

A twin obsession with art and film

Sisters Jane and Louise Wilson have made an installation from one of the late Stanley Kubrick's abandoned epics, they tell *Kevin Maher*

Jane Wilson, one half of the 41-year-old twin sister art phenomenon known as the Wilson Sisters, sinks her head into her hands and groans. "Oh no! The twin theme!" Her sibling, Louise, the dirty blonde to Jane's brunette, sighs, "Here we go!" The pair, Newcastle-born and Hackney-based, are resistant, it seems, to the "twin thing". Turner Prize nominees and creators of ambitious art installations (their most famous, *Stasi City*, was filmed entirely in the eerie former Stasi headquarters in Berlin), they will later say that the twin obsession ultimately distracts from the work itself. "It has about five minutes of interest, doesn't it?" Louise says.

And yet, in their cavernous East London studio, and in the opening minute of conversation, they bring it up themselves. "Kubrick worked with twins," Jane offers cheerily, by way of introduction, describing the late great film director Stanley Kubrick's first movie, *Day of the Fight*, a 1951

began constructing their own project — they interviewed Ter Steege, filmed her, re-created Kubrick's wardrobe tests, recorded voiceover lines, and edited it all together with newsreel footage of Holocaust abuses. The work-in-progress that they play here today on their ancient television is fractured, dreamlike and appropriately disturbing (the final BFI installation, complete with infinity mirror and top-notch technical specs, they warn, will be even more affecting). They dismiss any notion that they have succeeded where Kubrick failed, and instead insist that their work is merely one of many potential approaches that the film invites. "I hope it will give you a sense of the different roles and identities, and of a movie in the process of becoming," Jane offers.

Their dalliance with mainstream cinema, however, doesn't end with Kubrick. The sisters, who began their careers by drawing at their granny's Newcastle kitchen table, have been commissioned by Film Four to write and direct a short feature, with a full-length movie poss-

documentary short that featured the Irish-American boxing twins Walter and Vincent Cartier. The creepy twin girls in Kubrick's *The Shining*, Lisa and Louise Burns, also get a mention, but, Jane adds, "they didn't get very extensive roles, did they?"

Kubrick is at the forefront of conversation because the sisters are halfway through their latest installation, an exploration of the director's unfinished passion project, a 1993 Holocaust-themed drama called *The Aryan Papers*. The movie had been in development since 1976, and eventually emerged into preproduction in 1993 as an adaptation of Louise Begley's *War-time Lies*, about a Jewish woman and her nephew pretending to be Roman Catholic to escape persecution. Julia Roberts had been circling the lead role, but Kubrick chose the Dutch actress Johanna ter Steege (*The Vanishing*) and began scouting locations in the Czech Republic. However, *Schindler's List* was released that year, to critical and commercial acclaim, and Kubrick subsequently abandoned his film, fearing that there wasn't enough cultural space for two prominent Holocaust movies.

The Wilsons' work, entitled *Unfolding the Aryan Papers* (a joint commission from Animate Projects, funded by the BFI and the Channel 4) began as ten days of immersion in the Kubrick archives in South London. The sisters could have chosen any Kubrick movie for inspiration, but *The Aryan Papers* grabbed them from the start. "There was something unique about it, which made it stick out," Louise says. "It was the closest that any of his films would have come to being slightly biographical, in the sense that he had family from Eastern Europe who were lost in the Holocaust." "Plus," Jane adds, "it became obvious that this was an amazing role for a female lead to take on — he didn't actually do that in any of his other films."

After painstakingly sifting through the material ("Ten years of research, rows and rows, 50 or 60 boxes!" Louise says), they

ably not too far behind. Does this mean that after 15 years at the cutting edge of the art world, creating tricky, non-linear, non-narrative installations (exemplified by their busy 2003 multiscreen work *A Free and Anonymous Movement*), the girls have finally, well, grown up? "No," Jane says. "It's not so much that we have grown up, but that we've diversified."

They say that they will not be branding themselves as the "twin movie directors", but that twinhood remains an issue. They play it down whenever possible, and here claim that, despite nipping in and out of each other's sentences with remarkable ease, their interpersonal shorthand is nothing spectacular ("Any couple has that," Louise says). They admit, coyly, to being in separate relationships (Jane has a two-year-old son), saying: "We're happily ensconced in our private lives — but *not* together!"

It's in art that they are apparently inseparable: the sisters were the only pupils at their school studying art A-level. They then attended separate art schools, but for their final shows exhibited identical work, featuring themselves apparently killing each other. They then studied an MA together at Goldsmiths College in London. "We make light of it," Jane says. "But it's also a dedicated commitment. It's not always straightforward, and not always easy." "But the important thing," Louise adds, "is that we're still making work." Jane nods, and then, like a reflex, perhaps unconsciously, drops in the last word, "Together." **Jane & Louise Wilson and Stanley Kubrick: *Unfolding the Aryan Papers* is at the Gallery at BFI Southbank, London SE1 (www.bfi.org.uk/gallery), from Fri to April 26**