

Art in America

March 2004



Matthew Buckingham: *A Man of the Crowd*, Location Photograph: Gasthaus, 12:22 A.M., 2003, gelatin silver print; 13 1/2 by 18 1/4 inches; at Murray Guy.

Matthew Buckingham at Murray Guy

Matthew Buckingham's *A Man of the Crowd* (2003) is a 16mm black-and-white film installation for the narrator in Poe's text.

The film was projected through a small square hole in the wall that separates the gallery's exhibition space from the office area. The projection was aimed at a two-way mirror in the middle of the room, which allowed the image to pass through to the wall across the room as it simultaneously reflected it back onto the wall with the hole cut into it. Complicating things still further, viewers could see themselves in the glass partition, their images merging into the projected images and their own shadows.

Although there is no dialogue in the film, one can hear the

that transposes Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd" from 1840s London to contemporary Vienna. Poe's dazzling tale of a man following a mysterious stranger zigzags ceaselessly from one urban location to another. Buckingham, a 40-year-old, New York-based artist, utilizes a similar strategy as his camera follows a young man who is following an older man around Vienna. Sometimes both figures are visible; in other shots we see only the older man, hurrying down streets and disappearing around corners. Using available light and a handheld camera, the film takes us through public squares, back alleys, arcades at nighttime, a Turkish bazaar, a train station and so on. With its darting movement, the camera is an effective substitute ambient sounds of a lively city. Caught on the soundtrack are the voices of immigrant merchants selling their wares, drunken old Viennese men singing at a late hour in a small bar, the hum of traffic on a busy thoroughfare, the buzz of a sports car driving by on an otherwise deserted street. And there is the constant juxtaposition of historical and modern architecture.

So little happens in this movie, yet so much is going on. Buckingham avoids any hint of nostalgia yet manages to connect to the past. Poe's haunting tale, any number of strolling Surrealists, the flâneur of Walter Benjamin's arcades and the street cinema of the Nouvelle Vague are refracted through Buckingham's gift for dynamic storytelling in this small jewel of a film installation.

—Max Henry