

[keith gallasch time travels with merilyn fairskye's stati d'animo](#)



Merilyn Fairskye, Stati d'Animo (States of Mind), 2006-2007
courtesy of the artist

MERILYN FAIRSKYE'S STATI D'ANIMO (STATE OF MIND) EVOKES THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER ARTWORK I CAN RECALL. THE THREE-SCREEN WORK THAT WRAPS AROUND YOU AT ARTSPACE FUSES AT LEAST TWO STATES OF BEING INTO ONE. FIRST, THERE'S WAITING, WITH ITS SHEER STILLNESS, HERE A PRECISE PHOTOGRAPHIC FIXING ON THOSE SITTING OR STANDING. THEN THERE'S MOVEMENT, THE PURPOSEFUL STRIDE OR ABSENT-MINDED WANDER, REALISED CINEMATICALLY AS A GHOSTLY BLUR OF BODIES WALKING, RIDING ESCALATORS, HAULING THEIR BAGGAGE. THOSE WHO WAIT APPEAR FROZEN IN TIME, THOSE WHO MOVE SEEM ALWAYS ON THE EDGE OF DISAPPEARING. THE NOWHERENESS OF AIRPORTS AND THE SENSE OF ETERNAL TRANSIENCE IS RENDERED EVEN MORE PALPABLE IN THE WAY FAIRSKYE GIVES BUILDINGS, EQUIPMENT AND AEROPLANES THE GREATER SOLIDITY—HUMANS ARE A MERE EPHEMERAL PRESENCE.

With her Sony HDV camera hand-held, mostly at waist level, Fairskye recorded at Charles de Gaulle, Darwin, Dubai, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Hong Kong, JFK, Kuala Lumpur, Los Angeles, Pudong, Sao Paulo, San Francisco, Singapore, Sofia, Sydney and Vienna airports. She writes, "the camera moves or rests without composing or focussing on the people it tracks and traces" in a work that is not "investigative or ethnographic documentary. Nothing specific is revealed. The aim is to achieve a sense of things, of simultaneity, rather than a direct account or story.

"The formation of the interior airport images in this work is different from conventional film and photography. It closely resembles the sequenced exposures of chronophotography by Jules Etienne Marey which (like Henri Bergson's reflections on time) inspired the painterly experiments of the Futurists that this work evokes. The effect is to condense and dilate the experience of time, by superimposing a sequence of frames in fifty transparent layers."

This layering allows Fairskye to conflate time so that we are watching past and present at once folding into one another: "the 'present' is thus continuous (and coexistent) with the past, in a perpetual state of becoming and vanishing, in the same way as the people who briefly inhabit the airport, and the airspace above it, become and vanish."



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The association with Futurism is quite precise—the title is taken from Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni's 1911 trilogy of paintings which has the railway station as its zone of transience. Painting and train station are replaced in Fairskye's work with digital art and airport, the joys and anxieties of machine age speed paralleled with those in our own time to do with computer speed and hyperconnectivity. But the vulnerability of bodies and machines persists, not only in the visual ephemerality of Fairskye's airport inhabitants, but in their words.

Structured into passages of Arrival, Crossing, Waiting, Departure and Farewell, the video watches but also listens. What appears to be airport background noise is revealed to be something more: at one point the attentive listener is privy to a dialogue between airline cabin staff on one plane and the control tower—a terrorist drama appears to be unfolding in the cockpit. The aeroplane moves across the tarmac and then, when air control says, after communication is broken, "We've lost them", the jet simply disappears against the background of buildings and other aeroplanes. Life in the airport terminal goes on, with its alternating solidity and blurring.

I asked Fairskye about the technical side of her work which, she writes, "is quite simple but chews up a lot of render time. I had already sorted out the process in principle when I made an earlier three-channel *Stati d'Animo* installation (*Stills*, 2005, shot on SD and working with 25 layers only). Greg Ferris worked on post production for *Stati d'Animo* 2006. The new material was shot on HDV. Once the offline edit was completed, all the interior airport shots were each subject to the following process.



Merilyn Fairskye, *Stati d'Animo (States of Mind)*, 2006-2007
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"A template was set up in After Effects for 50 duplicate layers of video (going to 50 from 25 made the image much more fluid.) Each layer was moved along one frame. So overall, there was a time overlap of 2 seconds by the end of the particular shot. The opacity of each subsequent layer was decreased according to a formula I have worked out so that by the time you got to layer fifty there was still a visible trace of all the preceding layers, including layer one, but from two seconds earlier. This is an aspect of the process that is crucial from my point of view—a visualisation of a temporal depth that is quite different from linear duration. Lastly, the whole thing was rendered, and imported back into Final Cut Pro as a single track video, and colour corrected. With my new work, *Aqua*, I am doing everything in Final Cut Pro, greatly assisted by the Paste Attributes command."

Fairskye's new video work *Aqua* (see our cover image), premieres soon at Stills Gallery as an installation. I had a glimpse of the video in preparation. The look and feel, quite different from the gently fluent if eerie time shifts of *Stati d'Animo*, is of an intense vibrancy, a living impressionism and, again, magical play with technology and perception.

Merilyn Fairskye, *Stati d'Animo (States of Mind)*, 2006-2007, three-channel video installation, writer, director, producer Merilyn Fairskye, camera, post production, sound Merilyn Fairskye, Greg Ferris; Artspace March 16-April 14

Merilyn Fairskye, *Aqua*, Stills Gallery, Sydney, July 18-Aug 18

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