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## Projection Series #5

### Once more – but different...



*Projection Series #5:*  
*Once more – but different...*  
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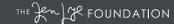
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The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre's state-of-the-art 62 seat cinema encourages audiences to experience the films of Len Lye and the wider world of local and international cinema.

The cinema welcomes you to see historical experimental film, contemporary artists' moving image and regular film festival programming. At the heart of the Len Lye Centre's cinema programme sees the return of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Projection Series*, our regular film programme surveying the landscape of historical and contemporary fine art filmmaking.

Cover: Len Lye,  
*Trade Tattoo*, 1937

William E. Jones,  
*Shoot Don't Shoot*, 2012

# Once More – but different...

Curated by Marc Glöde

## Once more – but different

### On the development of *Found Footage* Films

The artistic tradition of using existing or found material has been a continuous strand in artistic practice since the beginning of the 20th century. Spanning from Marcel Duchamp's legendary appropriation of a urinal in his work *Fountain* (1917), or the remarkable photo-collage works by John Heartfield, to the works by the so called 'picture generation' like Elaine Sturtevant, Robert Longo, and Richard Prince, to more recent works by Gerhard Richter, Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine.

Apart from these manifestations in different media (photography, sculpture, printing, and painting), there has also been a constantly interest in relating this practice to the film world. Here the reuse or appropriation of existing film material found its first recognized developments approximately 40 years after the birth of cinema in 1895. Specifically Joseph Cornell's film *Rose Hobart* (1936) famously became the first so-called 'found footage film'. Cornell, who had previously collaborated with Duchamp, took various sequences from the 1931 film *'East of Borneo'* (1931), rearranging them into a surrealist homage to the actress whose name then gave the title to the film, Rose Hobart. The filmmaker created new meanings and unexpected twists, which Tom Gunning described beautifully when he wrote:

Cornell delivered Hobart's image from its enthrallment to a stereotypical plot and created a dream-like homage (...) to a little-known enigmatic actress. Cornell not only eliminated the narrative logic and dialogue of the original film, but by projecting it at silent speed through a blue piece of glass and accompanying it with recordings of exotically themed pop jazz, he transformed a clichéd film into a more mysterious scenography of desire.

Two years later Len Lye's *Trade Tattoo* (1938) following on with the concept established by Cornell. Britain's General Post Office Film Unit (the G.P.O.) commissioned Lye to produce a film highlighting the necessity to 'post early'. However, instead of filming new material on location, Lye opted to customise footage left over from previous G.P.O. documentaries (notably Basil Wright and Harry Watt's *Night Mail*). Developing further his method of colour separation – which he had already been using in his earlier film *Rainbow Dance* – and other processes like intense contrast, or the use of negatives, he created an amazing visual experience. This effect can be seen in comparison with other experimental films from that period that were referred to as 'visual music', for example the work of Oskar Fischinger, Mary Ellen Bute, or Walter Ruttmann. However, while these filmmakers almost always worked exclusively with produced material, it was Lye's striking rearrangement of film that shaped *Trade Tattoo* into a masterpiece. By taking the imagery of a regular British working day and turning its rhythm into a pattern (like a tattoo – hence the title of the film) brought to life one of the most stunning kinetic film experiments of this time.

In subsequent years more and more filmmakers started to experiment with found materials. One of the most acclaimed is Bruce Conner's landmark film *A Movie* (1958). Conner combined heterogeneous sources such as newsreel footage, short films, soft-core pornography, B-Movies, documentaries and other material. He created an experience which made the viewer confront an existing stream of images digested on an everyday basis through the media. For Ed Howard this film brought to light not only the variety of filmic material existing, but highlighted films inner connection to the spectacle. He writes:

Conner claims the cinema as essentially an art of montage, of combination, cutting together disparate materials from Hollywood epics, car and motorcycle races, plane and boat crashes, war footage, the atomic bomb, and sexy girls. It's like a catalogue of the cinema's sensationalist devices, all of them blended together. (2)

While this intensification can be seen as the first critical approach towards the amount of filmic images and their political dynamics, an even more explicit criticism would appear by the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Structuralist filmmakers like Ernie Gehr and Peter Roehr were digging deeper into the material basis of film which had consolidated into a very strict set of rules that were dominating the classical mainstream film productions and commercial television. By using existing material and formally abusing it by looping, colourizing,

slowing it down or speeding it up, these new versions of found footage film were fostering a deeper understanding of the moving image and its impact on mediated realities. It was clear to these artists that using a camera was not necessarily required to make a statement in this field. On the contrary, Peter Roehr, for example, was always proud that he made more than 20 films without ever having touched a camera.

A few years later Jack Goldstein intensified the debate of Hollywood footage. He used material like the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) logo and looped it for 3 minutes, thereby turning a serious icon of the film industry into an absurd and quirky work. However, it would be too shortsighted to reduce Goldstein's films to their pure humorous dimension. Parallel to this element there is always a very strong tone of criticism in his films – a criticism of images and their use. In fact, he is part of what was known as the 'Pictures Generation', loosely named after the 1977 *Pictures* exhibition at Artists Space in New York.

The works of these artists all combined aspects of Pop Art and Conceptualism with more general concerns like consumerism, political power, gender, and most significantly, ownership of images. This re-established a strong emphasis on the act of image making, contrast against the almost imageless analytical positions of Minimal Art and Conceptual Art. Apart from the pure aspect of image making or the use of images, another shift started to appear alongside this development; the question addressing the presentation of film in a museum or gallery context. This shift from cinema to art space – a spatial as well as an institutional shift, as Peter Wollen pointed out in his famous text *The Two Avant-Gardes* (3) – would intensify over the next decades. The site of the museum, alongside with the aspects of digitization and internet availability, became the new spatial dynamics that brought new ideas to the discourses of found footage from the 1990s to present day. As a matter of fact, this development resulted in a rise of even more forms and variations from Müller/Girardet's *Home Story* (1990) or Tracey Moffatt's post-colonial aspects in *Other* (2009), from Nate Harrison's questions concerning copyright issues to Kutiman's position which explores the potential of the internet for artistic practice. Taking this in consideration we have to understand that found footage film which started with works by Joseph Cornell and Len Lye now more than 100 years after the birth of the moving image continues to flourish and is central to artistic film practice.



Rico Gatson  
*Gun Play* 2001



Tracey Moffatt  
*Other* 2009

1. Tom Gunning, 'Finding the Way. Films Found on a Scrap Heap', in M. Bloemhevel, G. Fossati and J. Guildemond (ed.) *Found Footage - Cinema Exposed*. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2012, p.51.
2. Ed Howard: Bruce Conner Shorts: A Movie/ Report. See: <http://seul-le-cinema.blogspot.com/2008/08/828-bruce-conner-shorts-movie-report.html> (last accessed: 13/10/2016).
3. Peter Wollen, 'The Two Avant-Gardes', in *Studio International* vol. 190, no. 978, November/December 1975, p. 171-175.



**Trade Tattoo** 1937  
**Len Lye**

5.00 min., 35mm. transferred to digital

*Trade Tattoo* is one of Len Lye's most innovative films, employing his full bag of filmmaking tricks. Beside his had drawn animations, Lye reused existing film stock, off-cuts from other GPO Film Unit productions.

Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation and The British Postal Museum & Archive. From Materials preserved and made available by Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision.



**A Movie** 1958  
**Bruce Conner**

12.00 min., 16mm. transferred to digital B/W

One of the most acclaimed found footage films, *A Movie* takes historical moments that were recurrent on television screens (taken from newsreels, B-movies and softcore pornography) and repurposes them into a meditation on how the media attempts to wield authority and apply a sense of order to the chaos of modern life.

Courtesy of the Conner Family Trust and Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA.



**Filmmontagen I-III** 1965  
**Peter Roehr**

23.50 min., 16mm. transferred to digital

Bridging the preoccupations of pop and minimalism, German artist Peter Roehr's film montages loop short excerpts of generic found footage, including cityscapes, shampoo commercials, wrestlers and highways. Roehr remarked that he 'changes material by repeating it unchanged', drawing attention to the pleasure of sheer repetition.

Courtesy of the Peter Roehr Estate and Galerie Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin.



## *Home Stories* 1990 Matthias Müller

6.00 min., 16mm. transferred to digital

A found footage masterpiece, *Home Stories* is a collection of clichéd images of well-dressed but distressed Hollywood women from the 1950s and 1960s era. Müller edits them into a film that both seamlessly melds motifs into an eerie drama and comments on gender entrapment in classic-era Hollywood.

Arsenal, Institute for Film  
and Video Art, Berlin.



## *Hide* 2006 Matthias Müller and Christoph Girardet

6.00 min., 16mm. transferred to digital

Müller and Girardet recycle commercial footage of models applying personal hygiene and cosmetic products, juxtaposing sensuality and glistening body parts with the cracked and fading material deterioration of the celluloid itself – a humorous metaphor for the vain pursuit of consumer-driven eternal youth.

Arsenal, Institute for Film  
and Video Art, Berlin.



## *Gun Play* 2001 Rico Gatson

3.00 min., digital video

A psychedelic spectacle of Hollywood clichés and cult references confronting the power of mainstream media. *Gun Play* is a kaleidoscopic mashup, mixing sequences from Jack Hill's blaxploitation film *Foxy Brown* (1974) and Sergio Leone's spaghetti western *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966).

Courtesy of Ronald Feldman  
Fine Arts, New York.



## *Other* 2009 Tracey Moffatt

6.30 min., digital video

A fast paced montage of Hollywood movie clips depicting fascination and desirability between races, both historically and contemporarily. The scenes swell into a narrative from tentative interaction to heated attraction between individuals of clashing cultures.

Courtesy the artist and Roslyn  
Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.



**Mother Tongue 2011**  
**Katherine Berger**

7.00 min., 16mm. transferred to digital

*Mother Tongue* is the result of found footage of Canadian families, which Berger then buried in the ground of Tasmania, Australia, for two months. This process was influenced by a residency in Canada, in which Berger witnessed the way native Canadians were losing their traditional lifestyle due to the change of nature. This method then works to communicate and co-direct with nature, having Mother Nature inscribe herself on the resulting imagery.

Courtesy of the artist.



**Shoot Don't Shoot 2012**  
**William E. Jones**

4.33 min., digital video

Jones reassembles a 1970s law enforcement instructional film used in educating recruits about the instinctive nature of firearms. The film, never intended for public viewing, tracks a suspect from the officer's perspective, now transferred to the viewer.

Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA.



**Aura dies hard (How I learned to stop worrying and love the copy) 2010**  
**Nate Harrison**

14.00 min., digital video

Harrison constructs an essay about the materiality of art and particularly the perception of the video as a dematerialized form. The film recounts the artist surveying an exhibition of video art that he then is then able to re-encounter through the duplication and reproducibility of the medium.

Courtesy of the artist.



**Thru You 2009**  
**Kutiman**

4.00 min., digital video via YouTube

*Thru You* is a music video assembled from unrelated videos uploaded to the popular You Tube social media platform. The exploitation of this mass resource of vernacular materials points to the power still available in found materials in the 21st Century.

Courtesy of the artist.