

## Uwe Wittwer: Raised Hide

by Jane Mae Howard, 2009

The amount of digital photographs on the internet is huge and forever proliferating.

For Uwe Wittwer's first solo show at Haunch of Venison, four rooms are dedicated to subjects sourced and carefully chosen from the world's wide web of abundant imagery. The works, all watercolour or inkjet on paper, feature recurring themes for Wittwer: war and its aftermath, family photos, still life, interiors and old master paintings. The entire show demonstrates a preoccupation with the past and continues Wittwer's research into the authenticity and meaning of appropriation art. An awareness of the way in which an artist's personal aesthetic creates a filter, when dealing with archival imagery, is always intriguing. Wittwer's Room one: Introduction, hosts an assortment of sourced material. One of the only two colour watercolours in the room, 'Raised Hide', sets the tone for the artist as observer, image hunter and 'voyeur'. Apart from 'Three Sisters', a beautifully faded, washed out and ghostly wartime image, the other six black- and-white 'inkjet on paper' pieces in Room One are threateningly severe in comparison. Intimations of Gainsborough paintings, historical photographs and portraiture are inverted into negatives and feature contrasting, warring shades of light and dark.

The two mediums resemble one another; the inkjets on paper are translated to look like watercolours. The presence and sophistication of this software manipulation is unsettling at first and, on closer inspection, not as intimate. But Wittwer's concerns with re-reproduction, authenticity and truth of the image constitute his unification of pictorial qualities; investigating multiple threads of reality, while bridging the sometimes uncomfortable gap between painting and photography.

'Room Two: the class of Beauty' contains an installation of glass display tables, each dedicated to an iconic artist revered by Wittwer. The room is filled with arrangements of scrapbook-style watercolour paintings, quite pleasingly sketchy and monotone, depicting small scenes or isolated details from their respective and acknowledged references. Compiled together, encased in their own museum-esque tableaux, they command a mark of respect and a strong sense of tribute.

The selection of cloud studies from Jacob van Ruisdael's works is particularly charming and reminiscent of art class studies. The installation suggests something of an old classroom from times gone by, with two huge watercolours of wartime school photographs, the subjects sad and nostalgic in their painted, fibre-soaked gesture.

The exhibition continues into two more rooms where scenes of domestic interiors have been taken from estate agents' websites. Wittwer's motif- the surveillance post- depicted more than once, emphasises his position as observer of the outside world. His voyeuristic collection of visuals and subject matter, borrowed from the wilderness of the internet, is pretty expansive, but also coherent. By contrasting the two mediums of digital photography and painting, Uwe Wittwer explores the artistic impulsion for re-interpretation and the prowling, commandeering, filtering and honouring of images.

These are notions that a vast number of contemporary painters are confronted with due to the sheer volume, wealth and accessibility of imagery. There are always more images to unearth and depict. Uwe Wittwer navigates himself decisively 'in a dream like certitude of aesthetic logic'.

