

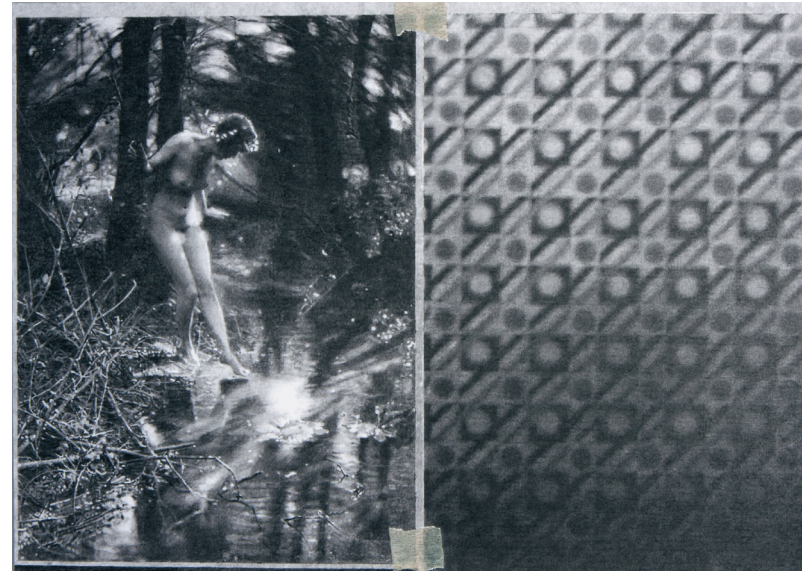
For the past fifteen years, British artist Richard Forster has been making highly skilled graphite and acrylic medium renderings of photographs. In fact, his drawings of images depicting urban housing projects, pastoral nudes from magazines, and seascapes from Saltburn, North Yorkshire, where he was born, are so often mistaken for their celluloid originals that one initially wonders why he chooses to make drawings rather than photographs, or not to draw from life. Certainly there is virtuosity in being able to replicate another art form so exactly – and Forster’s attention to minute detail and subtle transitions of black and grey is nothing short of astonishing. There is virtuosity too in being able to render the living landscape, but this is something in which he has little interest. In his words, ‘to draw from life, even though I have done this, seems alien now’. For Forster, the point of these works is the refusal to provide complete access. Indeed, he incorporates the distance that accompanies viewing one medium through another, and the world through the camera’s lens, into his choice of subject matter and method of approach. Consider *A Rehearsed inability to know this (un)place* (2009), a drawing project based on a train ride that the artist habitually takes from his home in Northeastern England to his studio in nearby Middlesbrough. For this project, Forster made twelve drawings based on photographs of a coal plant located on one side of the track, taken on consecutive days at incrementally later moments in time as the train approaches and passes by. Forster’s title plays on the ambivalence associated with a place that is both inhospitable in terms of its working conditions and yet also an integral part of the community. By positioning himself as a tourist reduced to approximating the plant through a series of quickly snapped moments, he accepts the fragmentation that defines our experience of our fast-moving world – as well as the literal and metaphoric instability that characterizes his subject. The tension between differing speeds is one of Forster’s preoccupations, as reflected in the title, ‘Fast and Slow Time’, of his 2011 exhibition at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art. Here, Forster paired drawings of photographs of the sea’s edge at Saltburn with renderings after a film of a Walter Gropius-designed modern housing project that he saw at the Bauhaus Foundation in Dessau. The seascape drawings are made from photographs that Forster takes standing on the pier at Saltburn, snapping his shutter each time the sea’s edge passes into view. They are contemplative images but hardly ‘natural’. Rather, their ceaseless, stuttering repetition reflects on the failure of digital technology to capture the natural world’s slow pace, as well as the limitations that the artist himself faces in his quest for quiet comprehension. The Bauhaus drawings invoke their own kind of loss. They are part of an ongoing project about East Germany that also includes Dresden cityscapes taken from Flickr and renderings of the contents of novelty shops. Forster is specifically interested in the way in which such images invoke *ostalgie*, a peculiar East German longing for a return to life prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Once again, it is the fact that this dream is a misplaced or impossible one that motivates Forster, just as his own method is shot through with absence. Drawing via photographs becomes for Forster a way of granting attention to, and indicating a desire for, a reality that can never be fully encapsulated.

Claire Gilman



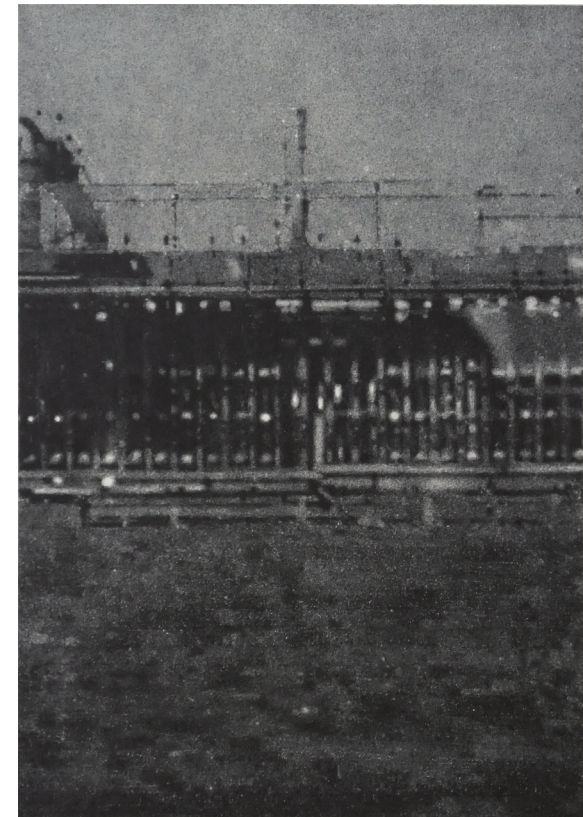
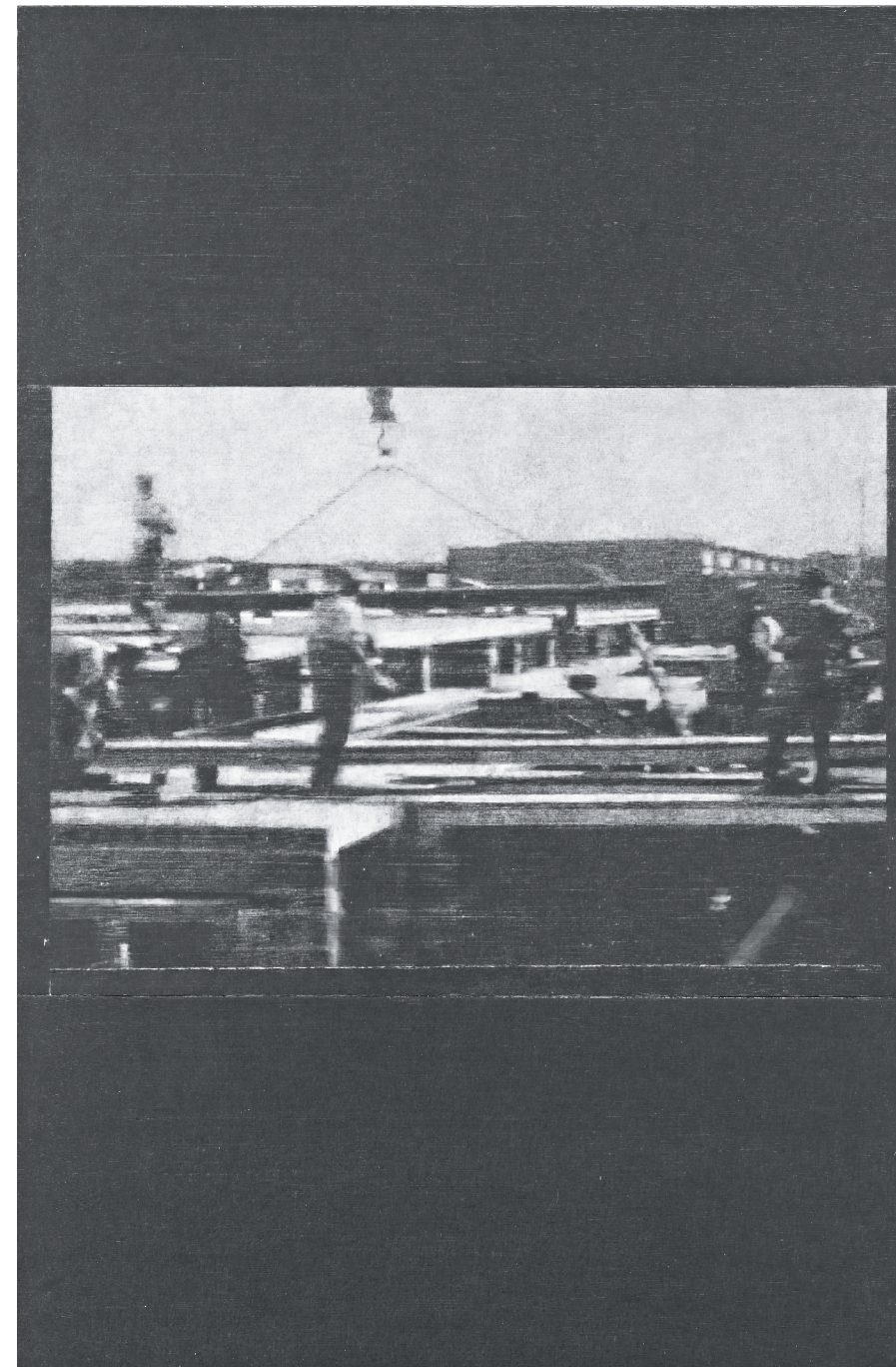
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1. *Sandman, Berlin*, 2012. Graphite and acrylic medium on Bristol board, 38.5 × 29 cm
2. *American Pastoral / Ostalgie Pattern with Tape I*, 2011. Graphite, acrylic medium and watercolour on Bristol board, 30 × 42.5 cm
3. *Visit to Bauhaus archive Jan 6, 2010; film of construction site, Torten Estate, Dessau. 1926. Twenty four stills at intervals determined by the incoming seas' edge on twenty four consecutive occasions, Saltburn-by-the Sea, Jan 5 2010; 11.37am–11.45am, 2010*. Graphite and acrylic medium on card, 1 of 24 parts, each 45 × 30 cm
4. *A Rehearsed inability to know this (un)place*. Ten seconds of a train journey from Saltburn on ten consecutive days, 2009. Graphite on card, 1 of 12 parts, each 30 × 21.5 cm (as part of a larger installation)



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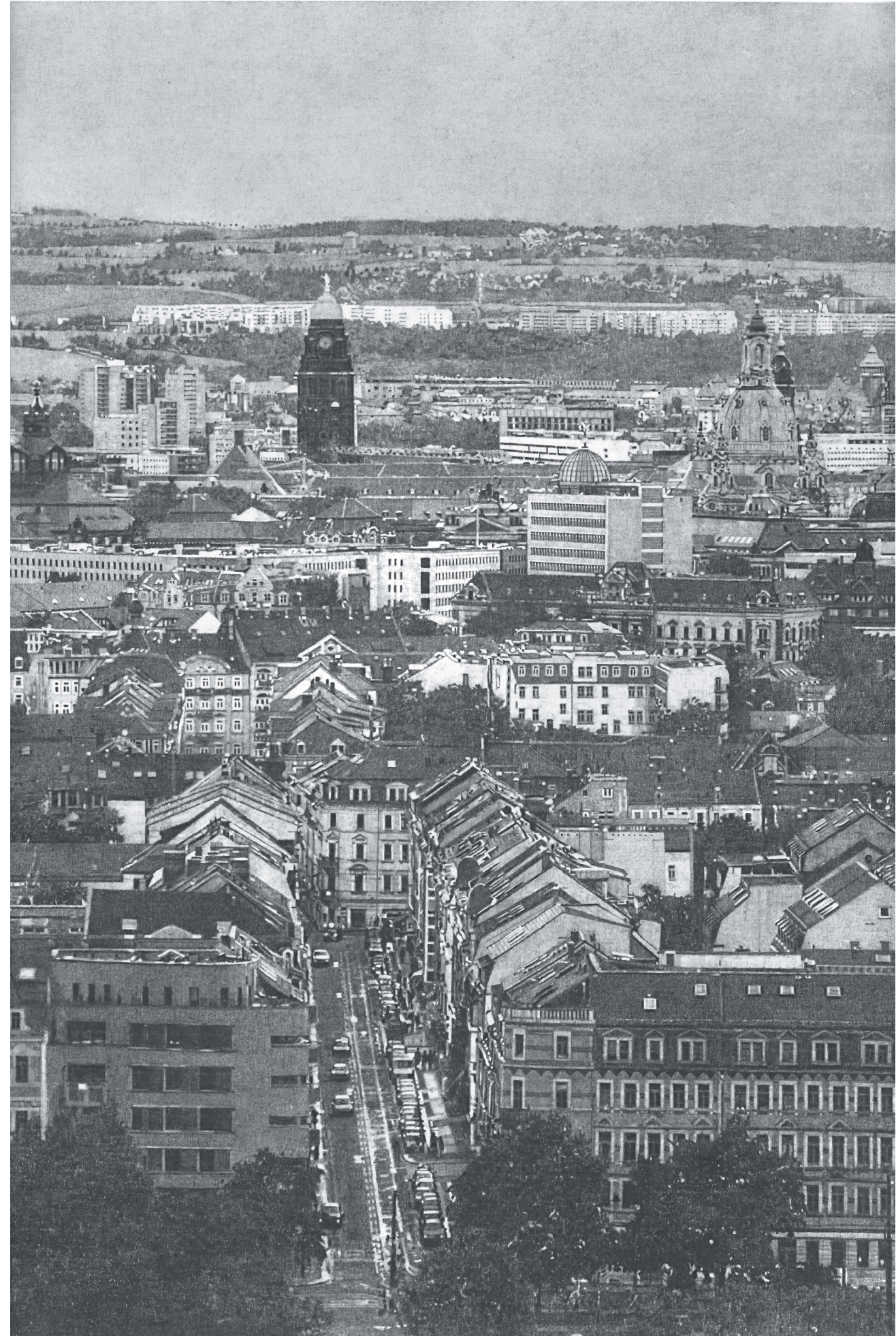
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