

PROJECTION SERIES

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# critical home video

new artists' video from the UK

7 December 2002 - 9 February 2003

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery presents *Critical home video* as the third installment in the Gallery's *Projection series*. This ongoing initiative acknowledges the importance of artists' video to leading edge developments in international art practice and its interpretation. Curated by London based artist David Mabb, *Critical home video* presents the latest in new artists' video from the United Kingdom to audiences in New Zealand and Canada. Works in *Critical home video* question the idea of what it means to be an artist in contemporary Britain, while tackling concepts of political commitment and standards of good taste with a healthy dose of irony. Many of the works feature high-energy soundtracks that drive the action with a real pulse. The Gallery is pleased to present *Critical home video* in collaboration with Artspace, Ontario.

Importantly, *Critical home video* is screening simultaneously with the return of international touring exhibition *Len Lye* that includes a programme of 14 of Lye's innovative films, eight of which were made in London in the first half of the 20th century. With the two programmes playing at the same time, visitors are able to scan a century of moving image history made by artists, and compare the differing concerns, and views of life, of artists working in the UK at respective moments in history. This critical coincidence is a reflection of the Govett-Brewster's ongoing focus on the presentation and contextualisation of artist's video and the important role that the *Projection series* plays in the Gallery's programme.

### ----- **Critical home video new artists' work from the UK**

The work in *Critical Home Video* was selected on the basis of the simplest of parameters: I would know all the artists; they would be my friends and/or ex-students from Goldsmiths College where I teach; all the videos would be short; all the videos would be single monitor/projection; all the works would in some way be self-critical; I would bombard my audience with multiple experiences.

There are twelve works, made by fifteen artists, including three collaborations. The works have common features. Two of them, *Gone* by Sheena Macrae and *Saturday Night Fever* by Don Bury, involve appropriation of popular film. Two of them, *Welcome to the studio* by Angus Wyatt and *Blood and Xerox* by Pil and Galia Collectiv, are 'traditional' animations. Two of them, *Cake Eaters* by Janet Hodgson and *Bike* by Kate Smith, are videos of 'performances', in the sense that the camera is set up and switched on to record the 'event' as it occurs, with little editing, beyond starting and finishing. Three works, *Can Can Can* by K R Buxey, *A Closer Look at the Life and Work of William Morris* by David Mabb and *Rotator* by Volker Eichelmann and Ruth MacLennan, use primarily still images which are then sequenced in different ways within the edit suite. Only two, *Mud* by Yasu Ishige and *Westminster* by Johannes Maier, use a camera and edit suite in a more conventional way to set up shots and construct narratives.

One characteristic shared by all the work is the low- or no-budget production. The work is made with cheap equipment, with amateur or borrowed casts and crew and uses appropriated sound tracks. The work, perhaps because of this, has a 'home-made' quality. And from this it might be possible to deduce that the artists are not particularly well known.

**David Mabb**

## Notes on the work in order of appearance:

### 1 *Welcome to the Studio* Angus Wyatt 1 minute 30 seconds

*Welcome to the Studio* is an invitation to enter the fabled arena of cultural activity, the near-mythic site of production, that is the cherished domain of the individual cultural producer. *Welcome to the studio* is a guided tour of the inner sanctum wherein the wonder of creation and the marvels of artistic process are laid bare for all to witness. More than a simple exercise in PR or self-promotion, our host's carefully considered representation, his portrait, dramatically illustrates the exceptional freedom enjoyed by the contemporary visual arts practitioner. So enjoy your stay, look around, delight in the unbridled enthusiasm and dedication exhibited by an obviously confident accomplished and committed artist, comfortably surrounded by the tools of his trade.

#### Angus Wyatt

### 2 *Cake Eaters* Janet Hodgson 5 minutes

*Cake Eaters* was made when the artist was sent to teach on a landscape-painting trip to the Welsh mountains with students from the art college where she works. Setting out to subvert ideas the students may have had about both her role as a tutor and what constituted landscape art, Hodgson spent the days whilst the students were out sketching in the mountains, cooking sculptures of the mountains for the students to consume on their return.



The video is shot from one static camera position and opens with a shot of the mountain cake placed in the foreground on a rock in front of a mountain landscape. Suddenly, two enormous girls' heads appear almost like dinosaurs dwarfing the mountain cake that had until that point seemed very large. The heads then proceed to eat the cake with their mouths, chunk by chunk, behaving like animals, until, apparently frustrated, they use their hands, ripping and tearing until all the cake is gone. The scene is gently subverted by the idyllic sounds of nature and by the girls' relentless giggling throughout their consumption.

#### David Mabb

### 3 *Can Can Can* K R Buxey 2 minutes 30 seconds

I dressed up in a number of different costumes, performing 'porn star' roles and acting out classic tropes of cinematic sexual representation, such as 'blonde starlet', 'flapper girl', and the more recent 'Readers Wife'. I orchestrated my performance to the 'Can Can', an orgiastic dance of the gods for Bacchus from Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*. Later appropriated by 'The Folies Bergères', it became the seminal music for sexual exhibitionism for the pleasure of the voyeur. The work also attempts to address a more macabre and violent element of some sexual films and representations, including a look at the subject of domestic violence and the ambiguities of faked pleasure and performance. **K R Buxey**

-- 4 *A Closer Look at the Life and Work of William Morris* David Mabb 4 minutes 20 seconds

I have made a DVD/video that quite literally looks closer at the work of William Morris. It functions as a parodic art documentary, particularly with regard to the rostrum camera shot of the artwork and the close up. The structure is taken from a computer-generated movie/animation that replicates the zoom tool in the computer software programme Photoshop. The animation takes the viewer on a journey. The image of a Morris's fabric starts as a pixel and zooms, appearing to reduce in size (1% at a time) until the whole image fills the screen. This procedure then appears to go into reverse, getting smaller until it ends as a dot on the screen. The space vacated by this image is filled by another of Morris's fabrics, which has begun the inverse process: the image seems to increase in size until a whole image becomes visible, and then appears to increase still further until a single pixel fills the screen.

This imagery is set to a Russian rendition of the *Internationale*. This music, juxtaposed with the imagery, highlights the divergence that existed in Morris's practice between his decorating business and his socialism, but it also serves to place Morris firmly within the revolutionary tradition, bringing that tradition forward to the end of the 20th century through the medium of computer digitisation. This technology, we can assume, would have been an anathema to Morris, who with few exceptions looked to the past for his tools.

David Mabb



----- 5 *Blood and Xerox* Pil and Galia Kollektiv 4 minutes

Emerging from the meeting point of avant-garde high art and crude DIY animation, *Blood and Xerox* attempts to exhume and reanimate the fossils of modernist architecture and advertising by putting their dead visual language in the mouths of horny transformers. Rewriting the urban skyline into a sleazy non-narrative of pornographic lust, the digitally edited black and white Super 8 film unleashes the violent yet playful potential of the skyscraped cityscape. Situationist slogans and consumerist propaganda, both interchangeably evocative of revolution and its demise, echo the collapse of the bold architectural vision of the early 20th century, while celebrating its aesthetic allure.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

----- 6 *Westminster* Johannes Maier 8 minutes.

College Green is the place where I took the opportunity to meet British news correspondents regularly in early 2000. The Green is opposite the Houses of Parliament in Westminster and is possibly the only

spot in the world where media television has created an open-air political site. Hiding behind trees and bushes, waiting for the species to turn up every night, normally around 6 p.m. I felt like a tourist on safari in Africa, quite nervous at the beginning. They were preparing, later they were shooting. After one week of observing and watching the situation I felt more secure and tried to get closer to the point where they were installing their equipment. I recognised some of them; they were part of the same crew as last week. After another week, they recognised me. I spoke to camera people, I spoke to the correspondents, later I interviewed them. Mediator meets the Media. It was cold, sometimes it rained, but I liked the atmosphere in this little topos of London..."

**Johannes Maier**

----- 7 *The Guitarist* Peter Lloyd Lewis, Mark Harris 4 minutes 15 seconds

A portrait of the aspirations of a surrogate guitarist.

What happens when an actor is employed to take the part of a guitarist for the day?

The result is a celebration of boredom, humour, artifice, contingency, lo-tech!

Originally titled *Love's Words*, this work was produced for the exhibition *Song Poems*, curated by Steven Hull. *Song Poems* was an investigation of the relationship between love, music, video and art.



This was the first time we had collaborated as artists. The only conditions we set ourselves were that there would be no complex editing, no overdubbing and no special effects and that we would have fun. We wanted to celebrate the risk element of making art, putting ourselves on the line as we had no way of ensuring we would get any usable footage from the day. As outsiders to video we wanted to eschew the seduction of technique. *The Guitarist* is a single unedited take. As artists working at the peripheries of diverse media, questioning the boundaries of what qualifies in a particular idiom, we celebrate the strategy of dis-involvement. A group was hired for the day. They had no access to information or lyrics prior to the recording session. We wanted to have an open agenda to the day's recordings, filming the events as they unfolded and being open to the possibilities of what is presented when people have to react to external stimuli.

The hired group, Dirty Snow, couldn't get their guitarist up in the morning so brought an actor friend along, who couldn't play the guitar, to act the part. After hours of improvisation even the most committed of musicians experience tedium. The result was an unplanned critique of the usual view of the rock

guitarist. What we get is none of the histrionic gestures associated with the conventional performer. We see a portrait of someone who could have stepped out of an Elizabeth Peyton painting, a triumph of pose and sensitivity. He's not playing and the guitar isn't plugged in. Any attempt at realism has gone out the window. What we see are the minutiae of the displaced performer, casually faking involvement as the band churns out romantic grunge versions. This was one of a number of videos resulting from the session.

**Mark Harris and Peter Lloyd Lewis**

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8 *Rotator* Volker Eichelmann and Ruth MacLennan 5 minutes

Eichelmann and MacLennan state: "An English landscape garden creates an illusion of a perfect nature. It is nature designed to be seen and enjoyed. The video *Rotator* draws the views of the garden at Stourhead, in Wiltshire, into a palindrome, complimented by the rigorous structure of J. S. Bach's *Art of the Fugue*". But in *Rotator* the audience is made highly conscious of the presence of the camera, as the video firstly appears to take the form of a slide show or "palindrome", with one view regularly fading into another. But two qualities quickly emerge, the shaky hand-held nature of the use of the video camera and the moving imagery within the scenes, such as trees blowing in the wind and glimpses of people. This appears to make us aware of the garden as being at least partly designed around the scenic view and the camera as now becoming the framer of that view and perhaps also its new owner.

**David Mabb**

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9 *Gone* Sheena Macrae 5 Minutes

*Gone* is a video work that compresses the entire three and a half-hour epic *Gone With the Wind* into five minutes. Here the quintessential Hollywood epic is redelivered and exposed. This movie zips by, each frame sharply visible despite travelling at break-neck speed. The video gives the impression of a restructured edit, but is in fact evenly condensed and arrived at structurally. The pivotal points of the film are reconfigured by lurching into real time to catch a repeating line of dialogue, both



denying the systematic approach and reiterating it through content. My version forcefully and hilariously emphasises the notion of the epic and its ambition to portray a universe of events by giving it all in an instant. But it also addresses the emotional/psychological aspect of that epic and its depiction of time and fiction. It is a parody of the notion of time, which becomes both extensive (in a fiction of world history) and meaningless in the seductive glitter of a Hollywood depiction. Our heroine remains unaffected, a resistor in the big machine of time where everything transpires, everything changes; yet she remains inert

in the whirlwind. Her repetitions at seminal moments within the speeding images defer potential meaning and the video inverts its gaze back towards the viewer.

**Sheena Macrae**

----- 10 *Mud* Yasu Ishige 6 minutes

The work is based on a nightmare of a perfectionist businessman who is suffering from a compulsive disorder. I performed a stereotypical image of a Japanese business man with glasses, in a totally disorientated landscape in Kent. These two elements and the sounds of bird calls combine to create an unusual atmosphere in the image. The poorly chosen shortcut leads the businessman to the hopeless incident that makes him aggressively self destructive. When he arrives at the station (the objective of his efforts) he is covered with mud, and he seems to realise that social values prevent him from going any further.

The process of video shooting is not calculated completely before I start - the opposite to most commercial film production. I produce my videos through experimentation and negotiation with the environment on site. Throughout the editing process I continue to experiment and gradually develop the structure of the story in order to clarify my main interests; the psychological structure of obsession, the endlessness of a nightmare and the moment of tension when our mind goes beyond our control. I use the structure of fantasy to allow these elements to work together.

**Yasu Ishige**

----- 11 *Don Bury Presents Saturday Night Fever* Don Bury 4 minutes



Recent work by video/installation artist Don Bury joyfully exploits the vernacular of the mainstream, reconfiguring popular Hollywood film footage in order to produce a more 'satisfying' cinematic experience. [*Don Bury Presents Saturday Night Fever*] is a reedited version that highlights alternative narratives – ones that emphasise homosexual characters and relationships ...This mini-film is usually shown on a monitor in order to reproduce a familiar site of blockbuster movie consumption: the

television. By mixing the familiar with the uncommon, Bury re-enacts and disrupts the cinematic process of identification. Using cinematic conventions of slow motion, repetition, score, and genre, Bury's film provides an alternative reading to this populist film. *Don Bury Presents* retains a primary regard for the viewing pleasure of the audience while simultaneously obliterating the conventional narratives (i.e. boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy triumphs against odds and gets girl at the end of the film) that customarily

produce it.

Extract from *The Pleasure of Subject: Homoeroticism, Appropriation, and Cinematic Spectacle In Don Bury Presents* by Adrienne Lai.

----- 12 *Bike* Kate Smith 9 minutes 20 seconds

Smith uses a static camera set up in her father's old workshop to record a man (Smith's brother) as he walks purposefully in, dressed in army trousers, leather motorbike jacket, and crash helmet. He sits on the red motorbike and revs it up, headlight glaring, engine squealing. The high-tech image of the Japanese bike contrasts with the context, the stillness broken as he repeatedly revs the static bike, burning rubber. The workshop fills with waves of rolling poisonous carbon monoxide exhaust fumes, as well as those from the tyres. As the fumes thicken he and the bike slowly disappear, until only the headlight beam is visible, shining through the swirling clouds of exhaust. At this point he switches off the engine and headlight. He leaves behind him the camera struggling, as the automatic focus on the lens attempts to find a point of focus in the still thick bellowing fumes. Fumes that dissipate as they are slowly blown away by draughts, until the air becomes clear and the bike and workshop return to their former state.

David Mabb

see cover image

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Screening daily 11.00am - 5.00pm

Approximate running time 60 minutes  
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The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is a museum that fosters the development and interpretation of contemporary art.



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