



SHARON LOCKHART
LOS ANGELES

Sharon Lockhart's film and photographic works are about a specificity of place. Her in-depth studies of locations combine a meditation on the physical place with portraits of its inhabitants. In *Pine Flat*, 2005, she set up a studio in a barn in a town by the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, allowing the town's children to wander in to be photographed. *Pine Flat* also included a feature-length film made of ten-minute vignettes of individual children, as well as groups, at play, shot by a static camera.

Lunch Break, which comprises two films and a suite of related photographs, centers on workers at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, a shipyard owned by General Dynamics [Blum & Poe; November 21, 2009—January 9, 2010]. Two theater settings were constructed in the gallery to show the films. The photographs are installed on the adjoining walls. In addition, Lockhart includes a photograph documenting the room's construction at the entrance of the exhibition, acknowledging her involvement in the artifice of the presentation.

The camera's movement sets *Lunch Break (Assembly Hall, Bath Iron Works, November 7, 2007, Bath, Maine)* apart from Lockhart's other cinematic productions. Filmed as a ten-minute tracking shot along a corridor where the workers eat their lunch in the factory, the eighty-minute piece stretches out this moment, slowing down the workers' gestures and interactions to the point where they appear to hardly move at all. This beautifully meditative work brings to the fore the isolation of the factory worker. *Exit (Bath Iron Works, July 7-11, 2008, Bath, Maine)*, 2008, a forty-minute film shot from a fixed location inside the factory and looking out towards the exit, counters the contemplativeness of *Lunch Break*. Each day of the workweek is introduced before we see the workers leaving. In addition to referencing Louis Lumière's historic *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, 1895, a forty-six-second black-and-white short that is widely considered to be the first true motion picture, *Exit* recalls Allan Sekula's *Untitled Slide Sequence*, 1972, a

series of photographs made in quick succession, documenting workers leaving the General Dynamics plant in San Diego. From the point of view of Lockhart's camera, the workers enter the frame as individuals or in small groups and are recorded as they make their way down the pavement. The differences from day to day become significant, as the nuances of a gesture, a nod or a different type of lunch box become points for comparison.

In her photographs Lockhart isolates specific aspects of factory life; documenting the ad hoc self-serve snack and coffee stands that provide workers with something to eat or drink during work breaks, in addition to making carefully lit studio shots of the workers' lunch boxes. These images of the open or closed boxes focus on the stickers, shape, size, and contents of what the workers bring with them to the factory. Collectively, they become portraits of the individual workers whose differences are embodied by what they carry. Lockhart's portrait of the factory focuses on daily life, yet is surprisingly devoid of people working. Although she documents the workers exiting the factory and on their lunch breaks, there is very little record of any kind of interaction.

It has been said that Lockhart is interested in the spectacle of reality, and places her camera in such a way as to frame situations from a distance. As a distant observer, she is conspicuously absent. In her films, she lets life unfold as it would were she not documenting it. There are no obvious political or social overtones in the work, which makes her choice of location somewhat suspect. Why make images of a shipyard specialized in the construction of warships in Bath, Maine? How can this not beg questions about factory life and the industrial-military complex in the twenty-first century, especially in dire economic times? The work resolutely refuses to address labor or the life of laborers. Instead, it focuses on aspects of everyday life, leaving us to draw our own conclusions about the underlying purpose, beyond formal questions, of Lockhart's endeavor.

—Jody Zellen

Sharon Lockhart, still from *Lunch Break (Assembly Hall, Bath Iron Works, November 5, 2007, Bath, Maine)*, 2008, 35mm film transferred to HD (courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles)