

About the Artist


David Claerbout was educated at the Nationaal Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp and at Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam. His work has been exhibited at The Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, Scotland; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, both in the Netherlands; CGAC Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago di Compostela, Spain; SM.A.K. Stedelijk Museum Voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium; and the DIA Center for the Arts, New York.

David Claerbout is represented by Yvon Lambert Gallery in Paris and New York, Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, Switzerland, and Galerie Micheline Sz wajcer, Antwerp, Belgium, among others. He currently resides and works in Antwerp and Berlin.

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Exhibition curator: Christine van Assche

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Public Programs

Thursday, Feb. 21, 6:30PM, Bldg. 32 (Stata Center), Rm. 155
Artist talk by Mary Lucier, whose work, *Arabesque*, is on view on the Media Test Wall, (21 Ames St., Bldg. 56)

Wednesday, March 19, 7PM, Bartos Theatre
David Joselit, Yale University art historian and author of *Feedback—Television Against Democracy* (MIT Press, 2007) in conversation with Caroline Jones, Professor in MIT's History, Theory, Criticism section of the Department of Architecture

Gallery Talks
Wednesday, February 20, 12:30PM Jane Farver, LVAC Director
Saturday, March 8, 2PM Bill Arning, LVAC Curator
Thursday, March 13, 6PM Bill Arning
Wednesday, March 19, 12:30PM Mark Linga, LVAC Educator
Wednesday, April 2, 12:30PM Bill Arning

Film Nights, Bartos Theatre
Organized by Curator John Gianvito

Friday, February 22, 7:30PM
Short works by Rebecca Meyers, and James Herbert
how to sleep (winds) (U.S.A, 2000, 9 min.) dir. Rebecca Meyers
lions and tigers and bears (U.S.A., 2003-2004, 12 min.)
dir. Rebecca Meyers
Apalachee (U.S.A, 1974, silent, 13 min.) dir. James Herbert
Silk (U.S.A, 1977, 25 min.) dir. James Herbert

Thursday March 13, 2008, 7:30PM
Films by Ken Jacobs
Capitalism: Child Labor (U.S.A., 2006, 14 min.)
Capitalism: Slavery (U.S.A., 2006, 3 min.)
Flo Rounds a Corner (U.S.A., 1999, 6 min.)
Ontic Antics Starring Laurel and Hardy: Bye, Molly
(U.S.A./2005, 90 min.)

MIT Public Art Tour, departs from LVAC galleries
Friday April 4, 12PM (rain date: Sunday, April 6, 12PM)

David Claerbout

David Claerbout is designed and organized
by the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

February 8-April 6, 2008

David Claerbout

This is the first museum survey exhibition of works by Belgian artist David Claerbout. Since 1996, Claerbout has explored the boundaries and overlaps between video and still photography, blurring the line between the still and the moving image. He digitizes found photographs and then introduces moving elements, and with them, time. He also uses digital video to create mini-narratives set in buildings or urban spaces that play on the changing light and passage of time to interrogate “the substance of time.”

Influenced by phenomenology, David Claerbout has developed a body of work that challenges our habitual perceptions, testing the limit of all forms of visual reproduction in his endeavor to transport reality. “I belong to a generation of artists that has problems with the aura of the art object, and that’s why I work in a medium, digital video, historically associated with mass culture,” says the artist.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published in two separate editions: one French and one English by JRP/Ringier. The 170 page illustrated publication was jointly produced by the Centre Pompidou, Paris with the MIT List Visual Arts Center and the De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg. The catalogue features essays by Raymond Bellour, Françoise Parfait, Dirk Snauwaert, and Christine Van Assche. *Unless otherwise noted, the texts below were written by artist David Claerbout.*

Kindergarten Antonio Sant’Elia, 1932 (1998)

Big screen single-channel video installation, 576 x 720 PAL interlaced, black and white, silent, 10 minutes

This video installation is based on a photograph dating from 1932, of the opening of the new kindergarten Antonio Sant’Elia in Como [Italy]. We see children playing in the school’s functionalist garden (by architect Giuseppe Terragni). The light is cold and it seems like the sun is low, creating long shadows of early spring.

The image of the children remains in between a spontaneously captured moment and a composed picture. The movement of the young trees suggests that the image is frozen, while it simultaneously continues to melt further into motion, undecided in which direction to go.

Four Persons Standing (1999)

Big screen video installation, 576 x 720 PAL interlaced, black and white, stereo audio, 60 minutes

The image—a video—shows two women and two men, life-size, on a pavement in front of a building. As Claerbout transforms and abstracts the photographic representation of reality, his figures become human prototypes, like actors playing a role, appearing as though in a classical drama. There is a strange non-verbal relationship constructed by means of silent glances. Both men are looking at a woman carrying a handbag, appearing on the right. This woman only seems to have eyes for the figure opposite her

on the left. The communication inherent in the image, operating through different chronological systems, confers upon the image a narrative dynamism, strengthened by the oscillation of the light from the screen. (Text Christoph Doswald)

Vietnam, 1967, near Duc Pho (Reconstruction after Hiromishi Mine)

(2001) Big screen video installation, 576 x 720 PAL interlaced, color, silent, 3 minutes 30 seconds

This work shows the landscape in Ha Phan (near Duc Pho), Vietnam, filmed 33 years after the crash of a twin-engine caribou aircraft. The plane was shot in friendly fire while trying to land on an airstrip. Images for this reconstruction were taken in November of 2000 at the end of the monsoon season, when the sun showers and clouds provide a natural, theatrical light over the valley.

The Stack (2002)

Big screen video installation, 1600 x 1200 HD progressive, color, silent, 36 minutes

In the foreground of the composition, a homeless man sleeps, hidden in shadow, while behind him the last rays of the sun penetrate a forest of concrete pillars. For this piece, I took a subject—poverty, homelessness—a problem I wouldn’t usually deal with because of its social dimension, which obliges one to take a position. But here, the sun, daylight, and the mere passage of time become the major elements, allowing an escape from the ostensible subjects. In other words, time—in a role played here by the sun, through 36 minutes of twilight—is not concerned with the critical, the problematic, with what is revealed, what perhaps ought to be revealed, even. The actor “sun,” I usually associate with warmth and wellbeing, here becomes a source of neutral light, losing its usual attributes. The same is true of the composition of the overpasses, elements that would otherwise establish a relationship between the homeless man and the sun; it is so demanding of attention that it comes to seem central to the work. The subject has become secondary, as in a history painting in which the painter is more interested in the landscape than in the mythological narrative.

Bordeaux Piece (2004)

Single-channel wide screen video installation, 576 x 720 PAL progressive, color, dual mono over headphones and speakers, 13 hours 40 minutes

It was for *Bordeaux Piece* that I first wrote dialogue, with the help of the actor Josse de Pauw, who plays the father. Each shot lasts two to three minutes, and there are seven altogether making up the story, a bit like a fiction short film. The plot was unimportant. I needed a succession of quick shots, of situations capable of being rapidly taken in, and I chose the story of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Mépris (Contempt)*. It could have been something else. I wanted quite a tense drama evoked through very bad dialogue. And I shot it so that it doesn’t really work. What I did was, we repeatedly filmed each shot from 5:30AM, when you can just begin to see, until 10PM, when you couldn’t see anything any longer. The shooting took place between mid-July and mid-August. We did exactly

the same shot every ten minutes, in the changing light of a single day, seventy a day in to total. Then I edited together all the scenes shot at 5:30AM, then all those done ten minutes later, and so on. In the final edit, the story is played out seventy times over, in exactly the same way, each time in the same light, a light corresponding to the same time of day, but on different days. Each of these cycles lasts between ten and twelve minutes, and the whole piece lasts thirteen hours and forty minutes. So, in *Bordeaux Piece* I wasn’t at all concerned to extend or to reread the domain of cinematic fiction. I did it as if I were shooting and editing a fiction short, against a background structured by light. But unlike in the cinema, this “background” gradually comes into the foreground, annulling the narrative. It is the light that organizes the whole thing. You can be interested in the narrative the first time, perhaps the second, but by then it has already become a dull sequence, a repeated motif giving rhythm to what is the real business in *Bordeaux Piece*, the giving of form to the passage of time using natural light.

Shadow Piece (2005)

Single-channel video installation, 576 x 720 PAL progressive, black and white, stereo audio, 30 minutes 19 seconds

I was interested to see how, generations later and knowing what we do, a photograph can still confront us with the ideals of the modern, conveying them to us across time. In *Shadow Piece*, action succeeds action but the shadows suggest that time does not pass. These are particularly evident in the space featured in the first shot, for which I used a photograph whose exact origin I am unaware of. One sees the entrance hall of a building, viewed from the top of the stairs, with glass doors onto the street doors that a succession of figures outside attempt in vain to open. The viewer is included in the static part of the space, a fixed digital composition, and independent photographic images. Within it, the shadows appear as the fixed framework for the composition, that is, for the unfolding of the narrative, rather than as an index of the passage of time. The photographic part of *Shadow Piece* exhibits itself—strikes a pose—as the distilled expressions of an imperishable modernity. A fragment of image that speaks an affirmative authoritative language, further emphasized by its photographic qualities.

Sections of a Happy Moment (2007)

Single-channel video installation, 1920 x 1600 HD progressive, black and white, stereo audio, 25 minutes 57 seconds

This video describes a moment in the life of a Chinese family, in a sunlit square surrounded by social housing. The figures, grouped in a circular composition around a ball suspended in the air, were photographed using a multitude of cameras. The moment was captured in a fraction of a second, from several different points of view, from different distances. The work fixes this fleeting moment in a highly sculptural composition. The cold, anonymous, modernist architecture contrasts with the intimacy of the group. The successive shots, showing the life of the family in all its spontaneity, like propaganda pictures for a happy life, are gradually transformed in an all-seeing instrument of control.