

I AM A CAMERA:

THE WORK OF OLEXANDER WLASENKO AS CINEMA



Photograph, 2011

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Curated by: Colin Wiginton
Bohemia, 125 Dunlop Street East, Barrie, ON

Reception for the Artist: Saturday, October 1, 5:30 – 8:30 pm, Artist Talk 6:00 pm



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Images Olexander Wlasenko creates are to be savoured like the best works of European cinema. They dazzle the eye and draw you in through a complex play of character and place, form and texture, light and shadow. At first glance his images reveal detail but then something else is revealed. There is something missing. In fact there is much that is missing. The truth they appear to represent gives way to a sense of mystery and, like a good film, they prompt questions and inspire contemplation.

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène (literally, "put into the scene") is a cinematic term used to describe all elements placed before the camera and captured within the frame.

It has its own language and much of Wlasenko's work plays within a similar set of conventions. *Mise-en-scène*, for example, is one of the defining features of cinema. It is what gives the Director power providing as it does the ability to direct the attention of the viewer in a purposeful way. In spite of the appearance of spontaneity, nothing is left to chance and everything within the frame has been carefully composed and constructed. In spite of the very deliberateness of this process, the creation of reality through illusion, which makes film so compelling.

The images Wlasenko creates convey their own unique sense of reality rooted in illusion—a process of creation that is equally composed and constructed. In the studio Wlasenko pins a piece of paper to the wall and begins to create imagery using his brushes to apply pigment directly to the surface of the paper. Unlike the immediacy of photography, Wlasenko employs a process that involves building up layers of pigment and then removing elements when necessary using an eraser. As work progresses, each layer within a given image is eventually secured using a fixative that allows him to add more pigment, more detail and more information until the work is complete. It is an approach that demands Wlasenko fill two roles within the narratives being created, as both Director and performer.

Narrative Film

Narrative film is defined by a structured series of events, linked by cause and effect, that create the evocation of a story with a beginning, middle and end.

Another compelling aspect of Wlasenko's approach is that the finished work is never based on any singular image from a film. They may read as such but, in reality, each work represents a conflation of the many images that make up a film as well as the overall impression it makes in terms of setting, mood, characterization and story. It is the totality of the experience that inspires the final image and the creative process itself is driven by the fact that Wlasenko often sets a film up to play in the studio while he is working.

His images do not represent a single moment in time, but rather, the evocation of a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. When confronted with Wlasenko's images that are so inherently cinematic, our instinct is to fill in the blanks by imagining what came before and what may follow. Knowing how a narrative film tends to evolve prompts us to fill in the gaps, but then Wlasenko disrupts our assumptions by presenting situations in which the relationships between the characters he creates are ambiguous, uncomfortable even disquieting. This is true in works such as *Discussion II* and *Elevator* that depict characters that avoid eye contact and occupy spaces that feel eerily claustrophobic.

Framing Shot

Framing shot involves the use of a rectangle or enclosing shape (such as a shadow, doorway, door or hallway) within a scene to frame the action.

Not only is the film frame prevalent in many of Wlasenko's works but, often, he chooses to introduce a number of other framing devices as well within an image. In a work like *Elevator* the space within the frame is divided up in a number of different ways by elements within the scene, including the framed artwork, the door jamb and the mirror itself. While the characters appear to be contemplating the image of an embrace, the way the space has been composed would seem to reinforce the fact that that is a connection they are unlikely to share. A similar effect is achieved in *Mirror* in which the introduction of a mirror within the scene seems to disorient the woman and disrupt the space she occupies. In both cases the viewer is allowed to stand apart from the action and, like a voyeur, keep a safe distance from the drama that is unfolding.

P.O.V. Shot

P.O.V. shot, or *point of view shot*, is a subjective shot made from the perspective of one of the characters to show the audience the scene as it would look through that character's eyes.

The relationship of the viewer to the action shifts dramatically in works such as *The Photograph* and *Tub (Shock)*. In both instances the viewer is drawn into the scene by being put into the position of one of the characters. No longer allowed to stand apart from the action, the viewer must read out the nature of their relationship to the other

as an editor leaving out details that, in turn, force the viewer to assume the role of the main character. Opposite the viewer sits the fan described in the title and appearing stark and unavoidable in its stillness. With so little information to go on the meaning of the image is uncertain, though it almost feels as if the fan itself is reaching out of the darkness behind it to communicate in its own way.

In this final scene the protective divide of the screen has disappeared and the viewer is forced to centre stage. The space between the viewer and that which is being viewed has collapsed and the flicker of the screen, like the flicker of the fan blades, has stopped. All has gone quiet except for the film that occupies the mind's eye forcing us to fill in the details, and muse upon our own predicament, when confronted with such open-endedness.

End Titles

The credit information that appears at the end of a film.

Colin Wiginton likes to think about art and is a life-long fan of film and the cinema. These days he spends his time in Kingston developing cultural policy, planning arts clusters and restoring steam locomotives, among other things.



The Elevator, 2010



My Biggest Fan, 2011



Olexander Wlasenko has based his studio practice in Oshawa, Ontario after earning a Master of Fine Art at The University of Western Ontario in 2000 and completing studies at both the Ontario College of Art and the University of Guelph. He has received several prestigious drawing awards, including the Eric Freifield Award; top prize in 2001 and 2011 at the national juried drawing exhibition organized at the John B. Aird Gallery; and Best Drawing Awards at the Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition in 2002, 2004, 2005 and 2006. Wlasenko has