



ART IN THE MAKING

Wot! No Art

Introduced by BFI National Archive Curator Steve Foxon

Christopher Mason's documentary presents a retrospective of the arts in the immediate post-war years (1945-51), when patronage for 'public art' was intended to promote a cultural renaissance to complement that in education, health and housing. A dream of universal access to Britain's cultural heritage is shared, with excellent use of archive newsreels, though can the dream be made reality or is art simply a luxury most can't afford?

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Chronologically, *Wot! No Art* continues the wayward story of the muffled impact of modern art and design on English life begun in Christopher Mason's *England Home and Beauty* (centred on the 1930s). The time span is now 1945 to 1951 – the period when the Labour government undertook to improve the people's lot in education, health and housing. Nor was art neglected: the Arts Council was formed, new towns and schools in Hertfordshire liberally sprinkled modern sculptures and murals about the walls and shopping streets, and a cultural renaissance seemed to be in the air. In tone and style, however, there is little continuity between Mason's two surveys. *England Home and Beauty* was a slyly arranged cinematic exhibition of Thirties design (art deco houses, china sets, wall paper, the coloured glass patterns in suburban front doors); some of the examples were imbued with the spirit of modernism, others with ghastly good taste. *Wot! No Art* probes deeper into the reasons for such muddled attitudes, into the strained relationship between the modern artist, the public and the reflection of both in the media (here, specifically newsreels).

The result is a sturdy, provoking, highly entertaining polemical tract, which rounds off proceedings with the obvious point that the gap between artist and public will only close when art is understood as a basic need and not as an elitist luxury. As with any polemic, some distortions and omissions are necessary to make the argument cohere: throughout, the implication is that the public is far more in need of education than the artist. So the actual examples of art produced in the late Forties (mostly paintings) take second place in Mason's scheme to archive samplings on the general social and aesthetic state of the nation. As *Before Hindsight* proved, cinema newsreels are a rich repository of Establishment attitudes, with their half-whimsical, half-snide commentaries capable of describing a lorry carrying prefabricated building materials as a 'lorryload of love nests' or the ICA's retrospective exhibition of modern art as 'the first of its kind – if you like that kind'.

Mason also includes brief interviews with the public of today – the people who are still living in their temporary love nests 30 years after they were erected, the children living in unimaginatively designed housing blocks, the Harlow residents for whom abstract sculpture simply marks a local meeting place. Along with his previous wry detachment, some of Mason's control and elliptical wit has disappeared: the camera's meandering over the façade of Sadler's Wells Theatre (during a sequence on the triumphant production of

Peter Grimes in 1945) seems desperately random, and footage recalling Hiroshima and the Korean War is glibly used. Nevertheless, *Wot! No Art* proves yet again what a wealth of provocative material there lies waiting to be explored in British life and art.

Geoff Brown, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1978

WOT! NO ART

Director: Christopher Mason

Production Company: Mason Bruce Film Associates

Sponsor: Arts Council of Great Britain

Producer: Christopher Mason

Script: Christopher Mason

Photography: Clive Tickner

Rostrum Photography: Danny Boon, Hugh Gordon

Editor: Polly Bindloss

Sound Recording: Michael Pharey, Denis Skelton

Sound Re-recording: Tony Anscombe

UK 1978

55 mins

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Experimenta Mixtape: S02 E01 Curated by Onyeka Igwe

Wed 8 Jun 18:00

Behind the Scenes at the BFI: Meet the CEO

Thu 9 Jun 18:20

**Silent Cinema: Miss Lulu Bett + intro by
BFI National Archive Curator Bryony Dixon**

Sun 12 Jun 16:00

BFI Flare: Looking for Langston + discussion

Fri 17 Jun 18:20

Member Picks: Ball of Fire

Sat 18 Jun 15:10

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Moon, 66 Questions

(Selini, 66 erotiseis) + Q&A with writer-director Jacqueline Lentzou

Wed 22 Jun 18:00

**Terror Vision: Terror + intro with screenwriter David McGillivray and
actor Tricia Walsh**

Fri 24 Jun 18:00

Relaxed Screening: In Pursuit of Silence + intro and discussion

Mon 27 Jun 18:20

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Merchant of Four Seasons (Händler der vier Jahreszeiten)

Wed 1 Jun 18:10 (+ intro); Sat 11 Jun 20:30

Ivan's Childhood (Ivanovo Detsvo)

Thu 2 Jun 14:30; Mon 20 Jun 20:50

The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty

(Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter)

Fri 3 Jun 20:50; Mon 13 Jun 18:10; Fri 24 Jun 20:45

Taxi Driver

Sat 4 Jun 20:45; Wed 15 Jun 20:40;

Sun 26 Jun 18:20

The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena)

Sun 5 Jun 13:10; Tue 14 Jun 20:45;

Wed 29 Jun 20:40

Escape from Alcatraz

Mon 6 Jun 20:45; Sat 25 Jun 17:50

Thief

Tue 7 Jun 20:30; Thu 16 Jun 18:00; Sat 18 Jun 20:30; Thu 30 Jun 20:30

71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance

(71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls)

Wed 8 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large);

Mon 27 Jun 21:00

Rosetta

Fri 10 Jun 20:50; Wed 22 Jun 18:15 (+ intro)

Stranger by the Lake (L'Inconnu du lac)

Sun 12 Jun 18:10; Wed 15 Jun 18:10;

Tue 28 Jun 20:40

Down by Law

Fri 17 Jun 20:45; Tue 21 Jun 20:45

Certain Women

Sun 19 Jun 13:10; Thu 23 Jun 20:50; Wed 29 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by
BFI Director of Public Programme and Audiences, Jason Wood)

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