

The Residency by Fact not Fiction Films

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Last Wednesday evening I was fortunate to be invited to attend (on behalf of Our Arts Magazine) the VIP private screening of a feature length documentary film “The Residency” by ‘Fact not Fiction Films’ Executive Producers: Hermann Meyer, Adrian G. Pop, and Abstract artist, Chris Rangel; Production Manager and Assistant Producer, Beth Moran and directed by the award-winning Monika Grassl, at London’s Baker St. Everyman Theatre.

The short film, completed in February 2018 was commissioned by Da Vinci, the famous artist’s brush manufacturer based in Nuremberg, Germany. It followed the progress of 5 talented emerging artists throughout their 10-day Residency in Nuremberg, hosted by Da Vinci, between 1 and 11 September 2016.

The artists, carefully selected for their ability and potential from the UK's leading Art institutions: University of East London, Kingston University, Royal Academy of Art, Royal College of Art and Glasgow School of Art, for this unique opportunity, were: Dr Suzi Morris, Melody Park, Jonathan Kelly, David Schroeter and Sam Stopford.

Immediately upon my arrival at the welcoming reception, a glass of Prosecco was offered and the CEO of 'Fact not Fiction Films' himself, Captain Tristan Loraine BCAl, greeted me and proceeded to introduce me to the gathering crowd made up of a small select group of artists, art supply retailers, gallery owners, another art magazine representative (for 'The Artist'), the film crew and our hosts, the Da Vinci CEO, Mr Herman Meyer (and son)

The atmosphere was lively and friendly and the air was filled with anticipation as we were ushered into the theatre and invited to take our seats.

After a short welcoming introduction by both Capt. Loraine and Herr Meyer (and an insight into the complicated process of how funding the film, followed by its distribution by sales agents, is a major hurdle every film company has to face and overcome) we settled down to watch the film.

Gently paced, beautifully and sensitively filmed and edited throughout, while accompanied by contemporary but non-intrusive music, the opening frames provided the setting; the beautiful narrow streets and red roofed buildings of the picturesque medieval southern Bavarian city of Nuremberg, home to the age old traditional production of the worlds finest artists material manufacturers; Da Vinci , Faber-Castell, Schmincke et al, to name but a few. A memorable landmark that was a delight to see, was the family home of the great 15th century painter, printmaker and theorist, Albrecht Durer.

The film proceeded to introduce the 5 artists individually and provided a profound insight into their backgrounds, their very individual methods of working and the personal reasons that lay behind their motivation to create.

Very different approaches were adopted by each of them on their journey into this unique 10 day residency but each began the process feeling inspired and, full of enthusiasm, eagerly began preparing a series of canvasses and sketching their ideas, explaining them as they went along.

Dr Suzi Morris (an artist currently represented by the NoonPowell Gallery and a co-organiser of the residency) who suffers from a debilitating eye condition, keratitis, is understandably terrified of losing her sight but bravely battles on regardless, firm in the belief that 'It's the artist's job to reflect the human condition through art'. She approaches all her work with a deep sensitivity, is lead purely by raw emotion and empathy with her surroundings, and aims to portray her feelings through her use of colour and texture rather than through any figurative imagery.

Melody Park, a naturally blonde-haired Korean, reveals how having different coloured hair affected her adversely while growing up but it left her with a fascination for colour and its effect on the human psyche. She similarly uses paint for its textural and tactile qualities; 'feeling' and 'moulding' it with her fingers on to the canvas directly. She too works entirely intuitively and also has a preference for Abstract pieces.

Multi-talented Sam Stopford specialises in complicated, layered visual collages, painstakingly cutting vinyl stencils from images he's taken himself by utilising another passion; photo journalism. He confessed he often feels torn between his love for several artistic disciplines at which he excels, including performing, as well as making art.

David Schroeter admitted he can happily make up to 100 trial runs before settling on a piece. His work, mostly playful and sardonic, often includes humorous 'jokes', which he expresses through his use of shapes and choice of colour in his work.

Jonathan Kelly feels a need to research a subject fully before applying any mark, describing his mind as a 'sprawling web of ideas', in his work he is constantly seeking structure; trying to 'make order out of the chaos of the world'. He admits he's a 'sucker for geometry, symmetry and rule' and that he's 'extremely self-critical' and indecisive.

As the days progressed it became apparent to each artist that the directions they'd initially taken were not proving as successful as they'd hoped and, more than half way through, faced with the fact that their time was rapidly running out, they had some quick decisions to make if they were to successfully complete the objective of producing and curating a series of original artworks, in time for an exclusive public display of their work, an exhibition entitled 'Landscapes of the Mind', at the Atelier-und Galeriehaus Defet, Nuremberg.

Dr Suzi Morris suddenly found inspiration on day 6 that had thus far eluded her; in a series of moving shadows along the white interior studio wall, of the trees outside, bouncing and swaying in the wind. She incorporated the rectangular shapes into her painting, successfully transforming it into a beautiful work filled with light, movement and emotion.

Melody Park, in creating a colourful abstract piece, arrived at the conclusion that art is 'not for understanding at all' but merely to be enjoyed visually for what it is

Sam Stopford came to the decision that ultimately Art can in fact successfully incorporate all his passions.

David Schroeter, probably the most confident of the artists, believes his bold, often humorous work is a reflection of every generation's natural reaction to the era that immediately precedes them.

Jonathan Kelly happily continued to research, experiment and explore and dissatisfied that his very structured painting looked too controlled and restricted, he loosened it with random daubs of purple paint and was at once happier with the chaos that ensued,

With all the paintings completed, the artists worked together to mount a successful exhibition.

The film concludes, one year on, at a reunion at the Herrick gallery where the artists discuss how/if the opportunity given to them through the Residency had influenced their work.

Jonathan Kelly has become more confident and his work more colourful, believing as he does that 'Every painting, is just a series of mistakes'.....

Melody Park has become inspired by the Scottish weather. Sam Stopford works prolifically, preparing 11 canvases at a time and Jonathan Kelly continues to pursue his many interests, with equal success.

Dr Suzi Morris continues to produce her wonderful, intuitive paintings despite her deteriorating eye condition. She also had the honour of being presented with a new Da Vinci brush that carries her signature and was produced specifically in her honour.

All in all, it was a most insightful film into the lives of 5 very different artists. It re-enforced the value of taking up a residency and left us in admiration of those companies willing to sponsor not only the artists but the film makers and all who contributed to the success of this first venture by Da Vinci brushes, as well. Hopefully there will be more opportunities for emerging talent and many other companies prepared to follow Da Vinci's example."

The film is being distributed globally by Boulder Creek International