

# Video visits "a failed project"

## VISUAL ARTS

**LYNNE MARSH:  
PLÄNTERWALD**

At the Or Gallery until October 12

Slowly, slowly, the camera glides and hovers over broken-down rides, rusting gondolas, and crumbling pavilions. Traces of human enterprise are disappearing into the encroaching shrubs, grasses, vines, and trees. Thick moss overgrows paving stones and pale-green algae cover the surface of a stagnant pond.

*Plänterwald* is a poetic meditation on what Lynne Marsh describes as "a state of indeterminacy and latency". The Canadian artist, who divides her time between Berlin, London, and Montreal, is talking to the *Straight* as she finalizes the installation of her engrossing video projection. It was shot in 2009 in an abandoned amusement park in Berlin, a place Marsh first encountered by chance while bicycling around that city. Her curiosity about the site and subsequent research revealed that it had operated successfully in the former German Democratic Republic. Following unification, it fell into disuse and disrepair, and it languishes now in a condition of "suspension", caught in a legal and financial impasse between city and business interests. It has been neither repaired nor redeveloped. The only people admitted are security guards, who seem to be protecting people from the collapsing and potentially dangerous park as much as securing it against potentially destructive people. Because of its association with East German life before the collapse of Communism, Marsh sees the place as "a monument to a failed project".

Although the video is on a loop and has no titles, it seems to open with high, hovering shots of tree-tops and thick foliage, as if we

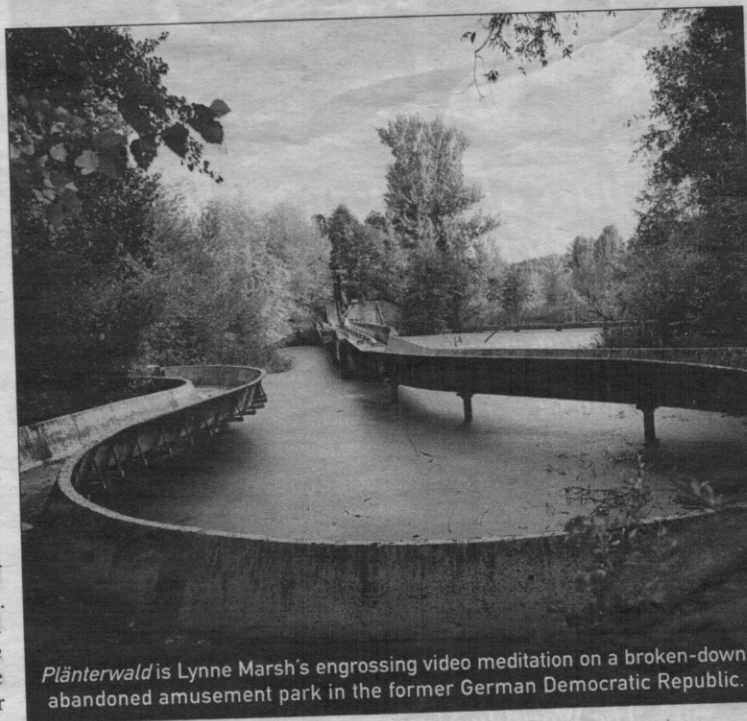
were alone in a fairy-tale forest. Pale grey-blue sky peeks through the leaves and, on the soundtrack, birds chirp and tweet. Behind the birdcalls is the constant, ambient roar of the unseen city outside the park walls. This roar becomes startlingly amplified when the camera dips into subterranean passages beneath metal tracks or nudges through the workings of some ruined machinery. Occasionally, we hear the whistle of a nearby factory and, in one scene, the loud alarm-bell sounds of a security guard dragging a rod or stick across a metal fence.

In some sequences, Marsh's camera is alone in the park, scouting out abandoned rides, tracks, ticket booths, concession stands, pinball machines, and a still, silent Ferris wheel standing in an overgrown

field. We see collapsed ramps and rusting tracks, scattered metal wheels, a tank filled with garbage and dirty water, and pieces of crumpled plastic, filthy bubble pack, and decomposing fibreglass. In other scenes, uniformed security personnel walk around the grounds, climb zigguratlike stairs, or stand stiffly amid the collapse and dereliction. They're like the guardians of a ruined civilization.

Although it's possible to read either nostalgia for a lost past or warning of an apocalyptic future into *Plänterwald*, Marsh is more interested in the current state of the park. Her descriptive camera work captures the "present-dayness" of the site, its right-now suspension between a Communist yesterday and a postcapitalist tomorrow.

> ROBIN LAURENCE



*Plänterwald* is Lynne Marsh's engrossing video meditation on a broken-down, abandoned amusement park in the former German Democratic Republic.