middle of the countryside. I would wait 20 minutes for the next one and wonder where all those people were going. And then I realised that they could have been going to prison, or even to their death, had it been another day.”

After attempting a version of *A Real Time Piece*, but transmitted from inside HMP



- 1 *Coupled* (2007), cast aluminium and paint, 20 x 189cm
- 2 *Oswiecim, March 1997* (1997), two 8mm parallel films with sound, dimensions variable
- 3 *Geisterbahn* (1999), single screen B&W video film, DVD, 9 minute loop
- 4 *Schwebebahn* (1995), 8mm film with sound, 12 minutes
- 5 *In The Between* (2006), 3-channel HD video with audio, 14 minutes



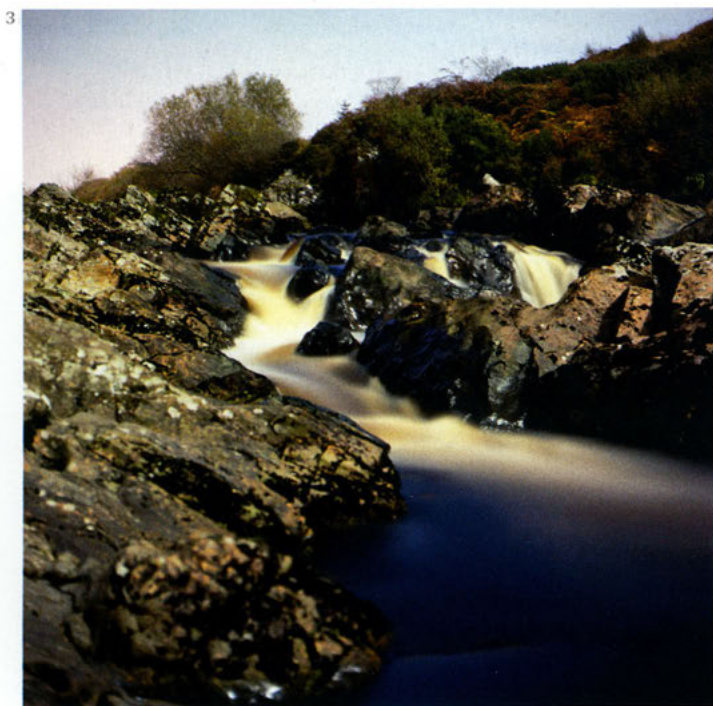
Pentonville to the galleries of the ICA, Almond's attention turned to the architecture of incarceration and he made a first tentative visit to Auschwitz, a grim pilgrimage that he'd been putting off until he felt the time was right. “I didn't know where I was, but sure enough I found this bus stop pointing the way there. It's a bit like disembarking from prison, stepping back into the public arena and being confronted by a bus stop, which is another social, public network about freedom or liberation.” These bus stops became a strange metaphor, a few times removed, for the movement of Jewish captives to and from the Polish mines and ultimately, to the Nazis' final solution: the extermination camps.

Almond began by filming the shelters for the short loop *Oswiecim, March 1997* (1997), using the original Polish place name for Auschwitz in the title. He then managed to physically relocate a pair of the shelters to a Berlin gallery (for the work *Bus Stop* in 1999), before paying to replace all the town's shelters himself and retaining 14 of them for his final installation *Terminus* (2007). As a work referencing the Holocaust, *Terminus* is both a necessarily inadequate statement – “You can't deal with the subject,” he agrees – as well as an ambiguous no-man's land between structures of death and everyday freedoms, where the viewer is caught in an eternal period of waiting, certainly not for any transport to arrive, but maybe for the inevitable to happen. “I go one way or the other,” says Almond of his personal attachment to this project. “Close to the event, I was incredibly emotionally involved. Now I oscillate between it being a very cold piece of work and being very emotionally warm.”

Just as his grandfather's wartime accounts of fighting in Belgium, France and Germany were important for the genesis of the *Oswiecim* project, so the old man's similarly harrowing tales of coalmining became important for another strand in Almond's oeuvre. The artist has himself been down numerous mines, notably in Karaganda, Kazakhstan; Kawah Ijen in Java; and Norilsk, Siberia. “I've been to Norilsk about eight or so times; I go at least once a year. There's



"I went from being an abstract sculptor who spent ages asking myself formal questions like what shape and colour to make things, to pondering movement and time"



1 Fullmoon@Sakura Hitachi (2006) 2 Fifteen Minute Moon (2000) 3 Fullmoon@Peat Brook (2007) 4 Fullmoon@Oregon Coast (2008). All C-print, 121.2 x 121.2cm



"It's beautiful and awe-inspiring, but it's the most toxic lake in the world. When you inhale, your insides turn to acid. I was there for two days, and by the end I was coughing blood"

something science-fictional about it, you step off the planet and step back on when you get there, plus you need permission to enter, as the mine owns both the city and the airport. As well as having the largest supply of nickel, all in one mountain, Norilsk has the world's most northerly railway and was the largest of the gulags in Siberia. It's practically built on dead bodies."

This bizarre, extreme territory is another in the category of Almond's unfulfilled slow-burners; he's awaiting the moment when a significant piece will arise from its strange landscapes. Even so, he's already made three series of black-and-white photographs in Norilsk. One centres on a dilapidated bridge and was named *Minus 60,000* (2005) after the number of intellectuals and imported prisoners who were assumed to have died while building the railway. The most recent set is *Night+Fog* (2007), showing a desperately bleak landscape in which even trees fail to survive the cold and poisonous atmosphere produced by the molten nickel, which releases clouds of sulphurous chemicals into the air.

Nickel and sulphur make repeat appearance in Almond's most recent film, *Bearing* (2007) – a testimony to the insane work of another hidden group of miners, who are chipping away at the crater of a forbidding volcano near Java in Indonesia. "They are actually mining sulphur. This stuff that I hadn't seen in Norilsk, where they're burning it away, is here made visible." And shockingly so, as a shaky, hand-held camera fixes on an ageing miner as he takes his luminous yellow load up through billowing vapour to the crater rim, step by step. "They climb, either in flip-flops, or barefooted, with these huge baskets



1 *Bearing* (2007), single-channel HD video with audio, 35 minutes

2 *Minus 60,000 (Plate 1)* (2005), 119.5 x 93.5cm

3 *Night+Fog (Monchegorsk)* (2007), bromide print, 119.3 x 149.1cm, installation view at Parasol Unit, London, 2008



weighing around 115 kilograms on their backs – that's heavier than me."

Once they reach the top, in addition to the insult of their pitiful pay-per-freight, the miners get the further injury of aggressive damage to their lungs and eyes. "It's beautiful and awe-inspiring up there, but it's the most toxic lake in the world. As soon as sulphur touches water it turns to sulphuric acid, so when you inhale, your insides turn to acid. I was there for two days, and by the end I was coughing blood. I handed out loads of Speedo goggles because none of them had any protection whatsoever." Almond feels a certain amount of guilt treading this line between voyeur and hardcore tourist, but there's no doubting the transcendental qualities of *Bearing*, a mesmerising document of human endeavour to which he adds, "You can't not notice the religious overtones of this load-bearer ascending up from the brimstone of hell."

Whether digging in his own biographical back garden or investigating historical genocide, Almond's intense methodology doesn't let up. "You do your research before you click," he says. And while he's far too technologically savvy to be a dusty archaeologist sifting through bygone eras by hand, his steady, patient lines of inquiry are anything but shallow or modish. Just for example, "Did you know that the ice-age ended at Finchley Road tube station?," he asks matter-of-factly. "Evidence of a change in the rock strata which was uncovered when the station was built showed that the glacial area ended there." Maybe his studio is built on more interesting foundations after all.

Exhibition (group show): Tate Britain, *Altermodern*: Tate Triennial 2009, 3 Feb–28 Apr 2009, www.tate.org.uk

DARREN ALMOND 5 KEY WORKS

Darren Almond's father suffered serious injuries at work (as did Michael Landy's), and his preoccupation with human labour in extremis is evident. But, underlying the spectacle, are quiet studies of time, light and motion

Traction (1999)

3-part video installation, 28 minutes



This three-screen work is Almond's most intensely personal piece and revolves around his father's recollections of serious injuries that he'd sustained as a labourer. Occasionally funny as well as gruesome, the work, says Almond, was a chance to exorcise a few autobiographical demons: "There was this huge range of emotional weight that I'd never confronted before. So I tackled it head on," he says. Almond decided to interview his dad himself and have his mother sitting there observing and occasionally breaking down, either in tears of laughter or distress: "I needed to be quite bullish about it and have this bravado within myself, because this was such a complete departure from anything that I was interested in or capable of doing at the time."

Meantime (2000)

Steel sea container, aluminium, polycarbonate, computerised electronic control system and components, 292.6 x 243.8 x 1219.2cm



"How do you solve the problem of longitude?" asks Almond rhetorically, as if everyone should know the answer by now. "You need a clock that works at sea – it's so logical, it's almost dumb." A giant, electric flip clock was installed into a corrugated orange sea container and sent off by cargo ship to New York, ostensibly to see if the clock could keep to perfect Greenwich Mean Time while traversing the globe. There was another challenge implicit in the work, however, as this enormous sculpture was being shipped to his first American solo show at the Matthew Marks Gallery. "That was my invitation – I was asked to go to America and make a solo show, which is a big step for any artist." Even though he admits that the piece "stinks of logistics", it nevertheless did its job.

Fullmoons (2000–ongoing)

Photographic prints. Pictured: Fullmoon@Rügen IV (2004), C-print, 121.2 x 121.2cm



Using unusually long exposure times, Almond tricks the camera into believing night is day. For *Fifteen Minute Moon* in 2000 (see page 39), he recaptured the view favoured by Cézanne of Mont Sainte Victoire near Aix-en-Provence, going on to follow in the famous footsteps of landscape painters such as Caspar David Friedrich and JMW Turner. "If I suffer from wanderlust," says Almond, "I've got my regular intake, which is the Fullmoon series. That means that every four weeks, there's another chance to make a photograph. My boy thinks I go to the moon every month."

Arctic Pull (2003)

Infrared film/DVD, 11 minutes 30 seconds



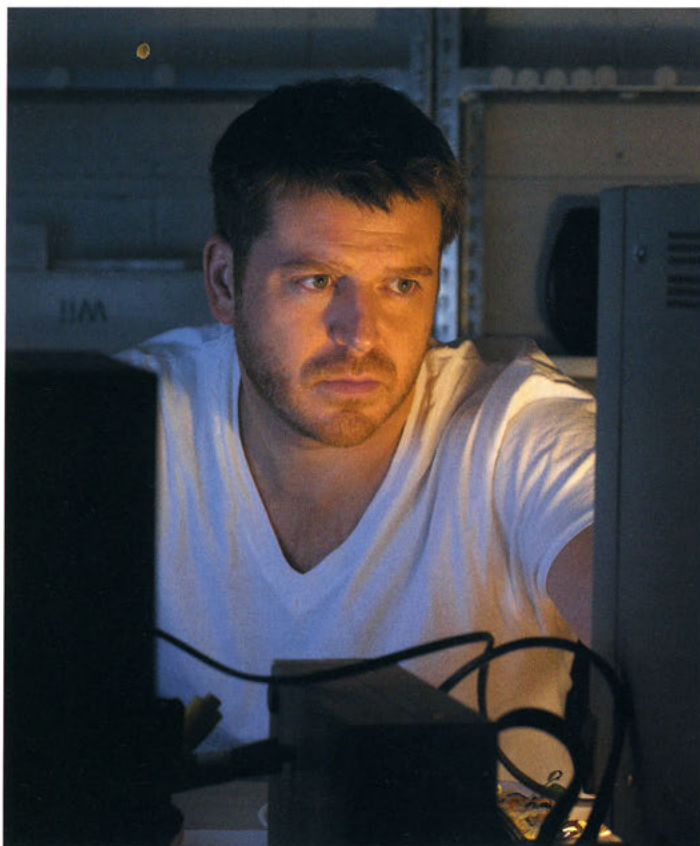
After an expedition with Mission Antarctica in 2002, Almond was compelled to complete the journey by travelling to the opposite end of the Earth – he literally felt the Arctic Pull. The resulting work is a night-time adventure in which the artist is seen pulling a sled on which the camera documenting his icy slog through the tundra sits passively, staring. This is in a similar mode to other feats of physical and mental endurance that the artist occasionally attempts, but the main obstacles for this work were weather-related: "That was in minus 41 or 43 degrees when your eyeballs start to ice over: the liquid in your eyes freezes and eventually you lose the power to focus."

Terminus (2007)

14 aluminium bus shelters



This monumental installation ended a decade's worth of visits by Almond to Auschwitz. All of the bus stops arrived from the Polish town ready-made and untouched, complete with shocking bits of contemporary anti-Semitic graffiti including a swastika. The dislocation embodied in the quiet atmosphere of the now useless shelters is also mirrored in Almond's circuitous path to finding his way to Auschwitz, after first deciding that his "emotional landscape" was prepared. "Being tertiary in line from any experience of the Second World War," he comments, "I relied on my grandfather's stories and this kind of displaced memory of trauma or ripple effect. Besides all that, my mum and dad met at a bus stop."



Jan Stadtmann

36 **IN THE STUDIO** **Darren Almond** From humdrum home to extreme environments

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Charlotte Payer

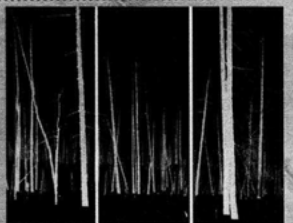
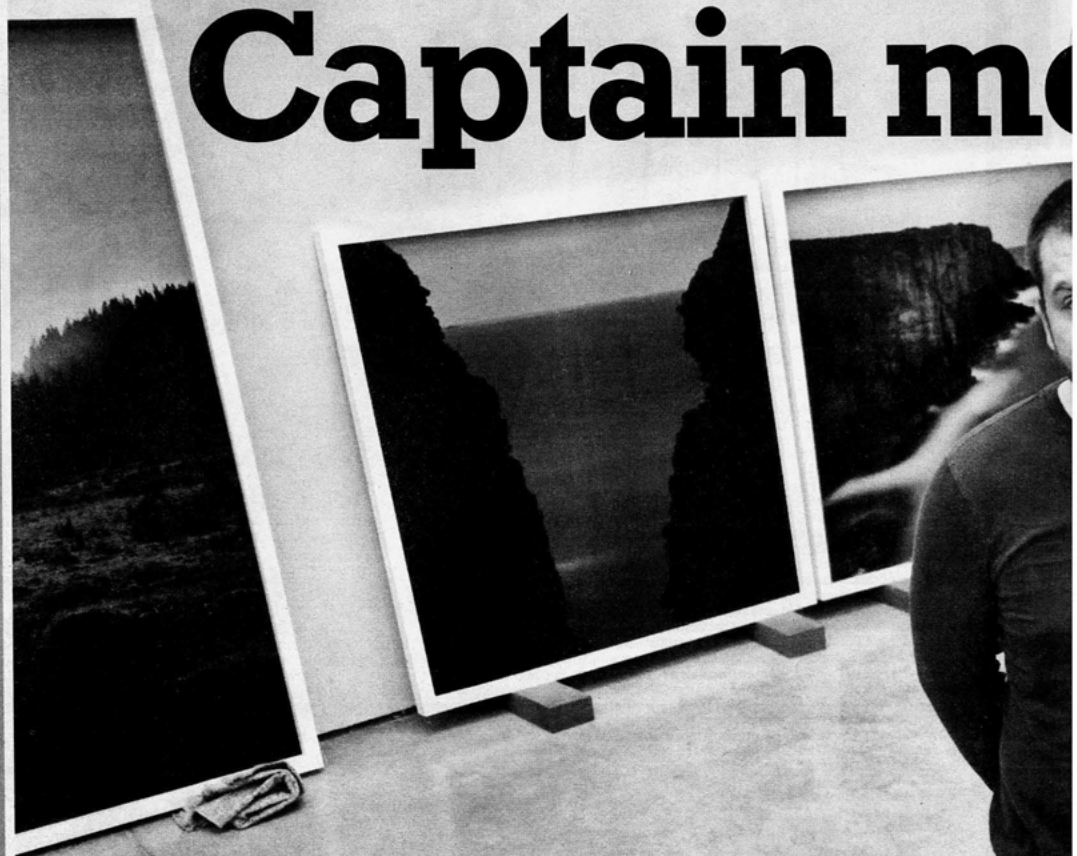
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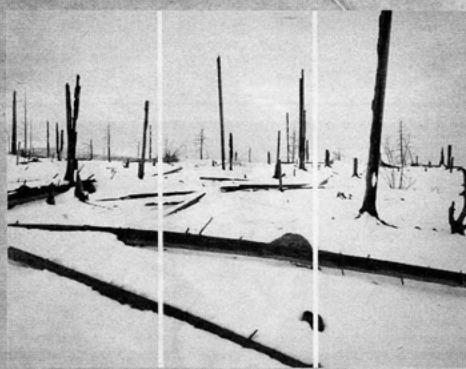
THURSDAY 17 JANUARY 2008 **THE INDEPENDENT**

Arts

Captain mo



'NIGHT AND FOG'
"Norilsk has one of the biggest nickel mines in the world. There's more acid rain in this town of 150,000 than in North America and Canada. The trees suffer something similar to frost-bite. You get these forests of dead, burnt trees in a landscape that's never dry so it's totally incongruous. It got down to minus 45C. My eyeballs froze" - DA



The Turner-Prize nominated artist Darren Almond points to the faint line of light streaking across a photograph of Ribbleshead Viaduct on the Settle-to-Carlisle railway. Cutting through the misty landscape, it marks the journey of the night mail-train from Scotland, captured in a long exposure that was lit only by the moon. "I was jumping for joy when I heard the train coming," says Almond, 36, as well he might - as a child growing up in Wigan, he was trainspotter.

Timetables, the steady flip of station digital clocks and waiting, waiting, waiting - as unlikely as it seems, that much-maligned hobby and its banal motifs have been good grounding for Almond's career as a conceptual artist, which took off in the late 1990s as part of the post-YBA generation tended by Jay Jopling's White Cube gallery.

In any case, Almond's nerdy days are well behind him, as his CV demonstrates. For *Sensation*, at the Royal Academy in 1997, he constructed an enormous digital clock and amplified the sound of the relentless click-clack of the passing minutes. In 2000, for the hip Matthew Marks Gallery in New York he made an even bigger clock, the size of a shipping container, freighted it across the Atlantic and then finally docked it at the Venice Biennale in 2003.

The work that got him nominated for the Turner in 2005 took a turn for the serious, with photographs and video that meditated on the visible effects of pass-

ing time on fragile wildernesses in Antarctica. Also included were photographs of moonlit landscapes - and it is 50 new colour prints from that ongoing Fullmoon series that comprise his new show at Jopling's Hoxton outpost, White Cube, where we met.

All photographed in the British Isles and Ireland, this insomniac's tour starts with the seething blue seas at rocky Malin Head, goes via dramatic gorges of Gordale Scar of Dartmoor and on to thick ferns and mountains of Wester Ross in the Highlands. The first thing that you notice is that the landscapes don't look moonlit at all. The sky is blue, or appears hazy with sunshine, and although there is a surreal quality to the fuzzy mists that hang in the air, and the seas and rivers resemble a seething brew of dry ice - okay, that's quite strange - the bright colours of plants, rocks and trees all suggest daylight. Maybe I've just watched too many night-vision real-life crime reconstructions, but looking at these pictures you realise how ridiculous it is to think that night-time is monochrome. Using exposures from 15 to 45 min-

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utes long (and the patient wait is part of the pleasure for him) Almond's medium-format camera soaks up all the light reflected off the moon, creating sublime new landscapes that convey a long meditation rather than quick snap.

But, while it's fun to search for the tiny white lines in the sky that show the progress of a star over a 40-minute exposure, is there much else in these photographs, which at times come dangerously close to the simply picturesque?

Initially, Almond says, the landscapes he chose were indirect references to Romantic paintings. Starting in Cézanne country, then in Turner's Alps and finally Constable's Flatford, (the location for *The Haywain* and included in this show), Almond revisited the sites of masterpieces in the dead of night.

"I thought the series would end at that, but I got sucked into the whole process of making photographs in moonlight," he says. There is, however, a subtle ecological aspect to Almond's artistic practice. These landscapes are disappearing, he says, "because we're farming so much," and while one might take issue with that (a good proportion of the photographs here show sheer rockface), the technique he employs certainly illustrates how light pollution is encroaching even in rural areas.

"When I moved to London I really started to miss the moonlight and my relationship with the moon. Every night you were

flooded with sodium and it was almost like someone had stolen the moon from me, and I wanted to go back and find it again. I longed for it." Even in the remotest regions of Britain, Almond says he struggled to find locations that were beyond the reach of artificial light.

If the creeping urbanisation of the British Isles is an issue only faintly detectable at the White Cube show, Almond makes more overt political statements at a not-for-profit exhibition at Parasol Unit in Islington, which opens simultaneously. Comprising video, photographs and sculpture (in other words, more digital clocks, this time in multiples and all clicking with menacing synchronicity), the main draw of this exhibition is a triptych film that protests at the cultural invasion of Tibet by China.

Showing, on the one hand, the mountainous view seen through a window on a train journey between the two countries on the newly-built Qinghai-Tibet railway (the world's highest train-route) and also Tibetan monks singing prayers, Almond mourns the gradual erosion of Tibetan culture as visitors from mainland China immigrate.

Equally confrontational are Almond's enormous series of black-and-white photographs showing blackened trees on the Siberian tundra outside of Norilsk. The town was the site of a notorious gulag and, more recently, home to the world's largest nickel mine. After spewing out sulphur unchecked, trees in the area have effectively been chemically burnt, and now resemble sad sticks of charcoal poked in the snow.

"You get these forests of dead, burnt, trees on a landscape that's never dry," says Almond, "It's totally incongruous." Almond spent months at a time in the town, contemplating the human and environmental loss (the residents' average lifespan is 10 years less than other Russians) and enduring temperatures of minus 45F. At times, he says, the liquid in his eyes froze. A second film, running for more than 30 minutes, shows workers at the face of an Indonesian sulphur mine, clouds of puce-coloured gases enveloping people as they struggle to carry rocks from a crater, with only rags to cover their mouths.

These works are not exactly a call to action, says Almond, but provocative subjects that he chooses to observe. The viewer is left to watch in a state of half-informed helplessness. As British contemporary artists rarely engage with current affairs, let alone political or environmental issues, Almond's works are pleasingly engaged with the world at large. "It's like we're in a vortex that's speeding up, a whirlpool," says Almond of the ever-increasing load of horrifying information we are given about the destruction of the planet. "The political and social issues are there in my work because they're current. This is the emotional landscape that surrounds me."

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Darren Almond, *Moons of the Iapetus Ocean* is at White Cube, 48 Hoxton Square, N1 from tomorrow to 23 February;
Fire Under Snow: Darren Almond is at Parasol Unit Foundation, 14 Wharf Road, London N1 from tomorrow - 30 March

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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DARREN ALMOND

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Inspired by the life and work of Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, Darren Almond's recent exhibition was a study in strategic contrasts, an orchestrated dialogue between beauty and decay designed to evoke both the lyricism and the melancholy characteristic of the late Nobel Prize-winner's artistic outlook. Pairing a suite of wildly gorgeous color photographs of the California coast with a series of somber black-and-white shots of a winter landscape in Siberia—where Brodsky spent eighteen months in a

labor camp before being exiled in 1972—the show also included a selection of Almond's painted aluminum signs, the centerpiece of which featured lines from Brodsky's "A Part of Speech" (1975–76), in which the writer contemplates the homeland he left behind.

London-based Almond is a prolific neo-Conceptualist whose diverse projects have frequently engaged issues of time, place, and memory, and the ways in which various forms of mediation may be harnessed to emphasize the instability of each. In Brodsky, Almond has clearly chosen a productive touchstone for his investigations. Concerned with questions of morality and mortality, the poet often deployed his language as a kind of bridge between a present lived in exile in the US and a past spent in a land that was distant yet vividly remembered for both its richness and cruelty.

Arrayed around the koanlike passage from Brodsky's celebrated work ("Only sound needs echo and dreads its lack. / A glance is accustomed to no glance back."), Almond's photographs demonstrate a classically skilled eye for landscape at the service of a meditative conceptual program. His understated black-and-white photographs were all drawn from the series "Norilsk": 69 *Parallel 1* and 2 (all works 2005) focus on a stand of barren winter trees shot against a sky so dead and white that it almost erases the horizon, while several works titled *Minus 60,000* feature different views of a ruined railway trestle. The chaos of the broken timber bridge, portrayed from vantages that destabilize scale and depth, provides an elegiac marker for the deeper reality of the site: sixty thousand-odd Stalin-era prison laborers died building the railroad.

In contrast to the restraint with which these images invoke the suffering of both Brodsky as an individual and the Russian people as a group, Almond's California pictures from his ongoing "Fullmoon" series, 2000–, are almost implausibly beautiful, providing (in keeping with Brodsky's own aesthetic) a kind of metaphysical counterpoint to the terrestrial misery implied by their companions. Extra-long exposures shot by the light of the full moon, these landscapes were taken, like many of the previous images in the series, at locations made famous by other artists—in this case, the areas of northern California first documented by nineteenth-century Bay Area photographer Carleton Watkins.

Several are so eerily scenic that they suggest Hollywood FX—especially *Fullmoon@Burns Bay*, in which a distant waterfall spills into a storybook cove, and *Fullmoon@Pacific*, in which rocky outcroppings emerge from what appears to be a fog bank but is in fact the moving current, like the surface of a distant planet imagined by Roger Dean. Yet the most modest images here are perhaps even more evocative of Brodsky than the preternaturally ravishing ones, suggesting not just the poetry of the world but also the transitory nature of our contact with it. This is nowhere more evident than in *California North Star*, in which the artist's exposure tracks the wheeling of the night sky above a row of ancient trees, recalling another emblematic passage from "A Part of Speech": "As for the stars, they are always on. / That is, one appears, then others adorn the inklike / sphere. That's the best way from there to look upon / here: well after hours, blinking."

—Jeffrey Kastner



Düsseldorf

Darren Almond

K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

26 FEBRUARY – 29 MAY

Darren Almond's work, though disparate in media – encompassing, as it does, video, photography, sculpture and installation – is tightly focused on his chosen subject: Time. He contemplates and attempts to capture this eminently ungraspable phenomenon through the idea of its passage or of temporal phases, whether pertaining to a lifetime or to the earth itself.

The four-channel video installation *If I Had You* (2003), for example, is a touching, multi-faceted portrait of Almond's grandmother. On one screen, in an almost static image, she watches people ballroom dancing – an activity she enjoyed with her deceased spouse. The other screens show gay fairground lighting and a dancing couple's feet, evoking the passage of her youth and bittersweet memories. Conversely, the earth's historical and geological time is conjured in the *Full Moon* series, in which Almond photographs locations once captured by Friedrich, Constable, Turner and other well-known painters. The mysterious landscapes – uncannily lit only by the full moon – recall a time before the advent of electricity, making us aware of a cycle greater than that of our own lifetime.

Bad Timing (1998) reminds us of time's fleeting in a more humorous manner. The sculpture is composed of a simple, almost inconspicuous, digital flip-clock, mounted on the wall and showing the actual time. Drawing closer, one can read the artist's name imprinted on its face, where one might usually find that of the manufacturer, and hear a whispering voice silently cursing, 'Shit' with the click of each passing minute. Directly opposite stands a gigantic rendering of another clock: a huge, black horizontal rectangle whose flip-panels change in perfect synchronization with the smaller timepiece. The numbers themselves are not printed but cut out of the plates, suggesting time's invisible transit.

Time and transit are also alluded to in a humorous set of works based on train travel: the *Plaques* series is a citation of British Rail station signs. These are re-contextualized by adopting their format to emblazon, and thus immortal-

ize, Almond's full name on the side of a locomotive, as in *Intercity 125* (1997), or by using them to relay baffling phrases that suggest the random thoughts inspired by a long train voyage, as in the video installation *11 Miles.....From Safety* (2000). For those who've been delayed due to such apparently insurmountable obstacles as 'leaves on the line', the three-dimensional rendering of the British Rail logo brilliantly captures time's apparent ossification while suffering for hours on damp, wind-swept platforms.

Not all of Almond's works are quite so light-hearted: the photographic series *Until MMXLI* (2002) depicts the bleak Antarctic tundra – whose creation is a miracle of geological time. The title notes the future date when the area will no longer be ungoverned and untouched: in 2041 nations will be allowed to bid for land, to invade and drill or mine. The accompanying video *A-* (2002) presents the haunting drift of ice floes, recording this virgin beauty while it lasts.

Perfectly encapsulating the flux of arrival and departure, the first and last piece to be encountered in this exhibition is surely its most sombre. Although simply appearing to be replicas of two innocuous bus shelters, *Terminus* (1999-2005) is a profound and desolate work. The bus shelters in question are from Oswiecim in Poland, otherwise known by its more sinister name: Auschwitz. In 1997, Almond made a film work that depicted visitors to the memorial waiting for and getting on and off the bus, and this developed into the larger project of replicating the shelters. The doubles were situated at the memorial while the originals were relocated to Berlin. Passage is portrayed not only in the physical transport of tourists and locals, the historical convoy of doomed inmates, and in the shelters' relocation, but crucially in the spiritual journey from life to death. AC

Loris Gréaud *Hors prises*,
2001, video installation
COURTESY FRAC ÎLE-DE-FRANCE
PHOTO: MARC DOMAGE

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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Flash Art



Darren Almond
"Fullmoon@Arondine"
Lambda print

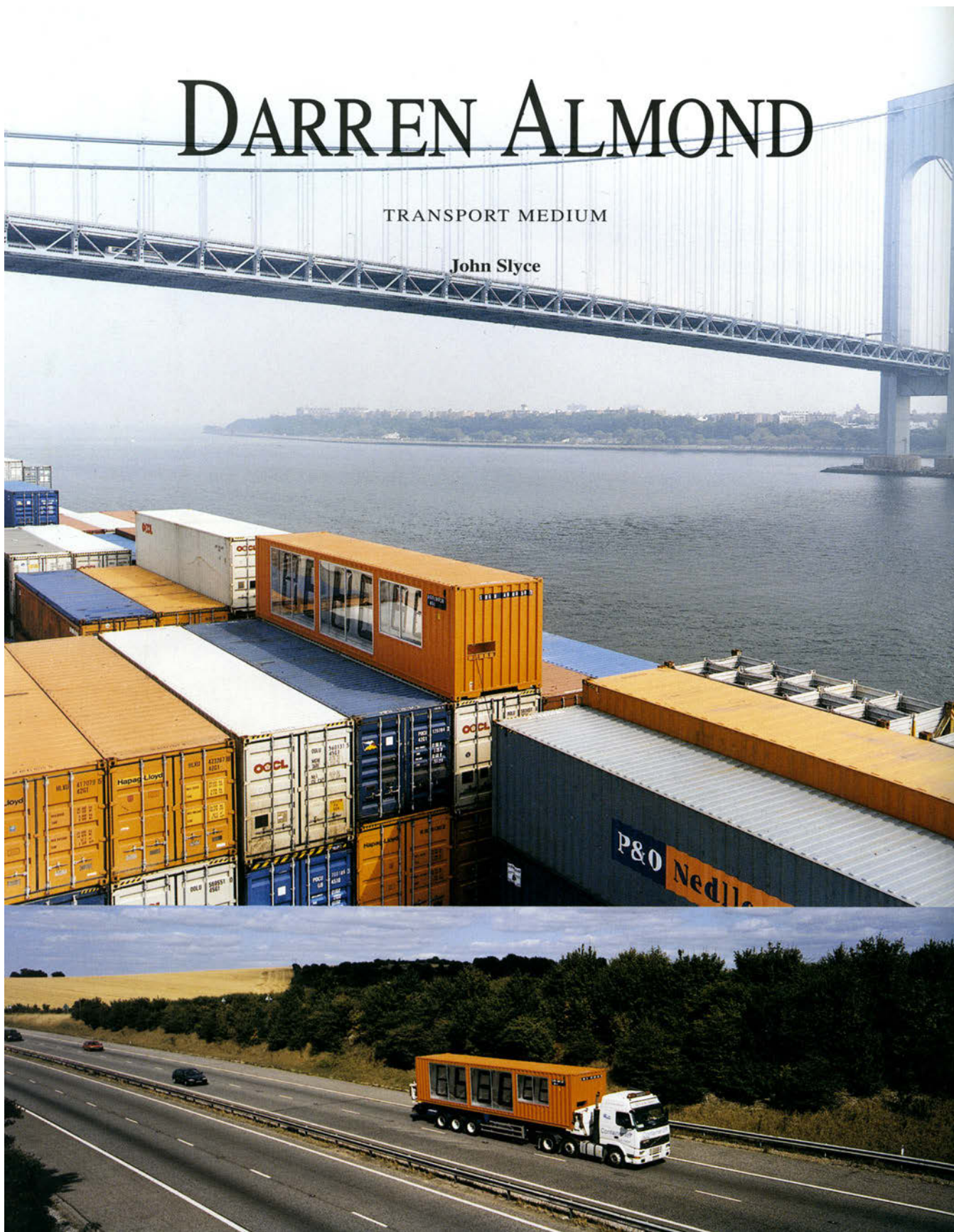


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DARREN ALMOND

TRANSPORT MEDIUM

John Slyce



JOHN SLYCE: *You were shooting a new project in the north last week?*

Darren Almond: Yes...and the main character had a mild heart attack the day after I arrived.

JS: *This is family?*

DA: Yes, it is.

JS: *I am sorry.*

DA: No, that's all right. She'll be fine — she's lonely. But yes, this was my first trip up to start filming so I will have to wait a while on that.

JS: *Do you want to talk more about the project or pass on that? This is your grandmother we're talking about?*

DA: This is my grandmother and the work is the next step in the film *Traction* (1999). She lost her husband twenty years ago. She had her first stroke about a year ago and when I visited her in hospital she lit up. Apparently I remind her a lot of him. In a very matter-of-fact way, she told me she wants to die. She wants to be dancing again with him. We connected. It's her body's fault. Her mind is still fine — she just feels trapped inside herself. As a child, I remember it all very vividly. I used to live next door. I had a very special relationship with my grandfather. In the film I'll step into this territory through conversation with her. She realizes she's coming to the end and she wants to get on with it. I want to do the film in conjunction with making a free-standing atmospheric clock that I am working on now. Do you know the clock?

JS: *A self-powered clock?*

DA: It's a clock where if the temperature changes by one degree centigrade it provides the clock with enough energy to run for forty-eight hours. It's almost a perpetual object and very analogue. This was the first time I would move towards an analogue way of visualizing the clock, or that kind of scale.

JS: *Would it be an outdoor piece?*

DA: It feels like it could be. I have a projector that runs off an arc rather than a bulb and gives off a very blue light. The film would shed a sepia toned nostalgia. The projector has no limited shelf-life — if there is electricity you'll get an image.

JS: *So potentially it's perpetual like the atmospheric clock?*

DA: Similar. Say with a solar panel positioned in the desert, the battery would charge through the day and the projection you would see at night and the clock would accompany it throughout. That's where it all is.

JS: *I was struck by the image of your grandfather in front of the coal-burning fire talking to you about going down into the mines — making material from that kind of experience.*

DA: Those stories were fascinating. My father, who worked above ground, would take a flask

of hot tea in winter. Then my grandfather would go to work and take a flask of cold water. I remember asking, "But why grandfather? It makes no sense." But then the temperature is constant in the mine and you need cool water for the dust and to clean your breathing passages out. I was back in Wigan last week and the mills are gone and now the landscape is all low-rise buildings and IT parks.

JS: *The introduction of Information Technology to Wigan has an Orwellian ring.*

DA: Definitely. They've turned one of the factories into a museum of the industrial past called the George Orwell Museum and the pub next door is The Orwell.

JS: *There's a relationship in your work to modernism that hasn't been much covered; your moves to address a modernist past in art, politics and economy. How have you attempted to negotiate these issues given the weak experience of modernism in British art and culture?*

DA: You do still encounter the relics of a utopian modernism here. There's a political point here concerning the birth of communism. How that process divided up the globe is central to my feeling very trapped in a position in the world. My perspective was one located in an industrial center — and the working class was a transitional cipher between two struggles for thought. The timeline cutting through England left definite cleavages and I felt as if I was at a central point on a political axis in Wigan. Mine was a very Eurocentric map as a child. There were connections to different cultures through the aspect of industrialization. For me, the cartography of that placement was a modernist issue. I couldn't escape what surrounded me.

JS: *That context still really forms you as an artist who identifies with issues of labor and of class within a wider European context.*

DA: In order to construct an image of yourself you look back to images of your predecessors and relatives. My great-grandfather was a cavalry man in the First World War. There are no other photographs before that in my family, so the image of my family begins with a man sitting on a horse in the early twentieth century. I can only apply that path as a transport medium to where I am at now and what I am surrounded by. It all begins with that man on a horse.

JS: *The sense of history in your work relates to its make up but also to an effort to place yourself as an individual and an artist. Does this stem from your origins in Wigan and a northern industrial family?*

DA: Definitely. I've done a lot of travelling and psychologically I need that attachment to keep focused. But there is also a need to make yourself vulnerable through travel and

All Images: Thames to Hudson, 2000.
Photographs. Courtesy Jay Jopling/
White Cube, London.





Schacta, 2001. Video stills.

exposure to different cultures. That was very much tied up with the notion of being a trainspotter as a kid: I am going to do something that nobody knows that I am doing and I am going to get out of here and see something along the way.

JS: Yet you always come back or attempt to return. I am interested in the point in your work where the autobiographical kicks in. Traction marked a point where storytelling, language and biography entered into the work in a strong way.

DA: The use of the figure was the most remarkable development for me. This gave it a linear quality that wasn't really attached to the work before. Within the reaches of what I had been doing, the work had followed a biographical vein. The prison piece, even though it was a live feed, came from an emotional response to a relative in that situation.

JS: But those biographical factors had always been secondary in the work.

DA: What happened was I turned it all on its head and inverted the equation as mathematics suggests, and it seemed the math was correct.

JS: You don't appear to be feeding the machinery of celebrity with these moves. That said, we're served a litany of plot points in your constructed self: the trainspotting as a youth, Wigan, and the industrial north. Walking to your studio today, I realized that if you had moved to this location only recently it would come off as contrived — surrounded as it is by the Westway, shipping containers, and a web of public transport. Finally, it seems that for you to work from the known is to engage in a theater of the self.

DA: I've always had a studio like this. I am in the landscape of my childhood here. My father worked on building sites and by the age of four I was in the sandpit myself digging in the sand they were using to build. The studio is at an intersection between railway, motorway and canal. You have the Heathrow Express and the underground. You have the mainline railway to Bristol — the line that Brunel is responsible for. It's a hub of the medium of transport. The elevated road outside the window is the road I take to Wigan.

JS: Your work focuses on transitional or suspended spaces not unlike the Westway.

Over your shoulder there is the photo Flatford@Fullmoon (2000) from your series of moonlight exposures. The images have an odd quality — almost as if photography has been suspended from capturing this dead moment or thing. Time is inscribed in these images in an extended and elongated way.

DA: The film is only meant to be alive for 1/100 of a second. I push it to fifteen minutes. I don't want to do the math but that's the push.

JS: Let's look at the idea of working in real time. You relate to these pieces as performances?

DA: In the original real time piece I was curious to see how compelling a still image could be. I was interested in the idea of imposed reflection while focusing on a real time event. To be technically aware of the environment that you are in and be witness to a live event extends time — every second counts for two. The physicality of the sound gives you a sense of scale both of yourself and the presence of the surrounding.

JS: Sound is a crucial aspect of your work that's perhaps underappreciated. Thinking

about scale, I am reminded of Smithsonian's line: Size determines the work but scale determines the art. Sound allows you to push scale beyond given parameters in a work?

DA: I have to deal with it. You can't lose the sound of your own heart and you can't lose the sound of your central nervous system. Put yourself in isolation and you're still left with those two signatures.

JS: Your fan sculptures have always sent me off to that sound scene in *Apocalypse Now* where the fan blades take on the signature of a helicopter.

DA: And *Bladerunner*. My introduction to postmodernity began by watching that second scene looking down through the overhead fan. I've always liked the way fans have been used in motion pictures as an indicator of time, movement, space. The objects — the fans and clocks — started with the idea that I might be making props that would come together in a film that would be made at some point in time.

JS: *Bladerunner* goes both ways for me — the modern is cancelled but preserved in a more virulent form.

DA: Let me show you something. This is a plan for a clock that I have been working on the past couple of days.

JS: *The three drums rotate?*

DA: That one spins on the minute, that one every ten, and that one turns on the hour. In front of this, if you place the negative of the number, as these drums turn you get a perfect reading of the digits.

JS: *So it is a two-dimensional deconstruction of the flip clock.*

DA: It operates at the conjunction of analogue and digital — it's a graphic illusion and narration in a controlled given.

JS: *I saw the drums and thought immediately of the chocolate grinder. Your work is inscribed by modernism at every turn — it's somehow about our inability to escape that frame of reference.*

DA: That's coming back to my placement: in going across the Atlantic in one direction with the clock and travelling in the other direction to visit a mine in Kazakhstan. I am a child of the cold war and divided frontiers.

JS: *Such moves are an act of cognitive mapping. Meantime is a project about mapping and the economy of shipping as a pre-existing model of globalization. Your work comes together as a map that shifts from the personal and local to the global and collective — a transport medium that leads from Wigan to the world.*

DA: In art school I spent a lot of time reading about Beuys and the path of the wolf and the coyote. Man followed the dog and wolf at every turn across the ice cap and through Canada to the limits of the West Coast. To go



FullMoon@Spring, 2000. Lambda print.

any further would have completed the cycle. The grid we think we are occupying is an old relational grid. So we are always looking backward as we are walking forward. And that's inscribed in the work.

JS: *Those acts of triangulation are clearly stated in Traction where the viewer is forced to read the three screens in conjunction.*

DA: Very much a self-portrait, that one. Like being out in the mountains with your map and compass — working out where you are is an act of self-portraiture.

JS: *Tell me more about your interest in temperature. How might you factor this into the work? Say, along the lines of what you do with sound?*

DA: With sound, like performance, you have to take up a position as a witness. The real time pieces operate strictly as performance. The pace of work is definitely related to temperature.

JS: *What I am thinking about is your atmospheric clock. There temperature and time are relational.*

DA: They relate because when you're on top of a shipping container in the middle of the Atlantic you're eighteen stories high in the midst of a desert and you can see the earth curve away from you at the horizon. Longitude was an argument between the stellar and the chronos and the time solution was the right answer. The atmospheric clock relies upon the idea that it, as an object, is circumnavigating a 24 hour circle around a magnetic core in a universe with another orbit under climatic control. I like the idea that the clock can be placed in my studio and, in 24 hours, it will have traveled the world and come back to itself. Along that journey it will have picked up enough energy to tell me that it is going to do it again. I like that abstract forward drive to a frontier beyond what is known. That's its function and its existence.

JS: *Time and space are the real agents in your performances.*

DA: They're resilient actors. I set off in a very nonlinear way. In the beginning I didn't think I had a linear track, or a strong enough identity to work in that way. So I shot off in three directions and viewed my

work pattern as a cycle that's constantly repeated within these three points.

JS: *Sculpture, video, and real time.*

DA: Yes, and moving one constantly into the other. That way I could keep the fan turning somehow. How many times have I said, "I am not making another fucking clock."

JS: *But you will.*

DA: And I am — the atmospheric clock and this two-dimensional clock — all without really being interested in time.

JS: *Your two-dimensional clock will also exist as a three-dimensional model.*

DA: Yeah, being a good modern postmodernist, I work from the grid. A grid moves from blank space to a delineation of a point in that space. I keep it to simple points of conversation, simple points of meeting, simple gestures. I deconstruct everything in a two-dimensional plane then recompose it.

JS: *Your work strikes me as concerned with the gap that exists between experience and its description. The Moonlight images, even though we know they're frozen, don't appear to be static — there is movement in them.*

DA: I just photographed a tree in Pollock's garden between his studio and the house. The negative spaces of the tree are totally the calligraphy implied by his paintings. And the position of the moon in autumn catches the tree just at that point where there's a perfect silhouette.

JS: *An autumn rhythm... Does that series have an end point or is it an ongoing project?*

DA: That was the last one of those images that I made. But the end points are Antarctica and the Arctic. That's it.

JS: *So that will complete the map — at the poles?*

DA: The films go easterly and sculpture goes west and the photo pieces have tended to go north and south. *Meantime* will complete its journey by rail travelling across the American deserts to the West Coast and then by boat across the Pacific and I am going along and documenting it all the bloody way.

JS: *You talk about your strategy of film-making as "instinctual."*

DA: The strategy is to make myself vulnerable again which allows me to look at things anew. I film at a glance while in a state of movement with no choreography. There's a point where it begins and it ends when the film runs out, but within that everything is instinctually lead by observation.

JS: *But research is involved. You have a guide to the Arctic and one to the Antarctic before you go there.*

DA: I have to obviously since I am going to be taking photos in crazy temperatures. I am using these guides as a logistical tool. I have no idea what I will get as far as images go. I imagine that looking into the horizon of a pole at night will produce a total white out. But it's a nice point to stop them on.

JS: *These moonlight images are about making visible an invisible quantity of time in the image and in the cultural past.*

You've looked at the spaces of Pollock, and Turner, and Constable.

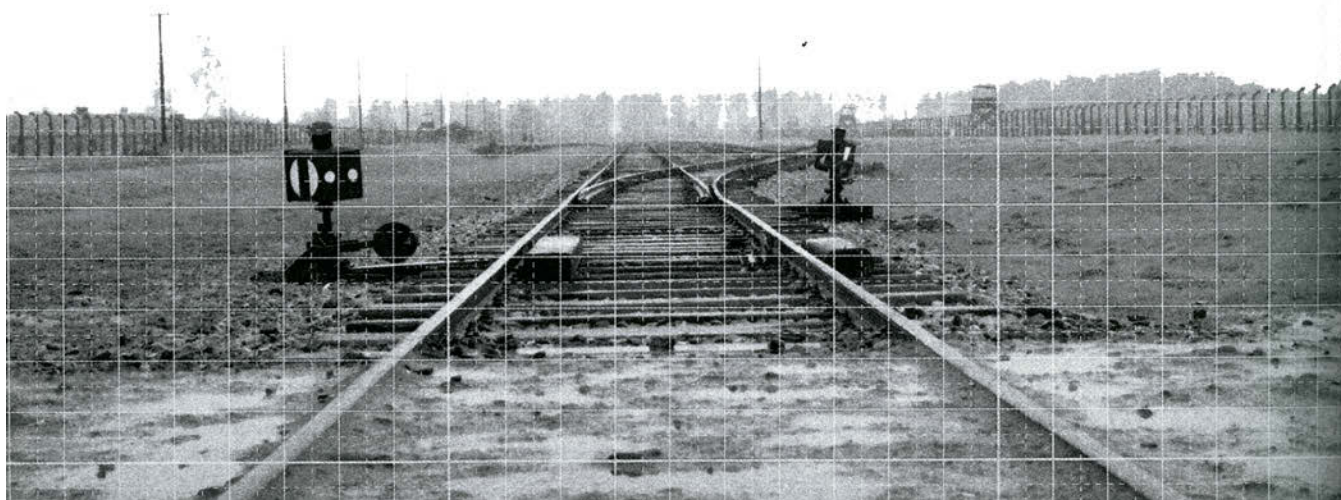
DA: The locations are not specifically artist-led. I didn't run off to Mont Sainte-Victoire because Cézanne was there. I just happened to witness the landscape and the light. These photo pieces were the first time I really enjoyed making something. I think it's about what you allow yourself to experience while you are producing. You go off into nature and sit down and look into one spot for an hour and you never know what you're getting. It's just a bloody nice thing to do. ■

John Slyce is a critic and writer based in London.

Darren Almond was born in Wigan in 1971. He lives and works in London. Selected solo shows: 2001: Tate Britain, London; Mathew Marks, New York; Max Hetzler, Berlin; Kunsthalle, Zürich; De Appel, Amsterdam, 2000: The Approach, London; Chisenhale, London; 1999: The Renaissance Society, Chicago; 1997: ICA, London; White Cube, London. Selected group shows: 2002: "Casino 2001," SMAK and Bijlokenmuseum, Ghent; Berlin Biennale, Berlin; "Deliberate Living," Greene Naftali, New York; 2000: "Apocalypse," Royal Academy of Arts, London; 1999: "Chronos & Kairos," Museum Fridericianum, Kassel; "Seeing Time," SFMoMA, San Francisco; 1998: "UK Maximum Diversity," Galerie Krinzinger, Bregenz; 1997: "Sensation," Royal Academy, London; 1996: "A Small Shifting Sphere of Serious Culture," ICA, London.

Strangers on a Train

Top: Alfred, 1999. Cast aluminium and paint, 114 x 22 x 1.2 cm. **Bottom:** Image Transfer I (detail), 2000. Heat transfer on handmade silk screened paper. Photo: Stephen White.



MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Darren Almond

*Matthew Marks Gallery
523 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through tomorrow*

Darren Almond, one of the more cerebral members of the group known as the Young British Artists, seems intent on conveying the wonder of time and space by means that, at first, offer little poetic potential. In his New York debut, he does this in several ways, continuing to work with clocks and modes of travel, sometimes simultaneously.

In the first gallery, prepare to be stopped in your tracks by the lumbering semaphore of "Mean Time," a digital clock the size of a large shipping container, which marks off the seconds, minutes and hours with loud, oddly soothing whirrings and rhythmic ka-chunks. Either the sveltely silent light-emitting diodes couldn't be enlarged sufficiently, or the artist intentionally reverted to a noisier, more primitive clockwork.

In a second gallery, large diagrams replicate the five night skies of the "Mean Time" ocean voyage from London to New York. Their almost photographic sense of infinite space becomes especially expansive once you realize that they are meticulously handmade, the color of each speck matched to the light tone of a particular star.

But the show's heart is "Schwebbahn," a 12-minute video shot from the motorman's cab of a suspended monorail as it travels around, and above, Wuppertal, Germany. Projected upside down and run backward, moving between color and black-and-white to the sound of somewhat loopy techno music, it creates much more than just an engaging spatial conundrum: it seems to glide effortlessly among different worlds, time periods and film styles, particularly between a dark, slightly foreboding past and a sun-dappled space-age future. Low-key and scientifically inclined, Mr. Almond is also, at his best, a mesmerist.

ROBERTA SMITH

OPENINGS

DARREN ALMOND

DANIEL BIRNBAUM

Snow falls from a gray sky, while a group of people waits for a bus that never comes. The black-and-white film is so grainy that it's impossible to make out faces or details. On the other side of the street, another bus stop stands empty; traffic passes by intermittently. The anonymous crowd lingers; nothing happens. It's March in the small town of Oswiecim, Poland, also known as Auschwitz. British artist Darren Almond's installation *Oswiecim, March 1997* consists of nothing more than two 8 mm films projected side by side, showing the two bus stops—one filled with visitors from the concentration-camp museum, the other for those few who wish to travel further into the country. (The bus stops themselves were recently moved to Berlin, where Almond exhibited them as an installation piece, *Bus Stop*, 1999.) The films have been slowed down considerably, making the hopeless wait more agonizing. Like many of Almond's works, this is a piece about duration, delay, and it affords an intensified experience of time. Where nothing happens, temporality makes itself felt, viscerally. Time hurts.

In *Traction*, 1999, an installation that recently premiered at the Renaissance Society in Chicago, tem-

porality is manifest as a bodily phenomenon. Built around an on-camera interview that Almond conducted in an attempt to unearth his father's history as a construction worker, the piece uses the elder's scarred body to establish the chronology. "When was the first time you saw your blood?" is Almond's opening question. Moving from toes and ankles to head and crown, the inquiry reveals an incredible number of injuries, bearing witness to the harsh realities of a working life. "How big was the crack in your head?" Almond queries matter-of-factly. "You were choking on your own blood?" The tripartite installation shows the father giving his

report, but the interrogator remains a disembodied voice; the viewer is made privy instead to the reactions of Almond's mother (projected on a third screen), who, sequestered alone in a room, sobs as she listens to the interview. The images of the artist's parents are separated by an additional projection, of an earth-mover's mechanical arm overturning brick and rubble.

Almond's most explicitly autobiographical work so far, *Traction* approaches temporality in a brutal way.

As a boy, Almond "train spotted" as a way of escaping the small English town of Wigan, where he was born, which introduced him to the world of timetables and clocks. In many of his works, several layers of temporality make themselves felt: the time measured by mechanical devices; the temporality of the human body; even cosmic time, marked each day by the rising and setting of the sun. In *A Real Time Piece*, 1995, a wall-size projection of the artist's London studio was transmitted via satellite to an abandoned shop (which viewers could enter) in another part of town. It's not a dramatic image in any way: You see a table, a chair, a fan, and a digital clock on the wall. No

one enters the room; nothing happens—except, every sixty seconds the numbers flip over, causing a surprisingly loud crash. This goes on for twenty-four hours, and in the time it takes the room to get dark and then light again the crash occurs 1,440 times. What we are taking part in, have become part of, is nothing but a huge clock, broadcast live a couple of miles across the great city.

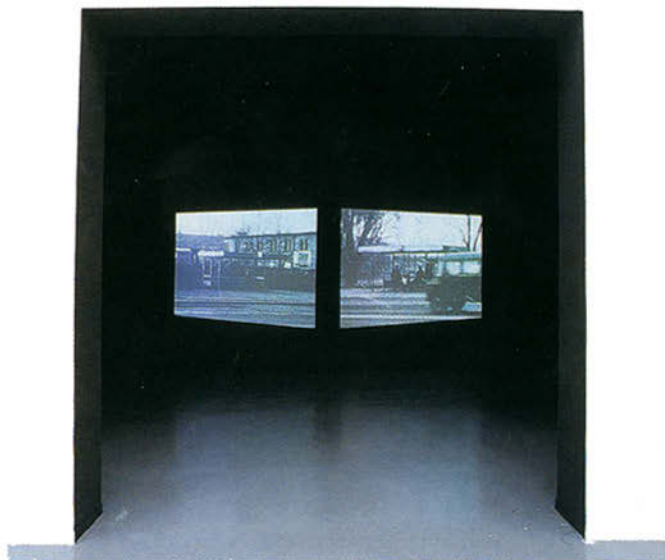
Although the work is technologically complicated (the artist required assistance from the BBC), it's not

Like many of Almond's works, *Oswiecim* affords an intensified experience of time. Where nothing happens, temporality makes itself felt, viscerally.

the technology so much as a theoretical conundrum that seems to interest Almond. After all, *A Real Time Piece* doesn't present us with anything we don't get in our living rooms every day via live TV. In fact, it offers us much less; but here the focus on the medium itself, on the live image, makes the basic theoretical predicament conspicuous: spatial distance, temporal presence. We are "here," bodily present in this room, but also "there," in another room, not directly perceivable but nonetheless given. Understood by Almond as a performance (with time and space as the protagonists), this piece seems to have developed in two directions: one rather traditional, producing a beautiful series of images; the other adding a psychological twist. The first direction led to *Tuesday (1440 Minutes)*, 1997, consisting of photographs that document the changing natural light in the studio each minute for twenty-four hours, resulting in twenty-four tableaux of sixty photographs each. The relation between the rigid grid and the seamless blending of light and darkness results in an elegant piece about cosmic time and the human desire to impose structure on experience.

The second direction led to a work relayed live via satellite to the corridors of high culture. *H.M.P. Pentonville*, 1997, is a truly innovative piece. Having a close friend in jail, Almond decided to stage a live transmission from a cell at Her Majesty's Prison in

In this ongoing series, writers are invited to introduce the work of artists at the beginning of their careers.



Darren Almond, *Oswiecim, March 1997*, two black-and-white films in 8 mm, both 6 minute loops. Installation view.

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Clockwise from upper left: **Darren Almond, *H.M.P. Pentonville*, 1997**, live satellite link between Her Majesty's Prison and ICA London (May 7, 1997). Installation view. **Darren Almond, *Bus Stop (detail)*, 1999**, two bus stops: aluminum, glass, paint, and plastic. 19' 9" x 119" x 106" each. Installation view. **Darren Almond, *Traction*, 1999**, three-part video installation, 28 minutes. Installation view.

North London. Relayed via satellite from the prison, the image of an empty cell appeared live for two hours at the ICA in London. The old and worn space, claustrophobic and depressing, offers no surprise, but the deafening sound from the guards outside—the constant clanging of metal gates and the shrill noise of keys locking and unlocking—is a real shock. The sound builds to a crescendo, and one anticipates, even hopes for, some final eruption of violence. It never comes.

What is it that's so puzzling about real-time projections presented in an art context? To begin with, they're

unique; they happen once. Filtered through technologies of mass distribution, they are nonetheless singular, in that they have an open future: We don't know what's going to happen. This is all quite evident, but still worth emphasizing, since it seems to relieve the artwork of the ailments diagnosed in Walter Benjamin's endlessly reproduced essay on mechanical reproduction. There is a videotape version of *H.M.P. Pentonville*, but the original work of art happened only once.

While watching videos of these projects in Almond's studio, I came across another work related to distancing

and remote control, and it has stuck vividly in my mind: *KN 120*, 1995, an aluminum fan attached to the underbelly of the huge concrete highway that runs past Almond's building. One can't see the fan from the window, but it can be turned on by flipping a switch inside the studio. When activated, the blades rotate mysteriously. This artwork has no audience and no clear mission. I got a glimpse of it on one of the videotapes, and it's majestic, like a huge mechanical albatross soaring through the night. Is it really out there? □

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is entranced by the Westway, the great elevated hulk of a road that carves through London in a brutal arc of concrete and cars. It soars past his studio window, sweeps out of the city and up the backbone of England to end in the industrial North near his hometown of Wigan. The road roars day and night, an endlessly evolving, kinetic sculpture, connecting him to where he came from. Like an English Romantic, a Turner or a 'Mad' John Martin, Almond is seduced by the sublimity of the industrial; like a latter-day Futurist, he is fascinated by the rhythm of the machine. Trains and travel, clocks and television, automatic fans and electronic music: these are the ingredients for works that meditate on changing conceptions of time and space, as experienced by human subjects caught between an industrial past and an electronic present.

by Kate Bush

Darren James Almond (Intercity 125) 1997
Aluminium and paint 22 x 115 cm
Courtesy: Jay Jopling/White Cube, London



Bad Timing 1998
Perspex, infra-red, sound stores and electronic motor 31 x 41 x 20 cm

As a very young boy, Almond used to escape from the small coalmining village in which he grew up, boarding trains going anywhere and losing himself in the rail network which veins across England. As an adult, he fabricates a sculpture for a train, a 'Darren James Almond' nameplate for an Intercity 125 bound from Paddington to Cornwall. Realised in British Rail's distinctive livery, the placard summons every trainspotter's wishful dream, the endless pleasures of speed and unknown places. Trains irrevocably changed experiences of time and space. The rail journey forced time to play at new and varied rhythms, while space became condensed into arrival and departure points. The Greeks understood space as an enclosure, a volume bounded by certain limits: trains presented a new image as space shrunk into points on a linear diagram, connected by measures of time rather than volume. The fusion of time and space through locomotion finds expression in Almond's hypnotic film *Schwebbahn* (1995). It features the Sky Train, Wuppertal's extraordinary proto-Futurist public transport system, engineered at the turn of the century – a monorail hanging upside down from a 20 kilometre track which snakes through the German town's deep valley at vertiginous distance from the ground. Over three days, Almond journeyed from the beginning of the line to its end and back again, filming inside and outside of the train in one long unedited take. His footage is then

DOING TIME

stretched out, slowed down, flipped upside-down and turned inside-out, a series of manipulations that subtly disorientate perceptions. The inverted train appears to be the right way round, but as it trundles along its ever-too-slow, endlessly backward journey through the valley, the scene dissolves into dreamscape as river and road flood the top of the frame, sky the bottom, and passengers disembark in reverse out of carriages. Synched to a mellow electronic dance track, and cast in a gorgeous, impressionistic palette, *Schwebbahn* is an oneiric piece. It is a journey that induces a kind of gentle motion sickness as time stretches and space dissolves in a series of uncertain reference points – akin, metaphorically, to the way in which time and space are experienced in the unconscious not as distinct, manageable entities, but as an interpenetrating, indivisible flow. While *Schwebbahn* recalls cinematic visions of the future – the visionary transport systems of Fritz Lang or Ridley Scott's memorable cities – here we are journeying backwards, not forwards, through time, to an industrial past once capable of imagining a utopian future.

The histories of clocks and trains – arguably modernity's most significant inventions – are bound inexorably. Clocks gave time form, rendering it spatial; trains rendered space temporal. Time, we should remember, was not always made up of little pieces joined together and moving in one direction, its passing marked by the metronomic, machine beat of the clock. Benedictine monks conceived the clock in the Middle Ages to combat an unruly world of heterogeneous rhythms – the circadian pulses of the human body, the rhythm of the earth circling the sun, the cycles of the religious calendar – and since then we have increasingly lived time abstracted from nature and from the body. *Tuesday (1440 minutes) (with clock)* (1996) is a photographic work that



Fan 1997
Wood, plastic, microprocessors, paint and motors Approximate diameter: 4.5 m

fuses body time to clock time, a performance piece in which Almond sets out to physically experience, or rather, endure, each minute in a single day. Every time that the digital clock in his studio flips over to the next minute, he takes a photograph, laying out the resulting 1,440 images sequentially in a vast grid. Time is pictured according to the logic of the clock, as a series of fixed, discrete, elements occurring spatially between two points. But beneath this tight geometry a different tempo intrudes, as the blue light of dawn and the pink light of dusk create organic washes of colour across the fixed grid. Solar time, body time, clock time – each is implicated in Almond's shooting of the day.

Tuesday grew out of the earlier *A Real Time Piece* (1996) which Almond refers to as a performance – a performance starring an empty space. Presented over 24 hours in a small gallery in east central London, a large video projection presents an image of an interior. It is a corner in Almond's studio. Furnished with a draughtsman's table, a desk fan, a light, a telephone, a swivel chair, a digital clock: clean and functional, unextraordinary, bare of the detritus of traditional studio interiors, a place for intellectual effort, not sensual play with materials. The artist is absent. Nothing much happens. Time drags slowly. A minute passes and the clock flips over with a resounding crash – it takes a second to associate the changed number with the noise.

Someone joins you in the gallery space and dials a number on their mobile. The phone rings in the image before you, but no-one picks it up. You realise, suddenly, that the inert scene in front of you is in fact unfolding in real, not recorded, time. *A Real Time Piece* propels us uncannily into a whole new domain of artistic representation, one in which the image, the representation, is experienced simultaneously with the moment it is happening. It is an artwork that no one will ever experience again exactly as you have, and most startlingly, it is an artwork where no one can know what will happen next. A live broadcast – a complex network of cables and microwaves, courtesy of the BBC, bounce the image of Almond's studio from one side of London to the other – *A Real Time Piece* is television at its purest, stripped of clamorous content in order to focus on the medium's peculiar spatio-temporal characteristics. The work, like live television, poses a philosophical paradox as it suspends the viewer in an 'equivocal space between "representation" and reality'.¹ In it, we witness an image that is simultaneous with reality, in which the normal divisions of space and time collapse in a representation of pure presence, pure Now. And yet how can we believe the real and its representation to be absolutely congruent? *A Real Time Piece* is philosophically rich; it opens up the paradox of time to art, through the medium of television.

The paradox of time has taunted scientists and tormented philoso-

***A Real Time Piece* propels us uncannily into a whole new domain of artistic representation, one in which the image, the representation, is experienced simultaneously with the moment it is happening.**



Tuesday (1440 minutes) (detail) 1996
Colour photograph 65 x 54 cm

phers since culture began. How can we define 'now'? It is the only bit of time whose definition we can even logically attempt, the only part that truly exists, because the past is always over, and the future has never yet begun. But the present moment, the Now, eternally eludes understanding – as soon as we attempt to grasp it, it is already transformed into the past. Science never gives up searching for the duration of the present, measuring time in smaller and smaller intervals – the vibration of an atom, 10^{-14} seconds – but it can never solve the puzzle. Live television is the perfect visual medium for a contemporary age living at the speed of electricity. Computers and television push the project of the railway to its logical extreme, by collapsing space and time into a perpetual present, and demanding that we occupy that present, the Now. And yet it is the one place we can never fully inhabit, because it exists beyond understanding, beyond human consciousness, beyond the body, and 'the more we insist on occupying the instant, the more decisively it eludes us'.² A *Real Time Piece* forces a recognition of the frustrating ambiguity of time (metaphorised in the absurdly over-amplified clock) which worries at the heart of human experience, and is exacerbated in the technological age. It is significant, given this psychic friction, that two of Almond's subsequent works add a psychological dimension to themes of temporal and spatial experience.

Like *A Real Time Piece*, *HMP Pentonville* (1997) is a live broadcast, a performance of limited duration. A television camera relays the interior of a deserted cell from Her Majesty's Prison Pentonville live to London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. The tiny cell is blown up to enormous scale on the walls of the gallery, monumentally oppressive in its bleak, institutional anonymity. Almond wanted to picture a space he found impossible to imagine – a close friend was imprisoned and he was troubled by his inability to visualise where they were. What he finds is a dead, inert space, filled with a bunk bed, two chairs, an opaque window, glossed walls. Nothing moves, nothing changes, except time and sound. In the frame, the video's digital counter rattles through seconds at hysterical rate, and the incidental acoustics of the prison are amplified to unbearable pitch – doors clang shut, keys scrape in metal doors, footsteps bang, voices in the distance rise in a cacophony. The unremitting volume of sound traps you in the gallery in a way analogous to the containing walls of the cell, forcing you to occupy the space as it invades from every direction.

Prisons are about time and space *in extremis* – hence the metonym 'inside', the phrase 'to do time'. Space is minimised, time maximised, as punishment for the crime. Prison space is the opposite of expansive 'train space', as it turns in on itself, encloses, fixes and represses the body. Prison is a place where the aporia of time, the paradox of the now, begins to unravel, because it is here that the present becomes palpable, as time slows down and weighs down, in 'a chronology that hesitates, a present moment that persists, in hours that never end.'³ But ultimately the paradox of time is only resolved with death, when the Now is finally fixed in the space of the tomb. The companion piece *Oswiecim, March 1997* metaphorises this, chillingly, by taking us on a journey to another architecture of incarceration, perhaps the most terrible. Auschwitz is not named or pictured. Almond approaches the subject obliquely using time and travel as metaphors for the unrepresentability of the Holocaust, in a way reminiscent of Claude Lanzmann's seminal *Shoah*, with its relentlessly repeated footage of track shot from a moving train. Two parallaxed 8mm films project side by side on the wall. In grainy black and white, slowed down by 81%, one records the bus stop where visitors disembark outside the Auschwitz museum; the other the bus stop lying on the opposite side

***HMP Pentonville* (1997) is a live broadcast, a performance of limited duration. A television camera relays the interior of a deserted cell from Her Majesty's Prison Pentonville live to London's Institute of Contemporary Arts.**



HMP Pentonville 1997

Video footage of live satellite link between Pentonville prison and the ICA (7th May 1997) with sound

of the street, the point at which one would board a bus heading further into Poland. Shadowy presences linger at the Museum bus stop, the other is deserted. Cars pass and snow drives diagonally across the scene, threatening to blot out the already grainy image. Time passes unutterably slowly, waiting for a bus which never arrives. It is a scene of hellish immobility, a site of oblivion, a place where time and space have locked in an eternal present, numbed by the cold and by history.

Whether through the painterly sound-and-vision aesthetic of his films, the performative aspect of his live broadcasts, or the off-beat mechanics of his kinetic sculptures, for Almond it is impossible to conceive of time and space without acknowledging the centrality of the human subject. His diverse work points to our profoundly heterogeneous experience of time and space as refracted through the dual prisms of technology and history – a significant thought for a culture that often believes it has mastered both.

1. Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity*, pub. Sage Publications, 1998

2. *ibid.*

3. Georges Perec, *Species of Space and Other Pieces*, pub. Penguin, 1997

Courtesy, Jay Jopling/White Cube, London