



## NEW RELEASES

# Tish

### Tish

Director: Paul Sng

©: Demon Snapper Productions Ltd

Production Company: Freya Films

In association with: Hopscotch Films,  
Velvet Joy Productions

Supported by:

the National Lottery through Screen Scotland

Made with the support of:

the BFI Doc Society Fund

In association with: BBC Arts, BBC England

Executive Producers: John Archer, Ella Murtha,

Shanida Scotland, Hannah Bush Bailey,

Mark Thomas, Dani Carlaw, Aisling O'Connor,

Emma Cahusac

Producer: Jen Corcoran

Co-producer: Paul Sng

Associate Producers: Ariel Baska,

Harley Hessel, Elton Murphy

Archive Producer: Kalbir Dhillon

Director of Photography: Hollie Galloway

Editors: Lindsay Watson, Angela Slaven

Production Designers: Siam Colvine, Richard Drew

Costume Designer: Siam Colvine

Composer: Alexandra Hamilton-Ayres

In loving memory of: Chris Killip,

Glenn Murtha, Mik Critchlow

With:

Maxine Peake (voice of Tish)

Shin-Fei Chen (Tish)

Contributors:

Ella Murtha

Gordon MacDonald

Eileen Murtha-Brown

Glenn Murtha

Jos Mahon

Bob Mahon

Dennis Birkwood

Ethel Cass

Chris Killip

Mark Murtha

David Hurn

David Swidenbank

Daisy Hayes

Carl Murtha

Mik Critchlow

Philip Herbert

UK 2023©

90 mins

Digital

A Modern Films release

### BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits

including priority booking at BFI Southbank

and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://bfi.org.uk/join)

### SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**,

the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine.

Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](https://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)

**SIGHT  
AND  
SOUND**

Paul Sng, the BIFA-winning director of *Poly Styrene: I Am a Cliché* and *Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle*, crafts an intimate portrait of Tish Murtha, a working-class photographer from the North East, whose work demands to be rediscovered and rightly recognised. Tish Murtha used documentary photography to capture and embrace her surroundings, and the people who occupied them. It ranged from the Newcastle working class community she grew up in to Soho sex workers in 1980s London. Despite receiving early acclaim for her work, she struggled to make a living from her talent. In Paul Sng's documentary, Tish's daughter Ella opens up her mother's archive and traces her life through previously unseen images, artefacts, letters and diaries, along with conversations with those who knew her. Narration from Maxine Peake brings Tish's own words to life, while Tish's photographs look magnificent on the big screen. The film is a fitting tribute an artist whose photography feels more vital than ever – a rallying cry against austerity Britain.

Kimberley Sheehan, Film and Events Programmer

Paul Sng's portrait of the late Tyneside documentary photographer Tish Murtha – who earned brief acclaim for her insider depictions of deindustrial edge-of-town deprivation in the early 1980s – mourns three layers of loss. There is Murtha herself, who died of a brain aneurysm a day short of 57 in 2013, having succumbed to the same poverty and hopelessness she had made her subject. There are all the photos she never took – the spurned promise of a talent that never quite soared. And there is the waste of the countless other scrap lives depicted in and denoted by her photos of northern Britain's sacrificial working class, the family and neighbours around her Elswick community for whom she felt both easy empathy and fired passion.

Like Sng's previous resurrection of a fleeting art radical, *Poly Styrene: I Am a Cliché* (2021), *Tish* reclaims its heroine's story through the eyes of her grown daughter; indeed, Ella Murtha's broader project of curating her mother's legacy provides the film's form, with Ella gathering memories from a series of Tish's old family, friends, tutors and peers, often at an outdoor table or with a pint. This ad hoc listening tour initially feels a little lumpen, but Tish's younger sister Eileen, and three of her brothers – frequent subjects of her photos, now etched with a lifetime's toil – bring character and intimacy.

Murtha herself remains an elusive presence, freeze-framed in the past – there's no movie footage of her. But insert enactments of domestic downtime with a model against beige backdrops, face unseen, evoke a sense of inner life and the trappings of the time. And Murtha's diaries, read by Maxine Peake, capture her lucid, determined voice almost as powerfully as her photos.

'I want to photograph a policeman kicking kids,' she told her prospective university tutor David Horn – the shortest winning interview pitch ever, he chuckles. She conceptualised her work with similar incision. Murtha's conviction 'that the fundamental value of the medium is its capacity to provide direct, accurate and vital records of the conditions, events and experience that shape our lives' is an indelible credo. When, midway through, the film quotes Murtha at length castigating the 'spectre of enforced idleness' and 'squandering of a whole generation of human potential', 'vandalism on a grand scale' from which 'barbaric and reactionary forces in our society will not be

## NEW RELEASES

### The Eternal Daughter

Continued from Fri 24 Nov

### Anatomy of a Fall (Anatomie d'une chute)

Continued from Fri 24 Nov

### Fallen Leaves (Kuolleet lehdet)

From Fri 1 Dec

### Queendom

From Fri 1 Dec

### Tish

From Fri 15 Dec (Preview on Fri 1 Dec 18:00 + Q&A with director Paul Sng)

### Priscilla (preview screenings)

Previews from Wed 27 Dec. Opens Fri 5 Jan

### The Boy and the Heron (Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka)

From Wed 27 Dec

## RE-RELEASES

### The Red Shoes

From Fri 8 Dec

## BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](https://player.bfi.org.uk)

## BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

slow to make political capital', her perception clearly stretches beyond the early-1980s moment.

Years later, Murtha was similarly eloquent in a funding pitch for a project on Middlesbrough's maligned multicultural community, which she hoped would 'validate lives [and] empower them to challenge decision-making processes that all too often reject their views', as well as regenerate interest in her own career. Her application, the film tersely notes, was rejected by the Arts Council of England.

Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, December 2023

## Documenting Your Community

Photography project, 'Documenting Your Community,' invites you to be inspired by Tish Murtha and take your own photos of your community, capturing life in contemporary Britain. You don't need to be a professional photographer – we'd love to see photos that capture your local shopkeeper or people in the park or pub.

The British Culture Archive, in association with Modern Films and supported by the BFI, will showcase a range of work on its website that shows the breadth of modern life today. If you'd like to be part of this photography project, then all you have to do is post your photo on Instagram and tag it [#tishmurthafilm](https://www.instagram.com/tishmurthafilm) with a line or story about what your photo is about. You can also submit your photo via [contact@britishculturearchive.co.uk](mailto:contact@britishculturearchive.co.uk)

The photo copyright remains with you, and by tagging the photo, you will be permitting us to post the photo online on The British Culture Archive website. The photo must be original and taken by you, or you have sought permission to use it. The photo must also be appropriate and not contain any offensive content. We will not sell or distribute the content. At the end of the project, we may produce a printed programme of a selection of photos submitted and will contact you for permission to use.

If you have any questions, contact us at [info@modernfilms.com](mailto:info@modernfilms.com)

Modern Films

This film's release is supported in part by the British Film Institute's National Lottery-funded Audience Award. As part of this, we ask that you take a few minutes to fill out this survey and help us understand the film's audience better, as well as improve future screenings.

