workers leaving the factory (again)
Buzzing neon tubes light up the pitch black corridor of an abandoned tobacco factory.

A walk through the endless uncanny corridor is accompanied by workers that seem to multiply.

Tableau vivants of workers evoke questions about the working class today and the representation of female workers.

The film transforms into a silent movie with a quote of the Film “La sortie des usines Lumière”.
A long, dark corridor, lit by neon lights, into which, one after another, more and more women enter from the side. The camera films them from behind as they advance purposefully. Katharina Gruzei is alluding here to a film by the brothers Lumiere: “La sortie de l’usine de Lyon”, which shows workers leaving a factory. But she has shifted the action to the inside of the place of production, and, through skillful editing, the route the workers have to take to get outside seems endless. This treadmill effect provokes questions about the form, position and changing nature of work in our time.
(Kasseler Dokfest)

Flashing neon transforms a factory corridor into a stunning light and sound sculpture. The workers move silently towards the exit. A multitude of silent factory workers walk down a seemingly endless corridor. The flashing neon transforms the space into a surreal light and sound show. At the end, they pose one last time for the camera before leaving the building. The automatic gates close slowly behind them. La sortie de l’usine Lumière à Lyon by the Lumière brothers dates back to 1895; now we face the end of the industrial age.
(IFFR Rotterdam)
Katharina Gruzei combines a sociopolitical issue and a precise formal concept, which is rare in experimental film. Inspired by the Lumière brothers’ first film, La sortie de l’usine Lumière à Lyon, which shows a large number of workers leaving their factory’s gate, Gruzei begins in the interior, in a passageway (made to seem incredibly long by the editing) that emerges from the darkness. Solely portions of the corridor — a production line at the closed Austria Tabak factory — flash into view in the buzzing neon light. The impressive sound and choreography of light were taken from an installation by the artist in the empty factory space.

The backs of the first workers, with their coats and bags, gradually enter the picture, and the camera accompanies these individuals as they leave their place of work. More and more of them walk down the dark, flickering hallway. By these scenes the weirdness of the space and the menacing quality of a mass of people who could form a resistance movement becomes increasingly evident.

All relevant questions concerning the on-the-job reality experienced by these workers, most of whom are women, can be formulated by means of association: Is it night time when they leave the factory? What kind of work do they have to do? What do female laborers earn these days? How long does it take them to get home from this monstrous factory, and when will it be moved to a low-wage country? When all the protagonists briefly gather as if for a photograph and look straight into the camera, it makes you wonder what a fight for humane labor would have to be like at present to be successful. The automatic gate opens and closes silently to release the anonymous crowd.

(Brigitta Burger-Utzer)
In 1895, in the German title of the film by the Lumière Brothers, it was simply “male workers” that were leaving the factory, even though there were clearly more women than men to be seen. Gruzei, in her reinterpretation, renders moot the assignment of gender in title and picture. In the flickering light of the film, the camera shows silhouettes and swims with the mass of people exiting the tobacco factory. Only at the end is the original scene recreated, but this time with extended perception. (Diagonale)
film facts

35mm / HD 16:9
stereo Sound
11 minutes
2012

Credits:

Idea & Directing: Katharina Gruzei
Camera: Renate Bauer & Katharina Gruzei
Dolly grip: Randolf Helmstetter
Set Management: Katharina Riedler
Set Assistant: Claudia Dworschak
Technical Support: Johannes Ramsl
Editing, Sound, Postproduction: Katharina Gruzei
Light Installation: Katharina Gruzei

Awards:

Local Artist Award
Crossing Europe Filmfestival

Award for Best Young Shortfilm
Vienna Independent Shortfilm Festival

Award for Best Experimental Short
Nashville Filmfestival
Biography
Katharina Gruzei

Born 1983 in Austria. Studies of Experimental Art and Cultural Studies at the University of the Arts in Linz. Studies abroad at the Art Department of the University of California Santa Barbara and at the University of Fine Arts Berlin for Visual Cultural Studies in the class of Katharina Sieverding.

Katharina Gruzei works with Photography, Film, Video, Installations, Media-Performances, Sound and Objects. According to the concept she experiments between these professions and convinces with an unique crossover language.

Her field of interest are the use of media as a political as well as a soziological and cultural tool. She works on visual strategies to decode the construction and ideology of Imagery. This research starts from a single image and often ends up in Archives. By using found footage she unfolds cultural history as a field of artistic research in which she introduces her own thoughts and statements.

Her videos and photographs tell about a distinct interest in the border between still and moving image. Her visual language explores the potential of resistance and empowerment within artistic practice. Gruzei’s also researchs in field studies which she later on reconstructs in spacial installations that encounter sound, objects or whatever evolves from her exploration. Her work is exhibited in international contexts.