

October 29, 2004

## ART IN REVIEW; Jane and Louise Wilson -- 'Erehwon'

By ROBERTA SMITH

303 Gallery 525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea Through Nov. 6

Jane and Louise Wilson, the English artists with a penchant for abject architecture, have regained their footing by returning to familiar territory, fabulously ruined interiors redolent of oppressive institutional power. In their last show here, they focused on an outdoor ruin, an abandoned missile site in the former Soviet Union, which was not as powerful. For "Erehwon," named for Samuel Butler's satiric novel of 1872, they are mostly indoors again, in New Zealand.

On five screens, abutted and cantilevered to suggest the walls, corners and ceilings of rooms, their tracking camera records an abandoned hospital compound ravaged by vandals, an old mining shed ravaged by nature and a group of virginal young women practicing gymnastics in old-fashioned garb. The structure of the screens mimics and multiplies the structures in the images, creating a cinematic Cubism that is stunningly formal yet haunted.

A gallery statement divulges the work's inspiration: New Zealand's devastating loss of manpower in World War I and a state-sponsored eugenics program that isolated young women in hospitals, including the one documented here. Not much of this comes across in the piece itself. Instead, the specifics of the images add up to a larger truth, conveying a diffuse sense of human folly and cost that is sad beyond words.