

Tacita Dean, *Disappearance at Sea* 1996

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Tacita Dean *Disappearance at Sea* 1996 (T07455)

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DESCRIPTION

Disappearance at Sea is a 16mm colour anamorphic film installation with sound. This work has been described as follows: “The film charts nightfall as seen refracted in the Fresnel lenses of the St. Abb’s Head Lighthouse in Berwickshire, cutting between a shot looking inwards at the bulbs orbiting each other and a view out to sea; it ends with the descent into darkness, evoking a sense of loss”. The sound incorporates the rhythmic clunking of the revolving beacon, and ends with a crescendo of seagulls. The work was inspired by the true story of Donald Crowhurst, who in 1969 competed in the Sunday Times Golden Globe Race. Crowhurst, an amateur sailor, quickly encountered difficulty and decided to report false positions. After several months his boat was found abandoned out at sea, and Crowhurst had disappeared. The film is 14mins long.

FOCUS OF THE CASE STUDY

Tacita Dean’s primary medium is film. As the number of laboratories processing 16mm is decreasing, and companies are ceasing to manufacture film stock this is an important time for the museum to understand and document the characteristics of film and its nuances before the technology and the technicians are lost.

The research focuses on the following:

Developing a greater understanding of the technology used for the production of the elements commonly acquired for the preservation of 16mm film; including prints, inter-positives, inter-negatives and sound.

Interviewing the artist and technical experts about the work and its technology.

Documenting the details of the equipment and maintenance procedures needed to sustain the display of a film installation.

Reflecting on the risk of the obsolescence of film technology.

Developing recommendations for the long-term care and management of 16mm film installations.

LESSONS LEARNT

Documentation of the work’s components It is critical to the management of this work to understand the ‘genealogy’ of components created for display or preservation purposes. To

this end a system of documentation was developed which visually depicts the relationship of components to each other and core cataloguing details.

Cold Storage This film installation is one of a number of works in Tate's Collection earmarked for cold storage. Tacita Dean's *Disappearance at Sea* was used as a pilot, to benchmark procedures to be implemented more widely for the cold storage of film.

Care and maintenance Tacita Dean's installation was displayed for over a year at Tate Modern from December 2005-March 2007. This enabled us to develop a more streamline approach to the maintenance of film installations whilst on display.

Technical art history Understanding how these works are produced is essential to developing an appropriate conservation plan and our ability to manage the production of prints for future display.

Artists' interview The opportunity to interview the artist enabled us to understand and document what it is that makes film so important to her work and develop a 'statement of significance' which will guide our conservation efforts in the future.

Introduction by Clarrie Wallis to *Tacita Dean: Recent Films and Other Works*, Tate Publishing 2001. p.11