**SCULPTURE/INSTALLATION**

**PULP PRESS**

May-October annually
Kistefos Sculpture Museum, Norway

Review by Herbert Wright

In a concrete pavilion by a roaring
mountain river 29 miles north of Oslo,
the digital documentation of structure
in 1,262,440 sheets of virtual paper
has begun.

The process began in May and will
finish in 2043, and is one of three
elements that make an extraordinary
new work by Irish artist John Gerrard,
called Pulp Press, designed site-
specifically in the open-air Kistefos
Museet sculpture park. The other two
elements are more visible: Gerrard has
renovated the paper pulp press which
chugged away there until 1950, but in
virtual reality. A2 architecture practice
in Dublin has designed the concrete
pavilion in which to watch it, and to
store the data the work generates.

Like Thomas Demand, the
internationally exhibited Gerrard
produces 3D-works for display in
two dimensions, and they both
meticulously map their subjects. But
Gerrard’s subjects extend beyond
architecture and, crucially, they are
animated and recreated digitally. Some
require historical research, for example
Dust Storm (Dalhart, Texas) (2007),
which sprang from a Thirties
photograph, and all require powerful
software: Gerrard’s tools include game
engines used in rendering by
video-game developers.

The original pulp press processed
pulp from logged trees floated down
the adjacent Rands river, and was
powered by its flow. Gerrard’s rendition
of the machine is projected, the
viewpoint making a 25-minute circuit
around the machine, the same time for
it to produce a bale of paper. The HD
animation is incredibly accurate and
evocative, for example showing the
changing light through the windows
around the grimy machine, or the
flicker of a gauge’s indicator needle.

The solid screen it is projected on
fills most of the 4m x 8m cross-section
of the hollow 12m-long box pavilion,
open at each end. The pavilion is
austere, a pure minimalist, brutalist
Judd-like form. Adjustable screens at
the front regulate the internal light
levels for better viewing, and the
screen at the far end is framed by light
from behind, where the river is.

When a bale is complete, each
sheet’s structural description down
to each pulp grain is downloaded to
a hard drive. Five parallel bench-like
shelves can each house 12 drives, and
when all their memory is full, new
layers of shelves will be added to
accommodate more.

A river surge that would flood the
pavilion’s floor is reckoned to be a
one-in-50-year event, but even so
the self-designer Jakob Iliesa (like
Gerrard, Vienna-based) has raised the
shelves on copper legs. Other natural
invaders include bats or birds taking
the structure for a cave and trying to
nest – when Blueprint visited, a pair
of what were probably pied flycatchers
magically fluttered above the screen,
but thought better of it and left.

PULP PRESS IS
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MADE STARKER
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pavilion’s design is nest-resistant.
Pulp Press shares the park with
works from a stellar array of artists
including Olafur Eliasson, Dragset and
Elmgreen, Bjarne Melgaard, Anish
Kapoor and Shintaro Miyake. It is not
the only site-specific work – there is
Claes Oldenburg’s huge, colourful
Tumbling Tacks (2009), for example,
and All Nature Flows Through Us
(2011), a showy metal doughnut
engraved with the scan of a pupil
set in the river.

The river’s roar provides a
soundtrack to Pulp Press, and the
weather changes the atmospherics
inside, conducive to contemplation
and creating an immersive experience.
And it breaks new ground. With the
dimension of time, Gerrard celebrates
industrial process, in luminous
hyper-reality. As artistic representation
of industry, it is a quantum leap
compares to the Hillers’ industrial
structure photography.

Yet its accuracy only goes so far.
Entropy is not programmed in – in
reality, the old press decayed a little
every day. The real detail lies in the
data mapping the pulp’s configuration
in a sheet, every one different from
the last off the press. It seems as
futile as documenting individual
snowflakes, but there are deeper ideas
at play. For example, it references
unseen, ubiquitous, digital black-box
processes. In this case, we see the
drives on the shelves, which actually
are black boxes, but neither what
happens inside nor the virtual sheets
they store. The accrual of useless
information tells us something about
the modern world, operating without
human intervention and increasingly
divorced from purpose.

Pulp Press is more than post-
industrial comment. It is a beautiful
and chilling take on the inexorable
rise of the datasphere, made starker
by its stunning semi-wild environs.