...than imagination may venture to follow.

Name Mike Windle
School of Design
Output name The Unconformity Project
Output type Film
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The Unconformity Project is a 22 minute single-screen experimental artist’s film funded by East Lothian Council and Creative Scotland, which screened in the International Competition at The Berlin Experimental Film Festival (now titled the Berlin Revolution Film Festival), December 2016.

It is a process based, solo authored psycho-geographic short film; a practice-based ethnographic documentary filmmaking inquiry that gathers and weaves together broad threads of research from geology, theology and cultural theory.

The work takes its starting point as Hutton’s Unconformity, a rock schism and important geological discovery by James Hutton, in 1788 on the South East Coast of Scotland. Documented in Transactions – Volume 5 (1805), in The Royal Society of Edinburgh journal (published since the eighteenth century), in an article written by the influential Edinburgh Architect William Henry Playfair, this famous event brought together three men in a boat, two friends with Hutton, whose
Section 01

Output

interpretation of the Unconformity rock schism that day proved to be geological evidence of Deep Time. Proof of a world billions of years old, in conflict with the Church’s assertion of creation in 4000BC.

Windle takes a ludic, playfulness in practice approach, inspired by Roland Barthes, in combination with Susan Sontag’s notion of sensibility, to create a process-based narrative, retracing the events and path of the Unconformity story. Using film footage, computer generated imagery, visual text, accompanied by a soundtrack of field recordings, conversations and Windle’s voice-over as interior thoughts that reflect upon content and structure, mirroring what is seen on screen. These elements are combined to create an immersive filmic experience of being there, within the film.
Section 02
Originality

Production of the film was unconventional in filmmaking terms, purposefully sidestepping mainstream techniques such as plot and act and production teams. Entirely non-formulaic, the filmmaking process was a non-scripted, non-storyboarded, process-based exploration, which involved Windle solo-authoring in an intuitive, responsive manner; a performative and painterly use of film, which connects back to Windle’s painterly origins.

This approach mirrors landscape painting, in process and content. The picturesque view of the Bass Rock (across from the difficult to access Unconformity) reflects the film’s Enlightenment narrative concerning the juncture of science, religion and time. The process is real-time in the voiceover, and structural filmic decision making is made apparent as the story unfolds.

Windle’s approach to the material takes a stance as artist as observer, the non-expert able to ask different questions, with permission not be cowed by expert voices; learning and leading the viewer to a new way of seeing scientific, historical information through storytelling. This approach echoes Tim Ingold’s proposition of the artist, designer and architect’s vital contemporary role within anthropological inquiry.
Rigor

The Unconformity Project began with geological research, both field-based around the cultural embedding of myths within geological remnants in ancient and contemporary Greece and The Royal Society of Edinburgh Journal’s recount of the Hutton Unconformity. He observed how the mass of rock on display in the Acropolis Museum in Athens added weight to the connected mythologies. Windle consulted with current professionals in the field, such as contemporary ecologist Ewan Davidson and anthropologist and explorer Duncan Ellis, both of whom appear in the film.
Materials were gathered by re-enacting the actual journey of Hutton, filmed and sound recorded in-situ the South East Coast of Scotland. Over a period of 12 months the assets were combined with computer generated imagery and voiceover recording, through the process of digital compositing and video editing, again as a solo-authored process, rather than a typical production company setting. The work was developed in iterative stages, by sharing with a selected audience of professional peers for critical review at various stages of development to obtain feedback on form and interpretation. This was fed back into the work as a continual process of reflection and review within production. This enabled Windle to have an eclectic, personal and open approach to filmmaking, intended for film festivals and gallery, rather than commercially routes of distribution, restricted by finance, studio backing, contracts and licensing.

The final form of the film is structured into intentionally non-linear chapters, as a stream of consciousness contained within a sequential single screen form.
The Unconformity Project was selected through an open submission process for the International Competition of The Berlin Experimental Film Festival. It was screened in December 2016 at Kino Moviemento, the oldest Cinema in Germany, founded 1907, located in Kreuzberg, central Berlin.

This yearly cultural event attracts an international audience, with submissions encouraged from all major industry hubs eg Filmfreeway and Withoutabox. The festival screenings are widely publicized, online via the festival’s website, in printed form through the festival programme and additionally via social media.

The Berlin Experimental Film Festival is an extremely pertinent distribution platform for the The Unconformity Project film, with its emphasis on self-produced films, not tied to big production companies or TV stations. It is an internationally recognized platform for unconventional and underground films made with a personal voice and style, from all around the world.

The Unconformity Project
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qc7yRE6EkWM

Transactions V: Royal Society Edinburgh
https://archive.org/details/transactionsofro05murr
Alain Bergala “The Cinema Hypothesis” (p38) discusses telling a story with enthusiasm in a personal or idiosyncratic way, making work using own experience. Windle’s own experience is as a painter. This film was made as a painter uses paint, with a palette of media edited relatively quickly after the research/collection process. Andrei Tarkovsky’s vision of being able to ‘be alone’ in a meditative and spiritual space has been influential. The sound has been developed to communicate an often defocused interior voice, as in a dream.

Windle has told the story as a stream of consciousness narrative using the rich opportunities within digital photography and editing to explore colour, rock, porous ideas that chime with history, the voice of God, internal thought, upending of landscape and belief, to create a kind of work that (Susan Sontag) says is about something, but is also something. This is intended to be not only illustrative but also to contain something of the material of rock and wind and time, told in a personal way.

The Scottish Enlightenment was a time of great enquiry. Ministers were scientists, and the church was under pressure to explain its authority on chronology and creation. In The Unconformity Project the story of the boat trip has been updated as a psychogeographic film work, with narrative uncovered through the process of making, provocation and playfulness. Windle has attempted to retain the spirit of Hutton’s storytelling that was recounted in Transactions by minister and scientist, John Playfair.

In 2016 on leaving the Acropolis Museum in Athens, Windle observed the museum did not appear in any way to entertain the possibility that the Greek Myths may not have been actual historical events. Although this seemed absurd he admired the confidence that the mass of stone sculpture offered in lending weight to these stories, true or not. Stories of rock appear to have this attribute.

The film enabled Windle to listen to ‘experts’ but allow own sometimes disbelieving thinking to be conveyed in voiceover through reflection and inflection. This is a film about what experts say using non-expert tendencies and artifice.

Contrasts are between the island of the Bass Rock which is well within the canon of the picturesque, and the much more difficult to distinguish Unconformity. The rock formation is close in location to other research Windle has made. He compares the dialogue between the Transactions text and The Unconformity Project to be similar to the connection between his more recent St Kilda project and Martin Martin’s journal from his visit there in 1697.

Windle imagines the work through the lens of ‘folk-cinema’. He first encountered the idea films could be made without the trappings of industry or commercial imperative when he first saw ‘Sheman’s March’ by Ross McElwee in 1986. This seemed something more than documentary but not quite the brilliant and often outlandish ‘ecstatic truth’ and locations of Werner Herzog. Interesting films could be made about ordinary life interpreted. Windle became interested in the moving image through the development of his use of computers since that time - not through traditional film school preoccupations. He has gained confidence in his own voice over time delivering ideas that can be triangulated over multiple mediums.

Inspired by other artists not yet mentioned such as Patrick Keiller and William Kentridge, Windle has developed a personal cinema alongside other media such as painting and journals which interact together and through landscape.

The Unconformity Project was screened by Berlin Experimental Film Festival in 2016.

In April 2020 Berlin Revolution Film Festival has shown a more recent work ‘The Quiet Hill ~ notebook’. The festival ethos is “Berlin Revolution Film Festival, True Independent Films, Experimental Art House and Genre Cinema. Low and No Budget films with Artistic Expression”. Because of the pandemic, the festival was streamed live through Twitch with Q+A on Skype between segments.