



Untitled 7, C Type print from photograph of vintage postcard, **Simon Barker**

capture the ethereal, ghostly quality of the odd and echoing sounds that are transmitted. The mesmerizing, utterly unclassifiable science films of Jean Painlevé<sup>7</sup>, as re-scored by Yo La Tengo, are recalled in the film's watery sequences, (a ladder leading nowhere but down, traffic cones languishing in the silt, muck and mud) with what appears to be underwater sounds laid over the text. Normality and the commonplace made strange.

A non-professional choir, sourced through the Kent Association for the Blind, perform the Jezreelite *Hymn 136*, denoting that in some sense James Jerushon Jezreel, even though physically absent and more or less excised from local history and mourning the Jerusalem he did not quite establish, is still in communication with the Medway environment. The audio performance of the hymn has been treated and found sounds added, rendering it's opaque language and oblique meaning all the more surreal; an echo confined it to an age we barely recognise and which feels both alien and strangely comfortably familiar to us.

7. **Jean Painlevé** was a film director, actor, translator, animator, critic and theorist. Advocating the credo "science is fiction", Painlevé managed to scandalise both the scientific and the cinematographic world with a cinema designed to entertain as well as edify. He portrayed sea horses, vampire bats and skeleton shrimps with human traits - the comical and the savage. Painlevé single-handedly established a unique kind of cinema, the "scientific-poetic cinema".



**Rochester**  
art gallery  
and craft case

## Under a Bridge

Simon Barker

28 Sept > 2 Dec 2012

Untitled 1, C Type print from digital pinhole photograph, **Simon Barker**

## Erased

by **Jason Wood**. (Jason Wood is a film programmer and author of films books on American Independent cinema, Road Movies and Mexican cinema.)

Explorations of the relationship between the M2 motorway bridge, a mid 20th century Ballardian<sup>1</sup> concrete superhighway, both austere and yet effective; and the partially completed temple, constructed in the late 1880s by James Jershom Jezreel that form its foundation. The three moving image pieces at the centre of *Under A Bridge* display clear links to film structuralism as appropriated and reconfigured by the avant-garde filmmaking practices of the late 1970s and developments in new narrative cinema. The formative moving image works by architect and artist Simon Barker, *A Medway Hymn*, *These are the Stones* and *The Naming of the Island* (Ballard's *Concrete Island*) via Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*<sup>2</sup> offer an effective and carefully calibrated mediation of environment, community and the lipstick traces the past leaves on the present.

Like the films of the pioneering American filmmaker James Benning<sup>3</sup>, Barker explores

the relationship between image, text and sound whilst paying attention, in the manner of Patrick Keiller<sup>4</sup> (albeit minus a Robinson type narrator figure), to the vernacular landscapes of British life. Like Benning, Barker's framing is static, observational, meticulous, referencing the memory of the temple and evoking the reverence its creator would have wished to inspire. Again, like Benning there is a sense in the fixed, tableaux-like compositions and long-take, semi-documentary visual aesthetic of a world that exists both within and outside the film frame and the notion of everyday lives being lived blissfully unaware. In *A Medway Hymn* the motorists, motor-bikers and train travellers, the joggers and the rowers denote it. There are also some playful cats that appear in the corner of the frame (to the left of a sign reading "Freedom") and the gently ebbing grass and wheat, caught in the breeze, Dovzhenko-like<sup>5</sup> and oblivious.



Untitled 8, C Type print from photograph of vintage postcard, **Simon Barker**



Untitled 6, C Type print from photograph of vintage postcard, **Simon Barker**



Untitled, C Type print from digital pinhole photograph, **Simon Barker**

There is a sense in Barker's images of a surprisingly harmonious alliance between past and present and of a symbiotic relationship between the natural world and the one engineered by mankind. Concrete interacts with fauna, the sky beats down, and the river laps and undulates. All is well. Equilibrium is maintained. As with Gideon Koppel's<sup>6</sup> hypnotic and poetic *Sleep Furiously* (2008), this is a topographic analysis of mental and physical landscapes and a journey into endings and beginnings, in which Barker reveals what has been

erased, lost and made obsolete through recourse to his camera's on/off switch.

If there is a rigorous and precise quality to Barker's images of columns, pylons, paths, roads and waterways, his use of sound is more playful and meta-textual. These films look and listen, focusing on the construction of the image and the direction of the gaze whilst also diverting our attention to aural events. Once more exhuming the notion of past history and suggesting a reverence for it, contact microphone recordings taken from under the bridge are employed to

1. **Ballardian** - James Graham "J. G." Ballard was an English novelist, short story writer, and prominent member of the New Wave movement in science fiction.
2. **Robinson Crusoe**, a novel by Daniel Defoe, is a fictional autobiography of a castaway who spends 28 years on a tropical island, encountering cannibals, captives, and mutineers before being rescued.
3. **James Benning** is an American filmmaker. Benning's films focus on a sense of place, and are often built from long, unedited takes.
4. **Patrick Keiller** is a British film-maker, writer and lecturer. His films are seen as a critique of the United Kingdom's economic and social landscape. *Robinson in Ruins* is a 2010 British documentary film by Patrick Keiller and narrated by Vanessa Redgrave which documents the journey of a fictional character around the south of England.
5. **Alexander Petrovich Dovzhenko** was a Soviet screenwriter, film producer and director of Ukrainian origin. He is often cited as one of the most important early Soviet filmmakers.
6. **Gideon Koppel** is Professor of Film within The Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at Aberystwyth University. His prolific work as a film maker and artist has been broadcast internationally and exhibited in galleries worldwide. His research interests lie between the blurred boundaries of documentary film and fine art.