

Time Out, 18-24 July 2007

Exhibition of the week

Jennet Thomas

★★★★★

Peer East End

If you're into fabulations, obscurantist esotery and tall tales, then Jennet Thomas's absurdist docu-fiction *'Return of the Black Tower'* is worth the trip to Hoxton. To start with, it's an homage to John Smith's 1985 *'The Black Tower'*, a seminal work of British 'structuralist' filmmaking, in which a narrator charts the troubling appearance of a black tower in his neighbourhood, which mysteriously can never physically be reached, and whose constant presence precipitates his ensuing mental breakdown.

Thomas's *'Return...'* is altogether more bizarre: two characters, John and Jennifer, faces painted gold and with the benign glow of modern-day cult members, explain to appreciative applause their experience of an indescribable yet recurring visual phenomenon, cryptically defined as 'meaning embedded in the relation of things. A kind of shape'. The two narrate the history of how its various witnesses are brought together through their common realisation that they are not alone, that the 'thing' is revealed to all of them, which – by the end of the video – eventually effects a quasi-transcendental



'Return of the Black Tower'

transformation of the protagonists.

Barmy, baffling and weirdly funny, Thomas's rejig takes Smith's honed inquiry into film's structural conditions and reverses its terms: instead of a lone protagonist, a group; instead of his lonely death because of the tower, a celebratory union with the 'thing'. Thomas's non-sequitur digression into collective conviction is an elliptical, satirical examination of contemporary belief, as much as it is about the problem of art as an incommensurate, incommunicable experience. If Smith's film sought to reveal the truth of its technology, Thomas suggests that video can only witness truth's evanescence in an increasingly uncertain age.

JJ Charlesworth

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