

A History of Abstraction in Film

Karl Hyde, founder and contributor to the electronic music group Underworld and the design collective Tomato, was asked by Josiah McElheny to select abstract films to be projected for the current Bloomberg Commission:

‘In 1990, I was fortunate to be one of the founder members of **Tomato** – a group of artists & musicians from very disparate backgrounds, who came together with the simple concept of inspiring one another and crossing borders between our disciplines. Our films always began as personal projects, driven by the desire to experiment and explore. Through their vision and the techniques employed, we were able to create beautiful films, which became the source material for all the TV ad campaigns they were commissioned to make.

My Tomato associates would ask **Underworld** for new music to which they could cut their experimental films, whenever they found themselves in an edit suite with free ‘down time’. (Experimental abstract films were being made after

hours in commercial West End facilities houses.) Before Underworld went ‘overground’, these films were the closest thing we had to ‘pop videos’ – unsuitable for primetime viewing but screened in the early hours where they connected with the Rave Kids who were still wide-awake.

The success of Bornslippy and its connection with the film *Trainspotting* we effectively ended a period of experimental collaboration, as our videos were required to be ‘suitable’ for primetime scheduling. Around this time, Underworld incorporated Tomato’s films in the live show, projecting them onto huge elaborate screen configurations, transforming our concerts into exhibitions that toured the world.

For the reconfigured projections of Josiah McElheny’s Bloomberg Commission, I’ve selected some of our films along with the work of some of the pioneers of abstract film who inspired us and who laid the foundations for a common language between us in all our collaborations. The work of masters such as **George Maciunas** and **Len Lye** are timeless and slip seamlessly into the film work. **Norman McLaren** takes me back to my first encountering his work as a 16 year old art student and how, to this day, I recognise that sound-to-image language he evolved as being the closest thing I’ve found which articulates how I see and hear the world every day.’

Karl Hyde, 2012

Films

Dylan Kendle, Jason Kedgeley
Between Stars, 2010
Music: Underworld
Film: Tomato
6 minutes

Dylan Kendle
Hamburg Hotel, 2012
Music: Underworld
Film: Tomato
5 minutes

Graham Wood
Ring Road, 2008
Music: Underworld
Film: Tomato
4 minutes

Graham Wood
Rez, 1995
Music: Underworld
Film: Tomato
10 minutes

George Maciunas
Artype, 1966
3 minutes

Norman McLaren
Dots, 1940
2 minutes

Mary Ellen Bute, Theodore Nemeth
Synchromy No.2, 1936
Music: Evening Star from Tannhäuser by Richard Wagner
5 minutes

Hans Richter
Rhythmus 23, 1923–24
4 minutes