

ABSENCES AND (IM)POSSIBILITIES **traces of an experimental cinema in Ireland**

PROGRAMME NOTES

1. HISTORICAL PROLOGUE

SACKVILLE STREET (1897, 50secs, b&w, 35mm), Alexandre Promio, Lumière Brothers

In 1897, Alexandre Promio, an agent of the Lumière Brothers, visited Ireland to get some footage of Dublin and Belfast at the very beginnings of cinema. This 50 second actuality film depicts a diagonal view of O'Connell Street, known at the time as Sackville Street. Following a predominantly realist approach, the Lumières – responsible for the birth of cinema in the 1890s – inaugurated 'actuality cinema', a non-fiction film genre consisting of the depiction of everyday life without the argumentative structure distinctive of documentary.

Alexandre Promio was taken on by the Lumière firm in 1896 and became responsible for the training of the Cinématographe operators who were to exhibit the machine the world over.

YOUGHAL CLOCK TOWER (1910, 30secs, b&w, 35mm), James Horgan

Youghal Clock Tower is a light hearted and playful exploration of the possibilities of animation in its infancy. Depicting the well-known landmark dancing into frame, the clock gate comes to life, spinning and dancing through the main street of the Cork town. A representation of the clock tower is given as a trophy for best first animation at the Galway Film Fleadh every year.

James Horgan was one of the pioneers of filmmaking and animation technique in Ireland, beginning to experiment in stop motion animation as early as 1909.

BY ACCIDENT (1930, 20mins, b&w, 16mm), Norris Davidson

By Accident, the first film by Davidson, is a rare example of independent film production from the early years of the Irish state, and one of the first films to emerge from the group Irish Amateur Films. Only the final third of the film remains intact, obscuring the film's narrative, dark and psychological elements, but allowing its more innovative qualities – stark, disjunctive editing, poetic juxtapositions and freewheeling camerawork – to take centre stage.

Norris Davidson was a pioneering filmmaker of the silent years and a founding figure of Irish documentary cinema. He also did television broadcasts with RTE and opera programmes on the radio.

SCREENING IN THE RAIN (1930, 10mins, b&w, 16mm), Norris Davidson

Filmed during the annual garden party of Dublin's Gate Theatre, *Screening in the Rain* was presented together with *By Accident* presumably as an additional attraction. Likewise produced by Irish Amateur Films and directed by Norris Davidson, this shorter piece is a dynamic and enlightening screen test in which a number of personalities connected to the theatrical scene of the time perform uninhibitedly before the camera.

2. PROGRAMME ONE

FILM (1964, 21mins, b&w, 16mm), Samuel Beckett/Alan Schneider

In 1969 Samuel Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in recognition of his development of a circular form of reasoning that implies entrapment in circumstances of one's own design. *Film*, directed by Alan Schneider in New York and written by Beckett, emanates directly from such reasoning, in which the main character, Buster Keaton, carefully blots out all external reality according to a prevailing philosophical principle: George Berkeley's "Esse est percipi" (to be is to be perceived).

One of the key-writers of the Theatre of Absurd, Samuel Beckett was widely known for his avant-garde writing, which includes poetry, playwright and prose. Alan Schneider was an American theatre director and one of the leading directors of Beckett's work in the US.

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH RED CAR (1976, 20mins, colour, 16mm), Bob Quinn

Made in collaboration with Joe Comerford (camera), Roger Doyle (music), and Brian Bourke (painter), *Self-Portrait* has been described as an aesthetic joke, although it is essentially an exploration of how sound controls our visual perception. The author himself explains: "The sub-plot of the film is the way we carry our past experience into new situations [...]. There are gaps in the soundtrack of this film for audience participation, to let them hear the echoes in their own heads."

Bob Quinn has made an immense contribution to Irish cinema, primarily in the documentary form and as a polemicist and agitator for a critically engaged film and broadcast culture.

GUERRILLÈRE TALKS (1978, 24mins, colour, Super 8), Vivienne Dick

Vivienne Dick began making Super 8 films in New York in the late '70s as part of a group of filmmakers and musicians whose affiliation to the aesthetics of punk became known as 'No Wave'. *Guerrillère Talks* is her first completed film, which according to Jim Hoberman 'can be seen as the extension of Warholian pragmatism to Super 8 talkies'. The film depicts a series of portraits of – or encounters with – women in Lower Manhattan; each allowed a full roll of Super 8 film to perform for a camera characterized by its handheld anarchic style.

Originally from Donegal, Vivienne Dick now lives in Galway and continues to produce film and video for gallery and cinema contexts. Her work has been reviewed in several international publications focused on avant-garde and independent filmmaking.

PROGRAMME TWO

part one: the filmmakers

GLASS HOUR, Clare Langan (2002, 8mins, colour, 16mm)

Clare Langan's work sits within both fine art and film traditions. The use of hand made filters gives a distinctly sensuous and oneiric appearance, mixing painterly values with a strongly cinematic use of sound and space. Part of a post-apocalyptic trilogy, this film portrays a lone figure moving through a volcanic landscape. Shot in Iceland, the harsh natural landscape forms part of an abstracted and sublime world.

Clare Langan studied art in NCAD and film at NYU. She has exhibited widely, and in 2002, represented Ireland in the 25th Bienal de Sao Paulo, Brazil.

HERE AFTER (2004, 13mins, b/w, 16mm), Paddy Jolley, Rebecca Trost / Inger Lise

Hansen

An atmospheric study of a decaying and crumbling flat complex in Ballymun, *Here after* emerges from the residue of unknown events. Paddy Jolley's film projects often begin with this sense of memory, time and place, inspiring experiments that explore the materials that embody them. Jolley's multidisciplinary background informs this exploration and contributes sculptural, painterly and conceptual elements to this film collaboration with Inger Lise Hansen and Rebecca Trost.

*Paddy Jolley was a graduate of NCAD and focused on photography before moving to film, and directed two feature films, *Sugar* (2005) and *The Door Ajar* (2011), along with many shorts. His work is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin; and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. In 2012 he represented Ireland in the 30th Bienal de Sao Paulo, Brazil. Jolley died suddenly in New Delhi in January 2012, while working on a new film project.*

Inger Lise Hansen is an artist filmmaker living and working in Oslo and London. A recipient of a Master of Fine Art Filmmaking from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1996, her work has been shown in institutions such as Tate Modern in London and Centre Pompidou in Paris, and at festivals including the International Film Festival Rotterdam. Information on her films, award winners at events such as the Bilbao short and documentary film festival, can be found at www.ingerlisehansen.com

Rebecca Trost is a German artist whose work, primarily in films and installations, has been exhibited in countries including Germany, Ireland, and Greece.

ST. FRANCIS DIDN'T RUN NUMBERS (2009, 2mins, colour, MiniDV), Chris O'Neill

The first in an on-going series of 'found-footage' film projects, *Saint Francis Didn't Run Numbers* is a eulogy to personal interpretations of cinema with a fetishistic fascination with the imperfections of ageing celluloid. By re-filming a well-known classic of American cinema, compositions are magnified and fragmented to find film within film, favouring minor characters and empty, abstract spaces on the periphery of the frame. Maximilian Le Cain suggests that the film prompts us to ask "what are we missing on a perceptual level as we watch films?"

Chris O'Neill was the manager and programmer of Cork City's independent arthouse venue, the Kino Cinema. He has since become a freelance film programmer and distributor.

LATE ARRIVAL (2006, 2mins10seconds, colour, MiniDV), Barry Ronan

Stripped of sound and language, *Late Arrival* relies entirely on its jittery and accelerated camera movement and overlapping imagery to create a kinetic and charged perception of its subject (the filmmaker's wife) that could not have been expressed in a more ordered form.

Barry Ronan is an Irish cinephile living in London, England. He is interested in the political relationships between thought, language and the senses.

MONGOLIAN BARBECUE (2009, 11mins, colour, video), Maximilian Le Cain

Mongolian Barbecue presents us with the edge of an abyss circumscribed by cinematic possession. The corporeal ritual involved falls at its ultimate climax into the rhythmical interstices of red frames that opens the way to static images from vampire B-movies, the feminine paradise a cinephile could encounter after taking a glimpse at cinema's interior cavities. *Mongolian Barbecue* shares with much of Cork-based Le Cain's prolific output (over 60 films in the past five years) the presence of TV static and the use of sounds that directly refer to medium specificity.

Maximilian Le Cain has made more than eighty experimental films and videos. He frequently works in partnership with sound/performance artist Vicky Langan, and collaborates with Esperanza Collado on the multidisciplinary art project Operation Rewrite. He is a member of the Experimental Film Society collective and the Cinema Cyanide noise project. He is also a film programmer and critic.

WITH WIND & WHITE CLOUDS (2005, 3mins43seconds, b/w, Super8), Dónal Ó Céilleachair

With Wind & White Clouds pays homage to Oskar Fischinger's 1927 film *Walking from Munich to Berlin*, which is one of the earliest films recorded in single-frame exposure. New York based filmmaker Ó Céilleachair repeats this process on his own travels between Istanbul's Bosphorous shores and the heart of Berlin's Alexanderplatz, using the single-frame technique to create an intense, high-speed staccato viewing experience.

Donal Ó Céilleachair returned to Ireland in 2007, after many years in New York where he founded the long-running Ocularis screening series. He has directed and produced an extensive filmography that includes documentary and experimental film.

AMERICAN DREAMS #3 : LIFE, LIBERTY & THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS (2002, 5mins, colour & b/w, 16mm), Moira Tierney

Based in Brooklyn, N.Y. in 2001, Moira Tierney caught the aftermath of September 11th on 16mm film and subsequently set it to the poem 'Ozymandias' by Percy Bysshe Shelley and the music of Charlemagne Palestine. For much of the film we see only sky and smoke, and occasionally revealed architectural structures. This sense of dislocation is emphasised by alternating between colour and black and white film stocks.

As well as producing her own work, Moira Tierney has programmed screenings for Anthology Film Archives, Ocularis and the Solus film collective of which she is co-founder.

HOMO SAPIENS PROJECT (93), Rouzbeh Rashidi (2012, 12min, DSLR, B&W)

The 93rd film in Rashidi's ongoing *Homo Sapiens Project*, *HSP (93)* evokes, like much of his prolific output, the atmospheric unease and suspense of horror cinema removed from its contextual and narrative confines. A man (played by Rashidi himself), inhabits a series of eerie environments, climaxing in a ravenous engagement with a field of daisies. Working primarily with the Canon DSLR camera and other new technologies, Rashidi has become an important innovator of digital cinema, achieving complex visual effects through an elaborate mixture of filters, lenses and in-camera color grading.

Rouzbeh Rashidi is an Iranian filmmaker based in Dublin since 2004, author of 25 feature films and more than 200 short films. He is also the founder of the Experimental Film Society, an international organization aiming "to produce and promote films by its members" who are "distinguished by an uncompromising, no-budget devotion to personal, experimental cinema."

Sorry, by Dean Kavanagh (2008, 3m26, HDV, 16:9, Colour)

Structured in a broken narrative, *Sorry* is a filmic note on inflicted isolation that takes us to a place of wordless contemplation. Abiding in the spirituality of the moment, the interweave of sounds and images speak through sinuous poetic reflections; mediated visions of atemporal objects and quotidian gestures of domestic life.

Dean Kavanagh is a Wicklow based independent, experimental filmmaker. He is a member of Experimental Film Society and of Cinema Cyanide, a sound project in collaboration with Rouzbeh Rashidi and Maximilian Le Cain. Kavanagh's independent films feature non-professional actors, natural/available light and no budgets. As Le Cain has put it, rather than telling stories in any traditional sense, his best films generate a slow, throbbing ache that invades and haunts his viewers. A selection of his works have been officially selected, won awards and screened internationally.

THE PREDICAMENT OF MAN (3 mins, 16mm and Digital Mixed Media, 2010), Jesse Jones

This film is the second in the collection of films; *The Trilogy of Dust*. Using footage shot in an opal mine in Cobber Pedy, Australia, intercut with over a thousand still images that appear momentarily on screen, Jones subliminally contrasts the desolate landscape with flashes of often recognisable 20/21st century icons and events. *The Predicament of Man* creates an uneasy and foreboding slippage in time that hints at an apocalyptic future. Its title is borrowed from an essay in *Limits to Growth* by the economic think tank The Club of Rome in 1972. *The Predicament of Man* examines the consequences of exponential growth theories of late capitalism and how they may not only over stretch our resources' carrying capacities, but also our sensory capacity to perceive reality itself.

The work of visual artist Jesse Jones primarily takes the form of short films, works which renegotiate the material and ideological structures of cinema. They are concerned with how cultural artefacts can be restaged to reveal embedded histories of dissent - and their contemporary relevance.

04:59 (2013, 6min, PXL2000 Tape Cassette, B&W), Michael Higgins

04:59 features Maximilian Le Cain, Karen Power and the work of Gorging Limpet. Inspired by cinema and visual narrative, Michael's work involves a range of both digital and analogue technologies, and concerns people's perception of time and reality. In following an initial idea through, he makes a point of being open to changes and external forces that occur throughout the various stages of production, allowing the development of the work to be self-driven. He simply assists it in materialising.

Michael Higgins is an experimental filmmaker living and working in Dublin.

part two: the curators

FILM FROM THE SEA (1999-2011, 5mins, 35mm, colour), Alan Lambert

Film from the Sea is a strip of 35mm cine-film found on a beach in Valencia, Spain. Corrosion has allowed only little photographic emulsion to survive, although two uniformed figures (possibly Spanish revolution soldiers) in heated discussion can be perceived. The 80 frames found (3.2 seconds) have been mounted in slide holders and screened on a slide carousel, with no fixed duration. Viewing the film this way intends to explore a different sense of time and scale in the individual frames, here presented like large abstract expressionist canvases.

Alan Lambert has been making films independently for over a decade. He is a founding member of Solus Collective and has collaborated in a diversity of creative ways with DEAF and Darklight festivals.

HORSES (2011, b&w, silent, 16mm on video, 2mins), Esperanza Collado

Rewinding the film in a Super 16mm Bolex camera to shoot a triple exposure, *Horses* was shot at different speeds and home-processed using an extreme, unorthodox procedure. The resulting footage shifts unexpectedly from negative to positive and vice-versa, while scratches and other chance factors dominate its length. Shot at a rural location in northern Spain, and featuring Maximilian Le Cain, *Horses* imposes itself as material and process, rather than image.

Esperanza Collado focuses her work in an investigation of cinematic properties outside the standard film apparatus. She began to screen avant-garde works in domestic environments of Dublin in 2005 under the title Pure Film.

DECLARATIONS 25 (2010, 2mins, miniDV, b&w), Donal Foreman

From 2009, Donal Foreman completed 25 short films using personal video footage shot over the previous five years, uploading one on the Internet every two weeks. This final film in the series consists of the disjointed image and sound of Jonas Mekas, the New York-based Lithuanian filmmaker-critic-programmer who has been central in supporting and disseminating experimental film culture since the 1950s. The footage was taken during a public discussion in what would soon become the first venue for the Experimental Film Club, Dublin's Ha'penny Bridge Inn.

Donal Foreman has recently begun to screen his work internationally as part of the (An)Other Irish Cinema screening project (anotheririshcinema.blogspot.com) with Maximilian Le Cain and Rouzbeh Rashidi.

PARIS DREAMING (2010, 9mins, Super 8 and photographic slides, B&W), Aoife Desmond
Paris Dreaming consists of a dual projection of photographic slides and Super 8 film with a separate sound recording. The film, slides and sound document a series of drift walks through the Jardin des Plantes Menagerie and Parc Zoologique at Vincennes in Paris. The filmed encounters with the animals and birds in captivity focus on the relationship between the camera's gaze and the uncomfortable position of the viewer. The soundtrack recorded in the menagerie and the courtyard at the Centre Culturel Irlandais juxtaposes birds and nature in the foreground with a Paris riot in the background. Desmond's art practice questions contemporary human relationships to place and nature.

Aoife Desmond is a visual artist and curator. Her artwork is interdisciplinary, she combines film, photography, drawing, performance and installation to make ephemeral site-specific works.

EPILOGUE

EXPERIMENTAL CONVERSATIONS (2007, 98mins, colour, video), Fergus Daly
Featuring a host of well-known filmmakers and critics including Nicole Brenez, Philippe Grandrieux and FJ Ossang (in France) and Maeve Connolly, Grace Weir, Clare Langan, Gerard Byrne, Vivienne Dick, and Maximilian Le Cain (in Ireland), *Experimental Conversations* draws links between Irish and French experimental filmmaking, highlighting the fact that experimental cinema can be an aesthetic and philosophical international dialogue.

*Fergus Daly has directed four feature-length documentaries, each dealing with the intersection of art, cinema and philosophy. His writings on cinema are available at fergusdaly.com. Until 2010 he directed the experimental film festival *Different Directions*, archived at differentdirectionsfilmfestival.wordpress.com*

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