

BREATH TAKING

Aberdeen, Birmingham, Cabrach, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool,
London, Manchester, Newcastle

From 22nd May 2005

SEEING

*'Seeing comes before words - the relationship between what we see
and what we know is never settled'*¹

John Berger

Among people living in rural areas across the UK there has been a great deal of public debate in the recent past around the placement of wind farms. And what clearly attracts the most concern is the sight, the very prominent visibility of these skyscraper-high turbines in the landscape. As an organisation with a focus on the visual arts, we felt compelled to offer an artistic response to contribute to the debate in a new and creative way. To engage Dalziel + Scullion - artists who are very interested in issues that bring mankind and the landscape together - was an obvious choice. Our objective was to explore ways of making this subject matter more arresting and allow contemporary viewers – not only those in rural areas - some form of engagement with a debate which is of both local and global concern.

Whilst the proposed developments are happening in rural locations, most of our energy consumption and the issues surrounding it exist largely outside this context. It seems important therefore, in order to highlight the global issues, that the debate should not be limited only to those places where the proposed renewable energy installations are going to have the most immediate impact.

The UK's governmental target, to have 10% of all energy production renewable by 2007, is a promise that is honorable and of course deserves our support. However, such statistics offer no comment about the extent of our current and future energy consumption. When we look at what is actually generating the ecological crisis that we face, it becomes apparent that this is not separable from the dynamics of the global economic system itself, founded on a concept of constant economic growth. In fact, the global economic system is increasingly becoming a challenge to the processes of the biosphere in terms of scale. This situation therefore casts doubt upon the viability and effectiveness of environmental approaches – such as the scattering of our remaining habitat with wind turbines - which simply accepts the imperative of growth and materialism.

As an arts organisation it is not our role to be either for or against wind farms. That is not the issue for us. With this photographic work the wind farm debate is used as a focus for a wider question - is there a future for the worship we have nurtured for materialism and economic growth? There is little more pressing an issue facing us than the debates surrounding climate, the environment and economic growth, especially as over 80% of the world's countries, now considered 'developing', are following our lead.

¹ John Berger: Ways of Seeing, Penguin, 1972, page 7

The governmental backing that the new wind farm sites have received may be just one example of an attempt to appear to be addressing an issue that has been running out of control for a long time. This has raised a lot of discussion, particularly among people in rural locations and perhaps it is time to start wondering whether our uncompromising desire for a lifestyle that cannot be shared by the rest of the world is sustainable.

Breath Taking is a photographic project that looks at the rural landscape, observing the advance of the turbine installations as one of a series of events that have already radically altered the landscape of our environment. The turbines represent another wave of change that follows earlier ones, such as glacial movement, high dams, agriculture, commercial forestry and so on. To help us to see, to see what is implied by and beyond simply the sight of a wind turbine high on a hill, in the creation of their image the artists have been influenced by the 'Romantic Sublime' - a time in our cultural history when mankind was both recklessly exploiting natural resources and also coming to marvel at nature's grandeur.

Dalziel + Scullion's photographic work for billboards can now be seen throughout the UK.

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