

Greenaway Masterclass

Article by guest writer, Marco Marcon Director of IASKA

Looking back at Peter Greenaway's long career, I am struck by the peculiar chronological non-synchronicity between his artistic vision and the technical means required to achieve it. Greenaway's ideas came of age in the sixties, at time when the revolutionary impetus of the early twentieth century avant-gardes was being rediscovered, and reinvented, by a new generation of experimental artists. But these new ideas called for new expressive tools that were not always available at that time. It was only the relatively recent growth of digital media that has allowed artists to fully explore the potential of what Umberto Eco - a theorist often quoted by Greenaway - calls the 'open work'. This is the a genre of avant-garde creation that is conceived as an open-ended field of expressive and interpretative possibilities, a work which is never 'finished' but that endlessly proliferates, expands, mutates, in a process involving the participation of multiple creative agencies, including its audience.

Greenaway's recent *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* project is an ambitious manifestation of this aesthetic approach. The project explores a cluster of narratives, aesthetic themes and conceptual loci via a huge spectrum of mediums, spanning feature films, exhibitions, television series, books, websites, DVDs, interactive digital databases,

games and live performances. Greenaway's declared intention is to explore an expressive future beyond what he calls 'death of cinema', by which he seems to mean not all cinema (and certainly not his cinema), but the mainstream type of movies based on a linear narrative and other naturalistic conventions.

Despite endlessly crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries, Greenaway's work always maintains a deep engagement with tradition. His films scavenge the Western canon and are always lavishly festooned with leaned references and subtle in-jokes for the cognoscenti. His experimental works are created by reprocessing the glorious detritus of Western art in a way that once upon a time used to be called 'postmodernist'. His love of traditional painting and architecture is evidenced by his frequent homages to Flemish and Italian renaissance artists. The complex visual texture of many of Greenaway's derives from

a reprocessing of his traditional sources and their hybridisation with contemporary cinematic, televisual and digital languages.

While, the artistic success of specific Greenaway's works may be debatable (the film version of *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* has received very mixed reviews) his overall approach has much to be commended. It is not common for an artist of his generation to be so open to the linguistic potential of digital technologies. And it is even rarer for an artist whose work is so enmeshed with new media to pay attention to the deep historical roots of current artistic languages.

Peter Greenaway's work therefore provides a much needed antidote to, on the one hand, the rejection of digital technologies which is so often coquettishly flaunted by artists of his generation, and, on the other, the historical amnesia that sometimes affects younger artists working with new media.



Peter Greenaway Photo: Janusz Strzaleki

DCA and Screenwest jointly supported a visit by Peter Greenaway, to Western Australia. Peter Greenaway delivered a keynote presentation to film makers at the Australian International Documentary Conference (www.aidc.com.au) and a masterclass to artists and creators of screen delivered content at the WA Maritime Museum. To view the podcast or download the transcript please visit www.dca.wa.gov.au
To learn more about Peter Greenaway please visit www.petergreenaway.info
For more information on IASKA please visit www.iaska.com.au