



Top: Anna Barriball, *Draw (fireplace)* 2005, video stills
Photo courtesy of the artist

Above: Mark Boulos, *The Gates of Damascus*, 2005–06
Photo courtesy the artist



Erik Bünger, *Gospels* 2006, video stills
Courtesy of the artist

Cover: Mark Wallinger, *Sleeper*, 2004 (video still), Tate Collection, London
Photo courtesy of the artist and Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

LIST OF WORKS

Mark Wallinger
Sleeper 2004
projected video installation
2hrs 31min
Tate Collection, London. Copyright of the artist. Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

Mark Boulos
The Gates of Damascus 2005/6
DigiBeta master
24.18 min
Courtesy the artist

Anna Barriball
Draw (fireplace) 2005
DVD projection
10.30 min
Courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

Erik Bünger
Gospels 2006
single channel projection
22.28 min
Courtesy the artist

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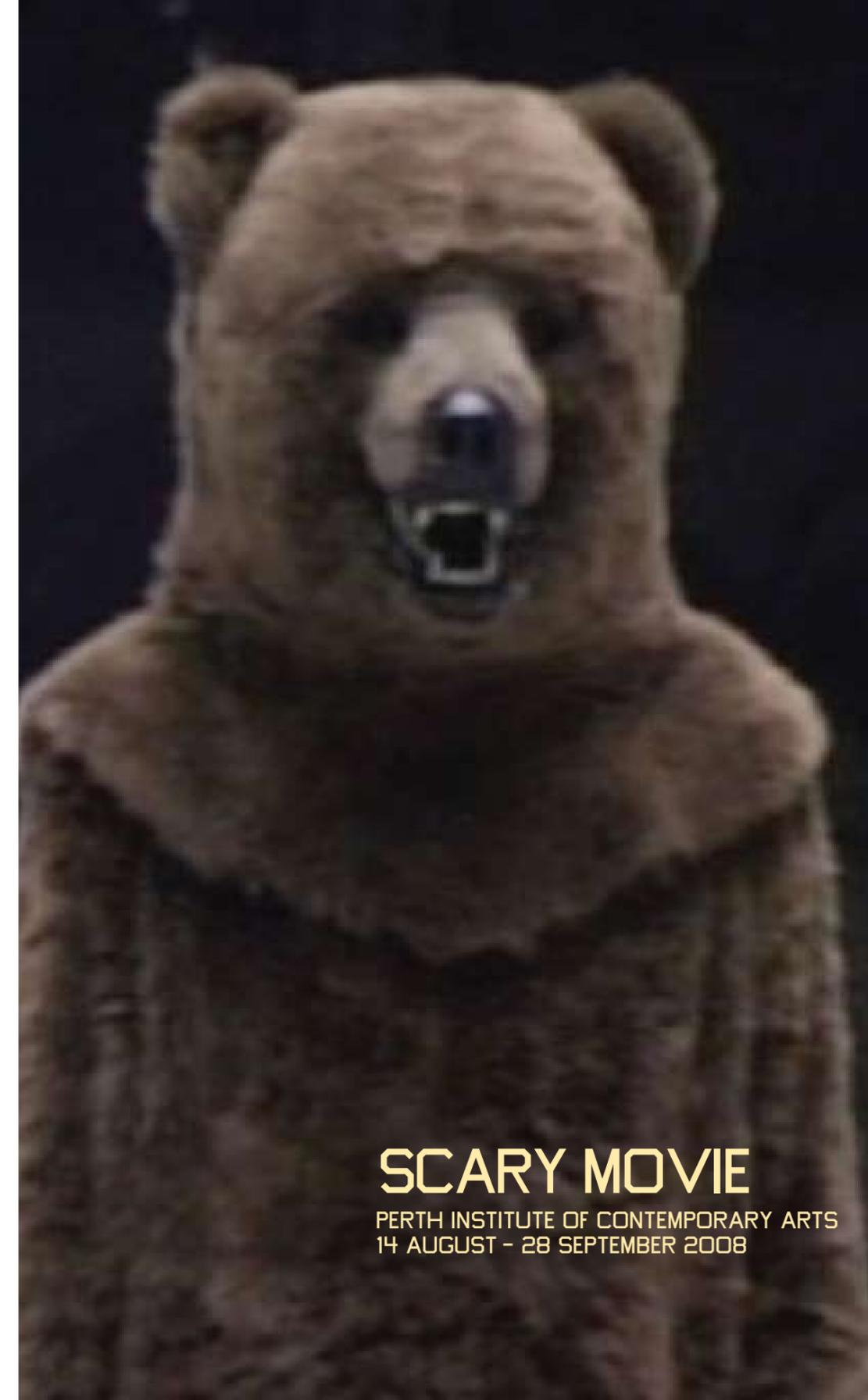
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SCARY MOVIE

PERTH INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS
14 AUGUST - 28 SEPTEMBER 2008



Mark Wallinger, *Sleeper*, 2004 (video still). Tate Collection, London
Photo courtesy of the artist and Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

SCARY MOVIE

CURATOR: RICHARD GRAYSON

ANNA BARRIBALL (UK)

MARK BOULOS (UK)

ERIK BÜNGER (GERMANY)

MARK WALLINGER (UK)

The 1902 film *Voyage to the Moon* by Georges Melies used special effects and sophisticated editing over fourteen minutes to tell the story of mankind’s first moon trip. The journey is made by the travellers being shot in a large artillery shell from a giant cannon. This shell plunges into the face of the man in the moon. The film traces the astronauts’ adventures: we see the earth rise above the horizon and bathe the moon’s surface in an eerie light. They find a cave of giant mushrooms. There is an attack on the party by moon-men who even though they explode into a thousand fragments when hit, force the voyagers to flee. They return to the shell and escape the moon and plunge through space into the depths of the ocean. They are picked up by a steamer and there is a grand parade and medals are awarded by president and king to celebrate their return.

From its very earliest days, cinema has conflated the idea of the animate – something with movement – with the idea of the ‘real’. This takes place at every level of the medium, the micro and the macro. The component fast-flicker of static images generates the impression of movement where in fact there is just sequence. We read this movement as having existence in the real and lived universe: it has animation therefore it is animate. Thus, the panicked audiences hastily vacated the cinema when the steam train filmed by the Lumiere Brothers puffed into the station (*Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat*, 1895), believing that it was about to crash right into the auditorium. Seven years later they would thrill at Melies’ representation of the rocket fired into the man in the moon’s gunky eye. Perhaps the intervening years had taught the audience to question the absolute veracity of what they were seeing, but the footage demands a reality.

The Lumiere Brothers themselves believed that cinema was an invention without a future, as the public would soon tire of seeing – and paying to see – representations of what they could watch simply by walking out into the street. The first showing of their work took place on December the 8th 1895, at the Grand Cafe, 4 Boulevard des Capucines, Paris. Melies was there. He wrote:

The other guests and I found ourselves in front of a small screen, similar to those we use for projections, and after a few minutes, a stationary photograph showing the Place Bellcour in Lyons was projected. A little surprised, I scarcely had time to say to my neighbour, “Have we been brought here to see projections? I’ve been doing these for ten years.” No sooner had I stopped speaking when a horse pulling a cart started to walk towards us followed by other vehicles, then a passerby. In short, all the hustle and bustle of a street. We sat with our mouths open, without speaking, filled with amazement.

It was this amazement that Melies built on, to reveal that instead of being a shadow of the every-day this new medium of cinema in fact allowed exchanges between the quotidian world and the realms of the unreal and the uncanny.

Arthur Clarke famously proposed in his ‘Three Laws of Prediction’ in 1973 that any sufficiently advanced technology was indistinguishable from magic and it’s as if Melies took this as a mission statement. As a young man, his first desire had been to attend the Ecole des Beaux Arts to train as a painter; this was resisted by his family who intended instead that he should enter his father’s boot-making business. He was allowed private lessons instead (it is claimed by his grand-daughter) from the French Symbolist Gustav Moreau, whose strange fantastic opiated visions mapped what André Breton later described as the ‘sommnambulistic world’. His father made the young man a supervisor in the factory that he owned. Melies spent his spare time developing an interest in magic tricks and when his father retired he sold his share to his brothers and purchased the deeds of the Robert Houdin Theatre in Paris in 1885, a legendary venue that specialised in illusions and magic. Here George Melies developed complex theatrical events that used sets, substitution and projection to baffle and disorientate the audience.

After seeing the Lumiere’s pictures Melies wasted little time investing in this new technology. In 1896 he started making his own films and he developed languages that we now recognise as science fiction, horror and the cinema of the uncanny: scary movies, where he worked with substitution, so that a beautiful woman could transform into a skeleton in the blink of an eye and his technique of what he called ‘spirit photography’ – multiple exposures and scrim, so that it seemed to the audience that they were watching the actions of apparitions and spectres.

He was building on something inherent in the moving image itself. Fairy tales and legend are full of instances where enchantment allows the viewer to watch events unfolding at a distance. This new medium easily permitted this supernatural act and exceeded it: as time went by its potential expanded shockingly to allow one to see across not only space but back through time to watch what had taken place last week, last year – ultimately to see far enough back, to watch those who are now in the grave move through the world, to see their expressions and follow their expansive gestures. Outside the private visions of seers, madmen and Shamen nobody had ever been able to do this before in the entire history of the human race. It is a power that haunts the medium to this day and which has made it the dominant place where we stage our stories of hauntings and the miraculous. *La Poste* on December 30th 1895, reporting on the same screening of Lumiere Brother films in France that Melies attended wrote:

...photography no longer records stillness. It perpetuates the image of movement. The beauty of the invention resides in the novelty and ingenuity of the apparatus. When these gadgets are in the hands of the public, when anyone can photograph the ones who are dear to them, not just in their motionless form, but with movement, action, familiar gestures and the words out of their mouths, then death will no longer be absolute, final.

Scary Movie presents the work of four artists using the moving image. Their use of video technology references some of the dominant forms that film and video have adapted. Anna Barriball’s *Draw* touches on ideas of the moving image as ‘proof’ - an uninflected document of effect. Mark Boulos’s *The Gates of Damascus* is a complex and professional narrative documentary. Erik Bünger’s *Gospels* uses talking heads from mainstream pop culture programs and Mark Wallinger’s *Sleeper* conflates security video footage with reality programmes such as the world’s funniest animals.

Draw presents us with the image of a Victorian fireplace that has been covered and draped. As an unseen door opens and closes – or perhaps some other, more obscure action – this membrane is pulled back and forth over the breathing mouth of the grate. The architecture becomes alive and hints at some strange miscegenation between discrete states of animate and inanimate. The projection itself offers the possibility of travelling across time, returning a fireplace as spectre to the place it may have occupied. Barriball’s work here speaks of the poetry and dread that underlies our perception of the phenomena of the world.

The Gates of Damascus by Mark Boulos documents the stigmata of the passion of Christ manifesting on a human body. Each Easter these wounds appear on the skin of Myrna Nazzour, a Syrian housewife. Pilgrims and visitors come to witness and experience this miracle and to hear Nazzour describe her divine visions. The work has qualities of a documentary, a horror movie, a grand religious painting of the high-Western tradition as well as

bearing witness to an achingly physical manifestation of the supernatural, the reading of which remains entirely mutable depending on the viewers’ belief system.

Erik Bünger’s work addresses our relationships to other, higher, powers and how these may (or may not) manifest themselves on Earth. *Gospels* wittily conflates the role of the musician with the role of God / God’s messenger. This not only has a mythic and historical or anthropological resonance – ideas of Apollo or music and trance states – but stylistic and sociological ones, where the figure of the sixties or seventies rock musician knowingly echoes the representation of a bearded barefooted long-haired (and usually Caucasian) Jesus. *Gospels* extrapolates from this to deliver a series of texts that become impossible to place and float between two worlds: the mythic and the mundane.

Sleeper first took place as a real time video-stream between the German Embassy in London and the iconic Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin. Mark Wallinger, dressed in a bear costume, moved through the deserted night-time galleries, tracked by cameras and this was seen on screen by the audience in London. The bear is the heraldic animal of Berlin and seems to speak of a time when the town was emerging from the dark encompassing Germanic Forest – as if a bear from a tale by the brothers Grimm had returned to be caught on CCTV. The fact that the artifice of the bear – a man in a raggedy and musty suit – is so overt, intensifies the feeling that we are witnessing a flicker between states – the real, the unreal – and it becomes, more poignant and more effecting. We are witness to the grainy electronic footage simultaneously creating the artifice and reinforcing the ‘actuality’ of a strange and magical apparition.

Richard Grayson



Erik Bünger, *Gospels* 2006, video stills
Courtesy of the artist