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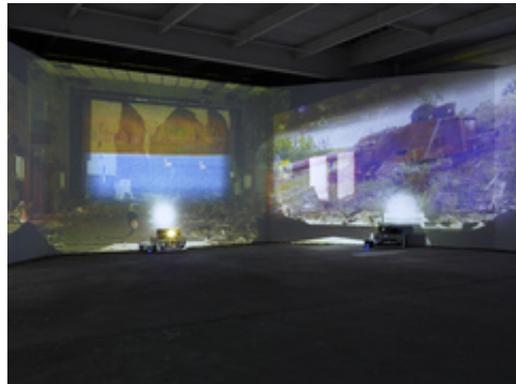
Diana Thater

DAVID ZWIRNER | 519 WEST 19TH STREET

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November 9, 2012–December 22, 2012

Diana Thater's intricate video installation *Chernobyl*, 2010, opens, on its backmost screen, with sunrise over the titular sarcophagus: a concrete tomb, ceaselessly shored, that contains the infamous reactor's noxious remains. The image is cast from one of six projectors, each centered before a floor-to-ceiling wall. Joined in an open hexagon, this makeshift structure mirrors that of a movie theater in Prypiat, a Soviet city built to house workers from the nearby reactor, now left to the slow decay of nuclear sludge. The theater's collapsed walls and debris-strewn floor furnish the ground for footage from the "Zone of Alienation," a nearly eighteen-and-a-half-mile radius of land surrounding Chernobyl that remains uninhabitable. Look closely, and Thater's tripod appears on each wall amid sedimented rubble, while the artist and her crew periodically perambulate the space. Their presence, along with the theater's now-conspicuous, now-faded interior, anchors each image of ruin in its status as spectacle.



Diana Thater, *Chernobyl* (detail), 2010, six projectors, six media players, Lee filters, dimensions variable. Installation view.

Nonlinear and loosely evocative, Thater's images resemble a W. G. Sebald novel made filmic. More than tumbledown, the prefab buildings her camera surveys seem imploded, as if the force of the reactor's destruction had reverberated for miles. Bruised, peeling surfaces, washed in a palette of oxidation and rot, encode the violence of the blast, while imposing architectures—brutalist, bulky, and generally shot from afar—assert their authority over a soundless landscape. Captured by Thater's camera, Prypiat becomes a place at once knowable and nowhere, the specificity of a stylized Soviet mural contravening the abstract flicker of birch trees imaged from a moving truck. Her mix of handheld and steady footage heightens this sense of disorientation, which pushes against the fixity of the theater's backgrounded frame. Though the work may be faulted for indulging in the inherent fascination of its subject matter, Thater's attention to form imparts a necessary distance. Layering spaces within spaces, *Chernobyl* both encloses its viewers in, and excludes them from, the sites that it documents. The result is a timely variation on charged themes.

— Courtney Fiske

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