



ffotogallery



THE SKATER

New photoworks by Wendy McMurdo and a film by Wendy McMurdo & Paul Holmes

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FFotogallery@TurnerHouse, Plymouth Road, Penarth CF64 3DM

Ffotogallery is pleased to announce that Wendy McMurdo is the recipient of *FF30*, Ffotogallery's 30th anniversary commission to celebrate the organisation's distinguished past and continued investment in international contemporary photography.

Wendy McMurdo is one of the UK's leading lens-based artists who has evolved a singular photographic practice and iconography that explores the impact of digital technologies on our understanding of the photographic image and how this new media fundamentally affects identity, particularly in relation to the psychological world of the young.

For *FF30*, the artist has developed a new body of work, which draws inspiration from Sir Henry Raeburn's much loved painting, *Rev. Walker Skating on Duddington Loch, 1784* – where the protagonist is pictured skating in splendid isolation in the middle of a frozen lake. The painting is widely regarded as a characteristic of the Scottish enlightenment – an 18th Century image of reason triumphing over nature.

In contrast, McMurdo's *Skater*, which forms a similarly evocative motif in her photographic work and time-based collaboration with filmmaker Paul Holmes, presents a more dystopian view of the impact of virtual technology on the lives of the young.

Here McMurdo has produced a series of strange and unworldly images of young figure skaters. Through these digital constructions, she explores the theme of the *avatar* – recognized as being a particularly important surrogate and tool for adolescents in an on-line world.

McMurdo's portraits of young skaters offer up an image of strange beauty and perfection. Like the avatars they represent – several of these skaters were used as models for 'real' computer aided avatars – these perfect, floating figures appear as beings able to be conjured, and manipulated, at will.

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To accompany these sublime, yet dislocated, studies of young ice rink athletes, McMurdo presents a series of portraits of young 'gamers' at play, which function as a paradigm for future generations immersed in a highly mediated world. These inanimate but charged 'characters' allude to how identity is formed in a virtual environment – where fantasy slides into reality and back again, within the looped world of the game.

According to Sherry Turkle, Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "*children grow up in a culture of video games, action films, fantasy epics, and computer programs that all rely on that familiar scenario of almost losing but then regaining total mastery: There is danger. It is mastered. A still-more-powerful monster appears. It is subdued. Scary. Safe.*"

Wendy McMurdo's digital work and the parallel film made in collaboration with Paul Holmes explores this disturbing dichotomy, examining the relationship and polarities – between traditional and digital recreation – and our need to play and explore both the 'scary' and the safe.

Wendy McMurdo - *The Skater*, a series of new photographic works by Wendy McMurdo and a film by Wendy McMurdo and Paul Holmes is commissioned by Ffotogallery Wales and supported by Alt-w and New Media Scotland

Notes to the Editor

Wendy McMurdo was born in Edinburgh and studied at the Pratt Institute in New York where she first became interested in photography. She completed her MA at Goldsmiths College, London in 1993. McMurdo has exhibited widely in solo shows in the UK and mainland Europe and has been included in a number of important group exhibitions which include: *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork; *Only Make Believe* curated by writer Marina Warner for Compton Verney, Warwickshire; and *What Ever Happened to Your Dreams?*, Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Paris. She is currently Fellow in Photography at Napier University in Edinburgh.

Paul Holmes is a British filmmaker and lecturer at Napier University in Edinburgh, Scotland. He wrote and directed the short film *Sniper 470*, working with actors Billy Boyd and Carmen Pieraccini, and producer Michael Hines. Paul was nominated for a BAFTA award for producing the short film *A Small Deposit*, directed by Eleanor Yule. Holmes has also directed numerous drama series for children's television, including the long running Newcastle-based *Byker Grove*.

Ffotogallery is the National Development Agency for Photography in Wales promoting independent photography and lens-based art through a linked programme of exhibitions, publications and educational out-reach work. The organization is a major revenue client of the Arts Council of Wales, and a recent recipient of the Welsh Assembly Government's prestigious *Beacon Company* award.

The **Alt-w Fund** supports the development of new media artworks, devices and creative applications by artists and technologists based in Scotland. The distribution of Alt-w Fund awards is managed by New Media Scotland and funded by Scottish Screen and Scottish Arts Council. **New Media Scotland** is the national development agency for new media. www.alt-w.com

For further details about the exhibition please contact Russell Roberts, Senior Research Fellow in Photographic Curation on **(029) 2034 1667** or russell@ffotogallery.org. To source images/jpegs/tiffs for print, please contact julia@ffotogallery.org.