

In this uncertain age of ever changing technology, a collective of artists, cached away in Bethnal Green, London, are fostering the craft of working with film.

Since 2004, Brad Butler and Karen Mirza, a collaborative duo who employ filmmaking in their artistic practice, have been reviving old film equipment and teaching themselves and the army of artists who use their facilities at *no.w.here* how to use it.

"The kind of equipment we're running now was considered obsolete," confides Butler. "It was just sitting there in a garage without anyone to energise it. We needed it ourselves, as hands-on filmmaking was part of our practise at that point, so we put it back together in a collaborative way."

With most lab technicians' spare moments necessarily wrapped up in keeping up with the galloping advances in technology, Mirza and Butler, apart from the odd tip from an industry old-timer, were on their own. However the equipment itself had a part to play in its own revival, for this particular kit had once belonged to the Filmmakers Co-operative, formed in 1962 and then the arts agency, The Lux. The people who had once known and loved this equipment, emerged from their own practice to breathe life back into it.

"There's a really wonderful lab in Paris called L' Abominable," says Butler. "They trained in London originally at the Filmmaker's Co-operative. When we orinally set up our lab we went back to them and they really helped us. Then we just worked it out, trained ourselves. We found a few key people along the way who were really interested for their own practise and that's how it came out of the garage and got put back together."

As member of *no.w.here*, for a yearly subscription of £110 and provided you have undertaken the necessary *no.w.here* workshop to learn the ropes, you can shoot, hand-process, make optical/contact prints, edit on a Steinbeck table and

project your own films. Simply single-handed if you choose. And with Arts Council funding supporting the lab, the only other outlay will be the subsidised cost of film stock and processing chemicals.

"We do a lot of shooting on Fujifilm," says Butler. "We ran a free cinema school in the summer with the Serpentine Gallery, occupying a production space on the Edgware Road. In the end there were about sixty-six people, from locals, to filmmakers with twenty years experience, to kids touching film for the first time.

"We used the new 16mm ETERNA Vivid 500T stock; it was something just brought out, which was quite exciting. We shot at night, which was beautiful, although we didn't have the industrial lighting you take outdoors, so it was much more *Man with a Movie Camera*. Then, because we feel that teaching people about processing really brings it home, took it straight downstairs in the space and developed it. It was immediate."

The film was constructed and then screened in the Pavilion at the Serpentine to an enthusiastic reception. This is, however, just one example of the many workshops that has originated at *no.w.here*.

"We've got a rolling programme of events at *no.w.here*," confirms Butler. "We're doing a course, *Experimental Ethnography*, at the BFI as part of the London Film Festival where we'll be using the cameras to investigate all aspects of film anthropology and documentary.

"Then there's *A History of Cinema in Reverse*, a free practical workshop starting with digital technology and working right back to the original photogrammes. We're doing something at Transmission Gathering in Glasgow where we're filming by car headlights, so it's a whole workshop and screening based in car parks," says Butler. "I'm really looking forward to that one actually."

With this kind of schedule, it'd be easy to forget that Butler and Mirza are first and foremost practising artists, although the

reality is that the only way they get to engage with their own craft these days is to get away from it all.

Their latest film, *The Exception and the Rule*, is a very personal work realised with the collaboration of the art commissioner Artangel under the project title *Museum of Non Participation*, and was shot in India and Pakistan.

"Some of the most beautiful images in *The Exception and the Rule* were shot on the Vivid 500T with a time-lapse unit," reveals Butler. "Personally I like the low light situation, so I use the Reala 500D and the Vivid 500T a great deal; I think these sorts of stocks are absolutely stunning.

"The amazing thing was, that with the time-lapse unit there was almost no grain. I really like grain, but in this instance it was so sharp it was mesmerising, and I was really pleased when that came through. We used a Bolex camera, that's what I use almost all the time, I love fact you can manually override everything and it's so portable and easy to handle. Whatever your scenario, you'll find a way of using it."

The Times BFI 53rd London Film Festival, where the film was screened in October, described the film as observation yet a step apart from documentary. "The film frames everyday activities within a period of civil unrest," states the online LFF programme, "incorporating performances to camera, public interventions and observation."

The eminent Canadian artist Robert Genn, echoing an established view amongst his compatriots says, "drawing is still the bottom line." Any artist, no matter how advanced into technology his practise becomes, will always refer back to the discipline of line against paper.

Filmmakers have perhaps something to learn from their artist cousins. Where celluloid to cinema must surely be as drawing to art, can filmmakers afford to forget the fundamentals of handling raw film?
NATASHA BLOCK

Photo main: *The Exception and the Rule*, Butler and Mirza's LFF art short, filmed in Karachi; inset right: images from Butler and Mirza's Artangel commission, *The Museum of Non-Participation*; for further information visit www.no-w-here.org.uk



“I USE THE REALA 500D AND THE ETERNA VIVID
500T A GREAT DEAL; I THINK THESE SORTS OF
STOCKS ARE ABSOLUTELY STUNNING.”

ART FOR FILM'S SAKE



INSIDE THE
LONDON
EAST END
FILM WORLD OF
NO.W.HERE