

A Directory of British

# Film & Video

Artists



Edited by David Curtis

Tony  
Sinden

### Imaginary Opera

1992, film and video projection and performance with orchestra

What is particularly poignant for this body of work is not so much the content of each individually made film or video tape, but the constant search for an appropriate method of projection which will bring these film-makers into a new and direct relationship with their audience. *Imaginary Opera* was commissioned as a collaboration between Housewatch and the composer Steve Martland for the Fourth Contemporary Music Festival in Kyoto. The public were welcomed to the outside of a building onto which the film was projected but from where the orchestra could not be seen. The cyclists on film and in performance offered many musical associations. The spacing, the repetition, the sequences (sometimes single images, sometimes collective) hinted at visual analogies with a musical score. More pertinent still was the invitation (rarely taken up) for spectators to move behind the screen, to view the orchestra and finally to produce (by silhouette on screen) an image in the artwork itself.

Jeni Walwin

### Little Big Horn

1992, film projections in motor vehicles

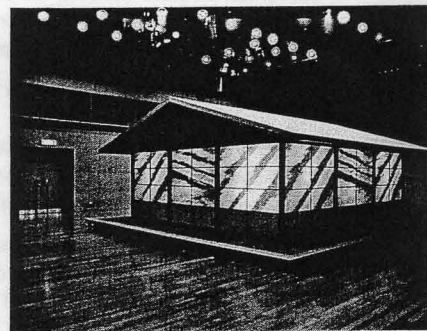
This mixed media installation consisting of six pieces using Super-8mm projection in real vehicles was organised for the Queen Elizabeth Hall Undercroft on the Southbank, in London. The pieces included: *Universal Power Drive* by Stanford Steele, in which a timber-tractor activated by passing spectators, flashed the message "Recovery",

**H**ousewatch was formed in 1985, and is a collective showcase of individual works by artists Ian Bourn, Lulu Quinn, George Saxon, Tony Sinden, Stanford Steele and Alison Winckle. Their aim is to transcend the traditional framework of cinema, performance and gallery exhibition space. As individual practitioners, they have backgrounds in the production of experimental film, video, sculpture, live work and site-specific installation. As a collaborative group, they have used light, film, video, sound and performance to develop new and challenging venues in a variety of public spaces and ordinary urban situations, at locations in the UK and more recently, Japan.

Housewatch began by using the front windows and door of a house as a site for projection. The result was *Cinematic Architecture for Pedestrians* (1985), a programme of six, multi-projected pieces specifically for the context of the street. Since the formation of the collective, they have embraced a wide range of media and perceptual issues that explore a new interactive relationship between the work, audience and exhibition context.

The essential idea of a Housewatch event is about a transformation of the site; expanding the threshold – exploring a broader definition of art, cinema and cultural language. To begin with, the six artists agree a common framework that allows them to produce a work independently of each other. The final programme is structured to reflect their individual ideas and responses to the site; setting-up a situation of flux and change, as a means of challenging audience expectations and of keeping alive the collective spirit of debate – of Housewatch.

and emitted music from Monteverdi's *Orfeo*; Lulu Quinn's *Fatal Instincts*, which evoked the predatory nature of cars: the Hunter – a crouched, shiny black Morris Minor saloon, the sound of its engines combined with the menacing purr of a cat – and the Hunted – an ageing rusty Morris Minor. Oblivious of their impending doom, two chickens could be seen staking their newly acquired territory: the female settled down to feed and rest, while the male shrieked out his claim to territory with persistent vigour; and Tony Sinden's *Acceleration/Arrest* and *Deceleration/Desire* combined two static cars (a Volvo 66 and a Rover 67) with film, projection and sound, developing a sculptural-cinematic concept that momentarily arrested the viewer's perception of the car as cult object, and the desire to be mobile.



ABOVE:  
PAPER HOUSE

# Tony Sinden

**F**ilm and light have always been central to Tony Sinden's practice but have never been the sole focus of his work. Early in his film making life Sinden became fascinated by the opportunities offered by what was known in the 1970s as expanded cinema. His influence on its early development was substantial. Since uncovering the possibilities of working with a projected image in a three dimensional space, the potential offered by the single screen has rarely been sufficient to sustain his practice.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Sinden worked on film based installations for gallery spaces. Although these were mostly solo projects Sinden was already beginning to collaborate, particularly with David Hall and with artists such as David Cunningham (a partnership which is still manifest some twenty years on).

In Sinden's solo installations sound, light and projected image have been combined with carefully selected objects to expand the architecture of the space in which he works. He creates a sense of an environment which is in constant flux. For the last twenty five years he has continued to uproot our understanding of an architectural space as fixed or permanent. As long ago as 1978, in his installation for the Acme Gallery *A Garden Site*, Sinden redefined the space using mirrors, projections, blinds and both artificial and natural light, creating an illusory space; an artwork to which the spectator could also contribute through shadow and movement. In his most recent solo projects that sense of reinvention of architectural space still operates, although the images are now more figurative and the use of sound and live video camera hint at more political uses of such technology in everyday life.

Since 1985 one of the most productive channels for Sinden's work with film has been with the group Housewatch, of which he is a founder member. Housewatch are best known for their marking of urban sites, using film, video, performance and installation. Their work will often re-present the history of a given location, sometimes conveying a new illusory experience of physical space, and – as in Sinden's earlier solo installations – the viewer can occasionally play a physical and visual part in the work. Sinden's individual contributions to the Housewatch portfolio in the form of film and videotapes projected onto multifarious surfaces have traced a route from initial, essentially formal investigation towards an evocation of 'emotional' response, underpinned by the same rigorous aesthetic structure apparent in his solo film work. The strength of Sinden's work in all these contexts rests with the way in which he manipulates seemingly straightforward imagery and in so doing undermines our expectations of the scene in which it is set.

Jeni Walwin

## Key works

### 5 Films – View, This Surface, Actor, Edge, Between

1973, various lengths, colour, 16mm (with David Hall)

These films are now history, although some of the ideas and concerns have, in retrospect, influenced each of us individually in the pursuit of new directions in films and other media since this collaboration. They represent an important phase in our work in which we explored an area of film which would possibly locate a 'broader aesthetic' by relating avant-garde issues to the generally accepted framework of conventional film-making, and in some cases, specifically to narrative cinema.

TS/DH

### A Garden Site

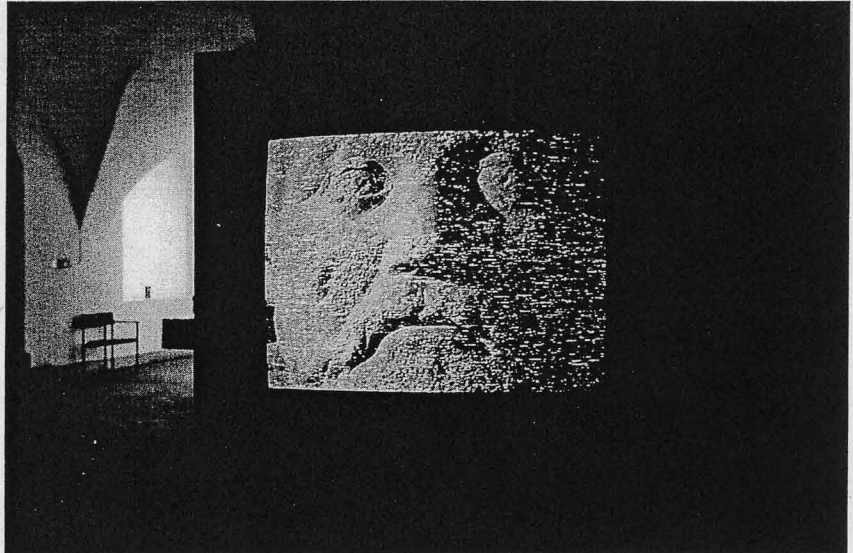
1978, installation, 8 x 16mm projectors, 1 monitor, video camera, mirrors

Since an earlier involvement with making environmental events, light-shows and Fluxus happenings during the mid 1960s.. 'location and site' and 'a sense of place' have been a consistent influence on the concerns and considerations of my installation pieces.

[...] My recent ideas begin to take their form only when they occupy a specific location, finding a structure the shape of which is descriptive in some way of aspects of the site's immediate surroundings; with projected looped-film, illusions and degradation of time, material, image etc, forming the essential 'evolving elements'.

TS

RIGHT:  
ANCESTRAL VOICES



## From Caligari to the Shadow of 1984

1983, installation, slide projectors, mirrors

This site-specific installation commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery was a meditation on war and nuclear holocaust. Suspended in the centre of the space was a black torpedo-shaped bomb, on either side two projected figures in red – as if dead or incinerated.

## Ancestral Voices

1994, installation, 12 monitors, 3 players

Set in the medieval crypt of St Nicholas Church, Bristol, this installation used video and sound to create a slowly evolving relationship with the location which is situated next to the River Avon. In the absence of daylight the subterranean medieval architecture of the crypt became the focal point of the work, the video camera revealing momentarily isolated detail and texture of the surroundings.

The interaction of the space, the technology and the lone spectator were vital parts of the encounter and transformation of the site.

## Biography

Born Brighton. Began working with film, sound and expanded cinema in 1966. Screenings of single screen film and video include: National Film Theatre, London; Knokke-Heist, Belgium; Millennium, New York; Hayward Gallery, London (1979 Hayward Annual); Arsenal Kino, Berlin; Museum of Modern Art, New York. Exhibitions of site-specific installations include: Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol; International Kunstmesse, Vienna; Atholl McBean Gallery, San Francisco; Camerawork, London; St Nicholas Church, Bristol. Tony Sinden has been a member of Housewatch since the mid-1980s (see separate entry).