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## Selected Press

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Lenard Giller  
Revisions

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The Shop, Sadie Coles HQ, London

Ben Broome in conversation with Lenard Giller

LENARD GILLER: The feature length film *Productions* consists of 360 found images (from a 1982 Panini sticker album) which I scanned and reinserted inside the exact time frame in which they first appeared in Disney's 1950 *Cinderella*. The timecode and soundtrack both mirror the duration of *Productions* while simultaneously highlighting the passage of time and the reduction of content. It's important to title both the timecode—*Timestamp (107232)*—and the soundtrack—*Soundtrack (01:14:28)*—so it's clear we're talking about three individual works which exist in relation to each other but could potentially also be shown separately.

BEN BROOME: I really like the idea of showing them separately. The stickers themselves are a reduction, and then *Productions*, and the way you've framed the imagery, reduces it further. It highlights the negative.

LG: It highlights the negative space...in the context of the sticker album, it's complete, but in the context of the film it is highly incomplete. So there's a complete object within a durational time frame making it seem entirely incomplete. Even though it's actually a condensed 'full thing'.

BB: But then by further removing the images, it's noticeably reduced. I wonder if people would still associate it with *Cinderella* if you just played the sound?

LG: I think what it's doing is highlighting the passage of time and the reduction of content. But the sound does also highlight the moments in which there is content. It's like a push and pull.

BB: The sound also highlights the passing of time because you become aware of the absence of sound.

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LG: Yes, there is a soundtrack that exists from start to finish, but parts of that soundtrack are conceived to be background noise, white noise. It's designed so that you notice it when you walk in and you notice when you walk out: something that creates an atmosphere but you're not so aware of it while it's playing/you are still immersed in it.

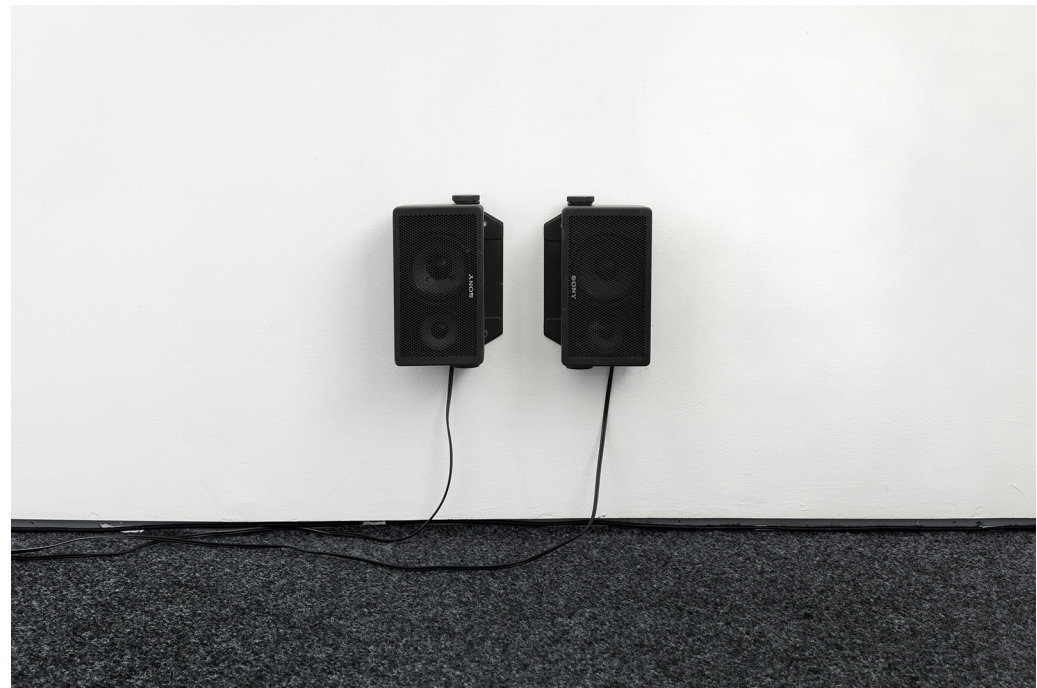
BB: You were telling me about how sound and image are historically different entities in that, when film first started to be developed in the early 20th century, sound was an accessory to film or it existed separately and the two were not as intertwined as they are today. Can you expand on that?

LG: To us they belong together because we are used to seeing images alongside sound but, technologically, they are two different things (or let's say within the evolution of technology). At first there were silent movies and the film camera was not able to record sound at the same time. Early cameras were loud: powered by a motor or hand-wound, the noise of the camera would drown out any other sounds. As cameras became quieter over the years the sound recording accessories were added to moving image equipment. 16mm was an obvious choice for the first iteration of *Productions* because it's inherently a silent medium. To me, its silent nature relates it more to photography. There are two elements at play: the idea that it's silent and the idea that there is no movement between the images because they are static stills. In an animation or a movie there is movement because the images, placed in a sequence, create movement. My images are static, and this makes it more of a photographic work than a moving image work. I like the idea that it's a photographic work within a time based container.

BB: So you see your film based work as static, more akin to photography than to moving image, in that it captures something singular?

LG: I like to say that I work with time rather than with moving image. I consider the durational aspect of the piece and then I place static content within that container. The other way I like to work is by having a fixed camera and one static shot: the camera is still and whatever is in front of it, moves. It's a type of a long exposure, a kind of photograph. I'm thinking about my more recent works *DreamWorks* and *Actors*.

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BB: I've been thinking a lot about the gallery as a time based entity: exhibitions open and close, they're up for a fixed amount of time, mostly without permanence. Once an exhibition closes, works are rarely ever reassembled in the same way. The extension of that is the lifetime of a given gallery space. A lot of galleries set out to exist indefinitely... forever. And I think it's interesting for me as a curator to consider longevity in the life of the gallery. To consider curating and existing in a gallery space in a durational context...maybe defining fixed start and end points. This is one of the reasons why I'm so attracted to your work: time is so ingrained in contemporary artistic practice. As young people working in art, I feel the pressure of time and I think you do too.

LG: That's also why I don't want to become a filmmaker and why I have no interest in cinema or theatre spaces. I have an interest in exhibition making and time based work because it exists durationally and can be accessed whenever one feels like it. I'm drawn to the concept of reflexive as opposed to consumable time. Consumable time is when duration is preconceived and something is consumed from start to finish and where an exchange happens (for example: an exchange of money). Reflexive time is a self-constructed duration: you're not a client, no exchange is taking place and you have free will to come and go as you please. If you're a filmmaker showing work in a gallery context you run the risk of the work being consumed the same way as it does in those other applied practices: from start to finish. I try to emphasise a conceptual point by making work specifically for a gallery or museum context in which, most of the time, it's accessible for free and people can walk in and out as many times as they want. Even though *Productions* is a work that is feature film length, it's not meant to be consumed like a feature film...one can spend an hour or two minutes in there.

BB: Do you think that it can be as impactful in two minutes as it can be in an hour?

LG: Yes because I think *Productions* is a work that relates to conceptual works from the 1960s and 1970s where, yes, I was the one executing the work but it's really about an idea and this idea can be understood in five minutes or in an hour. If someone decides that they want to experience the installation for longer, then they can.

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BB: As an extension of that, we were talking about the notion of boredom with-in the context of the viewer faced with your work. I think we're conditioned to constantly have stimuli and, if there's no stimuli, we turn to our phone. Was that considered when you were making the work? A very intentional lack of stimuli, a still moment?

LG: I've definitely been thinking about attention spans and how the contemporary consumption of culture is generally fast paced. There's a tension in the work between flashes of images, which is similar to, let's say, an Instagram story, and a build-up that is exactly the opposite, a build-up that is drawn out. I'm influenced by conceptual and minimal art—the idea that minimal art is reductive—getting rid of content to focus on a container and highlighting the formal qualities of an object. I think that's really clear in *Productions*. I am looking at the materiality of film, at nothingness...that's the minimalist aspect. And then the influence of conceptual art becomes clear in the way I placed the images and how a subject enters a minimalist container. I don't want to go on too long about minimalism, but what minimalism did was to confront the viewer with something that wasn't consumable in a linear fashion. I want to make time-based works which confronts the viewer like minimal sculpture.

BB: Which is why I think it's interesting in this context, because Disney films (in this case *Cinderella*) are designed to be universally consumable and accessible, this is their inherent nature. They are the opposite of minimalism, they are about as maximalist as it gets. This is a piece that originated from a Disney film, but it demands an entirely different engagement on the part of the spectator.

LG: I think it's also interesting to look at when this film came out: in the 1950s, Cold War USA. It was the time of post-war American glamour, of Marilyn Monroe. The cultural industry in the United States tried to remove any signs of labour in whatever it produced: let's say a Disney cartoon has a lot of hand-drawn labour in its production, but its surface appearance is slick. It was a decisive moment—industry trying to get rid of any artisanal trace—you can see this in minimalism too.

BB: I know the amount of work that has gone into developing *Productions* but it is also inherently slick at surface level. The different ways in which you've in-

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stalled the work, both as a 16mm projection and now in digital format, both these methods of display remove any trace of labour. It appears as a found object rather than something that is meticulously crafted.

LG: Yes, there was a huge amount of work in cutting the film physically but it's hidden inside a slick container.

BB: Going back to the audio element, the first time you showed it on 16mm the sound of the projector was a tool you relied upon to ground the piece. This sound is removed in the digitised version. The sound and timestamp exist as two individual works and are shown concurrently in *Revisions*, reminding the viewer of time passing and perhaps of the labour taking place behind the scenes. Is that fair to say?

LG: What the 16mm projector does is to materialise the passage of time both through sound and through the film material being pulled through the machine, by the machine. So in the moments in which there are no images, you see the celluloid moving and the roll spinning and you have the sound which suggests that something is operating, happening. You are aware of something not being static and the viewer is physically confronted with the passage of time. This was the conceptual starting point for thinking about how to translate an analog work into a digital one. What we came up with together is to look at the components of this work and build three separate channels. We have the entity of the moving image, a feature length film comprised of 360 images (*Productions*) which, in its digital form, exists as a silent film. Another entity is the audio composition, which tries to do something similar to what the sound of the projector did. It is mostly white noise—a sound that you are aware of but it remains in the background—similar to the sound of digital machinery rather than analog. And in the moments where an image flashes on screen there's also the synchronised sound of the voices from Disney's *Cinderella*, playing intermittently within the wider score composed of white noise. The third entity refers to what was originally seen in the 16mm version: the spinning roll of film. In the digital version you have timestamps synchronised with the images, playing on a Sony Cube...again this relates to the other two works, but can also be seen as a separate work. The timestamps visually illustrate the passage of time.

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Exhibition view, *Productions*, Galerie Noah Klink, 2022

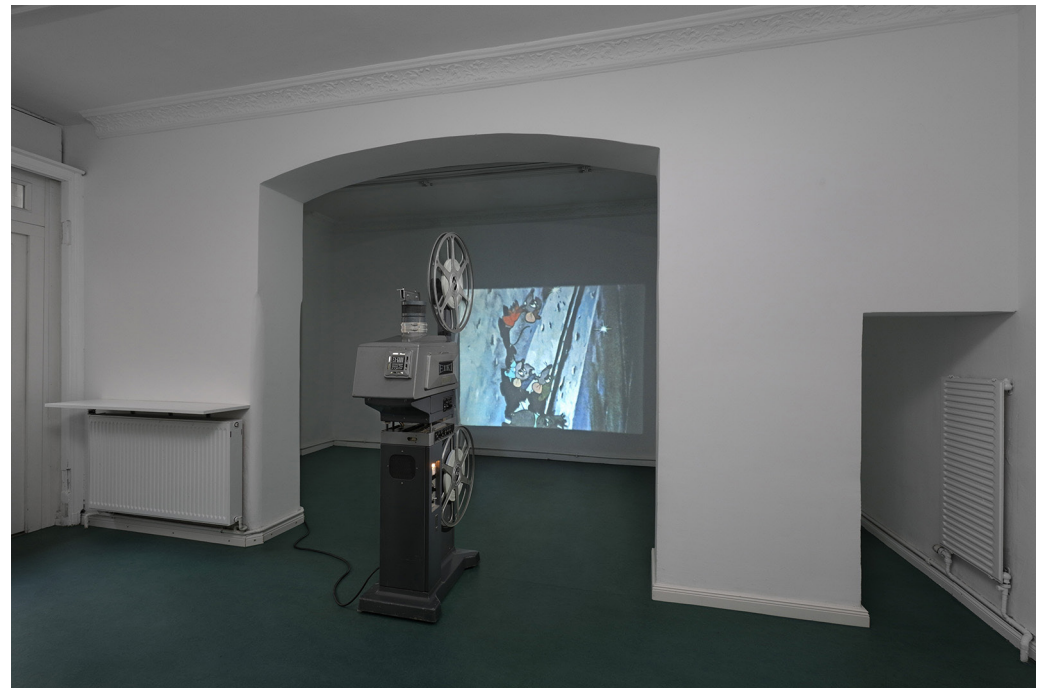
BB: Seeing the work as these three separate entities that come together to have the same effect as showing it in an analog format is what is so compelling about this second iteration. You have referred to the digital version as a facelift, can you expand on that?

LG: When I was making *Productions*, I was also following a philosophy of language course with Paolo Virno in Rome. Amongst other things, Paolo Virno is a great scholar of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht and we were reading *The Storyteller* by Benjamin. Here, Benjamin describes how we lost our ability to tell stories and he discusses the fairy tale and the Brothers Grimm, the idea of an oral history passed on generation after generation. He looks at how stories change through oral dissemination. I was interested in the history of fairy tales: how they have travelled and how they have changed over time. So now, back to your question. With Virno I was also looking at how Benjamin wrote about his friend and colleague Bertolt Brecht's writing from the same period. Benjamin wrote a review of Brecht's writing in which he describes Brecht's modus operandi as being similar to an industrial one: where human traces are lost. I think all these things I was reading came together with this work. I was thinking about style of production in writing, in commodities, in literature...plus the added subject of the fairy tale and *The Storyteller*. Around that time I found these images which were made in the 1950s but were reproduced for the Panini sticker album in the 1980s. So 30 years later. That, to me, is an example similar to that of orally transmitted stories changing over time. I realised that the story of Cinderella has essentially stayed the same over the past 80 years but its imagery has evolved with technology, becoming flatter and flatter.

BB: That brings me to the image you chose for the invitation: a mirror image of a still from *Cinderella*...can you speak about this in your own words?

LG: I think every image undergoes some form of metamorphosis. So it's a hybrid of sorts, an analog or digital film with the surface appearance of a printed image. I looked through the time-line of *Cinderella* to find the corresponding time-stamp of the 360 still images from the sticker album...to decipher where each image existed. Out of all the images I found, only one was mirrored. It is the image we used for the invitation. I don't know why but on the sticker the dog jumps from the left to right and in the film it jumps from right to left. It's a sort of glitch I

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Exhibition view, *Productions*, Galerie Noah Klink, 2022

guess.

BB: I think mutation is an interesting word to use in this context because we're living in this new age where everyone has the tools at their disposal to transform images through memes, the Internet, Internet culture. Everything is in flux, everything is sampled, everything is regurgitated and re-contextualised. I think it's happening in a very different way to the mutation of oral storytelling, but it is no less relevant. And I think humans are obsessed with the idea of reworking pre-existing materials.

LG: What I'm doing is creating a transfigured version of a pre-existing work and translating it into different media. I like the idea of the version and the idea of mutation—I don't really see my work as being fixed anyway. That's also a reason why I chose to separate the channels: I want the film, the sound and time itself to exist independently from one another. If I want to change the sound, I can just change the sound. I don't have to change the other two elements. There's an element of control there too—I can also decide to just show it silent and it's still conceptually round—I can just show the sound or I can just show the timestamp, they can work together but they don't have to. There's curatorial freedom for the future in the separation of channels.

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A SENSE OF PLACE

LENARD GILLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOLADE BANJO

INTERVIEW BY BEN BROOME

FOOTWEAR EXCLUSIVE: REEBOK LTD

London-based artist Lenard Giller explores the life-spans of time-based technologies and their translations into language, memory, and perception.

BEN BROOME

I last interviewed you six months ago in conjunction with your exhibition “Revisions” at The Shop at Sadie Coles HQ. That was a formative exhibition and a formative conversation!

LENARD GILLER

I think the one realization I had during our last conversation was the idea of making videos that can be approached like minimalist sculpture—I’d never had that thought before.

What I meant was that these objects appear without a predetermined narration: they just exist physically, sculpturally in front of you. They work in relation to your body and the architecture they are surrounded by. They don’t tell you what to do or how to look. I liked that ambiguity as a working methodology.

BB

And that idea came through the act of speaking?

LG

There’s very few people in my life who I can talk to about ideas without them having to be finalized or bulletproofed. It takes imagination; a lot of people need to see the final result before they can engage.

BB

I think that’s part of what we do: have a thought, exhaust it, then see if it still interests us a week later.

K



LG

Ideas stay in the back of our heads. The moment comes where the situation makes sense, and you get them back out. It's like a catalog you build. When you invited me to show at The Shop at Sadie Coles HQ earlier this year, I took something that existed in Berlin and brought it to London. In this process of transportation, the work changed because it had to adapt to a new context.

BB

Speaking of *Productions* (2022) and its subsequent second life as *Revisions* (2023), the work we showed together in London, can you tell me about the starting point for the work?

LG

Finding a box of images at a market sparked the idea. I realized they were all stills from Disney's 1950 film *Cinderella*. 360 stills had been extracted from the film and made into collectables for a 1980s Panini sticker album. It made me think about the hierarchy of images in pop culture and why certain images get selected over others to promote a movie or an exhibition, thus defining our collective memory of an artwork or of a wider cultural object. This selection of 360 images literally represents our collective memory of *Cinderella*.

Around the same time, I had this fantasy to hold the volume of a movie. I like the idea that, with analog film, there's a relationship between weight and time. Time equals weight, and weight equals dimension. In *Productions*, I combined these two objects: the material dimensions of an analog movie and the 360 found stills from Disney's *Cinderella*.

I transferred the images onto celluloid, cutting them into the precise moment where they originally appeared. The end result was a physical object the same size, dimension, and weight as *Cinderella* would've been when it was first shown, but the majority of what was shown was blank, with only the found images flashing in between. Disney was the perfect starting point for this work because the subject matter is so well known that only a few images spark our memory of the story.

BB

For *Productions*, there is no pre-defined method of viewing: without narrative language, spectators define their own way to navigate the work. Is this something

K



LG

We can talk about this in the context of exhibition-making but also consumerist society in general. It's a question that both the advertising exec and artist might think about, this idea of an artwork's potential indifference to the audience and vice versa. It's speculative: someone might sit through an entire video work of mine, someone might walk in and out, someone might not come at all. The advertising industry takes a similar approach when looking at a map of a city to decide where a billboard should go. They hope there will be encounters that affect the subconscious, there is the possibility of someone walking past and seeing it at 3:00 a.m., but it's equally likely that no one walks past.

BB

The grappling between the intangibility of time and the tangibility of object is apparent in your output. You've been making sculptural works from mosquito coils: Do you see these as an actualization of passing time in object form?

LG

I watched the mosquito coils in my studio disintegrating over my working day. They were objects that I lit in the morning and they worked in sync with me: as I worked and got tired, they burnt and became smaller. They have a burn duration of eight hours, which mirrors a working day. I started seeing them as abstract clocks.

They share visual similarities to film in that they're round coils. The more you show an analog film, the more it disintegrates. The coils consume themselves in order to protect you and film consumes itself in order to entertain you.

BB

And how do they manifest as artworks?

LG

I like to think of them as witnesses. They're a recording of their own fabrication. I was left with these remnants of a four- or six-hour work day and I decided to translate them into another materiality in order to preserve them. They're all getting cast, becoming solid and trapped in time. They become stopped clocks—it's like the end of a movie.

I like this change from one state into another. When you invited me to show

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*Productions* in London, we decided to translate it into a digital form in order to present it anew as *Revisions*. What happened in that translation from one material to another, or one state to another, is that we also preserved the work. By transforming it from celluloid into digital we also made sure that it has a life beyond its disintegrated form.

BB

Martine Syms has this notion of “Real Time Cinema”—the idea that, when you know you’re being filmed, your behavior changes to become a performance. I think it’s the same in an interview setting: you hit “record” and suddenly you have to perform. All of these metrics are at play that didn’t exist ten minutes ago when we were chatting as friends. In a sense, we’re actors in this conversation. You made a work entitled *Actors* (2023) that concerns the camera’s role as the protagonist in film. How does the camera function in this way?

LG

The title I had in mind at the beginning was *Is Acting Lying?* I was thinking about the difference between lying and acting and whether or not there’s a difference between the two.

BB

Do you think there’s a difference?

LG

I don’t think there is. What do you think?

BB

I don’t think it’s lying because I think the act of lying is rooted in self-preservation, self-protection, and self-advancement. Acting doesn’t have to have a motivation, but lying always does. When you’re lying, you’re acting, but if you’re acting, you’re not always lying.

LG

I like that answer! I’m more interested in the question than I am in the answer. I knew I didn’t want to work with actors and I didn’t want to work with language. I was curious to attempt to make a work in which the camera is both the recording

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device and the actor. I came across a special effect that was common in Hollywood: “day for night,” in which you film a day scene and make it appear as if it was shot at night. I was in Berlin—I had a 16 millimeter camera—I drove to an industrial part of the city and filmed the steam coming out of the chimneys of the factories, making it appear as if it was a romantic night sky.

BB

Your work poses questions but is not always immediately legible. Do you consider that it might be alienating? Could it be too abstract?

LG

I’m not sure what’s more abstract: a formal object or the type of work that I make. I’m interested in abstract ideas but I think I bring them to a logical conclusion—it’s not a logical conclusion only I can arrive at. I like that the work *Actors* sits between these polarities of a romantic depiction of the night sky and a constructed image of an industrial society. I’m definitely not going to become a simple illustrator of ideas; these polarities are what makes the work.

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