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# Pandaemonium 1998

By Nelly Voorhuis

pandaemonium 1998 The second Pandaemonium Festival didn't lie beneath a lucky star this year. As so often in the art world, it's much easier to find money to build a venue than to secure and maintain the programme budget. But none of this seems to have diminished the LEA staff's enthusiasm for working on their festival. Pandaemonium came after a long festival summer which started with EMAF, Impakt, Viper and World Wide Video Festival and you could tell that all these festivals must have rummaged through the same basket for new films and videos. Although on a superficial level the art world seems to be more interested in artists' films and videos, for festivals such as these the struggle continues to be getting the attention of precisely that 'art' public. Yet, except for some student groups from several London art academies, Pandaemonium's visitors were mainly the old 'avant-garde' film crowd.

What was offered to this public? As with the other media festivals, the quality of the selection left something to be desired. Due to lack of funding and the concurrent movement of artists toward installations, mixed media and net projects, there were fewer short films and videos than in previous years. Even the contributions by all those visual artists now working in the film and video field were not very convincing, as witnessed by the Pandaemonium commission: Sundown by Tracey Emin. Her video projection on the front of the Lux building about her fascination for horse riding was filmed like a commercial and lost, perhaps intentionally, its more intimate and personal undertones.

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With recent productions, the curators of the festival went the classical route: the majority of the works came from North America, Europe and Japan. Strangely enough there was almost nothing from regions like Eastern Europe, the Nordic countries and elsewhere. Not that the international selection was limited. The amount of works selected was so immense that it had to be shown in around 24 separate programmes and inevitably interesting films were screened alongside less impressive ones. Although the overall impression of the new productions in single screen film and video wasn't very exciting, as was the case in all the other European festivals, a few interesting and even excellent films were impossible to miss. Martin Arnold showed a new film in his series of found footage film. In Alone..Life Wastes Andy Hardy he recreates fifties B pictures as an investigation into the hidden messages of sex, violence and dependency in families. As Arnold's is a continuous project, we recognise the by now familiar strategy, but the result is nonetheless an amusing spectacle of rhythmic editing and the wicked play of layered meanings.

Reworking a past was also the subject of the film Shulie by Elisabeth Subrin. This is a historical reconstruction - quite literally - of a student's film made in Chicago in 1967 about the feminist writer Shulamith Firestone. Firestone later became famous for her essay "The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution". Through Shulamith's biography, Subrin investigates the historical time and myths of the late 1960s while at the same connecting these issues to her own contemporary preoccupations. The video is an ingenious mixture of today's interest in re-staging history and the autobiographic agenda of the filmmaker. Eija-Liisa Ahtila's film Today explores the relationship between a father and a daughter. The story Ahtila tells could fill a feature length film, but she eloquently manages to accomplish this in 10 minutes through her selection of scenes and dialogues. The British video maker John Smith was represented by his video Blight, a simultaneously poetic and political film about a building near the M11 in London. The video performs a perfect balancing act between diaristic images and a formal play of elements from animation and the documentary film genre.

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The international selection was combined with a few guest programmes by international curators. Lori Zippay from Electronic Arts Intermix showed 70s performance films by visual artists. Disappointingly, the 16mm and Super 8mm films were shown on video in the Lux Cinema, a venue easily capable of showing them in their original formats. The films from the 60s and 70s lose a good deal of their texture through this transference. Also, not all the selected films, like for example Hannah Wilke's, survived being screened outside their own historical period. In contrast Song Delay turned out to be a strong and playful work by Joan Jonas, whose recent videos are too often overloaded by symbolic meanings.

Gavin Smith and Mark McElhatten curated a programme of contemporary American avant-garde film. The strong films by Leighton Pierce and Peggy Ahwesh were undermined by Scott Stark's naive interpretation of pornography and a recent work by Greta Snider which, despite being technically well executed, failed to impart a strong enough sense of its intentions. Glass: Memories of Water #25 by Pierce was an extremely well edited and balanced film about a simple thing: the beauty of water. A real pleasure to watch. Stuck in the programme between Stark and Ken Jacobs, was the film Nocturne by Peggy Ahwesh. A sombre film which references Mario Bava, Kathy Acker and Marquis de Sade, mingles facts with hallucination and alternates between an atmosphere of humour and horror, violence and tenderness. In conclusion, the selection of the films and videos lacked a strong curatorial stance as to the prevalent tendencies in contemporary artists' film and video. Although this would have made the festival stronger, it must be conceded that the organisers were open to the other places where works are being shown.

Pandaemonium was not just limited to screenings and presentations of video installations; a lot of attention was also given to the Sound Meets Vision programme which combined musicians, VJs and artists. Memorably, the alchemist filmmaker Jürgen Reble presented his collaboration with the musician Thomas Küner. But, the event that most radiated a festival energy was the programme Riveting. Here, films were projected onto the back of the Bankside Power Station, soon to be the location for the second Tate Gallery. Some films like Richard Serra's Railroad Turnbridge or those by Gordon Matta-Clark admittedly turned out to be too studious for screening such an event. But the short films by John Wood and Paul Harrison worked well in a crowd that was the right mix of Pandaemonium guests, modern art lovers, passers by and London's alternative scene.

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