

ARTIST FILM & VIDEO AT TATE BRITAIN
UPCOMING SCREENINGS:

LUCY BEECH & EDWARD THOMASSON
MONDAY 18 MAY 2015, 19.00 – 21.00

BEYOND THE SINGLE SCREEN:
SEMICONDUCTOR AND LYNN LOO/GUY SHERWIN
WITH PROF. CATHERINE ELWES
MONDAY 15 JUNE 2015, 18.30 – 20.00



Daria Martin and Massimiliano ('Mao') Mollona, still from *Steel Town* 2013 © the artists

TATE FILM

**DARIA MARTIN &
MASSIMILIANO ('MAO') MOLLONA**

Artist Film & Video at Tate Britain
Clare Auditorium, Tate Britain
Monday 30 March 2015
19.00–21.00



Daria Martin and Massimiliano ('Mao') Mollona, still from *Steel Town* 2013 © the artists

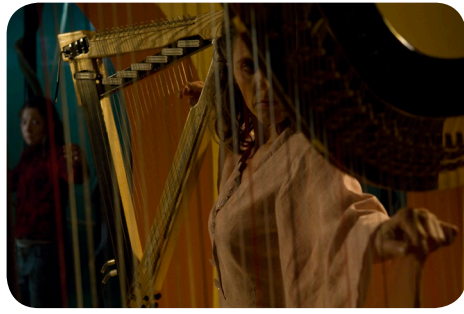
Daria Martin and her collaborator Massimiliano ('Mao') Mollona will present their film *Steel Town* and take the Clare Auditorium stage with Professor Andrea Phillips to talk about collaborative practice, evocations of place and enactments of melodrama.

Artist Film & Video at Tate Britain
is curated by Zoe Whitley, Curator
and Jenny Lund, Assistant Curator,
Contemporary British Art at Tate
Britain. With thanks to the artists.

tate.org.uk/film
Thoughts, comments, reviews?
f Tatefilm
t @tatefilm

BRITAIN
TATE

BRITAIN
TATE



© the artist, courtesy Maureen Paley, London

HARPSTRINGS AND LAVA Daria Martin, 2007 16mm film, 13 min

Harpstrings and Lava seeks to channel the tension inherent in certain nightmares. In the recurrent dream referenced here, tensile harpstrings and viscous lava inhabited the same space simultaneously, creating a sensation of visceral dread. The 16mm film aims to gently animate such 'hyper-real' dream images, drawing the viewer closer to the feeling of inexorable, anxious attachment shared by the onscreen characters. [http://dariamartin.com/]



© the artist

STEEL LIVES Massimiliano ('Mao') Mollona, 1999 HD video, 45 min (10 min extracts)

Steel Lives portrays the work and lives of a community of steelworkers in Sheffield in the post-Thatcher era. The film depicts the workers' close interaction with heavy old fashioned machinery, their lunch breaks and visits to the pub and reflects on their perception of work, class and global economy. Mollona spent one and a half year with the communities and in addition to the film published the book *Made in Sheffield: An Ethnography of Industrial Work and Politics* (2009) based on his studies.

STEEL TOWN Daria Martin & Massimiliano ('Mao') Mollona, 2013 HD video, 23 min

Steel Town introduced by the artists

Daria Martin: Volta Redonda, Brazil, home to South America's largest steel factory, is probably the most 'demanding' place I've visited, and for only a few weeks. As an anthropologist, you spent a total of a couple of years doing field work there – living with workers, surveying the functioning of the mill, socialising with those involved in an informal economy, volunteering with a theatre group. Some anthropologists choose to live in communities that in some way model an alternative to the capitalist West – places that others might envy as an 'exotic' destination of sorts – for example, the Amazon. Volta Redonda, on the other hand, is more complicated, and certainly not a utopia. What drew you to do fieldwork in a place that some would describe as dystopic?

Massimiliano Mollona: I am interested in modern or modernist utopias, especially communism and capitalism, and in observing how even when they went terribly wrong, people put up with them through their resilient and creative imagination. My fieldworks are always developed in dystopic places, which have been marked or scarred by these modernist projects. Volta Redonda was built in the 1940s by dictator Getulio Vargas in the middle of a dilapidated coffee-production valley, as part of a plan to turn Brazil into a 'modern', industrialized country. Vargas called the town 'his living monument'. Peasants, landless and poor travelled from all over Brazil to Volta Redonda to embody the dictator's dream. But Vargas' dream was self-defeating. Brazil, at the time a European colony dependent on the coffee economy, became a neo-colony industrially dependent on the US, which financed the coffee plantation. Today the city is far from being a dream. Most people have to endure leukemia, cancer and intoxication by benzene, poverty, land eviction by the company and its skyline is constantly filled with dark-yellow clouds. In my fieldwork I have tried to understand how and why people put up with this dream turned-out-nightmare. I became interested in the way people build life-narratives in a cinematic way, using the reality as screen to project their own dreams. I become interested in the unconscious zone where cinematic, mental images and reality touch each other. Volta Redonda is very cinematic and dreamlike. It is an industrial monster in the middle of a tropical valley. It has a certain beauty, in the modernist sense. This is the reason why I wanted to share my experience with a visual artist like you. In

my opinion, your films deal a lot with such grey zone where reality and imagination blur, especially in relation to spaces you construct, which seem both mental and material. What was your experience of encountering such a visually striking place? Didn't you feel that the city projected some strong mental or ideological state?

DM: Well, the physical reality of the steel plant is an incredible manifestation of will. It occupies 25 square kilometers – the size of a small city itself – and is not relegated to the fringes of town. It's the town's very centre, and the town's liveliness is pressed right up to it: schools, shopping malls, restaurants, all literally border the plant. The town has been planned this way. It's a sight – whether beautiful or ugly – that I'd never encountered before. For example, you've mentioned the ways that tropical foliage literally intertwines with machinery inside the plant and, from a distance, there is Fitzcarraldo-like layering of wild jungle and human construction. In our film, we captured this long view from a hilltop, the city's highest point, where the Bela Vista Hotel provides a meeting place not just for visiting steel engineers and town politicians, but also for working class lovers in search of a patch of grass and view of the city lights. But the place is also deeply ugly and brutal, full of serious environmental and health dangers, among others. I'd like to talk more about how we filtered the visual surfaces of Volta Redonda. But for a moment, could you say more about your question: 'why people put up with the nightmare?' Most of us would assume that the less privileged members of the Volta Redonda community don't have a choice about putting up with this place. You are not suggesting they enjoy views to the smokestacks...

MM: It is funny you mention the smokestacks. George Bataille writes beautifully of how as a child he would be terrified by industrial smokestacks and would experience them as angry hallucinations and formless reverberations of human violence. Growing up, he argues, people loose that 'untutored' way of seeing and rationalize these industrial monsters as necessary or even beautiful! I do sympathise with Bataille on this. The big economic ideas of this century – Taylorism, planned socialism and flexible production – are dreamlike, violent and, in Bataille's words, 'as inexplicable as the muzzle of a dog'. They propose violent and unrealistic scenarios, for instance that we live in a world of scarcity and that we must compete against each other in order to survive, or that industry or finance eliminate social inequality. Why do people believe in them? Why did people believe in Vargas's dream that a steel complex would develop and modernize Brazil? Why did they abandon their families and rural communities? Why did they accept

to work long hours in underground tunnels to lay the foundations of the complex? To live in constantly flooded wooden-shacks? Didn't they realize that the plant produced polluting and low-quality steel for the profit of western companies? That they were going through a new system of colonialism all over again? Poverty only partially answers these questions. State violence was a more pressing factor. Because of its strategic relevance the plant was under military law and absenteeism was punished with imprisonment for high treason. Yet, only a small group of communists rebelled against that stupid dream. Today it is too late to rebel against the company. The municipality is totally dependent on it, not so much in terms of employment but because the fiscal incomes from the company constitute 70% of its budget. You are right to say that people do not enjoy their views on the smokestacks. But perhaps they look at them through a mixture of delusion and rationalization, typically of capitalism, which Bataille described so well in his piece.

DM: Filmmaking is always a bit tense and part improvised, no matter how storyboarded or how 'documentary style' it may be, and much of what we filmed was actually staged and theatrical: a series of Theatre of the Oppressed workshops, and the fiction that resulted. So the process was not hugely dissimilar to my filmic fictions, which are often made in cooperation with one community or another, be they a group of AI scientists or Olympic athletes. In a nutshell the kinds of politics I've explored in my films have to do with embodiment, and embodied fantasies: creating images that rub against our habits of viewing, against a certain kind of virtuality. What was hugely different for me was what I perceived to be the power imbalance between ourselves – as privileged although well meaning Northern filmmakers and academics – and our subjects, who I perceived as 'trapped' in rather dire circumstances in Volta Redonda. I felt overwhelmed dealing with the enormity of the task of commenting on the bigger P politics of the factory and effects. But of course these are issues that you've been grappling with for years in your work, and as well we relied on the expertise of Flavio Sanctum, a Theatre of the Oppressed 'joker', whose mission in life and work is to make explicit hidden power dynamics. I'm curious too about your experience of the process. Given that the Theatre of the Oppressed creates rather dynamic and forceful dialectical binaries between oppressors and oppressed, how did the narratives that resulted strike you? Were they far more 'black and white' than the textured stories you encountered during your fieldwork? Was it anticipating this flattening that sparked your interest in the melodrama or telenovela genre?

MM: In my original intentions *Steel Town* was to be a reflection on the power-relations involved in the process of filmmaking as a way of telling the broader story of class inequality, racism and dependent development entangled with Volta Redonda. The film was initially structured in three parts. The current Part One is a documentation of the workshop of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (CTO) that we organized in Volta Redonda, asking people from the local working-class community to generate a script for a telenovela. The CTO was born during the anti-dictatorship movement in the 1980s with the aim of educating marginalized, exploited and illiterate citizens. Because its radical pedagogy is rooted in such historical context it works, as you say, through the basic oppositional terms of oppressed/oppressor. But I am very intrigued by the way these simple binary terms are able to capture complex interpersonal dynamics and crystallize them into social stereotypes – 'the patriarch', 'the revolutionary woman' or 'the black oppressed' – which are universally human. I guess my interest in telenovelas and other forms of popular storytelling stems from this. They show how, no matter how sophisticated we think we are, our behaviour often coalesces around very simple 'types' – we can call them stereotypes or archetypes.

DM: There's a difference between archetypes (in Jung's sense) as living, dynamic, human mental structures, and stereotypes, which tend to be pejorative, culturally inscribed, and ossified. But there may be ways that even stereotypes can carry and dramatisé energies. In the context of CTO, stereotypes are often 'outed' in order to be interrogated.

MM: Influenced by surrealism, Boal wanted ordinary people to confront their 'doubles' in public and in often cruel and painful ways, as in Artaud's theatre.

DM: In fact, our workshop participants, perhaps 'helped' by our very skilled CTO 'joker' Flavio, produced a script with many Brazilian social stereotypes: the *malandro* (young gang member) and his fashion-obsessed girlfriend, the abusive male breadwinner, a cynical student. We didn't want these to be endpoints in themselves, but a platform for debate.

MM: Yes and in Part Two the participants became actors, playing out the stereotypes they came up with. Here the shoot was full of conflicts and tensions both because we had to film in a very improvised circumstances and also, as you suggest, because the actors felt uncomfortable in playing their own characters. The acting of these social stereotypes became a pedagogical/political process of self-

awareness and collective reflection, including our own role of gringo filmmakers. In my opinion, the conversations and arguments that we had during the film shoot, including our own, are the most successful part of the project. Indeed, we rehearsed and performed again these conversations in the theatre of the CSN (a-la' *Chronicle of a Summer*) on our last day of shoot. That night we discussed the politics of filmmaking and storytelling; the social relations embedded in the production (scripted, filmed, edited) and circulation of images and whether our attempt to document the lives of people in Volta Redonda without victimizing them and by telling a fictional tale was successful or rather reproducing stereotypes of Brazil was an instance of cultural colonialism. But for technical reasons, we ended up with very few good images of that filmed and we had to drop part three. As it stands the film is truncated. But this is how the process went. One of the strengths of the ethnographic approach is the awareness of the unfinished, fragmented and open nature of human lives and stories. [Original text - http://www.vdrome.org/martin-mollona.html]

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Daria Martin (Born 1973, San Francisco, USA) Lives and works in London

Daria Martin's 16mm films aim to create a continuity or parity between disparate artistic media (such as painting and performance), between people and objects, and between internal and social worlds. Human gesture and seductive imagery meet physically mannered artifice to pry loose viewers' learned habits of perception. Mistranslation opens holes for imagination to enter or exit.

Since Martin graduated with an M.F.A. from University of California, Los Angeles in 2000 she has had numerous exhibitions internationally and her work has been collected by many museums including New Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Arts Council England; and Tate collection, London.

Massimiliano Mollona (born 1969, Rome, Italy) Lives and works in London

Massimiliano Mollona is a visual and political anthropologist and filmmaker based at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Working at the intersection of art, political economy and radial pedagogy, he has conducted extensive fieldworks in Italy, UK and Brazil, mainly in 'steel-towns' looking at patterns of industrialization, employment and political activism under late capitalism through participatory and experimental film practices.