



Backstory

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Mark Lewis

GERMANY/UNITED KINGDOM/France/
CANADA, 2009
English

39 minutes ■ 35mm and 4K
transferred to 2K

Production Company: Marklewisstudio
Producer: Michael White
Editor: Anne Monnehay
Co-Production Partners:
Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven),
the Channel 4 British Documentary
Foundation (London),
Westdeutscher Rundfunk (Germany),
Galerie Serge le Borgne (Paris),
Monte Clark Gallery (Vancouver),
Clark & Faria (Toronto),
Le Grand Café (Saint-Nazaire)

Cinema Museum

Mark Lewis

CANADA/UNITED KINGDOM, 2008
English

36 minutes ■ Super 16mm
Production Company: Marklewisstudio
Producer: Mark Lewis
Editor: Mark Lewis

For screening times, please see the Official
Film Schedule.

These two short documentaries are much more than an amplification of Mark Lewis's lauded artwork, although they directly relate to the film installations that took this year's Venice Biennale by storm. They fuse his curiosity toward historical filmmaking techniques with a carefully aestheticized approach to cinema as both a fan-based and industrialized cultural phenomenon.

Backstory introduces us to the remaining stars of rear projection, a technique prevalent in cinema until the development of the green screen, and used most famously by Alfred Hitchcock in films like *North by Northwest* and *Saboteur*. A second-unit crew films a scene's actual location, such as an Alpine slope, then projects the footage in the studio as a backdrop to the actors' performances. The result has the odd quality of being both narratively effective and obviously artificial, ideal fodder for an artist intrigued by modernism's contradictions. Lewis interviews the rugged, techie makers of these "plates" with some of the finest work from their archives as backdrops. The effect is uniquely beautiful: the faded, soundless images from a Hollywood past create a Zen-like elegy for the aging figures as they recall the key moments of their profession and unsung art form.

One cannot overstate the importance of rear projection in Lewis's art. His most famous projected works (like *Algonquin Park*, currently on display at the Art Gallery of Ontario) are, like rear projections, silent representations of controlled landscapes,

carefully framed and just referential enough to serve as playpens for our narrative imaginings. He recently began explicitly recreating the technique with 2006's *Rear Projection: Molly Parker*, a seemingly disjointed pairing of a rural background with a well-known Canadian actress; only after sustained viewing do we see Lewis's intent, his argument that rear projection is squarely within the tradition of the foregrounded subject, central to art history from the experiments of Van Eyck and Bellini onward. One of his major new works from Venice complicates the matter further, by making the images move: a swirling rear projection of Nathan Phillips Square pairs with a couple deliriously skating for their lives.

Cinema Museum may indicate another path, or perhaps just a fascinating detour, for Lewis's cinema experiments. His camera follows, in a Kubrick-like tracking shot, the eccentric owner of a private museum of cinema ephemera in south London. As the deliberate camera finds labels and objects of interest ("Gulag Guns," for example), it pauses, reflects, seemingly digests information for future use and moves on. One can feel the fertile mind of Lewis at work, mining cinema's history for nuggets to include in contemporary art's newest masterworks.

■ Noah Cowan

TIFF Cinematheque features Mark Lewis in person during its upcoming Fall season to present five examples of masterful rear-projection filmmaking along with a limited run of *Backstory* in October, 2009. Details available on September 22 at tiff.net/cinematheque

square, a Winter's Night scene, and now obsolete, best of rear projection in a relation between historical and. The divided spatial focus is also a common legacy of Lewis's non-projection film *Cold Morning*. This film records a homeless man holding a sleeping bag and clothes above an astoundingly domestic street January morning as pedestrians. Appearing to be spatially separated, underlines the tensions that rise in the urban space, including feelings of engagement and disorientation.



Mark Lewis began making films in the mid-nineties and has had numerous solo exhibitions at venues including Hamburger Kunsthalle, Musée d'Art Moderne (Lyon), PS1 (New York), Moma (Geneva) and the Vancouver Art Gallery. He is co-founder of Afterall, a research and publishing organization based at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, University of the Arts London, where he is also a research professor.

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