

MATERIAL

R E V I E W S

Sam Taylor-Wood

Chisenhale Gallery

SAM TAYLOR-WOOD HAS worked with both photography and video for quite a while, and although the show at Chisenhale consisted of only five video projections, one can sense that it is a photographer at work behind the show. Taylor-Wood is extremely precise with her camera, and the different films expressed this quality – they worked just as well as pictures as they did as films.

There is always a kind of perfection in the works of Taylor-Wood which impresses me. The five projections run perfectly edge to edge, covering the entire wall and they also had exactly the same length. These things do matter, I don't know how many times I've seen

video films ruined by the lack of quality (when lack of quality isn't used as the medium, of course). It is too often like experiencing the opposite of the sarcastic video "Nice Video, Shame About the Song" which "Not the Nine O'Clock News" did ages ago, if anyone remembers.

The shots were different but completed each other. One showed a girl walking around outdoors, facing the camera. Another showed a man sitting still, the next showed another man walking inside an apartment, the fourth a woman in a bar and the fifth a man in a backyard. They are different in many ways, and one thing that impresses me here is Taylor-Wood's sense for settings and colors. Taylor-Wood works with a hue and saturation in the pictures which exaggerates them and strengthens certain readings of them. The form underlines the content or perhaps privileges certain readings of it: in the bar scene, there is a cliché bluish color which is contrasted by the stark colors of the woman's outfit. The lonely man sits in a darkened room, whereas the man in the apartment walks around in very bright rooms. These films are flanked by the outdoor scenes, with all natural colors. The settings also completed each other. In the left outdoor scene the woman walks rapidly, in the right outdoor scene the man hardly moves at all and his ability to walk around is also limited by the yard. The sitting man doesn't move at all, the woman in the bar moves, but only slowly from time to time. The man in the apartment moves around in a different room. A composition-based analysis would note that he is at one extreme color-wise, the median in terms of movement, and that the tableau is in the center.

The videos showed people engaging in an internal dialogue. As in other works, Taylor-Wood succeeds in capturing a depression or anxiety which is on the verge of becoming frantic. They are all seemingly on the edge, on a level where the depression is likely to turn into another expression, whether it be indifference or mania, a scream or catatonia. Since each of them spoke out loud with no apparent listener, they created an impression of solitude. On the other hand, the speeches worked simultaneously; they seemed to be talking to each other, commenting on the other person's mania. It was as if they all demanded of the viewer: "listen to me, feel sorry for me." Their utterances were also telling each other to shut up. They thereby formed another position a viewer could easily take: when listening to someone who indulges in self-pity, the first reaction is usually empathy, but after a while you get the feeling you've heard the story, that you have your own problems and can't that person go somewhere else and leave me alone. I liked Taylor-Wood's dualism. There are no simple answers, no one-sided stances which can be taken for the abandoned and depressed, but there is no sarcasm there either. She succeeds in interesting the viewer in a different question – anxiety – which I thought had been totally destroyed by the post-war generation of authors and bourgeois family dramas shown in the theatres of the Western world. The connection with the theatre brings to the fore the only major objection I have to this work: I thought the actors were at times too theatrical, which detracted from their believability.

Håkan Nilsson