



## On the Ground in China

EXCLUSIVE, PREDICTIVE ANALYSIS ON CHINA INVESTMENT THEMES



[FT Home](#) > [Weekend](#) > [Columnists](#) > [Peter Aspden](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

### Other people's memories

By Peter Aspden

Published: March 20 2009 23:03 | Last updated: March 20 2009 23:03

It is an archetypal scene from middle England: a family is playing in the garden on a bright, sunny day. The clothes reveal that we are in the 1950s or early 1960s. The children, blonder than blond can be, gurgle with contentment. A quiet, plaintive melody is picked out on the piano. The short film hums with the nostalgia of fleeting pleasures.

But are appearances deceptive? The images on screen are split into several panels instead of forming a unified whole. Each is slightly out of phase with the other, suggesting a world that is not quite as wholesome as we think. Trouble in paradise, or just the hazy blur of recollection in tranquillity?

The artist, the Turkish filmmaker Kutlug Ataman, is happy to leave it to us to decide. The video is one of 10 similar pieces on show at the Thomas Dane Gallery in London's West End, all of which are shown simultaneously in a darkened room, increasing the effect of dislocation. The melodies, individually commissioned from the minimalist composer Michael Nyman, also overlap, veering between sweetness and cacophony.

Ataman's intention with his latest installation, *fff*, is nothing less than to replicate the effects of memory. Having questioned in his previous work the issue of personal identity, he now turns his attention to the wider theme of national self-definition. The footage comes from two English families, the Fryers and the Howards, whose fathers were pioneering researchers into the effects of flight and G-force on pilots.

One pair of films has a father calmly putting his pipe down before he is catapulted into the air in a test ejector seat, juxtaposed with a young boy (his son?) spinning round and round in his garden. Giddiness takes myriad forms: escape from a burning fighter plane can spin the head as surely as the uncontrollable cavortings of a toddler.

Ataman, a Turner prize nominee in 2004, was drawn to the project, he says, by the idea of exploring a past that "was not my own".

Early viewers of the work have expressed their surprise that this was the world in which he was brought up, assuming the films were personal documentary. "It is an act of appropriation, of stealing a past," he tells me on the phone from Dubai, where he is receiving a prize at the state's art fair.

"It is what we all do when we are confronted by a new culture, we try to make it our own. I was interested in reconstructing this history as if it were mine." The films deal with English archetypes – other themes include gardening, country fairs and park football – "because the footage was intrinsically like that. These are archetypal English families."

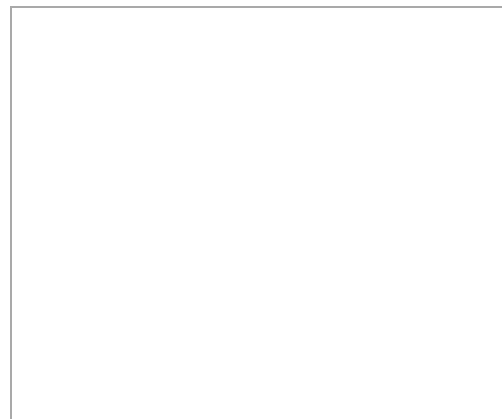
A secondary theme of the work is that of an England that has been lost. "That was an effect I hadn't planned on," says Ataman, thereby revealing his outsider status, for the theme of inexorable decline is surely as embedded in the British national psyche as cricket and cream teas.

But he denies that the fractured nature of the videos has any sinister metaphorical undertones. "It tries to reflect how your memory works," he says. "It is a constantly evolving puzzle, and it is how we assemble our personal mythologies. If you keep being told something, you start to believe it. I am very interested in those artifices but not in a negative way. Things are never pure."

I say that the most unsettling juxtaposition of images is that of a young boy learning to swim in the shallow waters of a family beach, played next to a swelling near-violet sea that churns with sickening grandeur. "I have had lots of different reactions to that one. It is how life changes," he says ruefully.

Ataman is part of a generation of Turkish filmmakers, along with Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Ferzan Ozpetek and Zeki Demirkubuz, that has established an international reputation for making meditative and beautifully crafted works that recall the golden age of European art-house cinema.

He calls the movement "something of a miracle". Turning for once to his own childhood and national mythology, he says he recalls a vibrant film industry that used to make up to 400 films a year and that was widely supported by an enthusiastic public. "But partly because of television, partly because of the political problems from the late 1970s, it suffered for a long time. Now it is coming back and it is very exciting, although a lot of it has more of a following abroad than at home."



#### RELATED SERVICES

<a href="#">FT Bespoke Forums</a>	<a href="#">FT Newspaper subscriptions</a>
<a href="#">Annual reports</a>	<a href="#">FT Fine Wine Plan</a>
<a href="#">Market research</a>	<a href="#">FT Diaries</a>
<a href="#">Growth companies</a>	<a href="#">FT Bookshop</a>
<a href="#">Corporate subscriptions</a>	<a href="#">FT Conferences</a>
<a href="#">Luxury Travel brochures</a>	<a href="#">FT Syndication services</a>
<a href="#">Analyst Research</a>	<a href="#">The Non-Executive Director</a>
<a href="#">MBA-Direct.com</a>	

Ataman is presiding over the national competition at this year's Istanbul film festival, though he is less certain about his participation in next year's European city of culture celebrations in the city of his birth.

"I am not completely convinced by it," he says a little falteringly. "There are some promising projects but not in the visual arts. And politics is very much part of it." He wouldn't be the first artist to find a confident voice in the appropriation of a foreign culture, while finding it harder than ever to speak with certainty of his own.

.....

*'fff' by Kutlug Ataman is at the Thomas Dane Gallery, London. until April 18*

[peter.aspden@ft.com](mailto:peter.aspden@ft.com)

More columns at [www.ft.com/aspden](http://www.ft.com/aspden)

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2009

[Print article](#)   [Email article](#)   [Order reprints](#)

[Digg](#)   [reddit](#)   [LinkedIn](#)   [Facebook](#)   [Delicious](#)  
[Mixx](#)   [Propeller](#)   [Yahoo! Buzz](#)   [stumbleupon](#)

#### MORE IN THIS SECTION

[Tapestry of Picasso work on display](#)

[Lunch with the FT: Daria Zhukova](#)

[Preaching to the afflicted](#)

[A Terrible Splendor](#)

[Joshing with Jonathan is not enough](#)

[A dramatic act of rehabilitation](#)

[What a museum can do](#)

[Iceberg warning for the BBC](#)

[High hopes for Manchester](#)

['Secret scripture' wins race to Costa prize](#)

#### MORE ARTS & WEEKEND

[The genius behind Google's web browser](#)

[London's first Slow Down festival](#)

[Murder of an Indian chief executive](#)

[What to wear to the G20 summit](#)

[Britain's countryside inns](#)

[FT Home](#)

[Site map](#)   [Contact us](#)   [Help](#)

[Advertise with the FT](#)   [Media centre](#)   [FT Newspaper subscriptions](#)   [FT Conferences](#)   [FT Syndication](#)   [Corporate subscriptions](#)   [FT Group](#)   [Careers at the FT](#)

Partner sites: [Chinese FT.com](#)   [The Mergermarket Group](#)   [Investors Chronicle](#)   [Exec-Appointments.com](#)   [Money Media](#)   [The Banker](#)   [fDi Intelligence](#)   [MBA-Direct.com](#)   [The Non-Executive Director](#)

© Copyright The Financial Times Ltd 2009. "FT" and "Financial Times" are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd. [Privacy policy](#)   [Terms](#)