

ARTFORUM

Emily Wardill

03.04.10



Emily Wardill, *Game Keepers Without Game*, 2009, stills from a 16-mm film transferred to DVD, 76 minutes.

Emily Wardill's films are known for their historical and intellectual appetites, as well as their stylistic restlessness. Her most recent, feature-length film, Game Keepers Without Game is currently on view at the Showroom in London, where she is also at work on her newest project, Fulll Firearms. Selections from this work in progress, which Wardill discusses here, will be screened at the gallery on March 13.

I'VE BEEN WORKSHOPPING A FILM based on Sarah Winchester and the Winchester Mystery House. It reimagines her today as the inheritor of an arms dealer's fortune—a business that, like Winchester's, is predicated on violence but legitimated through being a business. The daughter, Imelda, feels guilty about the source of her inheritance, so she uses her family's funds to build a house for the ghosts of those who have been killed by the guns. Once the house has been built, however, it becomes inhabited by squatters whom she misidentifies as ghosts.

A theme of trickery and misidentification runs through *Fulll Firearms*. The characters are constantly deceiving one another, encouraging a kind of delusion that distracts them from a concrete reality. For instance, Imelda seems to be deluded, and her architect must submit to her delusions because he is financially supported by her. The film confronts expectations of what might happen with what actually does happen. Thus the woman expects to see ghosts; she has a definite idea of who they might be, but then she is faced with who they actually are. Her expectation and material reality are made to happen in the same space—that of the house or the film.

The project comes out of a longing to set up a group of people for whom the process of discussing the film becomes part of the final product. The process of workshoping films in this way, parallel to the story line, is one where we are confronted with our own ideas, which are pretty different from what we imagined they might be. When this is done collaboratively, it becomes a way of communicating, which is distinct from a commercial mode of production where one is encouraged to be individual and to create products. Fassbinder once said that his films were like the walls to his house. There's something beautiful about this idea, in part because it goes against the comfortable notion that one should buy a house, move into it, and make it into a shelter, but also because a film, as opposed to a house, can't be just yours; it is implicitly social.

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I'm interested in the way melodrama is used to make difficult things more palatable. The original meaning of melodrama is a conjunction of melody and drama, whereby the musical element communicates to you in a way that somehow bypasses cerebral understanding. To speak of this melody more figuratively, there is a sense of a ghostly presence in this project. The work is developing a very sensual quality, and yet the audience will have the feeling that characters are very distant from their own bodies—that is, their bodies keep doing things that their brains must then catch up with. The actions that are performed in the space stay there. By inhabiting a space, they imply a kind of repetition, an echo of history.

— *As told to Joanna Fiduccia*