

DAVID CLAERBOUT OLYMPIA

THE REAL-TIME DISINTEGRATION INTO RUINS
OF THE BERLIN OLYMPIC STADIUM
OVER THE COURSE OF A THOUSAND YEARS

1 JUNE – 22 OCTOBER 2017

Stone by stone, Belgian artist David Claerbout (b. 1969 in Kortrijk) built a digital reconstruction of the Olympic Stadium in Berlin. Since March 2016 the monumental building has been subject to its disintegration in real time. The precisely calculated aging process covers the next thousand years – a temporal dimension that far exceeds the human sense of time.

The two-part monumental projection *Olympia (The real-time disintegration into ruins of the Berlin Olympic stadium over the course of a thousand years)* shows a real-time simulation of the natural erosion of the sporting venue inaugurated in 1936. The neoclassical structure embodies the Third Reich's claim to a thousand years of dominance, as referenced in the title of the work; for David Claerbout also understands his installation *Olympia* as an attempt to juxtapose the decline of an ideological construct over time with the biological timescale of nature and the life expectancy of a single human being.

The landscape-format projection of this two-part work presents a calmly flowing, uninterrupted, counterclockwise trajectory of a camera panning the exterior of the digitally simulated stadium. Depending on weather conditions, the camera track proceeds either on the inside or the outside of the stadium's 178, nearly identical, columns. The building is never shown in its entirety or from a bird's-eye perspective and it is also strangely empty with neither humans nor animals in evidence. The only sign of life is the flora that can be seen growing and changing with the seasons. At some point, the Olympic Stadium in this simulated rendering will presumably become completely overgrown with vegetation; yet the camera will continue its solitary orbit of the arena in the same hourly rhythm even then. The portrait-format projection of the installation shows a static sequence of close-up details and views of the surroundings – sections of stairs, the gaps between columns, trees and grass and the two grandiose statues of athletes.

The viewer becomes immersed in a parallel world of meditative languor. In real time it simulates the actual meteorological and climatic conditions occurring in Berlin, with David Claerbout integrating current weather data into his work: when it rains in Berlin, it also rains in the virtual world of *Olympia*. When it snows, when the sun shines, when visibility is obscured by fog, when wilted leaves begin to fall and the seasons come and go – all this happens simultaneously on screen before the viewers' very eyes. Slowly but surely, the weather and the growing vegetation gnaw away at the virtual stadium, expediting its decay. A peculiar tension arises out of the fact that the projection suggests a real location, but actually shows a world that is wholly artificial, without any human interaction.

When preparing the installation *Olympia*, David Claerbout and his team spent three years meticulously studying the history, original plans, structure and materials of the stadium, the play of light and shade in its immediate surroundings, the movement of the clouds as well as the vegetation typical of this climate zone. Rendered in a 3-D program, the sporting venue is virtually reconstructed with the greatest possible accuracy and attention to detail. The work was programmed using complex computer software of the sort designed for fast-action computer games.

Conceived to last for an unimaginable period of 1,000 years, David Claerbout's project *Olympia* is a dizzying reflection on the passage of time, perception and ephemerality. At the same time, it remains unfinished. Since its debut in New York in March 2016, followed by subsequent presentations in

Berlin and other locations, it has been subject to daily work-in-progress updates, status assessments and touch-ups. With the virtual processes of disintegration proceeding in real time, the same images can never be shown again at any future exhibition venues. All that remains is thus a set of documentary images in the form of automatically generated screenshots. Nothing else will be saved, but on the contrary will be lost irretrievably. David Claerbout has pledged to maintain the project in this manner for the next twenty-five years. Thereafter, according to his utopian plan, that task will pass to others, rather like the Olympic torch.

David Claerbout is known for digital animations of haunting slowness, situated at the boundary between still and moving pictures. He often draws his material from reconstructed or computer-generated images, historical photographs or his own recorded footage. The collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation owns eight works by this artist, the most recent of which – *Oil workers (from the Shell company of Nigeria) returning home from work, caught in torrential rain* (2013) – was acquired in 2014.

Olympia (The real-time disintegration into ruins of the Berlin Olympic stadium over the course of a thousand years), start March 2016
Two-channel real-time projection, colour, silent, HD animation, 1,000 years
With the support of the VAF Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds
Courtesy Esther Schipper, Berlin, Sean Kelly, New York

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Opening Hours

Thursday, Friday, Sunday 1–6 p.m.

Pentecost 1–5 June 1–6 p.m.

Art Basel (11–18 June) daily 10 a.m.–6 p.m.,
except Wednesday, 14 June 12–6 p.m.

Additional opening hours will be announced at short notice online to enable visitors to experience real-time weather conditions and different times of day (sunrise, sunset), see www.schaulager.org

Admission

Free of charge

Public Guided Visits

German: Sunday, 1:30 p.m. Guided visits in

French and English: alternately on

Sunday, 4 p.m., dates see www.schaulager.org

Public guided visits are free of charge.

Private Guided Visits

Registration and contact: tours@schaulager.org

Offers for Schools and Universities

For schools and universities, general or theme-based guided visits, art appreciation and workshops are offered at Schaulager. Registration and contact: kunstvermittlung@schaulager.org

Events

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