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# Flash Art

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“New York Tales”  
The Kitchen, NYC  
By Andrea Bellini



Above: MATTHEW BUCKINGHAM and JOACHIM KOESTER, *Sandra of the tulphouse or How to live in a free state*, 2001. Video still from installation. Courtesy of the artists. Below: FIONA TAN.

AS SPRING PROGRESSES, the New York art scene seems to lose some of its proverbial verve. The city's art world begins to prepare for the imminent European summer marathon, kicking off with the Venice Biennale, then moving on to the Basel Fair, often via the hot spots of contemporary art such as London and Berlin. In a curious form of collective hypnosis, the caravan of contemporary art moves as one, wandering here and there according to a fixed itinerary that increasingly resembles a ramble through a lovely mountain pasture, a clearing with few surprises, which at times can seem a touch too reassuring. Meanwhile, New York still does its bit, and even this phase of the season offers up a good story to tell. In this case, it is a story of crossed glances, of voyeurism, of images returning to life, and of cultures coming together.

## WINDOWS ON THE WORLD

Ultimately, the lighthearted world of Superflat does not exist even in the best utopian fantasies. Or so one deduces from the video installation by Matthew Buckingham and Joachim Koester at The Kitchen in Chelsea. On five screens, the two artists tell the story of Christiania, an anarchist community created in 1971 in Denmark on the site of 'occupied' military barracks in the port of Copenhagen. The community, built on 34 hectares of land, was created on the principle of self-management and collective property, and for the last 30 years it has represented a unique social experiment. In the video installation, a fictional character named Sandra experiences and observes Christiania from the point of view of an outsider. Standing before these five screens one can follow various interconnected narratives, each recounting different aspects of the story of this community: the collective experience and the private one, revolution and normalization, utopia and its failure. The stories alternate without any hierarchy in a disorderly, casual manner, without attempting to construct a thesis or offer a judgment on the community. Buckingham and Koester use the camera to tell a precise story, but at the same time they attempt to question the very concept of a documentary by contesting the presumption of objectivity and scientific method. Instead of imposing a hierarchy of themes and a logic leading to specific conclusions, the two artists prefer to enact a horizontal, multi-perspectival approach through which the observer can negotiate his own opinion. Just like the community that it examines, Buckingham and Koester's documentary offers itself as an unfulfilled prophecy that contradicts by its very practice the perspective on which it is historically based — in other words the notion that the gaze of the observer is unconditional and trustworthy. In general terms, Buckingham's work seems to derive from the lessons of Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, from their purist, essentialist approach to the camera, and from their interest in cinema as a vehicle of meaning rather than of spectacle.