

HELSINKI

Empty spaces rarely capture one's attention. The lack of an obvious focus suggests that there is nothing to see. In a gallery setting, viewers yearning for a point of reference become anxious, feel disappointed, or suspect that they are being fooled. Norway's **Anders Tomren** proves how misplaced such reactions can be. Using an empty Berlin apartment as the set for his video installation, *Luft*, 2003-4 (Galerie Anhava; January 13—February 13, 2005), he emphasizes the relative nature of emptiness. If it may be equated with absence, emptiness also enables new details to be revealed.

The installation includes four views of the apartment. Each view is projected onto a separate wall, and shows part of the floor, a wall or two, and a door. Not only is the apartment empty, it appears quite clean. A few areas of colour—pale grey linoleum, silver fittings, and white walls and doors—converge to form a monotonal environment within the gallery's neutral shell.

The projections articulate the minimalist setting through perspective, movement and sound. As each view encompasses at least one corner, illusionary recesses varying in shape and depth restructure the gallery's walls. The doors further complicate these perspectives. Without warning, they suddenly swing open or slam closed. Despite the numerous openings to adjoining spaces, one's vision remains curtailed. A door opens onto a balcony, revealing a few small plants swaying in the breeze. Beyond the solid concrete railing, however, a colourless sky alone can be seen. It is impossible to know where the other doors lead. The distant sounds of church bells, incoherent speech, and the roar of traffic fill the air.

No matter how the viewer looks, only the bare apartment can be seen. Spatial limitations and the absence of belongings convey confinement and oppression—qualities reinforced by the fact that



Anders Tomren, still from *Luft*, 2003-04, four-channel video installation, dimensions variable, edition of 5 (courtesy of the artist and Galerie Anhava)

the sounds of the city can be heard, while the city cannot be seen. At first the doors' movement seems logical: the breeze is pushing them. As it continues, however, this explanation vanishes. Uncovering the reason for these actions becomes an improbable task.

To the work's credit, the scale of the projections has been kept much smaller than the size of the gallery's walls. Though the mind seeks to connect these images, the idea that the work represents the four sides of a room does not hold. The structure of the video reminds one of Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story*, 1974, which challenges viewers' perceptions, making them active participants in the work. It is impossible to capture all of the action as one stands in the middle of the gallery, in-between the four projected doors. Surveying one or two means that the others cannot be seen.

Hailing from a part of the world where many artists use nature as the basis for their work, Tomren has cleverly shifted the focus indoors. Careful framing and editing allow him to exaggerate the interior's effects. The gentle flow of air creates an environment that, while initially mysterious, becomes increasingly humorous. These doors seem to be alive, like the tables which move up and down or tip toe across the floor in Rebecca Horn's films. Unhindered in its movement, each door makes a distinct sound. Their atypical

behaviour can also be read as an intriguing musical performance or dance. The action follows no logical sequence, as it relies on loops of varying lengths. Playing continuously, the installation compiles a series of real-time events in a manner that makes them seem extraordinary, if not altogether absurd. The work is a captivating visual puzzle that teases viewers hoping to deduce its structure or meaning.

—John Gayer

KINGSTON, ONTARIO

There's an old woodcut image that depicts a medieval understanding of the workings of the universe. In it, a young man is pictured crawling through the celestial spheres of sun, earth, and stars to gaze at the marvels and wonders of the unknown beyond. He is positioned halfway between two domains: the mundane world from whence he came, the empyrean one into which he dares go.

There's something similar going on in the recent work of **Ed Pien**. Through drawing, sound and light, he transforms mundane gallery spaces, aesthetically activating within them environments that have everything to do with the passage between realms. *Celestial Bodies* (Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, November 27, 2004—January 30,