

# DOUBLE TAKE

The Wilson twins have brought their unique artistic vision to the film Kubrick never made, they tell *Moira Jeffrey*

IT'S CUSHY when writing or talking about the artists Jane and Louise Wilson to dwell on the fact that they are twins. In fact, these days the 42-year-olds, originally from Newcastle and long ensconced in London, come across as much as business-like collaborators as sisters.

But, however pragmatic they are in person, their work is full of doubles, mirrors, reflections and fragmentation. Not so much the romantic psychology of "twinhood" but the practical result, says Jane, of having two pairs of eyes. "There's something about having two pairs of eyes and having two identities and two roles to play and having two versions of experience. The fact that we're constantly sharing the roles of watching and being watched means the work is constantly looping and quite fluid."

There was, of course, a great deal of merry mischief in their early work, right from the identical degree shows they submitted back in 1989: Jane at Newcastle, Louise at Duncan of Jordanstone. In Edinburgh they will show one of their earliest works, *Garage*, a photograph in which they appear to be locked in a fatal loop, each attempting to murder their own double. "We were playing with that idea of the double. When we were each seen as a single entity at college it's really interesting to introduce that idea of the mysterious other."

EDINBURGH 2009  
**TREEFEST**  
& WOOD MARKET

Sat & Sun  
18th & 19th July  
11am - 5pm

Inverleith Park  
Opposite Botanic Gardens



Free Admission

[www.edinburghtreefest.org.uk](http://www.edinburghtreefest.org.uk)

Fantastic Family Event...

interactive crafts, stalls, displays,  
games, demonstrations, axe throwing,  
horse logging, mountain biking display,  
entertainment, refreshments,  
beer tent,

...and Much, Much More



"This put him  
in touch  
with the  
history of the  
Holocaust  
that impacted  
on his own  
family"

SCOTLAND'S MEDIA July 17, 2009



In the frame:  
Jane and Louise  
Wilson, opposite, have  
made Dutch  
actress Johanna  
ter Steege the  
focus of their  
film installation  
*Unfolding The  
Aryan Papers*,  
featuring the  
images above.  
Main photograph:  
Dan Phillips

While their joint postgraduate studies at Goldsmiths College in London placed them right at the centre of the Britart generation, their breakthrough work, the funny, creepy film *Normanpath*, saw them stage implausible physical acts drawn from the language of psychological horror films and exploit their twin status to the full.

"It was a great point of liberation in terms of excess," recalls Jane. "We were creating these human feats and expressing a level of anger or violence, but it was all in filmic terms: crashing through a wall that was clearly polystyrene."

But quickly they moved beyond this to take their keynote themes of architecture, power and hierarchy. On a scholarship in Berlin, they filmed inside the notorious Stasi City, the terrifying headquarters of the secret police. At home they even got inside the abandoned missile base at Greenham Common and reached the heart of political power in an examination of the Houses of Parliament. The work carried through the techniques they had learned from mainstream film-making to an extreme language of their own. Their camera moved through their buildings just as it crawls along the hotel corridors in Kubrick's *The Shining*. Occasionally figures were glimpsed, sometimes the sisters themselves in costume or uniform.

When I meet Jane and Louise in Edinburgh, we're surrounded by the noise of men at work. The artists are preparing a festival show for the Talbot Rice Gallery which will open on 7 August, and the gallery is nearing the completion of a major refurbishment. There's a background hum of saws and the occasional swish of paint rollers. It's all the messy, noisy stuff that goes into making seamless appearances: the kind of work that, if it's successful, will become invisible.

It's the morning after the Edinburgh Film Festival premiere of *Songs For My Mother*, the artists' new short film about two displaced women who meet fleetingly in the film industry. We're meeting to talk about *Unfolding The Aryan Papers*, the film installation based on an unrealised Stanley Kubrick project that they will show in the gallery alongside some old and new works in photography and sculpture.

Both these recent works touch upon hidden labour, the complex process of making feature films and the obsessive nature of image-making. They also touch on far more emotional subjects: displacement and loss, the making and unmaking of identities in art and in life.

*Unfolding The Aryan Papers* draws on the story of Johanna ter Steege, a Dutch actress whose career may have changed forever if she had starred in legendary director Stanley Kubrick's film *The Aryan Papers*. The film went into pre-production in 1993, it was cast and sets were built, but Kubrick never made it. Perhaps because after *Schindler's List* was released, he felt that the mass market might not sup-

port another Holocaust-themed movie, perhaps because he was overwhelmed by its subject matter.

The script was based on Louis Begley's book *War-time Lies* about a Polish Jew who assumed a Catholic identity to save her family from the Holocaust. "It's a very dark story," says Jane. "It put him very much in this position where he had to be very subjective," explains Louise. "You think of Kubrick as this incredibly objective director, but this film put him in touch with the very painful history of the Holocaust, a history that impacted on his own family."

In a multi-screen installation the Wilsons explore Johanna's story, the wardrobe fittings she attended and her filmed recollections. The artwork explores the transformational necessary to play a role: the shift in identity that both Johanna and the character she was to play would have undergone. The artists had come across the actress's image when invited to work with Kubrick's archive. "He was notoriously secretive about his projects," says Louise. "He had offered her the role but kept her on hold for eight months and she was not able to tell anyone. She kept this secret to herself; only told her family and friends."

Ter Steege, who is still working in the Netherlands, is philosophical about her experience. "He wasn't going for the big Hollywood figure," explains Jane. "She is clearly a wonderfully talented actress and

## REVIEW RECOMMENDS

### KIDS

**TWINEES LIVE! TOP OF THE TOTS**  
Grab a glowstick and join Bella, Jake, Fizz and Milo for some pre-school pop music to celebrate their 10th anniversary (my, they grow up fast these days, don't they!).  
His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen (01224-641322).  
today, 11am & 2pm, Palace Theatre, Kilmarnock (01563-554800), Wednesday, 10.30am, 1.30pm & 4.30pm, Eden Court Theatre, Inverness (01463-234234), Friday, 11am & 2pm; Festival Theatre, Edinburgh (0131-529 6000), Saturday, 4.30pm (then 1 & 20 July)

### THEATRE

**MACBETH** RICHARD III  
"Something wicked this way comes" in Shakespeare's supernatural tragedy as three actors take on the classic tyrant's tale in these outdoor events. Both are performed as part of Glasgow's annual Bard in the Botanic Gardens (0141-429 0022).  
Marzeth, Glasgow's Botanic Festival.  
Marzeth, Glasgow's Botanic Gardens (0141-429 0022), Wednesday until 1 August, 2.45pm (not Sundays or Mondays); Richard III, Kibble Palace Glasshouse, Glasgow Botanic Gardens (0141-429 0022), Thursday until 1 August, 8.15pm (not Sundays or Mondays)

Kubrick saw that. The incredible thing is the bitter-sweet reality of it. She's successful in her own terms and her own life but it's not the classic Hollywood success story. It's very generous and thoughtful how she talks about the whole thing."

In *Unfolding The Aryan Papers*, the notion of dressing for a role is key. "Johanna, she says that it's through the clothes that you can feel the skin of the character," says Louise. Kubrick was obsessed with costume: "He really wanted the period detail to be authentic, with a real emphasis on the clothes in tone, colour and texture."

In much of the Wilsons' art, their eerie fragmented stories, their multiple points of view and their shifting identities are an oblique means of examining the brute nature of power, but *Unfolding The Aryan Papers* defies any simplistic understanding of Kubrick's own power as a brilliant film director.

"In lots of ways what happened to Johanna showed his power, but at the same time I think he actually felt powerless making this film at times," says Louise. "In the end it defeated him." But while his work remained unfinished, Jane and Louise Wilson have brought some of his painstaking labour back to life. ♡

Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, 7 August to 26 September  
www.edinburghartfestival.org



LUCINDA WILLIAMS  
BOOKER T  
LOS LOBOS  
HAYSEED DIXIE

MARY GAUTHIER, DIANA JONES  
JASON RINGENBERG, BASKERY  
THE FELSONS, STANTON MOORE  
BUICK G USA, SOUTHPAW  
THE MIDNIGHT RAMBLERS  
AND MANY MORE...

FRI 31 JUL - SUN 2 AUG

0845 6126327 | www.horseshoos.co.uk  
163 High Street, Perth, Scotland, PH1 5HZ  
www.perthfestivalofmusic.com