

**Moonshine**

UK 1975
5 mins

Sundial

UK 1992
1 min

A13

UK 1994
12 mins

Island Race

UK 1996
27 mins

Total running time: 110 mins

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Experimenta

Under the Tower Trilogy by William Raban

+ William Raban in conversation

Foreword to William Raban's *Nautical Twilight. Fifty Years an Artist Filmmaker*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).

By William Fowler. (Extract)

Beware: once you open it and get stuck in, this book reveals secrets. Readers who enter William Raban's world, here fashioned as an alternative form of biography in which a creative life is prised open through the sequential development and production of film after film, idea after idea, will discover new ways to think about film, art and cinema. It reads not as a press release or as a list of triumphs but as an honest grappling with processes that in many cases have not been tried before.

It is a gift indeed to follow the path of an artist as they unpick and consider, not just broad swathes of creativity and personal tendencies, but a series of individual works that, in William's case, he has made over what now runs to over half a century – practically half the duration of the entire cinematic art form. It shows new ways to conceive of and approach this odd beast which stills preoccupies and informs and puts a frame on the world: film.

A particularly refreshing aspect to William's output and the larger world to which it belongs has been, and remains, his desire to rethink and challenge not just commodity cinema, a conception of filmmaking all too often uncritically accepted as 'normal', but also commodity fine art. The London Filmmaker's Co-operative of which he was a prominent member chose to fully embrace the inherently reproducible nature of film celluloid, and thus reject the commodity, editioned artwork, predicated on value through scarcity.

Within this milieu, William made a series of experimental landscape films which for many have come to define his output, even making him something of a master of the form. The London Filmmakers' Co-op (hereafter referred to as LFMC) practised wholly different ways of making films to the larger so-called 'industry' of the time. It collapsed almost all aspects of filmmaking culture into one single locale: production facilities, editing, film printing, a cinema, and a distribution library. The organisation was at once important and self-contained, comprising something of a distinct film culture. Individual filmmakers shared concerns, even inspiring each other, whilst remaining relatively distinct in their expressions and articulation of thought through film. William carved out his own personal trajectory whilst belonging to the larger, exciting firmament. He wasn't the only one to focus on landscape but was arguably one of the very first and his development of considerable technical expertise and modes of genuine exploration gives his work a focus and identity.

It was through the lens of the LFMC, and its predominant interests in the perpetual experience and structures of film, that I personally came to first experience William's work. In fact *Broadwalk* (1972) was one of the very first LFMC films I ever saw, and for partly this very reason it has always lodged in my mind. (The LFMC had already ceased functioning by 2002, but a special project conceived by Mark Webber presented a significant number of LFMC

Regular Programme

Filmmaking for Artists:

French New Wave Workshop

Sun 11 May 10:30-16:30 (1 session)

Restored: Nightshift + intro by Jon Jost, filmmaker, cinematographer and friend of Robina Rose

Tue 13 May 18:20

Silent Cinema: 100 Years of Film as Art:

Celebrating the Centenary of The Film Society +

intro by BFI National Archive curator Bryony Dixon

Sun 18 May 15:20

Relaxed Screening: Pariah + discussion

Mon 19 May 18:35

Projecting the Archive: Sleeping Car + intro by

Michael Williams, author of *Ivor Novello: Screen Idol*

Tue 20 May 18:15

Seniors: Touchez pas au grisbi Hands Off the Loot + intro by Professor Ginette Vincendeau, Emeritus Professor in Film Studies, King's College London

Fri 23 May 15:00

Experimenta: Nicky Hamlyn: Cycles of Time

+ Nicky Hamlyn in conversation with BFI National Archive curator William Fowler

Thu 29 May 18:10

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affiliated films from the first ten years of the organisation in a project entitled *Shoot Shoot Shoot* which I worked on whilst volunteering part-time at LUX, the descendant organisation of sorts of the LFMC and which manages the latter's distribution library.) *Broadwalk* appeared simultaneously modest yet shockingly strange and unfamiliar, as it may still now to anyone encountering William's work for the first time today. Figures stutter – like time travellers struggling to materialise in a space neither fully urban, or fully rural. Routines, people walking through the space – a leafy London park, complete with waste bin and benches – appear at once visible, yet disrupted. Everything about it seemed provisional, interstitial, yet at once confident and of a piece. How was it made? From where did it come? Perhaps now, finally, more fully formed, substantial answers can emerge. Read that section to begin to understand.

It is in the realm of puzzling, extraordinary technical ideas that, in breaking the conventional possibilities of moving image production and experience, William's personal vision and approach in part emerges. He is nothing if not curious, even a vanguard foot-soldier (to use a Werner Herzog-ism) in the arenas of art and cinema. Looking back, it's as if he's been continuing and further mining the expansive possibilities first laid out at the very start of cinema, where modes remained undetermined and technical prowess combined with production and the unique generation of ideas. Those possibilities, and that relationship to creativity, remain far from spent. It's all too easy to overlook that line in William's curriculum vitae that states 'manager of the LFMC workshop from 1972 to 1976'. Whilst The LFMC practised, in theory, a flat structure and worked on non-hierarchical lines, was he in fact one of the most technically adept working at the LFMC in its early heyday, even subsequently?

Of course, William Raban's practice has evolved over time. There's been no sticking to early birth narratives. To return to this notion of 'landscape', I greatly appreciate how, just as his technical procedures have changed to embrace 35mm then digital, even editorial collaboration, his lens on the world has similarly shifted to examine social and political space, and deeper, more clearly stratified layers of time in variously *Thames Film* (1986), *Sundial* (1992) and more. And whilst the conceptual approaches have evolved, the use of a conceptual, serial, structuring component through which to prism light through his ideas and concerns, creating at once continuity and fracture within his own personal artistic history.

And yet 'landscape' feels too limited, as frames go, to sum up and summarise William Raban's work. Unless, that is, we change that term and position the expanded, multi-projector/performative, post-psychedelic light show works as about landscape too – i.e. concerned with the landscapes in which they are presented? Space is reconfigured, mapped (temporally as well as physically), and disrupted across arguably some of the boldest, singularly most untethered works in Raban's entire output. Yet, significantly, they remain, by their very nature, hard to see. And now we get to read about several of these films here, including examples, like the brilliantly mysterious *Pink Trousers* (1976), still yet to be represented in the 21st century. It's a rare pleasure.