

waterside
contemporary

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The Freestone Drone

George Barber

2 February - 23 March 2013

Private view Friday, 1 February, 6-9pm

Special press preview Friday, 1 February, 3-6pm

George Barber in conversation with Sam Thorne (associate editor, Frieze)
Wednesday, 27 February, 7pm

waterside contemporary is pleased to present *The Freestone Drone*, a new video installation by George Barber, in his first solo exhibition at the gallery.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles - drones - have become an everyday feature of contemporary military activity, replacing humans in reconnaissance flights, small-scale combat missions and covert operations. The US Army operates some ten thousands UAVs - a six-fold increase during Obama's term - deploying them over locations like Pakistan and Yemen.

In an installation conceived specially for the gallery and consisting of three video projections, an array of domestic objects and numerous washing lines, George Barber's *The Freestone Drone* follows a mission from the point of view of the machine. The drone's camera surveys cityscapes, encounters individuals, reports, and in flight becomes aware of its own utility and destiny. Drone operators routinely study the washing to learn about their targets - it is foretold that the Freestone Drone is to die entangled in a clothes line.

The video combines found and made footage to produce an uneasy, seductive montage, anchored on the drone's private thoughts. Barber brings together war, love, life, death, and sends the drone over not only Waziristan, but also to New York and a London suburb. The drone then travels through time, projecting images of the past and possible futures.

While narrative unravelled on screen resists easy categorisation, the artist draws the viewer to empathise with the antagonist. Engendered with human consciousness and independence, the drone is a poet who disobeys orders and does his own thing, a child within a machine.

In the legacy of Godard and Marker, *The Freestone Drone* proposes the meeting place of poetry and philosophy as a site to consider contemporary ethical and political concerns. Ultimately, Barber's work underlines the fact that technologies, and in particular modes of warfare, are symptomatic of the way we understand ourselves at our moment in history. Much now done in our name is at odds with democratic tradition: hidden, inhuman and robotic.

George Barber (1958, Guyana), rose to prominence in the 1980s as a pioneer of the Scratch Video movement, with works like *Yes Frank No Smoke*, 1985, which sampled clips from Hollywood films, using the untried sampling technology of the day, creating an unprecedented orchestration of sound, vision, repeat edits and rhythm. Barber's videos, in which the maker is forever using quotes from others, became celebrated as classic examples of Postmodernism.

Barber has developed a large and varied body of work, incorporating found footage, performative monologues, narrative essay films (e.g. *Taxi Driver II*, 1987, *Reality Check*, 2012) and conceptual works (*Automotive Action Painting*, 2007, and *New Orleans Shouting Match*, 2011). Barber's original contribution to video art results in many short, precise works that are both thoughtful and entertaining, a quality that sets him apart and has earned him much loyal support amongst a younger generation.

Barber's works have been shown in festivals, galleries and broadcast on television throughout the world and awarded major prizes at many international festivals. His recent solo exhibitions include a retrospective at Dundee Contemporary Arts, 2010, and his works have been shown at Tate Britain and at the Royal Academy. Barber is Professor of Art & Media at the University for the Creative Arts.

Further materials

Information on George Barber, including texts and reviews
<http://waterside-contemporary.com/artists/george-barber/>

Video preview: <https://vimeo.com/55141430/> password *watersidepreview*

Press images can be downloaded from
<https://docs.google.com/open?id=0BxMN2OYbb3iabWR5bDNLMdZDWWs>

Notes on UAVs

UAV technology has been in development for two decades, but its potential in defence activities has only recently been exploited. While drones are associated with efficiency and precision, their use is largely unregulated. The US operates an estimated \$51bn 'classified defence activity' budget with some 850000 personnel with top-level security clearances. The White House hit list includes US citizens, who have no access to legal process, and the Obama administration recently abandoned plans to introduce Congress oversight.

2011 saw the first use of UAVs in domestic law enforcement in the US. Legislation protecting airspace from commercial drone exploitation has recently lapsed in the US, and is absent in the UK.

waterside contemporary is committed to developing an ambitious and vibrant multidisciplinary and cross-generational programme. Directors Pierre d'Alancaisez and Olga Ovenden share an interest in determined and engaged art practices. An international commitment allows the gallery to foreground current and historical overseas debates in a London context.

The gallery's programme and projects encompass practices that pertain to and stem from political periphery, for example those of Karen Mirza and Brad Butler or Ștefan Constantinescu. In parallel, the gallery engages with conceptually-driven work of mid-career UK and European artists.

Practical information

Gallery open Wednesday-Saturday 12-6pm. First Thursdays until 9pm.
Nearest transport: Old Street and Hoxton.

