

# HOTEL

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Richard Birkett, *Juliette Blightman, Nought to Sixty*, Exhibition Catalogue, ICA London, p. 116

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## Juliette Blightman

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ICA Upper Galleries



The work of Juliette Blightman (born Farnham, 1980, lives in London) demands that the viewer refocus his or her attention. Using film and slide works, and direct yet subtle interventions in the gallery space, Blightman's work frames and enacts a certain kind of unadorned reality. Within a structure marked out by deliberately simple gestures, the marking of time gradually gives way to a sense of epiphany.

In a series of 16mm films made since 2005, Blightman uses the basic parameters of the medium to emphasise the reality of what is in front of her camera. Each work consists of a single shot, the length of which is dictated by the standard three-minute duration of the film stock. In *as a period in which nothing happens* (2007), the shot frames a domestic living room. Central to the composition is a single armchair directed towards a television, upon which can be made out the flickering image of Agatha Christie's Poirot. The shot lingers, a still composition in which the only evidence of time passing is the movement on the television screen,

an occasional car on the road outside, and the pattern of sunlight falling through a pair of French windows. The vignette concludes when the camera pans unexpectedly to the left, coming to rest on a second set of windows.

Blightman's compositions are characterised by an objectivism that is gradually infected with the minute and shifting experience of passing time. The rigid, almost schematic approach to representation is reminiscent of the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet, in which the perspective is limited to the surface of visual experience, and in which – to use the words of Roland Barthes – the object "never conceals a secret, vulnerable heart beneath its shell". Another characteristic of Blightman's work is the clear ordering of time (the clatter of the film projector serving as an ever-present metronome). In certain exhibitions she has asked that a film be played just once a day, at a designated time. This device perhaps presents a parallel to the 'represented' time in the film, but it also emphasises personal and associative qualities – and the attempt to recapture the lucidity of a certain period. The processes through which time is measured are shown to be fluid, their slippages invested with a sense of memory and loss.

Blightman's work for *Nought to Sixty*, entitled *Please Water the Plant and Feed the Fish* (2008), employed the simple placement of objects and turned the gallery into a live composition. A houseplant and fish bowl, placed in front of the gallery's windows, activated internal frames that echoed the way in which the windows framed the external world. Blightman asked that her brother perform the action requested in the title of the work, and he visited the gallery at 3pm every day, a function which required the restructuring of his daily routine.

This performance created an enforced shift of attention towards the banal and the non-event, and the way in which its repeated structure was used to impose order offered a parallel to the artist's films, although it was also a highly personal intervention. Once again, as in other pieces by Blightman, the world's stubbornly objective quality was balanced by the essentially emotive experience of the passing of time.

**Richard Birkett**

Juliette Blightman / Please water the plant and feed the fish / 2008