

GEORGE AND JØRGEN

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Martin Newth: *Sentinel*

10th – 29th May 2011

Private View: Wednesday 11th May 6-9pm

Built during the Second World War in anticipation of a German invasion the austere fortified structures of pillboxes peppered both the British coastline and en route to major urban centres. With a rocky history, where the majority of Britain's static defences were destroyed even before the end of the war, now an estimated 6,000 pillboxes still remain. Artist Martin Newth has tracked down and photographed several of them over the past two years. His starkly objective black and white photographs indicate their varying architectural designs, building materials, and how they have now become subsumed into the landscape. Whether buried in undergrowth, part submerged in sea, or masked in graffiti and vandalism, these portraits reveal the marginal status that pillboxes have in our society today.

Newth has also been transforming the small dark chambers into cameras. With the use of a simple lens and sheets of colour photographic paper he has made large photographic negatives on site. The images, shown here for the first time, depict the scenes over which the pillboxes have stood sentinel for the past 65 years. The vivid red of the negatives - a result of Newth's use of colour sensitive paper – shows the landscape in great detail and with a dramatic theatricality relating to the original intended war time function of the buildings.

Thirdly Newth has created a three screen video installation. The small apertures in the pillboxes, which were formerly used as gun emplacements, have instead been used to locate a camera and shoot video. The separate viewpoints are shown side by side to present a looped, moving panorama, where the architecture dictates the framing of the landscape; in this case a pillbox on the beach in Studland, Dorset, that is gradually slipping into the sea. Once an indicator of a united stand in defence of enemy invasion the viewer is invited to consider what pillboxes may represent today. Here it rather signifies the contemporary threat of rising sea levels and an impending ecological crisis.

Born in Manchester in 1973, Martin Newth studied at Newcastle University and the Slade School of Art. His approach is informed by a concern for the process of photography as well as the product, exploring its historical routes and raising questions about its aesthetics in the 21st century. He has exhibited nationally and internationally at: Axel Lapp Projects, Berlin; Focal Point Gallery, Southend; Ffotogallery, Cardiff; Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool; and the Kunstverein Konstanz, Germany. Newth is Course Director of BA Photography at Camberwell College of Arts.

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