

## Research Seminar Presentation

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 6.00 EMMTEC Theatre. University of Lincoln. 2008

**Andy Mckay, Principal Lecturer and MA Programme Leader, School of Media Production will show and discuss his recent film “ Bill Ming Stories of Wood, Wind & Fire “**

### Abstract

Engaging with “ The Work and Identity of Artists” is research theme that has pre-occupied many of Andy Mckay’s film projects. A previous faculty research seminar discussed “ DV Miniatures “ , a slate of his experimental film collaborations with poets, dancers, choreographers, jazz composers, visual and performance artists which was made to celebrate “ Year of the Artist “ and funded by Arts Council England.

Though there are exceptions, he has long been puzzled by the question of why mainstream media habitually speaks of visual artists as heroic visionaries after death – conferring a strange posthumous celebrity, when during their lifetime the same media often infers that their work is weird, usually anti social, publicity seeking, largely bonkers and basically unnecessary to the rest of an otherwise functioning society. All this, whilst the study of their posthumous significance provides for significant bulk of academic study, including the odd TV programme, and the aspiration to be a creative artist looms large in the consciousness of many young people.

Whilst a literary biography or biographic novel may take years of research and many days or weeks to read, a film biography of a living artist recorded from live events spanning many years not only requires significant research and logistical production practice, but also raises different considerations of substantive editing, audience engagement and mediation. Set in the context of current events, the film biography of the “ un-dead artist ” enables us to consider the significance of their work in the present, both to ourselves and to those whose current life experience also forms part of its motivation. The risk is that such contemporary film portrayal is viewed solely as media publicity, attempting to confer undeserved fame before posthumous analysis, rather than simply being current, informative and enlightening whilst also perfectly capable of being entertaining.

The presentation will raise issues of documentary film making, making choices and omissions, as well as show the film for comment.

**“ Bill Ming Stories of Wood, Wind & Fire “**

### Film Synopsis

In 2004 and the aftermath of hurricane Fabian the Government of Bermuda decided to commission a memorial to Bermudians “Lost at Sea”. The subsequent competition for

the islands first piece of “public art” of a non colonial nature was won by Bermudian born sculptor Bill Ming, who has spent much of his life working in England.

On a factual level, Andy Mckay’s film documents the trials and tribulations of the commission. its design in Bill’s studio, construction and casting in Essex, shipping from Liverpool and installation at Great Head Park St Davids Island in Bermuda. The 18 foot, 12 ton bronze sculpture entitled “Figurehead” was unveiled by HRH Prince Andrew and is recorded in the film in the presence of relatives of those lost at sea. These emotionally charged events coincided with the film makers 15 year project to document Ming’s engaging experience; his early life in a segregated society, as a seaman, the cultural adjustment of coming to England in 1972 and surviving as an artist in an unfamiliar culture. It includes international exhibitions of sculpture including his Homecoming Show at the Bermuda National Gallery in 1994 opened by the Queen, the first Liverpool Henry Moore, John Moores Fellowship and visits to Soweto SA to work with young people.

Bill Ming is an engaging personality and in following this emotional and humorous journey, the film also provides a fascinating and poetic profile of the artist. It explores the themes and ideas that have driven his art over three decades, his African and ethnic American roots, his self-exile from and subsequent recognition by a Bermudian society in which he previously found no place.



**Film Still: Bill Ming in his studio**

The film is a contemporary tail which was shot in the UK and Bermuda ; it includes archive material, original music composition and discusses artwork with actuality of a wide range of events from the casting to the unveiling ceremony. Interviews feature a

range of personalities including sculptor Malcom Poynter, Arts Consultant Shirley Pearman and eminent historian the late Cyril Packwood author of a definitive work on slavery “ Bermuda in Chains”. Original music is by Ronnie Fowler and the Editor is David Sleight.



**Film Still: Cyril Packwood, Author “ Bermuda in Chains “**

### **Distribution & Exhibition**

The film was launched to critical acclaim and standing ovation at its international premiere in the 10<sup>th</sup> Bermuda international Film Festival in March 2007. As part of the completion finance, the film has since been broadcast on GTV, Shown at the National Gallery of Bermuda and distributed to libraries, colleges and schools for archive and education. The UK Premiere was held at Broadway Cinema, Nottingham on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2007. The film has been financially supported by INTA Films, The Government of Bermuda, The Bermuda Arts Council, Arts Council East Midlands, Nottinghamshire County Council and The University of Lincoln UK.

### **Press**

*Bermuda Sun “ Andy Mckay gives us a fascinating profile of one of the artists that helped lay the foundations of Black British Art in the UK “ Bermuda Royal Gazette “ The film is a candid portrayal of the artist, but also the artistic process” WordPress.com “ I wish there were more films like this”*

Andrew Mckay has broadcast credits in the UK, USA and Australia. His films have received BBC festival award nominations, been shown at Montreal, Edinburgh, Trieste, Odense and many other film festivals. In 2002 he returned from a world tour giving lectures and screenings of his work he is currently a Principal Lecturer in Media Production at the University of Lincoln.