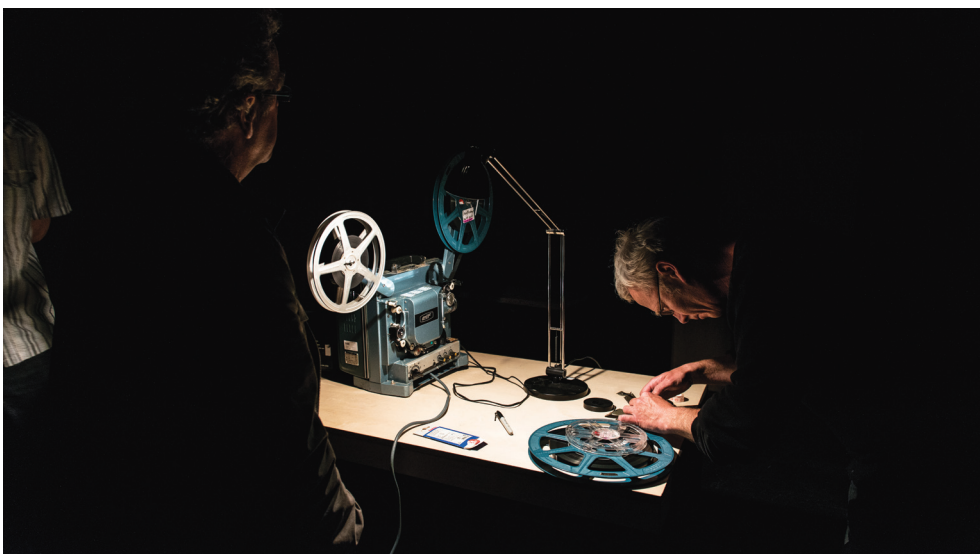## The Starry Messenger
VOID, Derry
05 August – 26 September 2014



Live projection as part of 'Starry Messenger' at VOID, Derry, image by Paola Bernadelli

**'STARRY** Messenger' presents the work of seven contemporary artist filmmakers in a kind of cry from the heart for the medium of film. It brings together 16mm, 8mm and Super8 films in a way that puts the beauty of the medium centre stage.

The first room of the exhibition, *Process Room*, is a beginning and an end. It comprises video, audio and written documentation about analogue film, looking at processing methods and at how it has becoming increasingly difficult for artists and filmmakers to use film as digital takes over. There are also a series of small framed works, where segments of films by each artist are displayed like delicate miniatures. This room simultaneously asserts the physicality of the medium and the precariousness of its future.

Next I encountered *Liahona* (2013) by Talena Sanders, a study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Shot on 16mm, the film has intensely saturated colour, and presents the viewer with a sequence of memorable images. The format encourages a sense of looking back in time, yet some of the footage is contemporary, highlighting the relationship between the past and the present on this particular subject. The film has a gently melancholic tone, and brings together personal insights with a broader historical sweep.

Moving into the next room a projectionist is working at a desk, lit with a single angle poise lamp, operating a beautiful old 16mm projector. On closer inspection the projector is the kind that folds out of its own 1960s-style mini suitcase. Nearer the screen is an 8mm projector, which the projectionist alternates with the 16mm. The screen itself is an old fashioned one with a tripod base and pull down fabric screen. The way the projectors and screen are set up and the quiet attentiveness of the projectionist form a work in themselves.

The room is set up to emphasise the act of looking as well as the physicality of the medium. The relationship between the artist, the viewer and the medium are explored in each of the films shown. Samantha Rebello's *the object which thinks us - OBJECT 1* (2007) uses close ups of a toothbrush, a plug hole, running water and blood. Images from the film are at once everyday and disconcerting – a surrealist strategy – but re-framed by the formal qualities inherent to16mm.

In Marika Borgeson's *The Starry Messenger* (2013) a red light flashes and is followed by darkness: a particular sort of darkness, deliberate and heavy. Borgeson achieved this by leaving film stock in the sun; the paradox of the sun creating darkness is one of many notions that might occur to the viewer of this medidative film.

*Murmurations* (2013), by Rebecca Meyers, is a celebration of seething, pulsating nature. It uses the organic qualities of the film to play on light, colour and texture.

*Two Fountains* (2014) by Janine Davidson was created using the features of the 8mm filming process to create a double image of two fountains, one in Belfast and one in Glasgow. The film, made by splitting 16mm into two 8mm streams played concurrently, alludes to the past through its construction and imagery. The film itself has an architectural solidity which is echoed in the solid yet anachronistic structures it depicts. Watching the film I became aware of the ubiquity of the split screen in video, and there is a sense that the technical challenges Davidson has created for herself within the medium are a way of asserting the the value of a slower more measured approach.

Michaela Nettell's *Garden* (2012), in the last room of the show, is a meditation on nature in the city. 35mm slides are overlapped to create layered images which flow into one another. The 35mm slide – once the staple of art schools everywhere – is another endangered species. The format shares some of the features of 8mm and 16mm in that it possesses an intangible quality that distinguishes it from digital photography.

Ana Vaz's *Sacris Pulso* (2007) uses found 8mm film intercut with parts of a re-created 1980s film. The elision of found elements from the past with contemporary footage is a theme running through many of the works in the show and here as elsewhere it used to explore the convergence of cultural and personal history.

The press release asks: "Can we describe the art and technology of celluloid filmmaking as a redundant technology or an extinct artform?" After seeing this show I would answer with a resounding "no!" One could ask the same question of etching, lithography, silk screen printing etc. These processes were revolutionary when they started, only to be superseded by other technologies. Each of these mediums have their own art historical associations, but they are constantly being reinvented by artists coming to them afresh.

As the show's curator Declan Sheehan asserts, its is important that the infrastructure needed for artists to discover film is preserved now before it is too late.

**Andy Parsons is an artist based in Sligo. His practice includes drawing, painting, printmaking and making artists' books. He is the co-founder of Floating World Artists Books.**

**www.savefilm.org**

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