

Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen

Urgency and Possibility: Counter-Cinema in the 70s and 80s

Screening Programme: 29 September – 7 October 2017



Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, *Riddles of the Sphinx* (production still), 1977. Image courtesy the artists.

Cooper Gallery presents, *Urgency and Possibility: Counter-Cinema in the 70s and 80s*, a two-week screening programme of the collaborative film works by influential film theorists and filmmakers Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. The programme, selected with Laura Mulvey, includes the pair's experimental shorts, features and documentary, which instigated Counter-Cinema in the 1970s. These works will be shown in a series of evening and weekend screenings.

Informed by their ground-breaking essays – Wollen's *Godard and Counter Cinema: Vent d'Est* and Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* – Mulvey and Wollen made six films between 1974 and 1983 that dealt with the discourse of feminist theory, semiotics, psychoanalysis and leftist politics in an attempt to work against the formalist and ideological domination of Hollywood cinema.

The screening programme at Cooper Gallery features Mulvey and Wollen's first film *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* (1974), which represents an experimental British venture into territory pioneered by the likes of Jean-Luc Godard and explores concerns central to Mulvey's writings: the position of women in relation to patriarchal myth, symbolic language and male fantasy. The screening programme presents their most influential film, *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), considered a key work of avant-garde film to have emerged from Britain during the 1970s for its visual accomplishment and intellectual rigour. The screenings also include the rarely seen films; *AMY!* (1980), *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1981) and *Crystal Gazing* (1982).

To mark the opening of the programme, Laura Mulvey will give a talk on 29th of September discussing the political context and critical approach in her collaborative film works with Peter Wollen.

The programme follows on from Cooper Gallery's Two Chapter Exhibition and Event series, *Of Other Spaces: Where does gesture become event?*, in which Laura Mulvey gave a keynote talk during the International Symposium, *12hr Action Group* at Cooper Gallery in December 2016. In this she stated:

"Nowadays, when, to my mind, there is once again a 'flowering' of media activity and of political consciousness, support is no longer even conceivable in these days of impact, value for money and so on. But the very lack of resources also points to the importance of alternative energies and activities in an academic context and the significance of a gathering such as this: the 12-Hour Action Group, which brings memories of past feminist creativity into dialogue with the new movements and ideas that are emerging in response to the difficult times in which we live."

Screening programme

Friday 29 September, 7 – 8.30pm

Talk by Laura Mulvey and screening of *AMY!*, 1980 (33 mins)

Saturday 30 September, 2 – 4.30pm

Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons, 1974 (98 mins)

Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti, 1981 (30 mins)

Thursday 5 October, 6 – 8pm

Riddles of the Sphinx, 1977 (91 mins)

Saturday 7 October, 2 – 3.30pm

Crystal Gazing, 1982 (92 mins)

Biographies

Laura Mulvey is Professor of Film and Media Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London. She was Director of Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image (BIMI) from 2012 to 2015. She is the author of: *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Macmillan 1989; second edition 2009); *Fetishism and Curiosity* (British Film Institute 1996; second edition 2013); *Citizen Kane* (BFI Classics series 1992; second edition 2012); and *Death Twenty-four Times a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (Reaktion Books 2006). She has edited: *British Experimental Television* (co-edited with Jamie Sexton), (Manchester University Press 2007); *Feminisms* (co-edited with Anna Backman Rogers) (Amsterdam University Press 2015); and *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and British Experimental Film in the 1970s* (co-edited with Sue Clayton), (I.B. Taurus 2017). She made six films in collaboration with Peter Wollen, including *Riddles of the Sphinx* (British Film Institute 1977; DVD publication 2013), and two films with artist/filmmaker Mark Lewis.

Peter Wollen is a radical filmmaker, film theorist, and screenwriter, whose crucial book, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969/72/98), continues to challenge and provoke. He co-wrote the screenplay for Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975) and subsequently worked outside mainstream cinema, collaborating on six films with Laura Mulvey. His only solo feature, *Friendship's Death* (1987) stars Tilda Swinton as an extraterrestrial. He wrote a BFI Classic on *Singin' in the Rain*, and his book, *Raiding the Icebox* (1993), is an alternative history of 20th century art. His expansive interests included organizing paradigm-shifting art exhibitions, such as *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1982) and *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International* (1989).

Notes to Editors

1. For image requests please email exhibitions@dundee.ac.uk
2. Cooper Gallery is part of University of Dundee's Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design.
3. Cooper Gallery DJCAD is internationally recognised as a distinctive platform in Scotland for radical curatorial research and focus on critical discourse in contemporary art and cultures. Through an integrated programme of new commissions, exhibitions, publications, residencies and discursive events, Cooper Gallery DJCAD actively develops meaningful and effective collaborations with emerging and established artists as well as respected organisations, writers and curators on an international platform. By positively advocating the pooling of knowledge from different disciplines, the Gallery programme implements sustained and rigorous critical engagement. Through devoting their gallery spaces to original and creative methodologies, Cooper Gallery DJCAD support, produce and disseminate the best practices of national and international artists, designers, writers and creative thinkers.
4. Cooper Gallery exhibitions and events are free and open to everyone. Please email exhibitions@dundee.ac.uk or call 01382 385 330 if you have any access requirements with any of the online website or social media content.
5. For further information please visit the webpage:
<https://www.dundee.ac.uk/djcad/exhibitions/exhibitions/lauramulveyandpeterwollen/>

6. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, ***Urgency and Possibility: Counter-Cinema in the 70s and 80s***, is a screening programme organised with the support of Laura Mulvey and open only during advertised screening times.
8. All screenings take place at Cooper Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee, 13 Perth Road, Dundee, DD1 4HT.
7. Cooper Gallery would like to thank Laura Mulvey and BFI for their support in realising the project.

Ends.

Cooper Gallery



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