

CIVILLIAN

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Civilian Art Projects is pleased to present photographic selections from Gesche Würfel's multi-year project *Go for Gold!* The solo exhibition *Go for Gold! The Transformations of the Lower Lea Valley*, a first for the artist in Washington, DC, opens to the public on Friday, February 19 at 7pm and will be on view until March 20, 2010.

Go for Gold! depicts the transformation of London's landscape in preparation for the 2012 Olympic Games. A trained urban planner, Würfel began the project in 2006 as an investigation into globalization and how it disrupts relationships between residents and their natural and built environment.

According to the artist, "the Olympic slogan *Go for Gold!* primarily reflects London's desire to remain on the stage of the 'Global Cities' arena, with little consideration for the needs of locals whose lives continue to be dramatically transformed by the changes to the Lower Lea Valley in preparation for the

games." The photographic series critiques the use of regeneration to bolster London's status as a global economic centre at the expense of local inhabitants' needs.

With a deep interest in how spaces transform over time, Würfel began to photograph the change in the Lea Valley to archive and witness a way of life deconstructing without ceremony or record taking. This push toward the goals of today's Olympic Games and the desire of London to compete financially and aesthetically in a global world struck the artist as she became personally acquainted with the local pace, economy, and lives forever changed by this faceless push toward modernity. Documenting the landscapes' sublime, pastoral scenes and dilapidated structures, Würfel thoughtfully explores a people's relationship to space as it dramatically changes forever.

Peter D. Osborne, Senior Lecturer in Photographic History and Theory and Cultural Studies at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, writes:

A photograph of broken walls inscribed with graffiti is titled, Hockey; another of a field of thistles, Fencing Hall II. One, titled Hand Ball Arena, shows a place of defunct industrial buildings, like an evacuated city on an abandoned planet. The Athletics Warm-up Track is a breakers yard, stacked with battered car bodies; the Fencing Hall a place of bosky tranquility; the International Broadcast Centre shows meadows stretching to a tree-lined horizon beneath a high blue sky devoid of messages. Above the Basketball Arena, across a sluggish green canal and just glimpsed through trees and bushes rises a mysterious concrete structure like an abandoned fort left over from some war conducted in secret. And the image titled Acquatics Centre pictures a large mauvish gate and a sign that reads, Demolition in Progress.

These photographs are instances of Gesche Würfel's engagements with the places and spaces of the Lea Valley on the eve of their disappearance; a set of images that are at once laconic and intense.

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These often strange sites are made stranger by Würfel's titling. Tagged with the function of their demise; their future is signified and their transience rendered more profound. But the titling additionally introduces that type of irony to be found in Surrealist photomontage or in Magritte where word and image contradict each other in order to reveal unsuspected or repressed connections, to release poetic energies.

The theme of spaces in transition is further developed in *Farewell from the Garden Paradise*, a photographic study depicting the long process of eviction of the Manor Garden Allotments plot holders on the Olympic site. The allotments were closed in September 2007 and demolished to construct a footpath for the Olympic Games. The images present the contrast between the small personal spaces of sheds and the grand spaces of international development. They question the notion of the 2012 Olympics as 'green' (as often cited in promotional literature), by documenting the destruction of allotments that were a rare example of sustainably managed green spaces in East London. The photos reveal the complex and nuanced relationships between the plot holders and nature.



Gesche Würfel was born in Bremerhaven, Germany. She holds a degree in Spatial Planning from the University of Dortmund, Germany, where she worked for several years in the field of regeneration and public participation. She completed her MA in Photography and Urban Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she graduated with a distinction in 2006. She currently works and lives in Boston, MA. Her work has been exhibited widely, among others in the Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2007 show, which is an exhibition of the most promising new talent to emerge from art schools across the United Kingdom. Her work has recently been published in "Younger Than Jesus: The Artist Directory", co-published by the New Museum and Phaidon.

An essay by Al Miner, Assistant Curator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, will accompany the exhibition.

More images can be found at www.civilianartprojects.com. High-resolution JPEG images are available upon request. Exhibition hours are Wednesday & Saturday 1-6pm, Friday 4-8pm, and Tuesday and Thursday by appointment.

Image credits: "Fencing Hall 2," Gesche Würfel; "Shed 8," Gesche Würfel