

## Ken Russell



# Sure it doesn't make sense — that's the point

The second instalment of the Independent Cinema's *Secret Masterpieces of Cinema* series opens next week at the ICA in London, with a programme devoted to Pop Art. One of the many talents on show is the artist Derek Boshier, who appeared in my BBC TV *Monitor* documentary, *Pop Goes the Easel* (1962), about four young pop artists, back when the movement was in its infancy. Of the eight short films at the ICA, Boshier's *Link* (1970) is the most substantial, a travelogue through sacred geometry, examining the Ts, triangles, domes and cubes that echo throughout Egypt, Mecca, the female torso and contemporary art galleries. Compelling.

What Boshier did with shapes, William Klein did in 1957 with light, with his dazzling *Broadway by Light*, a montage of Broadway by night against repetitive jazz riffs. It is a collection of images that has passed into history. No more animated Budweiser flying eagle, nor Sergeant Bilko proudly puffing smoke. Now it's all jumbo video screen, real-time interactive LED displays and travelling news zippers. The thrill is gone.

Ads also appear in abundance in *Film Montage 1* (1965-68) shot in Germany by Peter Roehr. A sequence titled *Hair 14* shows three shots of a pretty girl shaking a head of shiny hair, as we hear the words "Cleans, shines, manages but never overcleans. What do you want with Decleans?" I guess it's called *Hair 14* because the message is repeated 14 times. And we get the same sort of treatment for six more boring products. I feel it only fair to pass on the director's message: "I change material by repeating the unchanged. The message is the behaviour of the material in the response to the frequency of its repetition." I'm just not sure that the material got the message.

*I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986) by Pipilotti Rist is more fun. It's hard to mess up a Lennon and McCartney tune (the line is from *Happiness is a Warm Gun*, from the Beatles' *White Album*). The sexy girl's voice and her dancing, breast-baring, out-of-focus image are replayed at various high speeds, making her seem very enthusiastic if slightly demented. Then the tape s-l-o-w-s down and she catches her breath in a neurasthenic collapse. A kind of whirling dervish for the adrenalin-saturated moderns.

*Velvet Underground: Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (1966) by Ron Namath jostles film clips from Andy Warhol's home movies against musical performances by Nico and the Velvet Underground, singing their trancelike free-verse

chants about the romance of gutter sex. Warhol Factory regulars such as Gerard Malanga bounce and blur through a light-and-shadow circus of moving shots. Though I made it to the Factory in 1964 and was filmed by Exploding Plastic Inevitable for their *Screen Tests*, it's my understanding that I was relegated to the cutting-room floor.

"-----" (aka *The Rock and Roll Film*, 1966-67) is by Thom Andersen and Malcolm Brodwick. It's another musical trip down memory lane, an image of the times, the songs, the singers, the artefacts of the birth of rock'n'roll. Radios, jukeboxes, pinballs, poolhalls. Hot rods, coin slots, go-karts, 45s. The whole played with amphetamine zeal, standing, walking, jumping, hair-combing,

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In 1964 I ended up on the cutting-room floor at Andy Warhol's Factory

surfing, rioting, dancing, shaking, pleading, do-wopping. There's a hodgepodge of recognisable bars of hits from Presley, The Who, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, Frankie Avalon, the Yardbirds...

There's Mick Jagger as a sweet-faced, innocent-flirty boy. Momentary clips of the Beatles, the Shangri-Las, Bill Haley and the Comets. Put on your high-heeled sneakers, 'cause we're goin' to the ICA to meet the Duke of Earl.

The most slyly comic of the lot is *The Selling of New York* by Nam June Paik. A television announcer delivers earnest statistical information about the corporate suppression of free-media New York in 1972, while scenes of New Yorkers tell a different story, culminating in a burglar stealing the very TV set on which we see the announcer's talking head.

*When I Was Young* (1965) by the famous Peter Whitehead, is a moody montage of a very fresh-faced, sincere and appealing Eric Burdon (of the Animals, pictured), intercut with cigarette ads and film of jet bomber jets, prefiguring the antiwar movement. Whitehead promises to appear at the ICA at a preview event at 3.30pm this Sunday.

*Trilogy* (1967-72) by Jeff Keen is a trilogy of his three pieces *Cineblatz*, *Marvo Movies* and *White Lite*. It went right over my head and seemed a little threatening, but I'm all for it.

This series is a great way to dive into the avant garde counter-culture and come up with

a fresh appreciation of it all; joyful and gloomy, pure and impure

*The Secret Masterpieces of Cinema: Pop* opens on May 2 at the ICA, the Mall, London SW1. [www.icaessentials.org.uk](http://www.icaessentials.org.uk)



PETER WHITEHEAD