

Stefanos Pavlakis

Axis Artist of the month Sept 2010

Each month a guest selector chooses an artist from the Axis directory to be featured as our artist of the month. This month curator and writer Gillian McIver discusses her selection.

Working with digital audio and both still and moving images, including archival materials, Stefanos Pavlakis creates loops and installations that explore the problem of place, of placing oneself, of finding oneself in a place, of moving – or trying to – from one place to another.

Like an overheard fragment of conversation, Pavlakis's stories slip in and imprint themselves, leaving a palimpsest of their existence. He takes an archaeological approach to the data he has gathered: examining it, reordering it, working out its possible and potential meanings. And within that examination of meaning, reimagines the data, repurposes it, but – and this is crucial – without obscuring or destroying the original meaning.

In 'Killing Time' (2008), Pavlakis presents a montage of a photograph from an archive of images of *gastarbeiter* in 1970s Germany. Digitally manipulated and overlaid by a drifting blue sky, the arrangement brings the gritty street and the loitering man together with the wider possibilities that the world has apparently offered to him. This work re-presents a historical moment in German/European history, when they / we started to look beyond our Euro borders and bring in the rest of the world, to do work that Europeans no longer wanted to do. Pavlakis presents this moment as a poetic one, a moment of hopes and dreams colliding, but not fatally, with the mundane.

A different tack is taken with 'Along the Skin of a Desert Rose' (2009), a slideshow of still images. The place is unstated, and eerily deserted, yet every image amasses evidence of human activity. Here architecture is a phenomenon, an eruption into the landscape, bringing with it a host of fantastical elements, notably reproductions of Western artworks and decorative details that adorn a new and fabulously expensive hotel complex. Everything is new, as brutally clean and sharp as a knife edge. Pavlakis examines and deconstructs the idea of 'luxury' as a shell or veneer that masks everything in a uniform and predictable way.

Pavlakis takes a fresh approach to the experience of both past and present, an approach that is both satisfyingly aesthetic, and purely insightful and emotional.

Gillian McIver, AXIS September 2010