

Proton, Unity, Energy, Blizzard

Proton, Unity, Energy, Blizzard are names used for the different launch sites of the Baikonur Cosmodrome in southern Kazakhstan. The historical centre of the Russian space programme covers some 6,700 square kilometres. Proton refers to the military launching pad for carrier rockets, Unity (Soyuz) refers to the launcher for manned space missions, while Energy (Energia) supplied the launching pad of the space shuttle project Blizzard (Buran), whose facilities have lain idle since the official termination of the programme in 1993.

In 1999, Jane and Louise Wilson became aware of the previously covert facilities in the context of an announcement on American-Russian collaboration in space travel. During the Cold War, the location of the Cosmodrome base remained unknown in the West for a long time. This surprising cooperation included joint missions to the International Space Station, with American astronauts being ferried in Soyuz rockets. In 2000, the artists attained access and filmed this vast area located in the midst of surreal wastelands alongside the nearby memorial site for the Turkic thinker and composer Korkyt Ata, built in 1980.

In the 4-channel installation *Proton, Unity, Energy, Blizzard*, the camera moves slowly, hovering, its viewpoint resembling that of an uninvolved alien passing through the structures. Exterior and interior shots alternate between assembly halls and launch pads, surrounded by desert sand, which appears to be gradually taking back the infrastructures. The monumental spaces resonate as relics of a once ambitious programme. The installation shows the Cosmodrome as an institution with military, scientific and idealistic, utopian functions – as a structure suspended between reality and Fata Morgana. The piece created at the same time entitled *Dreamtime TM* (2001), which observes a Russian rocket launch, its title refers to the name of the American sponsor Dreamtime Holdings as well as to the indigenous Australian concept of an eternal order, whereby the past, present and future collapse into each other and landscape, memory and cosmic order are inextricably bound.

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