

The New Brutalists Jane and Louise Wilson

17th May 2006 – 24th June 2007
29 Bell Street

“The Wilsons transform their recondite subject into a dream-adventure with elements of documentary and tableau vivant: the results are mordant; sad and almost painfully beautiful, reaffirming the sister’s leadership in the thriving art of video installation”.

- New Yorker, October 11th 2004

Lisson Gallery is pleased to announce *The New Brutalists* by Jane & Louise Wilson, previewing Tuesday, 16th May at 29 Bell Street. This exhibition will include the five screen video installation *Erewhon* and new photographic works.

Here, for the first time, the Wilsons examine the social aspect of dystopia, the ‘flip side’ of their exploration of abandoned and brutalist architectural spaces. These photographic works are a radical gesture representing a dramatic departure from the unpopulated architectural landscapes of their earlier career. The inclusion of anonymous figures gives these images a startling new breadth and language.

Following a two-month residency with the Sofa Gallery and the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand, Jane & Louise Wilson have created a disturbing visual narrative of the darker aspects of colonialism at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Erewhon, a 5-screen video installation, takes its name from the title of Samuel Butler’s satirical novel about a young traveller who goes to New Zealand to build a new life on the isolated continent. The Wilsons addressed the vast New Zealand landscape, looking particularly at two sites in the South Island - the once functioning mining town of Denniston on the West Coast and the recently vacated sanatorium of Queen Mary’s hospital in Hamner on the East Coast. The expansive exterior spaces, coupled with the interiors of neglected hospital buildings dating from 1916, emphasise the physical and emotional seclusion of a particular time in New Zealand’s history. After the First World War the country suffered huge losses of its young male population, resulting in a need to re-populate and colonise the relatively young country. This prompted a discreet government-sanctioned implementation of early eugenics policies, which triggered a propagation of state-run sanatoriums and asylums. Medical science intervened on both willing and unwilling patients with the intended goal of creating a genetically superior, fit population.

For the video installation *Erewhon*, the Wilsons also filmed female gymnasts in a setting inspired by archival photographs of a ladies exercise class from the 1900s. They create moving images which are tense with exaggerated poses of stillness recalling the limitations of early photographic practice. They are derived from specific sources including an image ‘Gymnast Class’ from 1903 at Ponsonby’s Gymnasium in Auckland and ‘Ankle Contest, Christchurch’ printed in an edition

of the *Canterbury Times* in 1909. At this time the concern for procreation in New Zealand was at its height and the medical establishment equated women's physical fitness with the regeneration of the population. The images in this work perpetuate an anthology of poses in a rigid geometric setting, removing it from a recorded document into an abstraction.

The footage is projected on screens that surround the viewer from multiple sides, including overhead projections, bringing us more fully into the cinematic experience of the Wilsons work.

The iconic image of *The New Brutalists* directly quotes an archival image used as the cover for an architectural review magazine. The issue of the magazine examined The New Brutalism, the school of architecture based on the ideas of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, first applied in post-war England by Peter and Alison Smithson.

Jane and Louise Wilson's continued preoccupation and engagement with Modernist architecture can be traced by their direct referencing to Victor Pasmore through the titles of these new photographic works.

In '*Hamner Springs Mortuary*', and '*Seacliff Isolation Ward*', 2006 the Wilsons provide a subtle insight into this early fascination with mental health and physical wellbeing with eerily poetic images of disused and derelict hospital rooms that resonate with implied macabre activity.

It is significant that throughout their work, Jane and Louise Wilson consistently produce visually arresting, often beautiful images from sometimes challenging subject matter.

Jane & Louise Wilson live and work in London. Nominated for the 1999 Turner Prize, their work is held in numerous museum and private collections throughout the world. Two-person exhibitions and projects include '*The Knot Garden*' by Michael Tippet, in collaboration with Royal Opera House 2 (2005); De Appel, Amsterdam (2004); Fondazione David Halevim, Milan (2004); Pori Art Museum, Finland (2004); "*A Free and Anonymous Monument*" at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead which travelled to Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria (2004/5). In 2002 the Wilsons had a show at Kunst-Werke, Germany and solo shows at the Dallas Museum of Art, Texas (2000) and the Serpentine Gallery, London (1999).