

STORIES IN THE DARK

CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES TO THE MAGIC LANTERN

WOW INTERVIEWS ARTIST BEN JUDD ABOUT HIS PRACTICE AND THE NEW EXHIBITION HE HAS CURATED FOR THE BEANEY HOUSE OF ART AND KNOWLEDGE IN CANTERBURY

YOUR WORK SEEMS TO CROSS OVER BETWEEN FILM, PHOTOGRAPHY AND PERFORMANCE: COULD YOU DESCRIBE HOW THESE INTERTWINE IN YOUR PRACTICE?

I have previously used stereoscopic (3D) photography as it is a largely obsolete medium, like the magic lantern, and a prism through which some of the themes that are central to my practice, such as magic, belief and immersion, are explored. These early optical devices have the potential to be magical – partly through their historical association, and the awe that they inspired pre-cinema. With these media there is a paradox: the revealing of the process somehow increases a sense

of wonder. Conversely, I have no idea how a computer works, and it therefore has no sense of magic.

Recently the work has focussed on video and performance as a way of examining my relationship to specific individuals and groups. My work also explores how communities can evolve rhythmically or choreographically. In my performances with actors, a pattern might start emerging from a group of people, and that pattern is increasingly about a physical centering, a coming together.

THE MAGIC LANTERN HAS BEEN PREVALENT IN YOUR PRACTICE. COULD YOU GIVE US A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THIS AND HOW WORKING WITH IT HAS DEVELOPED?

I have used magic lantern projections in several recent performances as a way of connecting the audience to gatherings that instill a sense of belonging and wonder, such as campfire storytelling, séances, or Quaker meetings; the projected imagery often acting as metaphors for otherworldly experiences. I am interested in the way the medium can invite participation: historically, magic lantern shows were the first time people saw projected moving images, and were used for storytelling, education, and entertainment.

In profound contrast to our digital age in which the technology is largely incomprehensible, the magic

lantern's relatively simple analogue mechanisms and projected images paradoxically allow a sense of wonder, in which the viewer suspends disbelief and engages their imagination. Unlike the pre-recorded nature of cinema, the creative act takes place live with the audience, encouraging a sense of participation.

YOU HAVE CURATED THE 'STORIES IN THE DARK' EXHIBITION AT THE BEANEY. WHICH OTHER ARTISTS ARE INVOLVED?

The exhibition includes gallery work by eight internationally recognised artists: Dryden Goodwin, Lindsay Seers, Benedict Drew, Louisa Fairclough, Haroon Mirza, Jordan Baseman, Adam Chodzko and Guy Sherwin. All of their work has a way of engaging the viewer in an exploratory process - there is space, or gap in the work that allows the viewer to use their imagination and participate. Several of the artists also use contemporary versions or descendants of the magic lantern, such as Guy Sherwin and Louisa Fairclough's use of projected 16mm film, and Benedict Drew's digital projections.



WHAT WAS THE ARTISTS' STARTING POINT?

The only theme was the magic lantern - to respond to the medium. They were also invited to explore and interact with the Beaney's extensive collection - I am interested in how the Victorian museum's obsession with collecting and categorising objects from around the world can be seen reflected in the lantern's use as a tool for

bringing the distant, often 'exotic' and unseen world into close contact with the public.

ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS WITH THE COLLECTIONS BY THESE ARTISTS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT?

The three artists who have interacted with the collection are Seers, Goodwin and Chodzko. Seers's 'We Could Never Have Seen it Coming' (2016) has involved using several items from the museum's extensive offsite store and bringing them into the gallery, which are arranged in order to create a specific environment for her work.

Dryden Goodwin is presenting '13 X Christine' (2016), a series of drawings produced on traditional 3¼ inch magic lantern slides, that will be both embedded alongside original slides in the Beaney's collection and also projected through a 19th century magic lantern. Chodzko has produced 'Ask the Dust' (2016), a projection of dust from the cannon in the Beaney's offsite store, and 'Mask Filter Arc' (2016), incorporating original lantern slides into a new sculptural work.

AND WHAT'S NEXT? WHAT OTHER PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON AT THE MOMENT?

I have various projects in the pipeline... I'm really interested in designing and building a temporary structure that can be used to house various offsite performances. You can subscribe to my mailing list for regular updates! <http://benjudd.com/contact/>

'Stories in the Dark: Contemporary Responses to the Magic Lantern' is at The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge, 18 High Street, Canterbury until 19 June. Pay What You Can.

thebeaney.co.uk
benjudd.com

LIVE MAGIC LANTERN PERFORMANCES, 16 April

Various galleries at The Beaney: free admission, drop in

Four unique live performances take place throughout the day, all of them using the magic lantern in different ways. Ben Judd will be restaging the performance that he showed at the ICA last year, 'Apart, We are Together', which references the 'pose slide' genre of magic lantern projections, popular in variety theatre, pantomime, and vaudeville in Europe and USA, 1890s-1950s. Also showing will be Barnyard Productions, Jeremy Brooker and Lamplighters, Louisa Fairclough, David Francis and Joss Marsh, Nicole Mollett and Frog Morris.

