

Stephanie Stein
OASE (2022)
Video and Sound Installation
3:40 min, Loop
Sound: Carlo Heller

Although it looks abstract and could be mistaken for a digital animation in fact, the video footage I used to create *Oase* (2022) was filmed on location in Berlin in the laboratory of the now defunct GDR lighting company Narva with a Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K. The physical characteristics of their sodium vapour lighting fascinated me. Although still used in outdoor settings and military bases, it is becoming an obsolete technology. When you turn sodium vapour lamps on, they change colour, graduating from a deep red to a monochromatic yellow hue, much like a sunrise. Once yellow, they have the eerie effect of bleaching the colour spectrum from objects they illuminate, turning everything into shades of grey. It was this characteristic which made this kind of lighting the forerunner of the blue and green screens for special effects. A yellow-screen, for instance, was famously used in Alfred Hitchcock's iconic film *The Birds* (1963). In editing I cropped, serialised and time-shifted footage of the lamps into a composition of vertical stripes or bands. This adds a layer of compositional narrative, one of abstracted absences, appearances and disappearances.

I worked closely with composer and producer Carlo Heller, who created the sound. The sound and the visual components of the work are a fused unity. Our aim was to create an experiential installation which functioned like an immaterial sculpture that completely immerses a viewer in a sensorial event, in a spatial and temporal shift on a meta-level. One which is intensely physical and activates the subconscious. The sound evolved out of research into psychoacoustics and recordings made in an anechoic chamber. These chambers are completely insulated against external noise and absorb almost all sound within them. Through this near to absolute silence, all you can hear is your own body, especially the most primal and immediate sounds - your own heartbeat, and perhaps even the noise of your own neurons firing! In addition, synthesiser and string instruments are a sonic translation of these extreme audio conditions. The sound of shattering glass in the chamber, has been arranged into a particle-like cloud of sound that thematises the fragility of glass, and echoes the tubes of the vapour lamps.

Although I know that the work has aesthetic resonances of art like mid-20th Century abstract painting, or experimental structural film, in fact conceptually the odd starting point for this work was reading of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Private Notebooks 1914-1916* which he wrote while he was on the front in WWI spotting for enemy fire. In order not to lose his mind, he kept a diary during the day to document his philosophical thoughts, but also his most private and sexual ones. Against the backdrop of the global pandemic, his writing made me think about social and sensorial deprivation and isolation. The paradox which I hope is my work *Oase* is how it might be possible to use conditions and phenomena which initially entails the dramatic restriction of the senses, but which, in doing so creates a work which rewards those same senses with a heightened experience. This brings me to the title, which I have borrowed from an eponymous club in Maastricht, which I loved and where I once danced all night.

Stephanie Stein, Berlin 2022