

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Mark Prince, "Sharon Lockhart," Flash Art, May-June 2010, p.117

SHARON LOCKHART NEUGERRIEMSCHEIDER - BERLIN



Sharon Lockhart, *Podwórka*, 2009. 16mm transferred to HD, 30 mins. Installation view at Neugerriemschneider, Berlin. Courtesy Neugerriemschneider, Berlin. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

In 2005, Sharon Lockhart embedded herself for several months in the community of the Californian town of Pine Flat to photograph and film the local children. Her new film, *Podwórka* (2009), shows children playing in the courtyards of the Polish city Łódź, and was made in only a few days. Pine Flat and its inhabitants were familiar territory because

Lockhart is Californian, while she brings an outsider's eye to the urchins of Łódź.

Each section of *Podwórka* is shot in a different courtyard with a stationary camera. The spaces are arenas for the ebb and flow of the children's random activity. This is both minimalist filmmaking and social documentary. Lockhart's scenarios can be seen as embodiments of space and time — the basic abstract dimensions of the film medium — but she is also engaging in oblique social commentary. As always, her work is concerned with how people inhabit places, and therefore how they inhabit their own lives. The children are almost entirely unsupervised; this is not the politically correct safety of a U.S. playground. The absence of adult observation — except for the viewers' — as well as the absence of any particular event to focus the ambient proceedings, might be a metaphor for film's ability to access marginal corners of the world that would otherwise remain invisible.

Recurring questions arising from documentary filmmaking are, to what extent the observing camera affects what is being

observed? How much is this a performance, how much an impartial witness? It seems the children are oblivious to the camera's gaze, and yet the give and take between randomness and artistic control remains central to the film's drama. One of the courtyards, viewed from above, is occupied by a blue transit van, a red station wagon and a yellow bicycle, as though the primary-colored spectrum were intentionally decorating the image. However fly-on-the-wall the film may be, these vignettes are so intensely observed and composed that it seems there might as well be nothing beyond the limits of the screen's composition. This also means the specifics of each set of images are resistant to social generalizations. When a football ricochets around the enclosed parameters of the yard, it is as though it were bouncing off the edges of the frame of film because there is nowhere else for it to go.

Mark Prince