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Reviews



Omer Fast: Nostalgia

Posted by [artreview.com](#) on 8 October 2009 at 5:30pm in [First View](#)

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Omer Fast, *Nostalgia* (2009), production still. Photo: Thierry Bal
Courtesy gb Agency, Paris; Postmasters, New York; and Arratia, Beer, Berlin.

Omer Fast: Nostalgia
South London Gallery
7 October – 6 December

by **Laura McLean-Ferris**

A trap is for catching partridge is the central device around which Omer Fast's exhibition *Nostalgia* revolves. Though a partridge, it turns out, stands as a metaphor for any number of elusive quarryies evading capture. Most difficult to catch, perhaps, are slippery stories. At South London Gallery, Fast, the recent winner of the Preis der Nationalgalerie für Junge Kunst 2009, has installed a three-part film installation, in a walk-through environment. It begins with a film of a man building a partridge trap from sticks and twigs, with a voiceover that describes how to do so. The white man on the screen does not appear to match the voiceover, which sounds black African, perhaps. At one point in the film, however - like a glitch - the visuals from the voiceover seem to appear, as we cut momentarily to an interview setup in which a black man is speaking, which disappears as fast as it came.

This interview, its dramatisations, its doublings and ghosts, run through this exhibition like a fugitive. It reappears in the next room, as, on a two-screen installation, actors appear to reenact this original interview - the artist is asking a man seeking asylum in Britain to describe elements of his life, including the technique for building the partridge trap. The set up is theatrical and obviously primed for embellishment; on one screen the interviewee appears in front of a green screen, whilst on the other, the interviewer's backdrop is not tampered with.

In the final room this fragment has exploded into a dystopic, beautifully-filmed cinematic narrative projected large. The film is set in an alternative present, in which the world experienced Judgement Day in 1980. Britain and Europe a wasteland, many European immigrants appear to be attempting to make their way into Africa via underground tunnels. The past is a site of struggle and confusion, we cannot hang on to a particular account - nothing appears to have moved on from 1980, and all the sets and objects in the film appear to have come from the brown grainy 70s. A white man from Surrey is an illegal immigrant on the run from authorities, and we see the limits of the original interview stretched and twisted, as an African senior policewoman interrogates the refugee, and then further in a school scene where a young girl performs a 'show and tell' project about traditional practices and describes the partridge trap. This girl, in turn, is mirrored in a narrative following the death of a white refugee girl in one of the tunnels. As guards with alsatians look over her, the camera drags over her face and onto the vomit lying beside her dead body. The food that has spilled from her guts begins to transform as the camera pans away, into a glittering bouquet of fruit and flowers. This garish flourish is sickening, touching and magical, a cinematic slice of beauty that, Fast reminds us, is often too irresistible when telling stories, our own and those of others.