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Mark Lewis

30 June – 27 August 2007

This exhibition showcases the work of the Canadian-born artist, **Mark Lewis**. Based in London, Lewis has gained an international reputation for short films that investigate the pictorial possibilities of the moving image. *Children's Games – Heygate Estate* (2002) was purchased for the Arts Council Collection in February this year.

Children's Games – Heygate Estate is one of a number of films made in and around South London where the artist lives and works. It was shot on 35mm film in a single take in the summer of 2002 on location in the Heygate Estate, Elephant & Castle. Completed in 1974, Heygate is the largest public housing complex in Europe: notoriously dangerous, it is now earmarked for demolition.

Lewis often focuses on marginalised, overlooked architecture: buildings that seem exist today beneath the shadow of failure: *"The buildings or housing projects that have provided the locations for a number of my films could be described as examples of the great inter-war social experiment, when modernist architecture joined forces with radical city planning to try and improve the lot of the working poor. We now know that many aspects of these great modern building projects were and are highly problematic: the plans failed in many cases to properly anticipate the realism of people living and working in these places. In my films I try to recall in some way the utopian ambition of the idea, in order to remember what was interesting and important about it in the first place."*

To make *Children's Games* Lewis placed a camera on a rickshaw dolly, which he wheeled smoothly and steadily through the twisting concrete walkways of the estate. The camera glides through the playful architecture with the seamless motion of a computer game or a rollercoaster in slow motion. This sense of fun is mirrored in the scenes of children playing in communal spaces on either side of the walkway. The perfect summer weather and the fresh leaves on the trees only add to the pleasantness of the scene.

Despite the deadpan presentation, nothing in Mark Lewis's films can be taken for granted. Each film is meticulously researched, with site visits and pre-photography preceding the shoot. Careful planning and decision-making underpins all aspects of *Children's Games*, from the weather and the time of day, to the child actors. It is difficult to ascertain what is staged and what is real.

In blurring the boundary between truth and fiction, Lewis creates a new vision for the estate, one that reflects the aspirations of the original architects. Despite this reference to the past, Lewis's vision avoids nostalgia. As the art historian and critic, Mark Godfrey, wrote: *"The viewer feels the constant onrush of the future as the camera progresses along the ramp, never pausing to record the events happening on both sides. And yet we end back where we started, at the bottom of the ramp."*

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About the artist

Mark Lewis was born in Hamilton, Canada, in 1957. His work has featured in solo and group exhibitions across the world. A major solo show recently took place at FACT, Liverpool and BFI Institute, London (2006–7). Mark Lewis currently lives and works in London. He is Principal Lecturer in Research at Central St Martin's College of Art and Design, and co-founder and co-editor of Afterall Journal and Afterall Books
www.afterall.org

About the Arts Council Collection

The Arts Council Collection is the largest loan collection of modern and contemporary British art in the world. It is lent to public buildings throughout Britain and to exhibitions nationally and internationally. Since its foundation in 1946 the Collection has acquired over 7,500 works of art. These include sculptures, paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, videos and installations. The aim of the Collection is to acquire innovative work by artists living in Britain and to achieve this it actively seeks work by emerging artists. The Arts Council Collection team works with a changing acquisitions panel of artists, writers or curators, who are appointed for eighteen months at a time, visiting exhibitions and studios.

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www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk