

## FIONA CRISP

Camerawork, London

For the inaugural exhibition of the relaunched Camerawork, Fiona Crisp arranged three vast black and white photographs in the newly reconfigured space. The three *Still Films* all depicted a different view of a common space – an empty room of generous proportions in an industrial building, with wooden floors and large windows covered by wire grills. In the space a figure moves from one place to another with an improbable mixture of restlessness and an ability to wait forever. Narrative is suggested but suppressed, as is the figure's identity. We are presented with a scene that is loaded with potential, but one that we cannot trace forward or backward. Although always detectable, always present, the figure has a strange variable translucency, allowing the surrounding architecture to be seen through it.

In two of the photographs there were more than one figure, yet despite their anonymous nature it is apparent that this is a multiplication of the same figure rather than two characters. The character is of indeterminate gender, wearing heavy trousers, stubby boyish shoes, a bulky, hooded, waterproof jacket and thick, oversized gloves. Although its head is not always covered the figures face is never revealed. It is not only that the figure is often facing away from the camera but also that when it does face the viewer the body's density evaporates, erasing its features. The figure sits on a bench, waiting. The bench appears in different places within the space. The figure looks out of the grilled windows. It is as if the figure occupies different places, and perhaps different times, simultaneously.

The character's lack of identity and its only basic human form could give the figure a menacing presence, gloves and hood suggesting face and hands but removing their intimacy. Whereas earlier photographs in the series similarly played with the suppression of identity, the figure was always more substantial and this anonymity was achieved by the figure always facing away from the camera, its head covered by a hood like the murderous dwarf in Nicholas Roeg's film *Don't Look Now*. In the new works, it becomes obvious that the figure has moved during long exposures, lingering in one place longer than the other to create the different intensities of its manifestation. This technique has allowed Crisp to achieve the anonymity of the figure through the camera itself, erasing its identity with light alone.

There were also two benches in the gallery, one placed to allow the viewer to see all three images, while the other was placed directly opposite one of the images. The benches are of that familiar kind found in galleries – banquet seat, discrete metal legs. The only thing unusual about them was that they were an incongruous beige in colour. It would be easy to assume that the benches were simply comfortable seats to look at photographs on – which in one sense they were – but the preciseness with which they are placed, and the fact that their colour matches that of the metal bar from which the photographs are suspended, betrayed the fact that they are part of the experience orchestrated by the artist.



Fiona Crisp, *Still Films*, 1999

There is a subtle play of sitting and moving within the placement of the work, the two benches reflecting the activity of the spectral figure in the photographs. The benches tempt the viewer to sit and contemplate the photographs for longer than they might have otherwise, inducing a meditative pace that allows the viewer to realise Crisp's featureless, composite figure is actually far from the menacing presence that might be assumed. The figure's relationship to the depicted room, the unavoidable sense of waiting, of contemplation, give it an altogether more serene presence.

The figure's anonymity seems to almost be in deference to the space, which through its immobility registers as a permanent, *solus* ground in the photographs within which the figure waxes and wanes. Rather than any faceless menace Crisp's figure is a measure, an entity for meditating space over time, of absorbing it, demarking it, a suggestion of a human presence that provides the viewer with a marker through which to relate to and understand space. Once the space is marked the spectral figure moves on, using the bench as a stepping stone to climb out the window into the outside world. Without the container of the building to give it its rationale, the figure's body dissolves in the dappled light coming through the trees.

Simon MORRISSEY