

CINEMAGIC TOUR: SCENES FROM AN IMAGINARY PLACE

Elsebeth Jørgensen

Deveron Arts, Huntly, 2005-06

Draft Project Proposal

Background

For the last two years the artist Elsebeth Jørgensen has been traveling round, photographing empty, closed down and converted cinemas and picture houses. "Cinemagic Tour" is a long-term project which is contains various research processes and presentations through montage-based artworks, publications, webpages and exhibitions. (See: www.mappingmemory.net).

When Elsebeth was invited to do a place-related residency at Deveron Arts she immediately responded to the fact that Huntly once had a lively cinema culture, which now sadly has almost disappeared.

With the advent of the final demolition of the Picture House on Gordon Street, the artist now suggests a project that initiates thoughts about collective visual memory / storytelling and the production of imaginations and local history. This she intends to do by looking through the optic of Huntly's cinematic history. What once was called dream palaces is still today a question about transformation of social life as lots of these picture theatres across the world are now demolished or at best converted into something else: a bingo hall, a super market or a car park. *Huntly Palace* was once a social space where imaginations were produced as an activity in a small community's daily life. But now this is associated to the past and merely exists in local people's memories.

The artists' plan is to get access to the cinema building and photograph the space before it will be demolished (which is planned for spring 06). Further, to collect materials about the history of the site. The artist is not the only one who is curious to see how it looks like inside the building today: as Gordon McTavish, the former film projectionist in Huntly Palace said: "If you ever get in there I definitely want to go with you. I wonder how it looks today and I still have things in there, which I have not been able to get out. Nobody, for years has been allowed to go in there."

The tendency of disappearance of cinema culture is found almost everywhere in smaller towns. But what about the local people here in Huntly? How do they deal with the presence of a hermetically sealed building in the centre of the town, now infested by rats and pigeons, which they have no access to because of health and safety reasons? What do they remember, and what do they think about the future planning of the cinema site. Do they have stories to tell?

In my research the artist will be visiting public and private archives and interview people in Huntly. Her intention is to collect images and stories which relate to the cinema culture / history in Huntly. Of this material she will develop a series of montages of image and text. At the end the montages will be sited at the Stewarts Hall, which was the place for the first Magic Lantern (Laterna Magica) screening in Huntly as well as to the Brander Museum to be kept as local historical document. In the Stewarts Hall she will also arrange a public meeting and film screenings to initiate discussions about the meaning of cinema in relation to local life and history today. Here the artist intends to gather people who once worked in the cinema and those who once enjoyed its presence in the town. Further it is intended to reproduce and distribute the montages through the local newspaper, the Huntly Express.

The project is intended to be rounded up by a publication which documents both the life of cinemas in Huntly, as well as the process of the artistic work of Elsebeth Jørgensen.

This project is about the meaning of storytelling, imagination and visual memory in relation to special architectural sites. Fact and fiction will be combined within the work to provide a ground for imaginative exploration. People's voices will be mixed with archive material and the artists' own documentation and free associations without trying to make attempts to represent the history of Huntly within the idea of truth.

The artist therefore tries to focus more on aspects of the tradition of oral storytelling and constructions of mixed reality. For her as a traveling artist, 'the town Huntly with its cinema is a special site, but also a site like anywhere else. As such it will be a station in my *Cinemagic Tour*'.

Elsebeth Jørgensen's approach contains both local and global concerns. Her method is fragmentary, idiosyncratic and subjective through collecting what she finds fascinating of bits and pieces when visiting official and private archives, which contain information about Huntly's cinematic past. This is also precisely the reason why she has chosen an approach which allows to sample and juxtapose different voices and materials. Finally: it is a reflection of people's tales what essentially this montage of Huntly's cinematic past will be, - developed but edited and presented from a traveler's point of view.

Outcome

1.

Five montage prints of large-scale size of a movie poster. Edition of 5
Computer-manipulated photomontages, developed from collected images and stories in Huntly about the cinema culture. Collected images will be mixed with own photographs. (1 edition for Deveron Arts, 2 for donation to Stewart Hall and Brander Museum and 2 for the artist).

2.

Reproduction and distribution of the montage prints in the local press: Huntly Express.

3.

1 postcard, produced by Deveron Arts to announce the project.

4.

3 Film screenings with ice cream and coffee and discussion after the screenings. Movies about cinema and cinema-related topics, for example "Cinemanía", "Cinema Paradiso", "The last Picture show", etc. Introductions by Elsebeth Jørgensen.

5.

Public meeting/panel discussion with talks and open discussions about cinema culture, scheduled for 27 April 2005. Speakers will include: local people with memory of the cinema experience in Huntly, an art/film authority and the director of the cinema museum in London.

6.

Publication with compiled visual materials and text from the research, meetings and final presentation of montages, to include a critical text. Images from the closed down cinema will be included & documentation from public meetings.

7.

An education programme, to include talks at the local school, an artists' talk and a talk at Gray's School of Art.

8.

Webpage presentation

List of people and places involved in Research:

- Huntly Palace / Playhouse – former cinema at Gordon Street.
- The Esson shop (Costcutter), former Palace Cinema for silent movie, at the corner at Granary Street.
- Stewarts Hall, where the first Magic Lantern show was held in 1894. Also host for mobile cinemas during 80's and till nowadays.
- Gordon Mc Tavish: Former Film projectionist in Huntly Palace. And other people who worked in the Cinema.
- The local newspaper, Huntly Express:
 - The Archive.
 - Pat Scott, journalist.
 - Jack Johnston, photographer and owner of Huntly Express.
- Aberdeenshire Council – owner of the cinema building.
 - Jan Regulski, Planning Office, Aberdeenshire Council, Huntly.
 - Ron Davidson, Property department, Aberdeenshire Council, Inverurie.

- Colin Thomson, architect for the new building at the cinema site.
- Jan Bonner, Brander Museum.
- Jenny Lodge, Librarian, Brander Library
- Patrick Scott, Local Historian and collector of photographs.
- Donald Boyd, Town coordinator, Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership Huntly.
- Adam Sinclair, clerk man at Stewart Hall.
- Maureen Ross, local inhabitant in Huntly.
- Bypassing people at Gordon Street.
- Neighbours of the former cinema at Gordon Street.
- Andrew Gordon (film projectionist in a mobile cinema, Glasgow).
(Includes collecting information, stories and images, audio-taped interviews, photographing work.)
- and many others.....

Screening / Film club event

3 screenings (Open invitation, announced in Huntly Express and at different public spaces in Huntly)
 * Stewart Hall, upstairs meeting room; with mobile screen, projector and DVD-player.
 Dates: 23 February and 23 March 06

Meeting / Event

1 evening (Open invitation, announced in Huntly Express and at different public spaces in Huntly)
 at the Stewarts Hall, with:

- * Ronald Grant, Director at Cinema Museum, London & former film projectionist in Aberdeen.
- * Gordon Mc Tavish: Former Film projectionist in Huntly Palace.
- * Patrick Scott, Local Historian, writer of many history books and collector of photographs.
- * Gordon Barr, Cinema enthusiast and creator of website about movie theatres in Scotland. Works as post-doctoral research assistant in the Theoretical Crystallography, University of Glasgow.
 (Participation of guests has to be confirmed in February)

List of places involved in public presentation of the montages

- * Stewart Hall. Donation.
- * Brander Museum. Donation.
- * Huntly Express. Reproduction of the photomontages.

Final Documentation

- * Publication produced with Deveron Arts, with compiled visual material and texts.
- * Webpage www.mappingmemory.net and deveron-arts.com. Uploaded documentation of the project.

Timetable

8-18 November: HUNTLY – Pre-research

- Pre-research: Getting an idea of Huntly to figure out who to involve of people and places in the project; making contacts & first meetings with people.
- Practical solutions for working conditions, agreements of working with mobile office: Brander Library, Huntly Express and Deveron Arts.
- Developing and formulating of concept and timetable.
- Internet-connection still needs to be fixed to MAC-powerbook.

1-28 February: HUNTLY - Research

- Interviews with participants.
- Collecting material, images and texts.
- Photographing cinema site.
- Scanning images and text.
- Meetings and agreements about presentation, donation and reproduction: Stewarts Hall, Brander Museum, Huntly Express and Deveron Arts
- 16th Feb: Lecture at Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen.
- 23 Feb: Film screening at Stewart Hall during February month
- Artists' talk at Gordon Schools
- Introduction by Elsebeth Jørgensen with a screening of still-image movies from "Cinemagic Tour".
- If possible, other movies to be screened: "Cinema Paradiso" & "Cinemanía".
- Uploading material on web pages: Deveron Arts webpage & artists webpage:
www.mappingmemory.net
- Production of postcard.

20-31 March: HUNTLY – Editing / Production

- 23 March: film screening at Stewart Hall. Introduction by Elsebeth Jørgensen with a screening of still-image movies from "Cinemagic Tour" and slight show of converted cinemas. Also to be screened: scenes from "Goodbuy Dragon Inn" & "The Last Picture Show".
- Follow up of interviews and collected material.
- Transcription of interviews.
- Editing of material into montages.
- Uploading material on web pages: Deveron Arts webpage & artists webpage:
www.mappingmemory.net

1-12 April: COPENHAGEN OR ABERDEEN – Prints to be produced from Elsebeth's digital files.

- Final Printing of montages in either Copenhagen or Aberdeen - Peacock. Elsebeth's deadline to printer: 4th April.

19-30 April: HUNTLY – Presentation

- 27 April: public meeting / Symposium at Stewarts Hall with invited guests and open invitation to local people in Huntly. Title: "Huntly Palace: The meaning of cinema in relation to local life and history".
- Framing and Installing montages + Reception for donation of montages to Stewarts Hall & Brander Museum.
- Reproduction of montages in Huntly Express.
- Planning of publication with Deveron Arts.
- Editing collected material to the publication.
- Uploading material on web pages: Deveron Arts webpage & artists webpage:
www.mappingmemory.net

Summer 2006: COPENHAGEN / HUNTLY - Documentation

- Design and Printing of publication. As WEB-working process between Copenhagen – Huntly.