

# Hous Proje Old T Brew

Lighthouse Old Truman Brewery. Curators; David Beattie & Chris Fite-Wassilak

## Inside the Lighthouse Maeve Connolly

'Lighthouse' is one of many evocative terms claimed by cinema, often recurring within the sphere of arthouse film exhibition. There was once a Lighthouse Cinema in Dublin, soon to be revived in a newly subterranean form as the centrepiece of an urban renewal project. There are some odd points of connection between the worlds of cinema and coastline; like lighthouse keepers, film projectionists have gradually been displaced (or perhaps liberated) by automation. The name might also be particularly suited to arthouse film exhibition because the beacon of the lighthouse serves both a welcoming landmark and a warning to stay away for those who are unfamiliar with the territory. The Lighthouse caravan cinema, temporarily installed at the Old Truman Brewery in London's East End, plays with all of these associations but also evokes an earlier moment in the history of cinema, a moment in which film pioneers competed with a range of alternative technological, commercial and artistic attractions. Located in a former industrial site, now reinvented as a space for commerce, culture and leisure, this Lighthouse is simultaneously private and public. The tiny caravan, accommodating two or three viewers at most, even recalls the private viewing machines that flourished prior to the invention of the nickelodeon and the confirmation of cinema as a definitively public form of entertainment.

Once inside the cosy, kitsch interior, the world of the market outside recedes but it is never far from consciousness, asserting itself when an airplane flies directly overhead or when a sudden torrential shower of rain hits the metal roof. This intimate environment provides the perfect context for the explorations of domesticity, scale and everyday romance that connect many of the works in the programme. It is also possible to envision the caravan as a transmitter or receiver of signals from another place, recalling its namesake's role within coastline networks of communication. This association is prompted through the inclusion of Jonas Mekas' *June 23rd 2007*, one of a

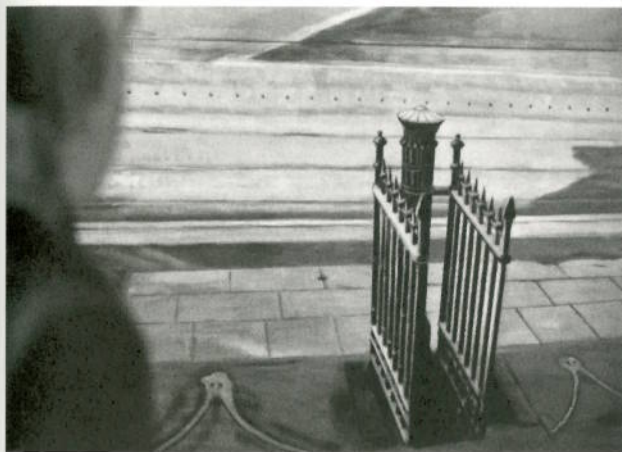
Projects



series of works from his ongoing, year-long project entitled '365 Films'. On Saturday June 23rd, Mekas is engaged in a conversation about moving image aesthetics and formats, over a bottle of wine with friends, in a jumbled office that is most likely inside Anthology Archives, New York. The screening of this work on the day of its production creates an illusion of presence that is both evocative of broadcasting and, at the same time, profoundly disorienting, because New York on the evening of June 23rd 2007 is of course five hours behind its London counterpart.

The theme of transmission reappears, more obliquely, in Lizzie Hughes' *2000 Horizons* (2007), which cycles at great speed through a vast collection of colour stills, each intently and immaculately focused upon the horizon. This scale and scope of this undertaking signals something more than mere collecting and categorisation, suggesting instead an attempt at communication, in a language that is yet to be deciphered. Simon Faithfull's *Escape Vehicle No.6* (2005) is explicitly concerned with the activity of transmission; it was first created and experienced as a live work, a video relay documenting the ascent and eventual disintegration of a chair as it ascends into space attached to a weather balloon. All sense of scale is lost during this venture, so that the chair seems reduced to a toy, echoing the miniaturised scale of the Lighthouse caravan itself. Distortions in scale are also created in Michael Fortune's *Reigning Cats and Dogs* (2007) simply through the placement of a video camera on the floor of a particularly chaotic home, dominated by animals, children and toys. Fortune documents the everyday, commonplace interactions between animals and humans within this world; in one scene a dog poses expectantly on its hind legs, as though for a portrait, while in another a kitten dressed as a doll is trapped in a miniature pram, before escaping to wreak its own revenge on an abandoned Sindy doll hidden under the bed. Throughout this madness, the camera is relentlessly static until, in the final sequence, it is overturned by a passing Jack Russell.

In *Spell* (2007), Eloise Calandre also employs an altered perspective to transform the domestic and familiar. Moving furtively through the dark undergrowth of a leafy environment, a garden transformed into a jungle, her gaze might be that of an insect, bird or even some imagined supernatural creature.



Declan Clarke, *Trauma and Romance*

Jochen Kuhn, *Sontag 1*



*Landscapes* (2005) by Mark Garry and Karl Burke also captures a spectral presence within the natural realm. This work is characterised by an overt lyricism but there is a tension between the romantic forest setting, dramatic editing and soundtrack, and the everyday quality of the spectres themselves; transparent plastic sheets that are simply suspended between the trees, animated by gusts of wind. A play between romanticism and self-deprecation is also apparent in *Trauma and Romance* (Declan Clarke, 2006), a work that seems to draw together many of the ideas explored within the Lighthouse programme. Echoing various other explorations of travel within the caravan cinema, Clarke's video takes the form of a journey; but his route is circuitous and it ultimately leads back to the sphere of the domestic, personal and familiar. Opening on an image of Byron's ancestral home, Clarke's juxtaposition of static shots and onscreen texts initially suggests a video slideshow charting a Grand Tour of intellectual and cultural awakening. But from the outset, the video foregrounds details that are rarely highlighted in such narratives (Byron apparently left a trail of illicit signatures in his wake). The poet is soon relegated to the role of supporting actor, displaced by Clarke's quest for evidence of his own earlier presence in various childhood spaces, recorded in hidden graffiti, shared memories and, finally, a single photograph.

A very different exploration of documentary form can be found in Stephen Gunning's *Leave to Remain* (2006), which focuses on one of a number of Afghan asylum-seekers engaged in a hunger strike in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin in May 2006. The group publicised their actions in the hope of gaining permission to remain in Ireland and Gunning observes the activities of asylum-seekers, interpreters, activists and journalists as they construct media representations of this situation. While Gunning remains silent and detached from the action, other artists engage in off-screen commentary or interaction with their subjects. Tom Flanagan employs the latter strategy in *Icarus... a view to inspiration in video art* (2007), apparently assembled from a series of outtakes. Striving to create a perfect shot, a dramatic image of an airplane flying above a man with outstretched arms, Flanagan is distracted by a rambling conversation about a possible collaboration, initiated by his star performer, another artist. Through its combination of failed, 'successful' and imagined artworks, *Icarus* neatly

summarises a number of diverse trends within video art, extending from the epic to the comic and the conceptual.

Repetition, and its function within traditions of representation, is investigated more formally in John O'Connell's series, collectively titled *Three Attempts* (2006). The ambiguous mix of production techniques used by O'Connell in the creation of these images, alternately suggesting time-lapse photography and stop-frame animation, results in a wholly unsettling sense of scale, so that even small movements by very small objects seem to be laden with significance. Jochen Kuhn's *Sontag 1* (2005) also exists on the borderline between animation and other art forms, consisting of a sequence of monochrome stills, which trace a route through the public spaces of a city that may or may not exist. This journey is narrated through a voiceover, spoken in German and subtitled in English, forming part of a rich aural landscape that transposes the internal emotional mental state of the central character into the world outside. The source of sound is more difficult to determine in *Go Home* (Miriam de Búrca, 2005) but perhaps because of this, it remains crucial to the construction of a sense of urban place. De Búrca's images of fortified walls are deliberately opaque, resisting interpretation other than through reference to the territorial divisions that define cities such as Belfast. But the distant rumble of a drum, deliberately slowed so that each beat becomes more and more ominous, is unmistakably threatening.

This use of sound lends weight and significance to the image, so that these scenes begin to acquire the status of evidence. Even though there is no trace of action within the frame, other than the occasional flickering of debris on the surface of the film, the drummers always seem to be just out of view, about to appear from behind the bend in the road. This work is attuned to the codes and conventions of narrative cinema, in which off-screen sound creates a sense of anticipation and expectation that can only be fully satisfied by the revelation of the source of the sound within the image. This impulse towards synchronisation remains powerful even within an environment where there is no attempt to mimic the immersive conditions that have come to dominate moving image exhibition. Unlike the disorienting void now commonly encountered by visitors to a film and video installation within a gallery, the interior of the caravan cinema is laden with



imagined and remembered associations and never entirely disconnected from the world outside. Just as many of the works within the programme investigate the minutiae of everyday life from an altered perspective, the Lighthouse seems to offer a vantage point from which to reconsider something that is both wholly familiar and yet endlessly compelling: the experience of cinema itself. MC

Maeve Connolly lectures on film and visual culture at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT). Her writing on film and art has been published in journals such as *Afterimage*, *CIRCA*, *Contemporary*, *Third Text* and *Variant*.



Lizzie Hughes, 4007 Horizons

Projects

# House Project

# Coloph

## House Projects

May–September 2007

Project Design and Production  
Atelier David Smith, Dublin  
Print Design and Project Identity  
David Smith and Oran Day  
Web Design  
Oran Day and Marcus Swan

Printing and Lithography  
Drukkerij Rosbeek, Nuth  
Binding and Prototyping  
Handboekbinderij Geertsen,  
Nijmegen

Paper  
Munken Lynx and Hello Gloss  
Type  
Berthold Akzidenz Grotesk  
and Quadraat

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