

GALERIE PATRICIA DORFMANN

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Press release

Rosa Barba

Western round table

4th September to 27th September 2008

Opening 4th September 6 pm to 9 pm

The Galerie Patricia Dorfmann is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Rosa Barba. This special project will include the installation *Western round table*.

Rosa Barba is an artist who might work in a variety of media but whose work is invariably about one medium in particular: industrial cinema. Rather a distillation of the form than a structural analysis of its component parts that those filmmakers of the late 1960s or '70s might have been investigating, her works are beguiling and elemental. Informed by a social and cultural research, the re-presentation or her subjects is more akin to the construction of peculiar monuments than the pleasure or celebration that would otherwise seem to be the surface qualities of her films, sculptures, installations and publications. *Western Round Table 2027* (2007) is paradigmatic:

Two projectors, close together, face each other on a small plinth that raises them slightly from the ground. Their lenses poke into the air with modest defiance, as if to accuse each other. They speak at the same time, projecting loops of clear 16mm film that sit on top of them like hats and carry optical soundtracks of feint chimes (one base, one melody) that sound like the clanking of old machinery, the industrial past or modernism's back catalogue, emblematic of the machines producing them. The light of each projector's bulb throws the silhouette of its opposite large onto the gallery walls, their shadows looming like characters in the alleyways of film noir, the immaterial motif of a depleted genre made sculptural. But the title of this work (one of three in Rosa Barba's recent exhibition, 'They Shine' at the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, all of which were developed from research in and around the Mojave Desert, California) points to the future – a future: *Western Round Table 2027*. As such this work becomes an already-antiquated memorial sent back from a future without words, figured by the epochal past of the early twentieth century, of derelict (modernist) form.

In 1949 the California School of Fine Arts organised *The Western Round Table on Modern Art* in San Francisco. A group of men – from art, literature, criticism, music, science, philosophy, architecture, including Marcel Duchamp, Frank Lloyd Wright and Gregory Bateson – publicly and privately discussed contemporary artistic practice, its modernist legacy and a modernist future. Is the implication of Rosa Barba's 2007 'round table' that this conversation was at once already archaeological, cultural dereliction its subject, modernism itself defined as a kind of predictive memorialisation? Certainly the symposium might be read into Barba's work even if it remains exterior to it, in the field of the viewer's independent research. But *Western Round Table 2027* is not necessarily about (or enacting) a bankrupt aesthetic discourse. Instead it distils what might be its source material into an abstract outside of space of time that defines its terms as a monument and an enigma. If it stands for 1949 it might also stand for a generalised situation of seemingly impotent negotiation (of politics or contemporary culture) – a debate trapped in an endless loop, the echo chamber that defines its (our) condition as ridiculous and unresolvable. Self-contained and timeless it is a simultaneously open and closed object, a key to Barba's practice.

Ian White, 2008