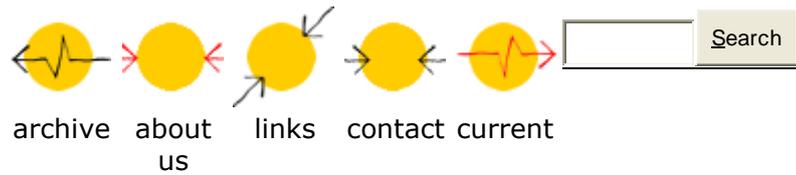


Culture Wars 



Edinburgh
Festivals

Visual art 2001

Infraliminal

Juan delGado, Rut Lees Luxemburg,
Sophie Rickett, Christopher Stewart

John Hudson



Viewing the Open, Rut Lees Luxemburg, 1999

The Stills Gallery has brought together four international artists under the curatorship of Christopher Stewart, whose chosen theme seems to be the dark underbelly of urban life. Using photography and video, the work captures a sense of contemporary paranoia and anxiety.

The staged images of **Juan del Gado** are the most disturbing of the artwork on show. Taken his photographs from the **Wounded** series of 1991-2001. These works reveal the aftermath of gangland killings, a robbery gone wrong, a rape or a murder. In **Untitled No 11** we are shown the body of a woman who may have been the victim of an attack or a hit-and-run. The companion piece to this is **Untitled No 13**, in which again we have a staged photograph of the aftermath of a brutal beating or murder of some kind. We see two figures on the ground covered by what seems to be morning dew, in woodland, dishevelled, items of clothes missing; a sock and a shoe. We see evidence that pockets and wallets have been searched thoroughly. Are we looking at the aftermath of a punishment beating or an execution? Do we immediately think of an area of conflict like Northern Ireland?

Rut Blee Luxemburg's empty car park, in **Viewing the Open** of 1999, is a golden, almost abstract piece, lit up by the orange glow of street lamps set in a post-industrial twilight zone. It's empty, but we suspect that it is a place where gangs hang out and boy racers might make their mark. These are desolate and lonely places caught between the bright lights and the vast unknown.

Sophie Rickett turns her attention to the vast unknown, namely: those spaces near railway cuttings, a school playing field on the edge of a motorway, or the dumping

ground for estates. **Cypress Screen, Dundee 2001** is a black-and-white image of a dense area of woodland that could hide bodies amongst rubbish, or even a stalker. The night plays on our imaginations; as we gaze out at the trees they become a threatening force.

Christopher Stewart plays on these insecurities with his images of the forests of Northern Finland and the borders of the Irish Republic. We are confronted with images of isolated figures waiting on the side of the road for a pickup or maybe to score. We view only their backs, adding to the sense of insecurity and apprehension. Are they in danger and what is our viewpoint? Who do we play?

For all its intensity, some of the visitors to the gallery may leave feeling cold. Sometimes you gain a sense that the only thing that really works is the medium, the fact that they are mainly large-format unframed photographs. The proliferation of photographic images and the age-old problem of photography as art might compromise our relationship to the medium. There are hints at an interest in the kind of automatic explorations of the Situationists, the surrealist wanderings of Paris by night, the capture and recording of twilight happenings, or the New York nightlife of Wegee's art. Compared to these, *Infraliminal* may look inauthentic (an odd term to use, I know) by comparison, and may lack the atmosphere and strange magic of the work of Brassai and Wegee, but these works have certainly left me with a different kind of chill. They may even reawaken a kind class-consciousness, for they record the margins of society. We sense its relationship with the underclass that lives in an urban dystopia, born out of modernism's concrete utopian visions.

Stills
23 Cockburn Street
Edinburgh
Until 1 September