

the big uneasy

Monochromatic grey-greens bloom like algal growth on a slide, some puffing into spirals. This is not some kind of fungus, but an aerial view of trees. There are no markers to show us where the edge of the forest is, no indication of its size. It is a landscape, but it is geographically unidentifiable: it is any place, it is no place. There are no clues. And so we are removed from the reality of locating it somewhere on the globe, of evaluating its familiarity to us. This is nature, with its patterns and repetitions, but the bird's eye perspective of the image alludes to the man-made — to attain this kind of perspective, one must ascend some kind of structure or be carried up in a helicopter.

The tension between the constructed and the natural is at the core of Izabela Pluta's work. In this series, *Making Traces*, she again explores this duality, sometimes emphasising the divide, at others, bringing the opposing forces into collision. Drawn to entropy and chaos, she records the natural world reclaiming spaces once made orderly by human intervention. Entropy can be horrifying, reminding us of the slow creep toward mortality, marked by the sag of our bodies. However, in her treatment of the

subject matter: firm objectivity, near-perfect symmetry, flattening the image, leaching out the colour, Pluta also bleeds out some of the emotion. She treads gently, so that instead of terror, her works evoke a kind of shivery unease.

The sense of disquiet is strongest in an image of an abandoned building standing in what looks like mountainous desert. It could be some kind of Gulag relic, decrepit but still oppressive. Post-apocalyptic, the harsh natural world is swallowing up the man-made construction. That there is no event, no movement, and there are no people in these images gives them a sense of timelessness. In this work, that timelessness is creepy. In others, such as an image of hops growing up wires seemingly without end, it allows for a peaceful silence. There is no hint of Pluta's journey to these non-places, of what she was doing there, or of her experience of these environments. This facilitates a remove from the real, from the actual uses of these constructed, sometimes urban, spaces. A soccer field with vines clambering to get a claim on it can become a place for contemplation.

In a departure from the mood, but not the themes, of the rest of the series, the three smaller images bring in an element of

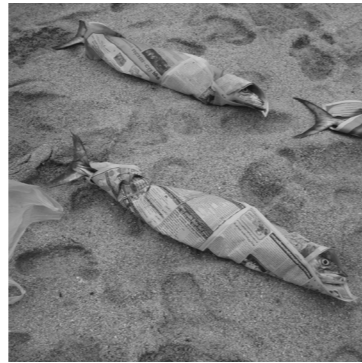
the absurd. In one, a pair of pedestal fans, their heads resembling nipples, become a couple reluctant to pose together for the photo. In another, fish are snuggled into newspaper wrappings, more animated in death than they could ever have been in life. And a horse-shaped rock presents as a strange growth on the side of a building, nestled into it, although logic tells us that the building must have been constructed around it. Here Pluta steps away from the abstraction and objectivity of the rest of the series, and with the playfulness of these images, allows us to glimpse something of herself. In a series as stark and cerebral as *Making Traces*, the levity of these images offers a humanising touch, giving us more room to reflect on the seriousness of Pluta's themes.

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Making Traces



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#1, 2, 9, 10, 4, 5, 8, 3, 7
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