

ARTFORUM

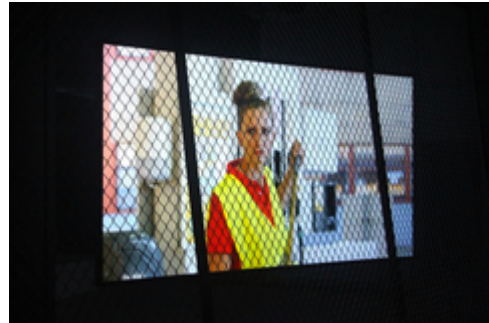
Knut Åsdam

SLOUGHT FOUNDATION

4017 Walnut Street

October 18–November 27

Norwegian artist Knut Åsdam, currently the Mellon artist-in-residence at the University of Pennsylvania, has created for his latest exhibition, titled “Edgelands,” a cinematic video, *Egress*, 2013, and two site-specific sculptures, each studies of architectural non-sites. The action in Åsdam’s video takes place entirely in stranded spaces—the sliver of green between two lanes of a highway, the dank area under an overpass, a rest-stop gas station. A twenty-first-century *Slackers*, the film follows protagonists who are employees of this Norwegian gas station and convenience store.



View of “Edgelands,” 2013.

Åsdam’s camera lovingly details the aesthetics of the employees’ minimum-wage labor. Shuffling packages of savory and sweet edibles under heat lamps or stealing candy bars as a matter of course, the disaffected employees are shown pumping gas and ringing up bottled water for passing motorists. The senseless, repetitive work is defined through their—and their nation’s—relationship to oil, Norway’s largest export. This same economic relationship structures the employees’ landscape. The characters bark orders to one another in lieu of real communication as every interaction is defined in terms of useful labor. (For example, retelling a story of romance gone bad, one woman describes it as “more love hours than can ever be repaid,” lifting a line from the 1987 Mike Kelley piece.) Georges Bataille described art as a glorious waste of excess energy; in the video’s climax, the blond lead spills black gas on concrete as if washing it with oil, expending liquid energy—and money—in blatant defiance of any economic logic.

Åsdam’s wall-size chain-link sculptural interjections in the gallery break the white box into a number of oblique stranded spaces through which one views the video. A sculpture on the University of Pennsylvania’s McHarg Plaza, *DS (2)*, 2013, consists of four interlocking chain-link planes. Architectural in scale, the enormous sheets of fencing were unraveled and woven together again by hand—a willful collision of the industrial and artisanal, extending the haptic into the prefab. “Edgelands” suggests the potential in peripheral, atomized sites for intimate and tactile forms of resistance to global capitalism.

— Maika Pollack