

Magali Reus



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Background
2009
DVD still

Ibid Projects, London, UK

Magali Reus' first solo show in London teased out a fluid, inward-facing narrative between sculpture and video. 'Background', which moved in January to Ibid Projects following a successful début at La Salle de Bains in Lyon, was an exhibition of two halves: an anteroom featuring various minimal sculptural forms, and a room screening a looped, seven-minute video (*Background*, all works 2009). The former comprised a shiny, cast-aluminium loop resembling a bicycle wheel (*Closure*); strips of silicone rubber, looped like ribbons (*Spill*); two identical sheets of perforated stainless steel (*Pattern Recognition*); a sheet of gleaming green polyester resin covered in splashes of darker green, intercut with a square of plain green, entitled *Sheet Section (Countershading)*; and two boards of green fibreglass resting on a simple aluminium frame several feet above the viewer (*Lift*). While their shared colours, glossy finish and very specific placement suggested an elusive narrative, it was the video, *Background*, that established a relationship between them.

In it, a group of six men dressed in green – not necessarily military fatigues, but the suggestion is there – enter into a strangely lunar landscape (in fact, an English quarry). Sand blows across the crest of some manmade dunes and the men appear, as if from nowhere, running into a pit to begin a series of exercises. Aimless yet obviously choreographed, the men – mute, faces impassive – run around large puddles, do press-ups in formation, wrestle and hoist one of their number up a long metal pole. The focus is on their sinewy bodies, stretched in vain effort; the group makes a single sculptural form, controlled even when it is in motion.

The landscape, meanwhile, is strewn with objects similar to those in the anteroom: strips and sheets of metal are lodged variously in the

sand and rock, often reflecting the movements of the men, whose fatigues echo the green fibreglass boards. The sculptural objects, adrift on their own, suddenly acquire significance, seeming to reference a whole landscape of war: camouflage; physical rectitude; even the neat headstones of military graveyards (which are suggested by perforated steel sheets). Similarly, the men's impressive level of choreographed control finds its adjunct in the polish and deliberate placement of the sculptures in the anteroom, and even within the video, where there are instances of reflection between things and bodies. At various points, the camera rests briefly on the assorted metal objects in the sand, after which it cuts to the men, who are organized in similar formations. In one sequence, the fluttering of a thin sheet of reflective metal in the wind is followed by a shot of one man's flickering eyelids.

Each of the two sections animates the other. Despite the video's title, the question of which section holds primacy – which is background and which is foreground – is open-ended. Nevertheless, the video and the sculptures are bound together in a sealed world, each requiring the other; it is difficult to imagine the works functioning separately, other than as clues for a wider narrative. Their relationship is flowing, symbiotic, but something potentially disconcerting also transpires – the lack of an escape route. The men reside in a sandy bowl, in a film that loops back to sculptures in an adjacent room. Reus' skill in creating something mysteriously lyrical, yet claustrophobic, packs a neat punch.

Laura Allsop