

Lynette WALLWORTH b.1961

Duality of Light, 2009

single channel interactive video projection
Lynette Wallworth in collaboration with
Chris Watson: sound, and Pete Brundle:
video processing and system design;
lighting design: Bluebottle;
technical director: Kamal Ackarie
courtesy the artist, produced by Forma Arts
and Media Ltd; commissioned by Adelaide Film
Festival Investment Fund (2009)
This project has been assisted by the Australian
Government through the Australia Council,
its arts funding and advisory body

Hold: Vessel 1 and 2, 2001–2007

Hold: Vessel 1, 2001

3 channel video projection, multi-channel sound
editor: Tinzar Lwyn; consultant editor:
Reva Childs; glass artist: Emma Varga;
sound designer: Greg White
courtesy of and commissioned by the
Australian Centre for the Moving Image,
Melbourne, Australia
This project has been assisted by the Australian
Government through the Australia Council,
its arts funding and advisory body

Hold: Vessel 2, 2007

2 channel video projection, multi-channel sound
editor: Greg Ferris; glass artist: Emma Varga;
sound designer: Greg White
commissioned by the British Film Institute, London

Courtesy the artist, produced by Forma Arts
and Media Ltd; imagery courtesy: David Hannan;
Jeremy Pickett-Heaps; Dr Allan S Jones, Australian
Key Centre for Microscopy and Microanalysis,
The University of Sydney; David Malin; Rosemary
Golding, School of Medical Sciences, The
University of Sydney; Greg Rouse; Dr Anya Salih;
Exploratorium, TRACE (Transition Region and
Coronal Explorer); Stanford-Lockheed Institute for
Space Research, NASA Small Explorer program2;
NASA Hubble, hubblesite.org

Damavand Mountain, 2006

digital stills, DVD

17:00min

imagery: Lynette Wallworth; editor: Rhys
Graham; technical director: Kamal Ackarie
courtesy the artist, produced by Forma
Arts and Media Ltd; commissioned by
New Crowned Hope
This project has been assisted by the Australian
Government through the Australia Council,
its arts funding and advisory body

Beautiful Sunset, 2006

single channel HDV

dimensions variable

editor: Greg Ferris
courtesy the artist, produced by Forma
Arts and Media Ltd

Invisible by Night, 2004

single channel interactive video projection
camera and editor: Roberto Salvatore;
performer: Ivanka Sokol; lighting: Marden Dean;
system design: Matthew Gardiner and
Pete Brundle; original interface: Daniel Horwood
courtesy the artist, produced by Forma Arts
and Media Ltd; commissioned by Experimenta
Media Arts Inc

artist biography

Lynette Wallworth was awarded a Synapse, Australia Network for Art and Technology residency in 2008 to develop new work with marine biologist Dr Anya Salih at the Confocal Bio-Imaging Facility, University of Western Sydney. In 2003–2004 she was awarded an Australia Council for the Arts New Media Arts Fellowship which enabled her to undertake residencies in Iran, Italy and New Mexico. In 2006 she completed an Arts Council England Fellowship residency at the National Glass Centre, Sunderland, UK. Her exhibitions include: *Invisible by Night*, commissioned by Experimenta for the 2004 Melbourne Festival; *Still: Waiting 1*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, The University of NSW, as part of *Terra Alterius*, which toured to galleries throughout Australia during 2005; the premiere of *Still: Waiting 2*, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, UK, 2006; her first major European solo exhibition, *Lynette Wallworth – Evolution of Fearlessness*, New Crowned Hope Festival, Vienna, Austria, 2006; her first UK solo show, *Lynette Wallworth*, National Glass Centre, Sunderland, 2007; Auckland Triennial, New Zealand, 2007; *Regarding Fear and Hope*, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2007; *Hold: Vessel 2*, BFI Southbank Gallery, London, UK, 2007; *Still Waiting 2*, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University of Technology; a solo exhibition, *Evolution of Fearlessness*, Festival International d'Art Lyrique, Aix-en-Provence, France, 2008; and *Invisible by Night*, Mostly Mozart Festival, Lincoln Center for Performing Arts, New York, USA, 2008. *Evolution of Fearlessness* was also presented at the Melbourne International Arts Festival 2008 and in 2009 at the Sundance Film Festival, Utah.



Lynette Wallworth: Duality of Light

19 February – 24 April 2009

presented by the Samstag Museum of Art
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Light is an inherent quality in the work of Australian artist, Lynette Wallworth, which includes video installation, photography and film. Over the past decade, Wallworth has employed technology and light-based media to explore the complex interface between subject/viewer and the surrounding physical and metaphysical world of experience.

Duality of Light Catherine Wilson

Her installations, which engage the viewer in unexpected scenarios, frequently with intense human encounters, are profound and memorable. Wallworth is an outward-looking artist with an enduring interest in the human condition. She has travelled extensively with a spirit of openness to diverse cultures and worldviews, and has articulated the importance that, 'we are in a global community that requires us to lift up out of our individual lives in order to get a sense of what we are participating in, whilst holding in our minds ... the comprehension that our senses cannot tell us everything, that there is always more complexity to be revealed.' Ultimately, she aims to, 'create a space for opening to what we do not know, rather than to present a known.'¹ In Wallworth's work, light is both physical phenomenon and metaphor, alluding to heightened states of mind and the human desire to communicate, seek knowledge and explore the unknown. This understanding is significant for *Duality of Light*, a new work commissioned for the 2009 Bigpond Adelaide Film Festival, and the culmination of a trilogy which includes two previous works, *Invisible by Night*, 2004, and *Evolution of Fearlessness*, 2006.

In *Invisible by Night*², touching a video screen generates a moment of connection with a woman, a stranger, who occupies a melancholic space. The woman, filmed behind a layer of condensation, ceases her pacing in response to the viewer's gesture, and wipes her finger across the screen, revealing her eyes immured with the shadows of grief. Her searching gaze momentarily communicates wordlessly across virtual time and space. There is also an unexpected emotional journey for the viewer in *Evolution of Fearlessness*³, where the viewer initiates a series of poignant encounters with eleven women, most of whom are political refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Iraq and now reside in Australia. Created with film portraits, the work is a powerful testimony to human resilience.

While these works suggest a moment of transference, an insight into the life-changing experiences of 'another', the installation *Duality of Light* is a zone of encounter with the self. Inspired by the Preah Khan temple at Kompong Svay in Cambodia, architecture, light and symbolism are combined to create an immersive environment that alludes to the transformative experience of sacred

sites. The immersive, often an aspect of digital and installation art, is also present in examples of sacred architecture across myriad cultures, from the Renaissance churches of Europe to mosques of the Islamic world. Preah Khan ('Sacred Sword') is a Mahayana Buddhist temple built by King Jayavarman VII in 1191. This immense stone structure features entrances at the outer four cardinal points. From any one entrance, the journey on foot along an eternal passageway, marked at intervals with corbelled archways, galleries and devotional references to Hindu deities, is a revelatory one, culminating at the inner sanctum. Dedicated to Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, the central sacrosanct space is also the point of intersection of the four passages.

Significantly for Wallworth the experience of Preah Khan is a vivid analogy for engulfing and unexplained moments of altered reality that occurred during early childhood. The seizures the artist experienced, which resulted in loss of consciousness, opened avenues of insight into other dimensions of being that transcended the physical. They have been an important formative influence on *Duality of Light*. Searching for an analogy in science for a multi-dimensional understanding of reality, the artist has made reference to the theory, in physics, of 'wave-particle duality' which describes light as possessing both wave-like and particle-like properties. In terms of spiritual belief, a link

between Preah Khan and the artist's revelatory experience is the Mahayana philosophical tenet that claims our conscious perception of the world is an illusory construction of the unconscious mind. Enlightenment is attained when the individual has undergone three stages of transfiguration. The first, characterised by the 'constructed' world of self, other people and objects, is superseded by the second level of relative reality, where the individual perceives his/her existence as dependent on the 'other' in a subject/object duality. Transcendent knowledge occurs when the subject/object duality dissipates in a transition to a state of complete unity with the world.

As an encounter with the self, *Duality of Light* also offers a reflection on the 'other'. We live in a world where constructed dichotomies continually inform social and cultural perceptions. It was Edward Said who convincingly asserted the Orient was one of the West's, 'deepest and most recurring images of the Other.'⁴ In a wider context, the 'other' may be understood as that which the self regards as foreign and irreconcilable. Proposing an avenue out of this binary conflict, Said suggests seeing, 'the entire world as a foreign land.'⁵ Instead, Wallworth's installation, which brings the viewer to a moment of 'uncanny strangeness', seems to suggest, 'the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder... A symptom that precisely turns "we" into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible. The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners...'⁶

A desire to move beyond the self/other dichotomy in an engagement with cultural difference is inferred in the video installation *Damavand Mountain*, which developed from the artist's residency in Iran in 2004. The visual poetry between a woman clothed in a chador, the fragile existence of a poppy flower and the tender draping of clouds across a snow-covered mountain peak seduces the viewer into seeing the world through the eyes of another, through a visual dialogue between the strange and the familiar, change and continuity. A sense of journey through contemplation of the enduring and the transient is also intimated in the video *Beautiful Sunset*, where the focus is an almost imperceptible process of natural light transformation against the silhouette of a river red gum in the Flinders Ranges, South Australia.

Wallworth's interest in the interconnected nature of the world is related to her fascination



Lynette WALLWORTH, *Invisible by Night*, 2004, photograph by Colin Davison, image courtesy National Glass Centre, UK



From left: Lynette WALLWORTH, *Hold: Vessel 1*, 2001, photograph by Colin Davison, image courtesy National Glass Centre, UK
Lynette WALLWORTH, *Hold: Vessel 1*, 2001, photograph by Dave Morgan, courtesy of the British Film Institute

with the human desire for knowledge, especially via scientific research. This is epitomised in the installation *Hold: Vessel 1 and 2*, 2001–2007; which reveals to the viewer, who enters with a glass bowl, the brilliant complexity of the marine world and solar system. Comprising microscopic imagery of the Great Barrier Reef and rare imagery of the 2004 Transit of Venus, the work evokes wonder of the planet's ecology.

The art of Lynette Wallworth, which describes a profound enquiry into what it means to be human in the 21st century, has resonated with audiences around the world. In 2006, she held a solo exhibition at the *New Crowned Hope Festival* in Vienna, and her London debut was at the BFI Southbank Gallery in 2007. Last year her work featured at the 60th International Festival d'Art Lyrique, Aix-en-Provence, followed by the Mostly Mozart Festival at the Lincoln Centre for Performing Arts, New York. This is a valuable opportunity to experience more than one of the artist's works in an exhibition in Australia.

Catherine Wilson, BFA(Hons), Dip World Art, is a writer based in London.

Endnotes

- 1 Interview with Lynette Wallworth, June 2008
- 2 *Invisible by Night* was originally commissioned by Experimenta in association with the 2004 Melbourne International Arts Festival
- 3 *Evolution of Fearlessness*, 2006, is not included in this exhibition
- 4 Said, E., *Orientalism*, Penguin, 1978, p 1
- 5 Mercer, K., (Ed.), *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, inIVA and The MIT Press, 2008, p 9
- 6 Kristeva, J., *Strangers to Ourselves*, Columbia University Press, 1991, p 1