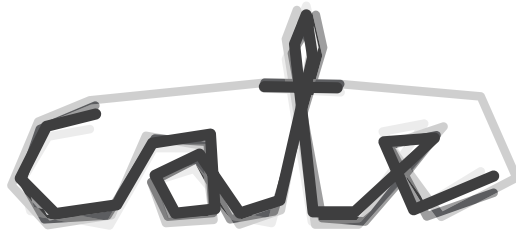


OCT. 16
6 P.M.



Conversations At The Edge - Fall 2014

An Evening with John Smith

1976–2014, UK/Cyprus/Switzerland, multiple formats, ca 76 min +
discussion
John Smith in person!

In his playful and thought-provoking short films and videos, UK filmmaker John Smith explores the language of cinema and reflects on the image's role in politics, war, and the global economy. The 2013 Jarman Award winner presents a selection from across his 40-year career, including the seminal *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976), an absurdist fantasy applied to the banal setting of a busy London street; *Throwing Stones* (2004), a personal and political meditation on ongoing conflicts in the Middle East; *Dad's Stick* (2012), a surprising personal history; and the Chicago premiere of *Dark Light* (2014), among others.

Presented in collaboration with the Video Data Bank, Northwestern University's Department of Art Theory and Practice, Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, and the University of Chicago's Film Studies Center. Smith presents his work at the Block Museum of Art on Wednesday, October 15 and at the Logan Center for the Arts on Friday, October 17.

Since 1972, John Smith (b. 1952, London, UK) has made more than 50 film, video, and installation works which have shown in cinemas, art galleries, and on television around the world. He has been the subject of retrospectives at film festivals in Oberhausen, Germany; Tampere, Finland; St. Petersburg, Russia; La Rochelle, France; Mexico City; Uppsala, Sweden; Cork, Ireland; Regensburg, Germany; Karlstad, Sweden; Winterthur, Switzerland; Bristol, UK; and Glasgow, Scotland. Smith has had solo exhibitions at Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin (2013); Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover (2012); Turner Contemporary, Margate (2012); Weserburg Museum for Modern Art, Bremen (2012); Uppsala Art Museum, Sweden (2011); and PEER Gallery, London (2011). He teaches at the University of East London where he is Professor of Fine Art. In 2011 he received a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists, and in 2013 he was the winner of Film London's Jarman Award. His work is held in numerous collections including Arts Council England, Tate Gallery, Ella Fontanals-Cisneros, Kunstmuseum Magdeburg, Ferens Art Gallery, and Wolverhampton Art Gallery. He lives and works in London.

program

The Girl Chewing Gum

(1976, 16mm transferred to video, B&W, Mono, 12 mins.)

"In *The Girl Chewing Gum* a commanding voiceover appears to direct the action in a busy London street. As the instructions become more absurd and fantasized, we realize that the supposed director (not the shot) is fictional; he only describes—not prescribes—the events that take place before him. Smith embraced the 'spectrum of narrative' (suppressed by structural film) to play word against picture and chance against order. Sharp and direct, the film anticipates the more elaborate scenarios to come: witty, many-layered, punning, but also seriously and poetically haunted by drama's ineradicable ghost."

—A.L. Rees, *A Directory of British Film and Video Artists*, 1996

The Black Tower

(1987, 16mm transferred to video, Color, Mono, 24 mins.)

"John Smith uses humour to repeatedly subvert and frustrate potentially threatening content in an economically constructed tale of the narrator's descent into paranoia and, ultimately, oblivion, as he is pursued, haunted, and finally destroyed by a mysterious peripatetic black tower. Throughout, both verbal and visual imagery are low key to the point of banality; shots of familiar inner city landscapes—terraces, tower-blocks and scruffy wastelands—are set against a narrative that is laconic and bathetic in the best traditions of English suburban comedy. There is a (frequently hilarious) reflexive relationship between sound and image and while the early sections appear to pursue a conventional storyline, this is gradually undermined by an increased emphasis on and deliberate misuse or overplaying of filmic conventions. The tower becomes a 'trick of the imagination' as the disappearing cars are shown to be a trick in the editing."

—Catherine Lacey, *The Elusive Sign: British Avant Garde Film and Video 1977-87*

Artists' Film, Video, New Media, & Animation



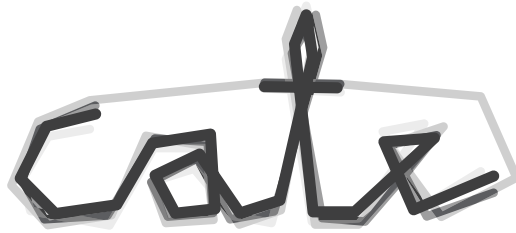
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and Animation



OCT. 11
6 P.M.



Conversations At The Edge - Fall 2014

program continued

Throwing Stones

(2004, DV video, Color, Mono, 11 mins.)

As the camera looks out through a barred window and the clock strikes four in a Swiss city, the death of Yasser Arafat provides the starting point for a journey back in time.

Throwing Stones is the third episode in the Hotel Diaries series, a collection of video recordings made in the world's hotel rooms, which relate personal experiences and reflections to contemporary conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Flag Mountain

(2010, HD video, Color, Stereo, 8 mins.)

A view across the border in Nicosia, the divided capital of Cyprus. The camera looks over the rooftops of the Greek Cypriot south to the mountains of the Turkish Republic in the north, where a display of nationalism is enhanced by filmic means. Moving between macro and micro perspectives, Flag Mountain sets dramatic spectacle against everyday life as the inhabitants of both sides of the city go about their daily business.

Dark Light

(2014, HD video, B&W, Mono, 4 mins.)

"The only time I've visited a communist country was when I went to Poland in 1980, not long after Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government was first elected in Britain. I first visited East Germany in 1997, eight years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and a few months after Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government was elected. Recalling these experiences many years later, Dark Light questions idealised imaginings of life in other places and political systems, mirroring its narrative through its form."

—John Smith

Dad's Stick

(2012, HD video, Color, Mono, 5 mins.)

Dad's Stick features three well-used objects that were shown to the artist by his father shortly before he died. Two of these were so steeped in history that their original forms and functions were almost completely obscured. The third object seemed to be instantly recognizable, but it turned out to be something else entirely. Focusing on these ambiguous artifacts and events relating to their history, *Dad's Stick* creates a dialogue between abstraction and literal meaning, exploring the contradictions of memory to hint at the character of "a perfectionist with a steady

hand".

unusual Red cardigan

(2011, DV video, Color, Mono, 13 mins.)

The discovery of a VHS tape of the artist's films for sale on eBay triggers obsessive speculation about the seller's identity.

upcoming

October 23rd at 6pm

Cao Fei: *Haze and Fog*

Artists' Film, Video, New Media, & Animation



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