

Time Trials

Fiona Amundsen

Fiona Amundsen's *Time Trials* is a series of medium format photographs of speedways. Taken early in the morning, they utilise the same techniques as her previous series of motorways and public spaces. These works are deadpan investigations of the built environment: parks and pools, government housing. Depicting communal structures, the works are always empty of people, as if some apocalypse had vapourised the populace, an H-bomb melting the inhabitants but leaving the buildings standing.

Time Trials' settings are more bucolic than her previous locations. Speedways, consuming space and producing light and noise, exist largely in semi-rural zones – although, in a suburban exception, on raceway nights, I can hear the petroleum roar of Western Springs Raceway from my balcony. But the halo of arc-lights, the fumes, the frisson of speed and danger are absent in these photographs. The tracks are dormant in the cool light and overcast of the morning.

With one straightaway exception, the photographs zero in on the grassy void at the centre of the track, variously: swampy, hilly, or carefully tended and garnished by goalposts. The brief looping journeys of the racers trace its muddy periphery.

The vacant arenas remind me of a very early photograph, of the Boulevard du Temple in Paris, made by Louis Daguerre in 1838. Shot out of his studio window, the image reveals details of buildings and trees: curbs and chimney pots, windows and curtains. The photograph renders the structure of the city, but the streets are empty, bustling commuters and strollers unseen by the camera's slow eye. The sole figure visible is a man on a corner having his boots polished. The phantom of the shoe-shiner weaves about him as he stands, waiting.

Like the image of the day lit Paris street, whose inhabitants were almost entirely too swift to register on the plate, *Time Trials* calls attention to the chasm between machine and human time. The mechanism of the camera, dicing time into fractions of fractions of fractions echoes the calibrated time of the speedway, the seconds counting down. Man, machine and time form the structuring logic of the speedway, but what happens when the photographer and her camera stand in for drivers and spectators?

During racing the camera's dissections of movement capture the action: the fast-moving vehicles. In the cool rational light of morning the camera's evidential revelation of incidental detail – traces in the tracked mud, speakers, lights and signage is more forensic.

But while they are rendered in clear detail, the tracks are instances rather than locations in themselves. Their seriality: evenly spaced on the gallery wall or stitched together in Amundsen's book of the same title; gives the images a certain pace and order, while depriving them of individual import. Their testimony stands against those preceding and following, leaving viewers to play the game of similitude and difference.

It is these evidential incidentals of the dormant tracks that mark the distance from photo finish to anthropological study. The cloudy mornings illuminate a dour fantasy: an archaeology of the present.

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Image: Fiona Amundsen

