

Mon 3 Oct,
6.30pm–8pm

Artists' Film: Selected 12

KEYWORDS

film, programme, humans, tree, feel, plants, bridging, thinking, world, question, wondering, ways, Nottingham, year, specific, intimacy, beings, interest, library

SPEAKERS

Jamie Wylde, April Lin, Samiir Saunders

Talk

Jamie Wylde 00:00

Good evening everyone. My name is Jamie Wylde, I'm the director of videoclub. We're an artist film and video agency based in Brighton. We do national and international projects around film and video and digital culture. Really pleased to welcome you to Nottingham Contemporary tonight for this screening of Selected 12. As it suggests, it's the 12th year of this programme and for all of those 12 years, we've been coming here to Nottingham Contemporary, so thank you to Nottingham Contemporary for hosting us for our 12th year. The programme is a collaboration with Film London Artists' Moving Image Network. We established it in 2011 as part of a sort of a response to and complement to the Film London Jarman award. So each year we invite the artists who are shortlisted for the Jarman Award to nominate artists who are earlier in their careers. And then from those nominations, we curate a programme which we then tour around the UK. So this is the fourth part of the programme. We've already

Nottingham Contemporary

been in Glasgow, Brighton, and London. And next we're off to Cardiff, and then Southampton for the close of the programme. If you've got any friends or colleagues that couldn't make it, we are going to be screening the programme online as well, at the end of the tour, so that'll happen at the end of November. If you want to pass that on to people. I'm really happy to have April Lin here who is the creator of the film TR333, which we'll see at the end of the screening. April's going to be in conversation at the end with Samiir Saunders. And they will have a little chat about April's work. And we'll open that up to a q&a at the end. The programme is about an hour long. There are eight films within the programme. Just to warn you, there is a very short instance of cutting skin and bleeding in Sophie Hoyle's film Hyperacusis there isn't a warning before that. So I'm just warning you now. So if you see the title come up for Sophie Hoyle's film hyperacusis and you're a bit squeamish, just be prepared, or maybe just close your eyes for that film. That's probably enough from me, just to say thanks to the Arts Council for funding this programme. And thanks to my colleagues at Film London. And also again, thanks to Nottingham Contemporary for hosting us. Enjoy the films and we'll see you after. Thanks.

Samiir Saunders 02:38

Hello, everyone. I'm Samiir Saunders. And I'm going to be in conversation with April Lin just talking a bit about their film TR333, which is the last film that you just saw there. So yeah, I guess my first question is going to be sort of about the making of the film, I know that you were in conversation with Dr. Nalini Nadkarni, who is an ecologist on the making a film, can you tell us a bit about sort of the conversations that went into the film and how that manifested in the film itself?

April Lin 03:14

Yeah, so I was originally approached by Sheffield docfest because they wanted to support these films that were collaborations between scientists and artists, and just to see what kind of work they would engender. And I'd had a few

Nottingham Contemporary

scientists whose works I'd followed for a while and Nalini was one of them. And then a bunch of other people that I had also wanted to work with, they were all unavailable. So it ended up being Nalini, for which I'm very, very grateful. And Nalini is based in Utah in the US. And we would have like regular Skypes. And it's kind of at first just chat a bit about like the idea and I was just kind of like, oh, I want to make this more like speculative or like sci fi, if you will film about history that doesn't really exist, but could exist. And then she was just like, I think she only told me afterwards that she was like, I didn't really know what you meant, but I just like went along with it anyways. So I think over the months, we went through like a lot of different processes of I think her as she has said it her unlearning of like a scientific paradigm of truth of like her being used to only creating knowledge that like has been proven to exist by like the scientific method and just like allowing herself to participate in something more imaginary and also kind of true in its own right. And for me, I think I almost went the opposite way like I've always felt like an affinity to like plants or like vegetal like beings. But I've always avoided referring to them by their like Latin names because I felt that that kind of diminished their beings or it would be almost like pejorative in a way and I was like I would rather know you by like touch or like smell etc. But then when doing research for this, I had to read a lot of papers on the specific beings that I was kind of working with and whose stories I kind of wanted to tell. And I felt like I unlearned a bit of that kind of, I don't know distaste, maybe is the right word. Yeah and I was just like, Oh, okay. Yes, this way of classifying and naming and speaking about plants comes with its own kind of more violent history. But actually, it's also a gateway to a very specific kind of knowledge, which is also very rich in its own right. So we kind of met in the middle, and had a bit of like, like, a knowledge jam with swords. Yeah. Nalini has a very specific kind of energy as well. Which I think is a bit hard to explain if it's not happening in front of you. But sometimes when I'm very excited, I will talk a lot. And I'll be like, Oh, my God, I just read this, da da da, This is so amazing. Like, wow, I had no idea

msdnpnttoII Contemporary

these plants are like, so wise, and they have really evolved to like, grow their environments in this way. Then Nalini will take that energy, and like, dial it up, like tenfold and come back to me was like, I know, right? Isn't it so amazing. And then we would just go like back and forth on these zoom calls. And at times, when we've done Q and A's together, it's also very much the similar vibe. And it's kind of Yeah, kind of wild.

Samiir Saunders 06:27

Sounds like a really fun energy to be collaborating with. Yeah, so you talked a bit about sort of how you were interested, like, you sort of met in the middle with these, like, with the scientific names versus like the, I guess more like, imaginative, like sensory, like, ways of relating to these beings? Are you quite interested in like in approaching knowledge from quite a plural kind of way that and sort of looking at it in a sort of less hierarchical kind of manner?

April Lin 06:59

I think there's a lot of interesting things that can come from like fusing different kinds of perspectives. And I feel like almost, that's something that defines my art practice is this idea of like, or this desire, or this intrigue of what might happen if we combine lots of different threads that otherwise are seen as quite separate from each other. So I'm always making things that are like, both speculative and also about, like, for instance, speculative about like the climate crisis, also about like how humans can relate to plants differently. And really, you could make about a billion films on each one of those things. But I find for me, it's nicer to kind of like, throw them in, in like a blender of sorts and see what comes out the other end rather than like specifying in one field. Yeah, yeah. And sometimes it becomes a bit unruly and hard to manage. But usually, it's quite fun. At the end, it's quite easy to say that it's fun.

Samiir Saunders 07:55

Yeah. So like speaking of sort of like fun, and like intimacy and

Nottingham Contemporary

playfulness, like you ended the film there, with a provocation to say hi to every tree that you see, and to tell them that you treasure them and I think that again, I'd say it's quite as of playful, like call to action. Can you tell us a bit more about why you included that and why that might be an important thing to do?

April Lin 08:19

I think so many ways to answer this question. Really, I feel like for me, quite an important part is kind of bridging this divide that is constructed between like humans and nonhumans, or more than humans. And I think in making a work that's about like the climate crisis, or about like ecological disaster, I feel like it was really important to kind of, I guess, like, foreground the experiences of this character and have that also be like, an invitation to something else. And especially with film, which I think is quite can be quite like a disembodied experience. And it's very like, can be very head heavy. I kind of wanted to extend, I guess, the world of the film into like, the embodied world of the viewer, with like, something that maybe this character would like them to do in everyday life.

Samiir Saunders 09:16

Yeah. Kind of making it like sort of very interactive in that kind of way. Is that something...

April Lin 09:23

Kind of like a campaign film of some sort maybe?

Samiir Saunders 09:27

Literally like yeah, calling everyone to go and like, be chill with the trees, isn't it?

April Lin 09:32

Yeah. I mean, it was something me and Nalini spoke about as well, because I guess she was just like, oh, you know, this film is very political, in a sense, just because of the kind of world that we live in now saying, showing this kind of viewpoint is in

Nottingham Contemporary

essence more like radical even though it doesn't necessarily need to be or could be in another way in another I guess society that's dominated by a different way of relating to nature. This might not be that strange that she was like, you know we live in, this is the world we live in. And like sometimes people like how overt do you want people to be like, I don't know called or like drawn into its mission? Do you want people to kind of like feel their way forward? Or do you feel like there needs to be a more clear, like, instruction for how to take, I guess this energy forward into everyday life?

Samiir Saunders 10:24

It feels to me like there was quite a good mix of the clear instruction and also the more felt instruction because of the way that you sort of really characterised and personified the character of tree and just, yeah, like, can you talk a bit more about like you were saying like this, like the feeling, and this sort of like, literal call to action.

April Lin 10:49

Feeling. I knew that I wanted to use animation to kind of tell the story because of the kinds of feelings and textures I think animation can open up that like more lens based film is sometimes hard to do, or it's more tied to reality, right? I don't know, this feeling is a bit like, I think I've heard a lot of audiences describe it that they're like, kind of scared or like they, they think trees feels very unfamiliar. So they're a bit like, put on edge. I don't know if that's the case tonight with everyone here. But they're a bit scared. And I was like, Oh, I kind of wanted that lack of familiarity, like I could. But I could have made for you very like friendly looking. And like cuddly and like furry and have like a more anthropomorphic kind of face to be easier to relate to. But I think that distance from like human, or a human viewpoint, or like a human sense of like, what's comfortable. There's something that I think is maybe more interesting, or like in this story feels more more fitting?

Samiir Saunders 11:54

Nottingham Contemporary

Yeah, definitely. I mean, I feel like that's an active like, radical political choice as well to sort of have this being that may make us feel uncomfortable because of distance from them. But also like, showing the importance of like, intimacy and their relation and their history, even though they feel quite different. I know that like quite a few of your previous works you've been interested, or at least I interpret the you've been interested in intimacy and distance. Yeah, so I wanted to sort of like, ask a bit about sort of how this film relates to your previous works. Is there an intention to like to look at the themes of like intimacy and distance and things like that? And do you see this as a progression of that in a way?

April Lin 12:55

Yeah, I think so that's quite a nice way of putting it. Like, I feel like my intention with films is to kind of create a space for new conversations to be had or like new pathways of thought to be grown or emerged out of and I feel like intimacy and distance are quite a big part of that, or I'm quite interested in like, this constructed separation between like a self, and another, and how, what trying to bridge that might lead to or like, what kind of bridges the way that you build these bridges between self and other, what kind of worlds might open up if we were to, like walk across them or kind of walk across them and then like, jump off of them or? Yeah, and I feel like, maybe that ends up becoming like a if it's a conversation, then it ends up with the two parties being quite, or like to juxtapose different kinds of things coming together, I guess. And seeing like, what's I don't know, in between, in the space of things meeting?

Samiir Saunders 14:01

That's really interesting as well because it makes me think about your process for making TR333 as well being like to, you know, physically separate worlds of like Utah and then like, in the UK, where you were, at the time, sort of, like, coming together and the different lenses of, you know, the scientific and the imagined sort of way of viewing things. Yeah, I think that's like definitely something that's really important, sort of

msdnpnttoI Contemporary

bridging those gaps and doing so with like, imagination and intimacy.

April Lin 14:31

Yeah, and I think bridging those gaps, or I don't know, I think they're fun.

Samiir Saunders 14:34

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Definitely. So yeah. So in terms of like, things progressing from previous works, is there. Are there any new projects that you're working on? And do you see these themes progressing in them as well?

April Lin 14:51

Yeah, I'm currently doing a fellowship that's hosted between FACT Liverpool and Jerwood Arts. And it's me kind of dipping into more like in attractive new media digital work where I'm working with a programmer and some other collaborators to build a chatbot. That's an interactive. So it's the first time I'm working with something that's interactive as well, which is quite different from making a film, which is more of a one way dialogue. And so it's a chatbot that's interactive. And yeah, just, I'm just laughing, because I'm thinking again, about all the different strands that I've combined. So when you speak to this chatbot, via WhatsApp, you're also speaking to this character in this other world. And then their mission or their aim, or their intention is to guide this kind of cosmic library of different wisdoms about like ancestry, or like lineages, that happened through generations. And this library has fallen into disuse. So this chatbot presence is reaching out to the user being like, hey, I need help with my library, would you be so kind as to just give me a hand. And so when you chat to them, the Chatbot will ask you some questions. And what you respond then takes that conversation into different directions. So maybe they'll say, Do you only consider family as like biological family as part of your ancestry? And if you say, yes, you're taken down a certain path, and you say no, you're taken down a different path in this Chatbot. But it all ends up to new

Nottingham Contemporary

material being formed for this library. And so, yeah, maybe this also echoes some of the themes you brought up in terms of distance. Like I've like I've, yeah, there's, there's a question of distance between like the world of this Chatbot. And like, the user that I'm trying to bridge and seeing what common interests might, they might hold?

Samiir Saunders 16:44

Yeah, you seem to have like a lot of interest in like, imagining these, like, sort of different worlds and different kinds of futures. Yeah, that's cool. Yes. So we're gonna open up for questions to the audience, we have a microphone in the audience. And if anyone has any questions, raise your hand, and we'll try and get to you.

Audience member 17:25

Having done the movie and the film and sat with it a while, would you have done and looking at it retrospectively, would you have done anything different or change anything or, you know, the idea of, of the connectivity between the trees, you know, and the communication with trees, and then the discussion at the end or the or the saying at the end about, you know, say hi to a tree, the more human element? Is there? Is there anything in that mix that you might have changed retrospectively?

April Lin 17:56

Good question. I think the things I would change would maybe be more informed by like, my understanding of like, the climate crisis as it is today. And the ways that like, I mean, that was only made like last fall, so last autumn less than a year ago, but a lot of things have already developed. And in a sense, it feels both more dire, but also more hopeful. I'm not really sure. So maybe in that nuance of the story, that tree would say there would be some shifts. Yeah. And to maybe pull more at the extremes of like, the urgency, but also the way that like, we're, you know, a decent amount of society is still mobilising to try to counteract it. So maybe there's giving a

msdnittoI Contemporary

bit more credit to that. I'm not sure. Maybe I'm just in a better mood today as well.

Audience member 18:59

Thank you. Hello. Just wondering about the writing process for the voice of tree. Yeah. Just wondering, maybe if you could explain how you went about coming up with this narrative. In particular in the way of transmitting transforming the dialogue that you had into a kind of personification if you like, or into a voice, a singular voice?

April Lin 19:32

Thank you for your question. Yeah, I think the initial concept came was quite intuitive to me. I was like, Oh, I think I knew I wanted to make something that like addressed the ecological crisis. But like from the perspective of like, a plant that we, is something that we don't really hear about so much, or you know, a lot of it is framed in more like, human centred narratives of what, what we might lose and the things that might be destroyed, I was just thinking about all the amount of trauma or the weight that say a plant would carry, basically having seen like lots of their family, lots of their friends having perished in the lead up to things being the way they are now. And so I thought a bit about that. And I was like, oh there are lots of ways to just kind of, like, tell the story. What would be, what would be a nice way? And then I think, because sometimes I like to watch a lot of interviews on YouTube. And I was like Hmm, what if someone interviewed this like spirit from this specific tree, and like what they would say, and thinking also about the different kinds of like, interests, I guess that that kind of platform holds, like usually comes in some kind of like funding interest, or some kind of like media spectacle, interest, that wants that, that some, to some extent, provides, like a context to this interview, it's not just an open space of dialogue, where you can speak freely, but you know, other things creating that space, that are more invisible? And just thinking about yeah, how? How might that look like in an interview with this species, like at first, you

Nottingham Contemporary

know, they're still referring to them by their like, assigned name, or their like, Latin name? And Tree's like, No, I don't want to be called that. And just seeing how they also kind of, I guess, subvert this like questioning, or being questioned and having to respond, power dynamic. So built around that.

Audience member 21:33

Did it make you think about the kind of use of what you know, furniture and kind of what we actually do with it?

April Lin 21:41

Yeah, there's a bit at the beginning, that's like more collagey, or there's like, lots of being lots of photos are incredibly saturated, and like overexposed are like, pasted on top of each other. And, for one of those scenes, it's like, lots of human and plant interactions that I find really funny that I've like sourced around the internet. So there are like, some really intense like hedges, and like photos from like, award winning, like hedge masters and stuff that I've used, that it's quite quick. So it's hard to catch. But I think that was kind of there as, as like drawing the history between plants and humans in this specific timeline that they exist on. So yeah, I did think a lot about like, how humans, you know, tend to approach nature as something that is like used, or extracted or kind of made useful. And how, actually, maybe in this film, what Tree wants is for humans to be useful to them, or for them for once.

Audience member 22:52

I was wondering, how did you, like come up with setting like in 2040? And did you kind of imagine a particular world and the narrative around it to like get to it? If you could just tell us a bit more about that.

April Lin 23:11

Um, I guess it's both quite random and kind of intentional. I, up until quite recently, it was having maybe up until like, two years ago, found it quite hard to like, look into the future and be like, Oh, this is, this is what I'm going to be doing when I'm

msdnjttol Contemporary

sort of like, I don't know, 30, 40, 50, 60. And it felt like, having that kind of foresight was something that I should have. But it was very hard to be like, I actually have no idea what I'm going to be doing then what the world would look like or what I will be wanting, where I will be living, like all of these things are really open. And I think at one point, I was like, Okay, no, maybe I can just like project some ideal version of me in year 2040, who is doing this and this thing? And then I think from there, I drifted off into thinking about what's going to happen, like, if I really ride along the more like climate doomy thoughts that I have sometimes like maybe the world will look like this, and maybe, you know, but I'm sure there will still be gaps or glimmers of hope that exists, because that is never completely extinguished. So what might that look like in that year? So it's kind of a bit random, but then also more rooted in my own, I guess, personal conception of the future?

Audience member 24:44

Hi, I just wondered what the scientist you were working with and her colleagues and her students thought of it and do they make use of it and has it had any impact on the other side, are they using it?

April Lin 24:55

Yes. Great question. Yeah, me and Nalini had a really nice time working on it actually, and I think she's told me both in private and during Q&As that she's really happy to have made this film or like to have contributed her scientific knowledge to this type of project that she's never really been encouraged to do before. So we're trying to make a programme and find some funding. So if anyone knows anything you can hit me up. But we're trying to basically encourage more collaborations like this between artists and scientists. Where people are, I think, encouraged to come together and make stuff, but not just in a way where art is just used as something to like, display or express or just like translate a scientific understanding into something more creative, but for them to really be meeting and like kind of combining at the foundations a bit more.

Nottingham Contemporary

So I think that's one of the ways that it has kind of stemmed out a bit. So yeah, we're currently kind of looking around for different places we can take this idea to, but she's also showed it to some of her colleagues at a university who I think similarly go on a similar journey to what she did. So at first, they're kind of like but that, that would, that's not possible. You can't fuse these three trees, they're too far away from each other. But eventually, they kind of get used to thinking about the fact that, okay, it's not about whether it's realistically possible or not, but about the fact that like, allowing yourself to think beyond what is possible actually means that you can return to this reality with other kinds of information. So that's been quite fun to hear.

Audience member 26:49

Hi, I was wondering if you can explain what was the visual process? Or the inspiration of the whole video? Like, was there any specific references by Dr. Nalini or by you like that, that made you choose like a specific mood board, or like a choice of like, the landscape shots, or the frame, the angles, like the angles used, or even any vision for the artwork that you made?

April Lin 27:19

Weirdly enough, we actually never had a mood board, which I think is usually quite staple for the work I do now. But it felt more like, yeah, a lot of the stuff I was just building as I went along, but in terms of the frames, I was thinking a lot about kind of like, like headstones a bit, and just kind of the frame was like a containing device. You usually think about things being stuck inside the frame, but then a lot of the text kind of spills out. And yeah, weirdly, actually, I think maybe the closest visual reference that I would use is like Studio Ghibli. It's like not very Studio Ghibli at all. But I think the way that like, those films are like, yeah, films that are directed by Miyazaki maybe in particular, are just very good at building these kinds of worlds that really feel very emotional, and very, like relatable, but maybe I went a little bit weirder than Miyazaki

Nottingham Contemporary

does. But he's made some weird shit too. So I should give him more credit. I'll have a think about that. Let you know.

Audience member 28:46

Thank you. Um, I was wondering, I mean, you mentioned like a few, like, personal things that kind of inspired this film or like, like, where you kind of went on a thought journey, like through it, but I was wondering if you had also like, personal experiences that kind of, like, could more elaborate and like, yeah, kind of personal experiences that kind of really influenced that, like film? Because I think sometimes exactly this kind of artists kind of scientist kind of collaboration can feel kind of distant from the personal yeah, world, but like, I do think this is still very kind of poetic. And, yeah, it has a lot of it in it. And, yeah, so I was wondering if you can yeah elaborate on that?

April Lin 29:34

In terms of this interest in like intergenerational trauma that tree carries, I would say that's quite, very much personal and something that's also quite present in other works, especially this chatbot project that I mentioned. And just thinking maybe in the past two years, I've been thinking a bit more and doing a bit more research on my own, like family history and the ways that you know, the things that they experience have also influenced me whether that be on a more like sociopolitical, like more material level or also like more emotionally or like psychologically, or just the ways that like dynamics kind of are reborn and like re emerge in as different forms later down the line. I think that that was quite a big part of it. And I think feels very important to me personally, to kind of extend that kind of grace in terms of thinking about how both like violence or like resilience or whatever patience, etc, these things are transmitted down generations, not just for humans and but amongst like biological family, for humans, but also like other other than human types of beings as well, who also, you know, have to live their lives, perhaps a different like time cycles than humans do. But also, you know, transmit their knowledge

Nottingham Contemporary

and evolve a certain type of knowledge that continues to develop as time passes, which I don't think is very different from what humans do.

Jamie Wylde 31:22

Hi, can you join me in saying thank you to our panelists. Thank you both. Thank you all for coming. I hope you enjoyed that. And hope to see you again, either next year or at one of the other screenings. Yep. And again, thanks to Nottingham Contemporary for hosting us. Thanks.