

66. International Short Film Festival of Oberhausen

Susannah Gent: Retrospective

Susannah Gent was featured in the *Profile* section of the 66th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, 13-18 May 2020. The *Profile* features four filmmakers each year. They are usually artist filmmakers who have screened several films at the festival in previous years and who have a filmmaking practice that exceeds ten years.

The *Profile* artist is teamed up with a curator to build two 90 minute screenings and a text to be included in the festival brochure. In addition to the festival coverage, the French / German television channel *Arte* commissioned a short documentary about Gent's work. This programme was made in Sheffield by the documentary filmmaker Marita Loosen-Fox who visited Susannah from Cologne. This programme can be seen here:

<https://vimeo.com/423208355> password: GENT

In 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic outbreak the festival switched to an online format. This document contains material in evidence of these activities, including the festival text, programmes, and images from the documentary.

International Short Film Festival Oberhausen



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Profile Susannah Gent
Psychotel, Susannah Gent, UK
2020
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Profiles

The Oberhausen Profiles are traditionally dedicated to the works of outstanding filmmakers, some of whom have dealt with short films for decades.



The Dance Project @ Susannah Gent

Susannah Gent

In her works, the British filmmaker and artist explores the uncanny, illustrates the unconscious, ghosts, delusions. Since 2017, Oberhausen has repeatedly shown Gent's films; the Festival now presents a first comprehensive overview of her unusual work which eludes simple categorisation.

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Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen

22 April · 🌐

#kurzfilmtageonline: Very proud to announce that our online programmes are almost complete with over 350 films! Profiles, Archives, Distributor Screenings, new programmes, European documentaries, Kenyan web series and much more!

Ticket sales start end of April, lists of programmed films will also go online then, all at www.kurzfilmtage.de.

For a list of programmes that will go online, go here:

<https://www.kurzfilmtage.de/.../press-.../news/online-programme/>

Still from THE DANCE PROJECT by Susannah Gent, part of the Profile dedicated to this artist



Profile

Susannah Gent / International Short Film Festival Oberhausen 2020

Program 1 (total ca. 79:00 mins)

Thread, 1993, 7:09 mins, 16mm, screening copy: DCP

A 'narrative' thread that emerges from a young man's body connects a series of objects, people and scenarios.

Blue Movie, 1996, 3:34 mins, 16mm, screening copy: DCP

A porn film without any people or human sounds.

Black Bag, 8:35 min, 1994, 16 mm, screening copy: DCP

A woman discovers her bag holds a portal to her past through which she relives an incident of abuse.

Bun, 1998, 3:54 mins, 16mm, screening copy: DCP

A collaboration with the performance artist Lisa Watts who explores the physical wrapping potential of bread dough.

Melvyn's Pencils, 1995, 9:35 mins, 16mm, screening copy: DCP

Melvyn slowly unravels under the oppression of his overly possessive mother. This story, told from before and after 'the event', suggests an interconnectivity between involves parties. Produced for the '10 x 10' series, *BBC Bristol*.

Scanner, 2020, 6:04 mins, HDV, screening copy: DCP

A filmic experiment documenting an fMRI survey that used an image set to investigate the neurological underpinnings of the uncanny

Pregnant Pussy Mash Up, 2013, 2 mins, HDV, screening copy: DCP

A reflection on pregnancy, taxidermy, and techno music.

The Reynard Diary, 2008, 9:10 mins, HDV, screening copy: DCP

The filmmaker skins a fox. The confrontation with death provokes memories and ideas. The editing interweaves these stories in an experiment in the boundaries of narrative comprehension.

Snake Shifter and the Bone Chair, 9:32 mins, HDV, screening copy: DCP

A dark fairy tale about a little girl who ventures into the 'dream world' to rescue her brother but first she has to listen to the story of 'The Bone Chair'.

Unhomely Street, 2016, 19:18 mins, HDV, screening copy: DCP

The film follows a female protagonist in a state of fugue following a head injury as she wanders an alienating city underbelly of clubs and free parties. Through recollections of anti-capitalist conversations, historical information about wartime atrocity, and human brutality, she searches for hope in an increasingly frightening, subjective landscape.

Program 2 (total c.a. 71:00 mins)

Influence of Mars, 2017, 4 mins, HDV, screening copy: DCP

The filmmaker asks her ten year old son, about his arsenal of weapons, many of which are intended for other use; the handle of a back brush, juggling batons, and a plastic cricket stump. Despite his enthusiasm for maiming and killing Harvey has no idea why we have wars.

The Dance Project, 2005, 4:50 mins, mini DV, screening copy: DCP

A documentary that explores the experience of dance in the free party community of Sheffield.

Fish promotion, 1:16, 1990, VHS, screening copy: DCP

A short compilation of undergraduate films and animation pulled from the archive

Psychotel, 2020, 60 mins, HDV, screening copy: DCP

A hotel provides a metaphor for the psyche in an essay film that investigates the uncanny. A dead boyfriend, a spirit guide, a character who leaves herself behind, populate this journey through space and mind.

Text written by Susannah Gent and Christiane Büchner for festival brochure

My practice is concerned with exploring everyday aspects of what it means to be human. This brings me into contact with the animal, with death, with the nature and our perception of reality. Through my Ph.D. research that explored the uncanny and related concept of hauntology, I have studied ideas about consciousness, selfhood, territory, and time. The shifts we experience across psychological space between past, present, and future lend themselves to representation in cinematic space, itself a porous plane that becomes entangled with its own references. In the films, produced over the last two decades, these preoccupations with narrative and time, life and death, presence and absence form returning motifs.

My undergraduate work in Liverpool began as animated sculptures made from organic materials; skulls, feathers, skeleton leaves etc., influenced by the work of the Quay Brothers and Jan Svankmejer. Later in Sheffield, undertaking an MA in filmmaking, I was among students aiming to enter the film industry. Attending film festivals opened the notion of a career in which progressively higher short film budgets would lead to features. I made short films for the British Film Institute, the BBC, and the Arts Council of England, but found the move into features demanded that the projects be more conventional.

The independent feature film, *Jelly Dolly*, won a British Council award but was not a mainstream film. My life circumstances changed; I had two young children and regular work at the university teaching filmmaking. I became less focussed on entertainment and returned to making work as a mode of inquiry. This included experimental taxidermy, that, although short-lived, rekindled an interest in the uncanny.

The Reynard Diary introduced me to the idea of using editing as an exploratory tool and led to me gaining skills to enable me to work alone. I undertook training in and *Snake Shifter and the Bone Chair* was a learning project for this endeavour. Experimental documentary and unconventional fiction merged in the framework of the essay film to explore new approaches to narrative. Story-telling is a human occupation. Filmic narratives are structured and conventional. The spectator brings narrative expectations with them and playing with these codes has rich potential. Our sense-making is underpinned by emotion. I am intrigued by possibilities of making narratives that follow conventional structures and deliver emotion but in the absence of other conventions such as on-screen character and linear story.

In thinking about attempting to represent reality (whatever that may mean) I am intrigued by the early twentieth-century when Newtonian physics was usurped by quantum physics. That we thought we nearly knew it all only to find there is so much more – so much strangeness. Suddenly matter is not so solid anymore. The boundaries we put between things are a means to organise the world but they are also constructions. We need increasingly complex metaphors to understand the world.

The membrane is an interesting metaphor for a preoccupation in my films. It seems there is a membrane that separates the mind and the body. In academic fields this membrane thickens and the physical and the mental are separate. These boundaries are artificial and relate to the methods of the discipline. My interdisciplinary research is concerned with regions where these disciplines overlap. Although I do not fully align myself with Freud, many psychoanalytic metaphors that shape the

architecture of thinking are potent. Considering the idea of repression, it seems that we repress our animal selves, that there is a shield between our biological actuality and our idea of ourselves. Foundational mammalian instincts reach out and interfere with the idealistic veneer that we are self-controlling higher beings, something more like angels. We can learn from engagement with organic forms. They remind us that we are biological organisms pulsating with fluid until the system ceases, then other life-forms take over making a lively environment of organic activity, that which the taxidermist attempts to halt with controlled chemical processes. When messing about with dead things, as I do in *The Reynard Diary*, I am struck by the intimacy I have through access to a body. The threshold between life and death is a vast space in conceptual terms, that takes just a moment to travel.

When one is deliberately interrogating one's thoughts with a view to making cinematic representations, filmmaking becomes complex and enmeshed. This is especially so when performing in the films and filming aspects of one's everyday life as I did in *Unhomely Street* and *Psychotel*. Membranes exist between these mode of thought that act as barriers and means by which we maintain separation between thresholds. *Unhomely Street* references different qualities of mental health; how feeling low can be experienced as a darkening of the world, a tangible change in physical texture. These states can be likened to seeing the world through different lenses or filters. A return to health can be felt as a pushing through into a new space. *Psychotel* illustrates the membrane more literally when cracks in the walls of the hotel show the flesh on the other side, in the physical dimension of mind for which the hotel acts as a metaphor.

In the environment of a practice-based Ph.D. I gave myself permission to be more radical, personal and independent in my filmmaking. There was a shift in process. I did not write scripts, instead the films evolve and the edit became the writing process. *Unhomely Street* explores a state of anxiety I experienced when recovering from post-concussive syndrome following a head injury. It also attempts to capture a mood of the times. We now talk about the precarious environment but in 2015 there was a culpable silence. The film intended to break that silence.

Psychotel was made as a filmic chapter to my Ph.D. and aimed to explore the uncanny. I soon realised this would be a longer film that opened space for me to experiment. This followed a brief venture into scientific research. I worked with a neuroscientist to devise an fMRI survey that attempted to seek a neurological underpinning to the uncanny. The survey became the film *Scanner*. Science films tend to be slick and conventional whereas this film challenges the viewer to orientate themselves, and as such it is an odd hybrid. When confronted by the brain as flesh we are reminded that the richness of mental life exists on another side of a conceptual membrane.

Consciousness feels like something, and it is the feeling of the body in its current state. When you introduce the content of thought this becomes complex but at the core is sensory experience. Touch is our foundational sense. It is arguable that all other senses come from touch. But to muddy the waters it is an open question how close things need to be in order to touch. Fur, skin, dough; these are coverings and relate to ideas of inside and outside and to the metaphor of the membrane in which states of being can be seen as spatial and porous.

The focus of my experimentation is the junction between cinematic conventions, the experience of mind, and notions of selfhood and consciousness drawn from philosophy, psychoanalysis and neuroscience. The relation between psychical space and cinematic space is rich territory.

In parallel with the presentation of a retrospective of Susannah Gent's films at the International Short Film Festival of Oberhausen 2020, the French and German channel Arte has produced a film by the documentary filmmaker Marita Fox-Loosen about Susannah Gent's work.

KURZSCHLUSS - the weekly film magazine on the French/German culture channel ARTE presents
a Special edition on the occasion of the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen 2020:

SATURDAY NIGHT 09.05.2020 AT 23:45 PM

Streaming online from Saturday here: [>>> SENDUNG AB SAMSTAG FRÜH HIER ONLINE](#)



Due to the Corona crisis, this year's Short Film Festival Oberhausen [Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen](#) will take place from 13-18 May as an online festival.

Also new this year: ARTE is media partner of the festival online blog: [Festival online Blogs](#)

SUSANNAH GENT

Encounter with the uncanny: in her work, British filmmaker Susannah Gent explores the abysses of the human soul and the visual language of the unconscious. For her surreal visions she experiments with stylistic elements of the psycho-thriller, fantasy- and horror genre. The International Short Film Festival Oberhausen [Internationale Kurzfilmfestival Oberhausen](#) is presenting a retrospective of her unusual work for the first time in 2020. We meet her in her house in Sheffield, which often serves as the shooting location for her films. Here we encounter the uncanny in Susannah's artistic universe - while outside the storm Sabine is brewing.

Gent's film [Influence of Mars](#) will be screened in Kurzschluss.

Here you can see the entry online from Saturday: [Hier gibt es den Beitrag ab Samstag Online zu sehen](#)

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Interview mit Susannah Gent



00:47 08:23

Interview mit Susannah Gent

susannah gent réalisatrice

9 Min.

Verfügbar vom 09/05/2020 bis 09/05/2024

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Interview mit Susannah Gent



9 Min.

Verfügbar vom 09/05/2020 bis 09/05/2024