

# South Square Gallery | Press Release



*Control Room Mantelpiece, Esther Johnson, 2010*

## **Esther Johnson | Obsession | 07 – 30 October 2011**

To coincide with *Ways of Looking*, a new festival of photography in Bradford, South Square will be presenting artist filmmaker and photographer Esther Johnson's ***Analogue Kingdom***. This short film is a poetic portrait of Gerald Wells, founder and curator of the British Vintage Wireless and Television Museum.

Wells' stole his first radio, a Belmont, in 1943 at the age of thirteen. He was immediately sent to an 'approved' school, whose psychiatrist diagnosed 'an obsession' with wireless and electricity – an obsession that continues today. The house Wells was born in and still inhabits is now home to over 1,500 wireless objects and 45,000 valves - the UK's largest such collection. *Analogue Kingdom* reveals the charm of Wells' world, where radio relics and their attendant stories fill every nook and cranny. As the digital switchover fast approaches, Wells' analogue collection is a reminder of the magic that may soon be lost.

In addition to *Analogue Kingdom*, Johnson will exhibit a selection of photography taken at the British Vintage Wireless and Television Museum.

"*Analogue Kingdom* was one of the highlights of the 2010 Cut & Splice festival. The film's intimate documentary portrayal of obsessive radio collector Gerald Wells as a Sir John Soane for the Marconi age touches on deep truths about the nature of collecting. In this simple yet beautifully judged piece Esther Johnson explores how identities are formed through place and the meaningful accumulation of clutter. It is one of the most moving descriptions of the relationship between man and machine that I have experienced."

– Richard Whitelaw, producer Sound & Music and Cut & Splice

"...in allowing her subject a sympathetic platform [Johnson creates] a palpable connection between subject and audience through film... Without any noticeable mediation (itself proof of Johnson's skill as a director) Wells hints at his own deeper story, all the while moving around his museum as a frail man, preserving technology that continues to offer pleasure, and still functions, despite having been declared obsolete by the world beyond his museum's four walls. It's touching, tinged with nostalgia (the cinematography seems to caress the objects we see, as though bathing everything in the golden light bestowed by Wells' own vision) but there's also a tougher subtext here about mortality; an implicit acceptance that today's cutting edge, multi-million dollar mass technologies will themselves, one day, be the preserve of men like Gerald Wells, pushed into the margins of whatever world they have (by then) helped to create". – Wayne Burrows, Nottingham Contemporary review

## Artist Information

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Esther Johnson (MA, Royal College of Art) is an artist primarily known for her film, video and photographic work. She creates poetic documentary portraits that unearth subjects from the minutiae of everyday life. Her films intimately convey extraordinary, resonant stories that may otherwise remain hidden or ignored. Recurring themes include the underdog, personal histories, heritage, everyday vernacular, regeneration, psychogeography and the often-uneasy relationship between her protagonists and their respective place in contemporary society. Her film and video work is acutely observed with minutely composed and paced imagery juxtaposed with contemplative soundscapes that mix voiceovers with field recordings. She makes photographic work that develops observations of the inhabited social and domestic environment and via the praxis of *dérive*.

Johnson has been commissioned to make several acclaimed works supported by Arts Council England; BBC; The British Council; Film London; LAFVA; the National Endowment for the Arts; the National Lottery; Skillset; Screen Yorkshire; Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum; Sound and Music and Yorkshire Arts.

Johnson's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in galleries and art fairs including, BFI; Cornerhouse, Manchester; FACT, Liverpool; ICA, London; Istanbul Biennial; Site Gallery, Sheffield; Sotheby's, New York; Tate Britain; Tate Modern and Zoo Art Fair, London; plus film festivals and special events including, the BFI London Film Festival; International Documentary Festival Amsterdam; NASA, California; Raindance, London and the Science Museum, London. Work has also been broadcast on BBC television and radio.

In addition to her practice, Johnson is an independent film/video curator, and is Senior Lecturer in Filmmaking at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. In 2008 she was nominated for the Northern Art Prize.

[www.blanchepictures.com](http://www.blanchepictures.com)

## Support

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In January 2010, South Square embarked upon a two-year audience development project funded by Arts Council England [Yorkshire] and Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

## Background

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South Square is a visual art resource centre based within a Grade II listed building in Thornton, Bradford, West Yorkshire. It is home to South Square Gallery, a grassroots exhibition space committed to providing a professional and supportive resource for artists and emerging curators. As a test bed for new ideas, the gallery hosts an ever-revolving dialogue between artists and their audience. The square also incorporates a community space, artists' studios, fine art framer, café and exhibition spaces for local artists.

## Opening Times

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Opening night: Friday 07 October 2011 7–9pm  
Exhibition open: Saturday 08 October–Sunday 30 October 2011  
Opening times: 12–3pm | Tuesday–Sunday | and by appointment

## Media Contact

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For further information, contact the curator David Knowles:

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