Yass approaches the camera in a way that is not necessarily based on human seeing, but rather on a different kind of vision, which Deleuze calls “gaseous perception”: “the pure vision of a non-human eye, of an eye that would be in things.” Michael Newman, Catherine Yass: Filmografia, published by Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Gran Canaria (2005).

Alison Jacques Gallery, London is pleased to present a solo exhibition of the British artist Catherine Yass. For her first exhibition in the new gallery space the artist will show her latest film Lock, which was shot at the Three Gorges Dam in China’s Yangtze River. In addition to this film, Yass will show a group of new lightboxes relating to her time in China.

Stretching one and a half miles across and six hundred feet high, the Three Gorges Dam is one of the world’s largest structures of its kind. Perhaps the most ambitious piece of engineering in China since the Great Wall, this project has not been without controversy. In addition to the 1.3 million people being displaced by the rising waters, there are concerns over the ecological consequences and potential loss of many valuable archaeological and cultural sites.

Projected in two parts on opposite sides of the gallery, Yass’ film places the viewer in a deep ship lock which cuts through the dam and whose doors are sealed at each end. As the water level rises tiny figures moving about the boats become recognizable and the vast size of the structure becomes apparent. The scale is temporal as well as physical; the sheer walls and rows of columns are reminiscent of ancient temples as well as being, literally, concrete embodiments of futuristic dreams.

China’s history seems present even in the most futuristic projects. The scale and ambition for social and economic change runs back through Mao and the Cultural Revolution to the country’s huge dynasties. The entrance to the lock is barely distinguishable from the exit, which raises questions about the nature and direction of progress. The film itself seems stilled as if the camera gates have also been closed. Time is suspended in an unresolved present where past and future have been shut off. The boats float in a transitional space and time where outside references are absent, engendering a sense of claustrophobia that is only relieved as the doors slowly open, albeit onto an uncertain future.

The lightboxes in the exhibition concentrate on the exit and entrance of the lock: the heavy doors, mooring columns and signs. In these, Chinese characters loom as large as houses and columns stand in the water like relics from a past civilization.

Catherine Yass was born in London (1963) and graduated with an MA from Goldsmiths College (1990). In 2002 Yass was nominated for the Turner Prize at Tate Britain. HIGH WIRE, a major new installation commissioned by Artangel will premier at Glasgow International on 11th April 2008, and will be shown in London later in 2008. (For further information visit www.high-wire.org.uk or www.glasgowinternational.org.) Recent solo exhibitions include Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Gran Canaria (2005), and Herzliya Museum of Modern Art, Israel (2005). Group exhibitions include Eastern Standard: Western Artists in China, MASS MoCA, Massachusetts (2008), Dateline Israel: Recent Photography and Video, Jewish Museum, New York (2007) and Jewish Museum, Berlin (2008), 6th Shanghai Biennale (2006), and Wow, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle (2004). Public collections include: Tate, London; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; New Art Gallery, Walsall; The Jewish Museum, New York. Filmografía was published in 2005 for Catherine Yass’s solo exhibition at the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. The book features texts by Andrew Renton and Mark Godfrey. Yass is currently showing in the group exhibition Sleeping and Dreaming at the Wellcome Collection, London (until 9 March 2008).

Catherine Yass would like to thank Artist Links, Arts Council England, the British Council China, and Film and Video Umbrella. Lock sound in collaboration with Simon Keep.

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Next exhibitions: Björn Dahlem, 29 February – 29 March, opening Thursday 28 February, 6-8pm.
Paul Morrison, 3 April – 3 May