

EXPLORING COLLABORATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART AND DESIGN

FEATURES, BLOGS AND CRITICAL DIALOGUE FROM AROUND THE JOTTA COMMUNITY

PUBLISHED

FEATURES

Filter articles

CRITICAL DIALOGUE

COMPETITIONS

BLOG FEED

CALENDAR

GET PUBLISHED

jotta Published is a platform for your writing. Upload articles, events and critical writing here.

[Submit here](#)

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

NEWSLETTER

Sign up for our weekly newsletter.

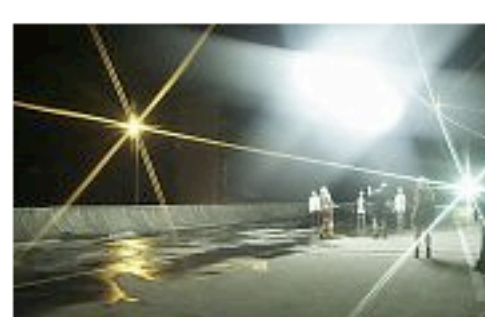
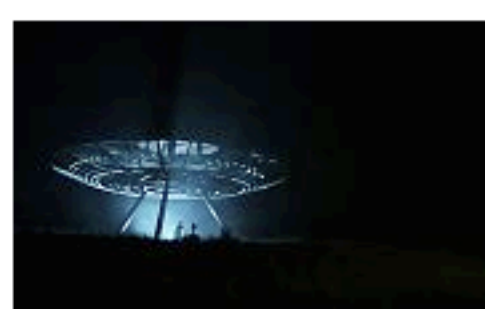
FEATURES

Abandon Normal Devices: Shezad Dawood's Preston

By Millie Ross - 28.09.2011

Film & Animation

When British artist Shezad Dawood discovered that Lancashire claims the highest number of UFO sightings in the UK, it was too tantalising for him to resist. Dawood decamped to Preston to make his first feature film, *Piercing Brightness*, which, like all good sci-fi's, is part B-grade schlock, part socio-political commentary. The film premieres at Liverpool's Abandon Normal Devices festival next week, with a live soundtrack by Acid Mothers temple and an exhibition of Dawood's new neon sculptural works.



What triggered your transition from art in to film? And what challenges have you found working in the new medium?

I've always been interested in the syntax of film. Even as a kid I used to skip school to see double-bills at the Electric or Scala. This kind of amateur - in the strictest sense - approach, meant that film was always creeping round all my work. Whether in early works such as 'Make It Big' 2003, which involved a hoax remake of Antonioni's 'Blow Up' in Pakistan, to a more nuanced influence of set design in my installations.

As for new challenges, these have been enormous but exciting. The possibility to expand a notion of collaboration and community through working with both film crew and actors, and with extended communities, as each of my film projects has been a response to a place as much as the other ideas. Particularly with *Piercing Brightness*, I was really trying to combine a set of really difficult approaches: firstly the desire to really step into the space of narrative film-making while at the same time looking to see how certain experimental and structuralist approaches to film could be there to support the narrative. So, I chose to work with 7 main characters/actors and make the film in four languages (English, Mandarin, Urdu and Arabic), so that was no easy feat.

When did your fascination with science-fiction begin?

Particularly with certain dystopian 70s sci-fi films such as *Logan's Run* and *The Omega Man*, in turn leading me to writers such as Philip K. Dick, Richard Matheson, and later Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany and Doris Lessing. I was always quite taken with the inventive possibilities of literary sci-fi, given the general falling off of experimentation in literature post Joyce and Beckett. Particularly with Delany's 'Dhalgren', I've always viewed it as the literary inheritor of 'Ulysses'.

Preston - what took you there originally?

In Certain Places, a commissioning agency based in Preston, who work extensively with more expanded commissioning in the public realm, sent me a very sweet email inviting me to come and have a tour of Preston with them with no obligation. That's just the kind of approach I appreciate as an artist, and led to a mutual uncovering of various structures, past and present, that inform Preston as a site.

Research - who did you talk to when you were doing your intensive research in Preston and Lancashire?

Quite a lot of people in fact. Everyone from the Public Relations Officer for the Church of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons), as well as novelist Jenn Ashworth (who is a lapsed Mormon). LAPIS (Lancashire Anomalous Phenomena Investigation Society), who very graciously welcomed me to their meetings and annual conference, and really helped inform the film. The liaison for Chinese students at UCLan (University of Central Lancashire), and so many other leaders of community and faith groups, archivists etc. And ultimately various individuals from the city, a lot of whom became extras or production assistants on the film.

How much of the film is fact vs fiction?

It is very much a fiction film, with a nice synthesis of the fantastical and the mundane. Yet you'd be surprised how much of the plot-line is based on factual and historical material. It is that ambiguous elision which interests me.

Piercing Brightness exhibition is on until 26th November 2011

Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston

Shezad Dawood will be there on October 2nd in conversation with scholar Mark Bartlett.

The *Piercing Brightness* film will be screened in full on October 1st in Liverpool with a live soundtrack by Acid Mothers Temple. [Click here for info.](#)

SHARING

Like this? Share via Facebook, Twitter or bookmarking sites:

COMMENTS

Like 20 people like this.



Log in to Facebook to post your comment

Facebook social plugin

PORTFOLIOS

[Explore Work](#)
[Search Users](#)
[My Portfolio](#)

PUBLISHED

[Features](#)
[Critical Dialogue](#)
[Competitions](#)
[Blog Feed](#)
[Calendar](#)

WORKSPACES

[What's New](#)
[Create](#)
[My Workspaces](#)

CONTEMPORARY ART

[Exhibition Programme](#)
[Events & Symposia](#)
[Art Advisory](#)
[Work for Sale](#)
[Opportunities](#)

DESIGN

[Design Blog](#)
[Design Portfolio](#)
[Design Shop](#)
[Opportunities](#)

CONTACT

At our jotta Portfolio

12 Newburgh St
London
W1F 7RP
United Kingdom

e: hello@jotta.com
t: +44 (0)20 7440 1850

