

Screening the Museum

Moving image artists investigate museums and collections.

Friday 29 June 2012
4 – 7.30pm

Birkbeck Cinema
43 Gordon Square
WC1H 0PD

4:00 – 6:00

Welcome and introduction
Short film programme

6:00 – 6:20

Break

6:20 – 7:30

Introduction by Laura Mulvey
Disgraced Monuments
Q&A

Supported by The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, Vasari research Centre and LUX artists' moving image.



Screening the Museum



Elizabeth Price, *User Group Disco*

Artists' film and video belongs today in the gallery as much as on the cinema screen: the white cube is as natural a home for moving image as the darkened auditorium. Returning the favour, some moving image artists have turned their lens back onto museums to examine their collections and practices.

Film allows the thrall of museum objects to take hold. Under the scrutiny of the lens, familiar things become obscure or else reveal too much. Still and silent collections become animated, speak for themselves and question their collectors. Through performance, the museum space is transformed into a site of critical and satirical examinations of museum practice. Even the organizational rhetoric of museums finds its way into the artist's film.

These films are diverse in both origin and form, but share a fascination with museums and their collections, with the making of memory and the preservation of things, and with the invisible structures that sustain institutions.

Mouse Heaven, Dir Kenneth Anger, 2004, 11 mins

Mel Birnkrant's collection of pre-*Fantasia* Mickey Mouse memorabilia is the subject of this unlikely film by legendary underground American filmmaker Anger, a paean to the atavistic and anarchic aside of Disney's mascot.

While Darwin Sleeps, Dir Paul Bush, 2004, 5 mins

Three and a half thousand insects star in this short film, only a small fraction of the 250,000 specimens in the Walter Linsenmaier Collection in Lucerne. Millions of years of evolution take place in seconds through the fluttering, flashing forms of the insects. "Like a mescaline vision dreamt by Charles Darwin".

The Phantom Museum: Random Forays Into the Vaults of Sir Henry Wellcome's Medical Collection, Dir Quay Brothers, 2003, 12 mins

Blythe House, the former west London headquarters of the Post Office Savings Bank is now home to some of the collection of Sir Henry Wellcome, a prodigious collector of human medicine and culture. The Quay Brothers' idiosyncratic animation 'documents' the collection: in eerie museum store rooms, the white-gloved hands of unseen curators bring Sir Henry's curious objects to life.

Narrative Remains, Dir Karen Ingham, 2009, 12 mins

A collaboration with the Hunterian Museum to accompany a site-specific installation. The museum contains a large number of 'wet specimens', preserved elements of pathological human anatomy, collected by the anatomist John Hunter. *Narrative Remains* brings the dead back to life through imagined stories reconnecting patients with specimens.

Special thanks

Cai Yuan & Jian Jun Xi
Fiona Candlin
Jem Cohen
Sam Connor
Liz Drew
Karen Ingham
Laura Mulvey
Yvonne Ng
Christopher Peck
James Putnam

Museum of Stolen Souls, Dir Chris Elliott, 1993, 7 mins

“Christian evangelism has had, and still has, much involvement in the ‘history making’ of rainforest cultures. *Museum of Stolen Souls* uses 2-D, model and photo animation to depict ruthless missionary activity, past and present, and to raise questions of how and why objects came to be removed from their cultural sources.” – Chris Elliott

Historia Naturae (Suita), Dir Jan Švankmajer, 1967, 9 mins

This film is dedicated to the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II, whose encyclopaedic cabinet of curiosities helped usher in the Enlightenment. *Historia Naturae (Suita)* is an animated *wunderkammer* of life’s eight categories, a parade of illustrations, objects and specimens both living and dead. Each chapter’s grim conclusion suggests that all the variety and wonder of life ultimately meets the same end.

Monkey King Causes Havoc in the Heavenly Palace, Dirs Cai Yuan and Jian Jun Xi, 2004, 10 mins

Cai Yuan and Jian Jun Xi’s performances in museum spaces have often been unauthorised, whether jumping on Tracey Emin’s *My Bed* or urinating into Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*. *Monkey King* was produced as a collaboration with the British Museum, and casts the artists as two characters from the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, causing havoc in the ‘Heavenly Palace’ of the British Museum.

Every Painting in the MoMA on 10 April 2010, Dir Chris Peck, 2010, 2 mins

“I thought that treating art in this way: quick, easily digestible, nonchalant, would make some people happy and piss others off.” Chris Peck’s film does what it says on the tin: every painting on display on a single day at New York’s MoMA... as well as tourists, photographers, lovers, teachers and other visitors to the world’s foremost museum of modern art.

Museum Hours (Preview), Dir Jem Cohen, 2012, 7 mins

Cohen’s filmmaking career spans three decades of exploring urban landscapes, collaborations with musicians and lyrical experimentalism. His forthcoming feature *Museum Hours* centres on Vienna’s Kunsthistorische Museum. In this short preview, a museum guard confesses to his ritual examinations of paintings in the gallery; a woman is summoned from Montreal; and an audio guide to an Egyptian book of the dead becomes the soundtrack to scenes of a Viennese market.

Hole, Dir Adam Chodzko, 2007, 12 mins

“*Hole* creates a ‘documentary’, set in the future, which explores the relationship between a museum and a woman who, daily, transmits a description of her emotional state to an enormous LED sign mounted on the side of the museum.” – Adam Chodzko

User Group Disco, Dir Elizabeth Price, 2009, 15 mins

The second film in Price’s trilogy investigating a fictional museum, the New, Ruined Institute. Mysterious objects are examined and structured by a series of texts gathered from sources as diverse as management theory, Adorno and Borges. “Selection and categorization are, of course, never neutral activities, and in *User Group Disco* they prop up the creaking machinations of institutional power.” – Sam Thorne.

Disgraced Monuments, Dirs Laura Mulvey and Mark Lewis, 1994, 50 mins

In 1991, the inhabitants of Moscow created the Temporary Museum of Totalitarian Art to display the discarded monumental statuary of the soon to be former USSR. Mulvey and Lewis’s film uses interviews with architects, public officials and art historians, as well as contemporary and historical footage to examine the multi-layered meaning of monuments in a society in the midst of cataclysmic transformation. “In the final sequences we tried to suggest the complexity of the return of the repressed and the way that contemporary attempts to deny the heritage of Communism only made way for a surge of reactionary nostalgia for the pre-Communist world. But this in itself denies the repetitions in Soviet history that I have tried to draw attention to.” – Laura Mulvey