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SFMOMA PRESENTS TWO VIDEO INSTALLATIONS
***Charged Space* Marks Debut Exhibition by New Media Arts Curator Rudolf Frieling**

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present the exhibition *Charged Space: Jane & Louise Wilson/Fikret Atay* from October 20, 2006, through January 21, 2007. Marking the curatorial debut of SFMOMA's newly appointed media arts curator, Rudolf Frieling, this presentation pairs two video installations that allude to the loaded histories of specific sites—places laden with connotations of terror, political oppression, or cultural imperialism. *Stasi City*, 1997, by Jane and Louise Wilson features multichannel wall-size projections that journey through the abandoned headquarters of the East German secret police—the Staatsicherheit—a few years after the reunification of Germany. Fikret Atay's *Tinica*, 2004, a single-channel projection, is set on a hillside against the backdrop of Atay's hometown, Batman, a Kurdish city rife with political turmoil that is located near the border between Turkey and Iraq. Occupying adjacent galleries, the works share a fascination with the uneasy political subtext of seemingly banal locations, offering complementary perspectives on the gulf between the physicality of a place and its cultural symbolism.

“Both the Wilson sisters and Atay confront the difficulty of engaging in an authentic way with spaces burdened by so many symbolic images and potent histories,” says Frieling. “The installations presented here record two different geographical and historic conditions: the past of a socialist East European city and the present of a modern Islamic city. In both cases, the artists not only envisage the political implications, but convey a sense of physically charged atmosphere through their use of image, sound, and artistic enactment.”



Jane and Louise Wilson, *Stasi City*
(still), 1997; private collection © 2006
Jane & Louise Wilson

Jane and Louise Wilson

Known for their split-screen video installations, twin sisters Jane and Louise Wilson work collectively to conjure vivid, often uncanny portrayals of the psychology and secrecy of physical space, evoking theatrically heightened environments that attempt to merge past and present, individual and historical memory. At the core of their work is

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an interest in invisible aspects of place; the intangible web of experience that resonates in abandoned architecture, interiors, and other deserted locations; and how the presence of those who once occupied these sites is manifested.

Stasi City, 1997, a 29-minute multichannel color projection with sound, was shot inside the vacant headquarters of the East German secret police, popularly known as Stasi City. While living in Berlin in the mid-1990s on a grant awarded to promote German studies, the pair became fascinated by the city's controversial historical architecture linked to the Cold War and saw Stasi City—a potent symbol of government repression—as a way to continue their exploration of the intersection of space and sociopolitical philosophy. The once fenced-off complex had become a haunting relic of the architecture of surveillance, paranoia, and ideological control. Although the Wilson sisters did not experience first-hand the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), they propose a surreal and subjective view of its aftermath.

The installation consists of two double-wall projections positioned in opposite corners of the same room—four projections in all—each showing five-minute video loops. The twin but subtly out-of-sync footage occasionally aligns to create striking juxtapositions, mirrored images, diametrically opposed actions, and cross-frame motion—choreography that the artists have said is greatly inspired by Russian film directors such as Dziga Vertov and Andrei Tarkovsky. Projections both in front of and behind the observer force a constant negotiation of gallery space in order to fully comprehend images in peripheral vision, a nod to concerns of spectator participation handed down from Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham.

A slow pan that seems to proceed in real time glides through an eerie maze of empty corridors, offices, and interrogation chambers once used by more than 100,000 Stasi agents and informants during the Cold War, while an ambient soundtrack offers disembodied footsteps, the hum of austere fluorescent lightening, and jarring electronic sounds interspersed with silence. A close-up examines outdated surveillance equipment and imposing file cabinets, follows elevators traveling between floors, and observes the opening and closing of secret doors. Obsolete reel-to-reel recording devices, mute telephones, and outmoded monitors seem ready to spring into action at any moment.

In the final sequence, a pair of legs suspended in midair fill the frame. The lens widens to reveal a figure dressed in a period GDR track uniform, levitating in the empty interrogation room as if in a vacuum. Then a flask floats up and hovers next to the figure in a moment of acute tension before suddenly dropping to the floor, breaking the spell and beginning the video loop's cycle anew.

In a nightmarish, suspense-inducing penetration of the Stasi headquarters that, in fact, defines—and simulates for the viewer—the regime's own Cold War surveillance tactics, *Stasi City* creates an artistic space that indulges in a mesh of chaotic details only to point to the macro-perspective of doomed political ideologies and unstoppable powers of entropy. The historical ambiguities, bureaucracies, and banalities that lie at the bottom of fundamentalist policies have now been exposed and subverted.

Jane and Louise Wilson were born in Newcastle, England, in 1967 and currently live and work in London. They studied separately for bachelor's degrees in fine art before earning master's degrees together in 1992 from Goldsmith's College, London. The artist pair's work has been exhibited internationally at major institutions and exhibitions, including the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva (1997), Kunsthalle Hamburg (1999), the Tate in London (2000), Kunst-Werke Berlin (2002), the *Carnegie International* (1999–2000), the *Istanbul Biennial* (2001),

and *Moving Pictures* at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (2003). In 1999 they were short-listed for the Turner Prize, the most prestigious award for a British artist under 40.



Fikret Atay, *Tinica* (still), 2004;
Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
© 2006 Fikret Atay

Fikret Atay

Artist Fikret Atay's low-tech videos offer deceptively simple sketches of everyday life in Batman, a militarized Kurdish city near the Turkey-Iraq border. Economic depression and oppressive government surveillance of the Kurdish minority population there, as well as suppression of their culture, would seem an obstacle to making and publicly exhibiting art, but Atay deliberately sets his work in this politically unstable environment, using it to address the transgression of cultural borders and the disparity between globalization's intention and fact. Using a handheld camera and natural lighting, he records ordinary yet somehow urgent snapshots of local Kurdish culture against a highly charged backdrop of global economy.

Tinica, 2004, a 7½-minute single-channel projection with sound, observes a teenager's open-air drum performance on a hilltop at sunset. In the opening close-up, the boy, with help from a friend who remains mostly offscreen, carefully assembles a makeshift drum kit from waste materials—rusted containers, overturned buckets, plastic lids, scrap metal—and begins to play with great concentration. The camera pans out to show the boy's location, perched atop a plateau overlooking the sprawling city of Batman to one side and green, undeveloped countryside on the other. His driving, impressive solo steadily builds until, finishing with an ardent crescendo, he suddenly rises and despondently kicks the drum set down the hill, throwing the sticks aside in a gesture reminiscent of classic rock 'n' roll stage antics. The camera tracks the broken drum-kit as it falls down the hill, rolling to a stop at the edge of the city.

In the end the drummer's surroundings remain unconcerned with his impassioned performance. Though his drums are cast away, the authenticity of their makeshift nature is a strong reminder of their potential to reappear anywhere at any time. The protagonist's rebellious attitude may seem like trivial posturing that reflects music-video aesthetics, but his unheard call for an audience is poignant and far-reaching. Meanwhile the city's jumble of depressing conditions and newly built, upscale townhouses tells a story of urban global development. But the drummer's heroic rhythm and improvised stage insists on a distinct sense of place and identity, confronting the Western viewer's assumed cultural understanding. A testament to the power of individual expression and freedom of the imagination, Atay's work affirms art's ability to transform and transcend circumstance, if only for a moment.

Fikret Atay was born in 1976 in Batman, Turkey. He received his degree in fine arts from Dicle University in Diyarbakir, Turkey, and currently lives in Paris. Atay has had solo exhibitions at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, León, Spain; Maison de l'Architecture, Paris; the Vienna Kunsthalle; and the Hammer Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles—his first solo exhibition at an American museum. His video works have been included in the group exhibitions *Time Zones* at the

Tate Modern, London, and *Adaptive Behavior* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and in several biennial exhibitions worldwide, including the Eighth International Biennale, Istanbul.

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