

Martin Sercombe

A Journey in Film

I began making films at Maidstone College of Art in the 1970s. The course focused on artists' practice in film and video, under the aegis of the pre-eminent video artist David Hall. My approach was strongly influenced by the structuralist work of other artist film makers working at that time. My early films were funded by Arts Council England and featured in their Film Makers on Tour catalogue. The Arts Council subsidised screenings and presentations by artists in galleries, colleges and cinemas around the country.

My early work explores Bolex camera specific image making processes (such as multiple exposure, animation, time exposure and systemised camera movements) to choreograph visionary, metaphoric journeys through rural and coastal landscapes.

"In his two films In Motion and East Coast, Sercombe reveals that attempt at fusing formal, aesthetic and structural operations into a movement on/through landscape. The films use a number of visual possibilities in direct relation to the subject matter: handheld shots for the stream sequence and rapid forward zoom in the forest sequence for In Motion, and in East Coast the use of single frame in the railing/plank sequence. These moments all work towards an equivalence of treatment with 'content' which the use of (looped) sound reinforces."

Michael Maziere, "Content in Context", Undercut No 7/8, 1983

In the 1990s I began working closely with other artists, such as the composer Sianed Jones. 'Singing the Horizon' (1997) is built from a continuous pan across a flat expanse of reed beds, grazing marshes and windmills in the Norfolk Broads. As it progresses, natural phenomena and encountered forms are transformed into an animated mandala of evolving motifs which Sianed then used as a visual score for her musical response.

Once again, I drew upon a repertoire of camera actions and post-production techniques to both mirror and comment upon formal aspects of the observed landscape. The pans (and their layering) became a metaphor for travelling, which was then reinforced by other vectors of movement through the space and frame, such as that of trains, boats, birds and wind-blown reed beds.

The exploration of the rhythmic and lyrical possibilities inherent in serial or structural, visual montage is a recurring passion. Much of my work to date has been born of a desire to arrive at a personal definition of 'visual music'. I seek to organise pro-filmic content in ways which draw cues from electro-acoustic and other forms of experimental music. This interest has led me to work closely with composers across a number of fields.

Sianed Jones and performance poet Cris Cheek worked with me to develop a live performance and multiscreen work entitled 'Tongues Undone' (1999), commissioned by the World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam. The central theme of the work is the voice, and an exploration of how pure vocal statements can be choreographed into performed and animated movement and gesture. Throughout the piece, graphic symbols and graffiti are translated into vocal sounds, concrete poetry and body movements. Spoken words mutate

into animated text on the screen creating a cyclic dialogue between the different linguistic forms.

This exploration of hybrid forms and the meeting points between spoken, written and visual poetic languages is further developed in 'Maud' (2000). 'Maud' quotes a few short fragments from the Alfred Tennyson poem of the same name, which charts a lovelorn protagonist's descent from joyful anticipation into abject misery at the loss of his heart's desire. This transition becomes a journey through intense emotion, manifest in stylised visual and aural readings of woodland settings in Norfolk and New Zealand. In the live presentation of the piece in Amsterdam, Sianed Jones embodied Maud and stood within a sombre animated landscape as she sang her response to her lovelorn suitor.

A concern for the spirit of place is revisited again in 'Delirium', made during an artist's residency in Brisbane in Spring 2006. It's a heat-crazed, disoriented vision of the city. Tropical vegetation and the natural world collide with its towering cityscape and life is observed via the humid pulse of a slow infrared shutter and flickering, grainy camera style. The film is a collaboration with Tasmanian sound artist Matt Warren, who composed the vocal and electronic underscore.

Since moving to New Zealand, I have focused on relationships between landscape photography, poetry and the moving image. A trilogy of my short films, shot along the west coast of Auckland, was shown for a four-month season on the outdoor screen run by Auckland Live in Aotea Square, Auckland. I have collaborated with Gus Simonovic of Printable Reality and a range of experimental composers and performers. One of our projects, 'Find me a Word' has been featured on the [Moving Poems](#) web site.

Still photography has been a related passion throughout the years, focused mainly on landscape. To quote my artist's statement from a recent exhibition: 'My work explores ways the constant flux of the natural elements transform readings of the landscape. Each image is a response to a particular moment, a fleeting mood, a momentary conjugation of light, space and form meeting in the eye of the camera.'

For more information, including an online filmography and photo galleries, do visit martinsercombe.com