

### *The Shadow of History*

Ilaria Gianni in *GRUTAS*, nero produzioni, Rome, 2006

The third appointment of *Step in step out* focuses on the work of the German artist Astrid Nippoldt, thus continuing the attempt to explore the relation between art and cinema, analysing the works of artists who emerged in these last ten years. The artist, who grew up during the 80s in a divided and politically instable Germany, belongs to the so-called *VHS generation* that fed itself with images from the cinematographic industry. Like the previous shows, this exhibition questions the way in which the visual hyper-stimulation has been interpreted by its protagonists.

Astrid Nippoldt's videos carry with them a disturbing and heavy atmosphere, focusing on the concepts of physical effort and weariness. They are often set in bare and hostile landscapes and go together with very troubling soundtracks. The artist considers the *suspense* condition—sagely elaborated inside the history of the cinematographic language—an effective method to shake and confound the parameters of what is familiar to us, to render the icon to its condition of uniqueness. The images she creates are intimately related with sound, which plays an essential part in the way in which the viewer perceives the whole work. Both associative and evocative processes are key elements in Astrid Nippoldt's work. A great part of her inspiration comes from Cinema, from which she picks most of the movements, languages, dialogues and soundtracks that appear in her work.

The German/Swiss film *It Happened in Broad Daylight* (1958) is the starting point from where she created the atmosphere of her most recent video work, the trilogy *Grutas*, *Sitting Lenin* and *Adele* (2006), exhibited in this show.

*Grutas* takes place in Grutas Park, a unique park in Lithuania that hosts monuments from the past of the Soviet regime: statues of politicians and intellectuals that lay amongst fields, woods, paths and benches. The viewer perceives the space through the eye of an unknown and disturbing presence that wanders aimlessly, like a voyeur, whose steps are followed by the anguishing soundtrack of the film. We follow the route of this mysterious inhabitant of the park while he observes, from a distance, the people who are unaware of his existence, couples who walk around, friends who have fun, children who play. The look of this presence makes us wander in the borders of these unfathomable woods, between paths spread with old watchtowers that broadcast regime songs, more serene glimpses of fountains, see-saws and flower buds. The background music is suddenly interrupted by an anguishing scream that no one seems to notice, by an unheard terror expression that doesn't disturb the life in the park. The viewer seems to be the only one to perceive the eventual threat created by the unknown presence.

Who is this secret inhabitant? Is it the shadow of history, which is still alive in the present? Is it the spirit of a heavy memory that, unsolved, is searching for its identity, hoping to find a place in our time? In this case, it would be the metaphor of an only apparently threatening past, like it is showed in the images of a woman who tries to climb the legs of a gigantic Lenin. The politician seems harmless, the revolution is forgotten and ideology, gashed in its heart, loses its sense.

However, this mysterious inhabitant we follow could also be the personification of the constant threat to our life, in its most innocent and daily gestures. Being so, and bearing in mind both presumptions, the most frightening thing would be the indifference that people demonstrate, their incapacity to look around and beyond. This difference lays in Astrid Nippoldt's point of view, in her glance towards reality. In *Grutas* she shows us how perception is able to distinguish and is able to move between history and present, making the difference between vision and visuality more clear.