

The approach

Sublime Smoke

Lisa Oppenheim & John Stezaker

1 October – 5 November 2017

Opening: Saturday 30 September, 6–9 pm

The Annexe

Sublime Smoke is a curated display of works from Lisa Oppenheim's photographic series *Smoke* paired with John Stezaker's cropped found images from the series *Sublime*. These works by Oppenheim and Stezaker make an unlikely convergence across time and material approaches in their respective use of found images of billowing smoke that they have cropped to suggest the sublime beauty of clouds in the sky.

Oppenheim has been making her *Smoke* works since 2013, in which she appropriates found imagery of explosions, smoke bombs, air raids and erupting volcanoes in the form of vintage negatives from archives or news images from the internet. The artist has cropped the source of the smoke from each image and inverts it into a positive, whereby the black smoke appears like white cloud against a dark sky. These images evoke the sublime beauty of epic skies in Renaissance paintings and frescoes. The dramatic events that had caused the smoke — deleted from the image — are recorded in the title of each work. The titles read like newspaper headlines relating to historical incidents or current affairs, such as the diptych in this display: *Spectators sitting on hillside watching fires consume the city after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. 1906/2016 (Version III)*. Oppenheim re-introduces the element of fire into her *Smoke* images through the photographic process, in which she replaces the light of the enlarger with the flame of a match.

John Stezaker began the series *Sublime* in the early 1980s using found images of steam trains with smoke clouds puffing from their chimneys. The artist crops the images so that only the exhaust emerging from a thin sliver of chimney at the bottom edge of each picture remains. The ethereal and fluffy smoke clouds appear at a remove from the weight, speed and thundering noise of the steam trains which are eclipsed from the images. The resulting horizontal vistas evoke the art historical trope of transient clouds in a vast sky, as do Oppenheim's works. The subtle presence of the chimney however reveals the source of the smoke as the result of the burning of coal to power the steam engines. *Sublime* plays on the characteristically British nostalgia for the glorious railways as well as resonating with contemporary environmental concerns, such as US President Trump's attempt at reviving the coal industry.

The display will be accompanied by a transcribed conversation in which the artists respond to questions to discuss their respective works. *Sublime Smoke* in The Annexe coincides with Sam Windett's solo exhibition during the fall programme at The Approach.