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What has happened to the Art Film Makers?

By Femke van Iperen

Independent film is increasingly being strangled by underfunding. So what does the future hold? Where better to discuss the issue than between the art deco panels of the Phoenix, widely known for its support of film culture and normally-hard-to-find independent movies.

On 24 November, a special-ist panel consisting of the Head of London Film School Ben Gibson, British Film Institute's Helen de Witt and Ken Loach's producer Rebecca O'Brien tackled the obstacles that filmmakers often face. Special guest was Kitty Cooper, whose late husband Charles Cooper was honoured with the event. Their Contemporary Films, UK's pioneer in independent foreign, art-house and specialist films, rescued the Phoenix from collapsing in the 70s.

When host Mr Gibson took off his black hat and carefully positioned the microphone, no one seemed surprised as he kicked off with, "Good Afternoon Comrades". Introducing the discussion with his concerns about the lack of cultural input and minimal funding for innovative newcomers, he said, "This has been a frustrating cycle for me, and I am very depressed about the whole thing", and added, "Commercial, commercial, commercial' might have been the motto of the last years", before condemning the audience tendency to view entertainment as the rival of art.

About the current status of low-budget film versus profit-making, producer Ms O'Brien

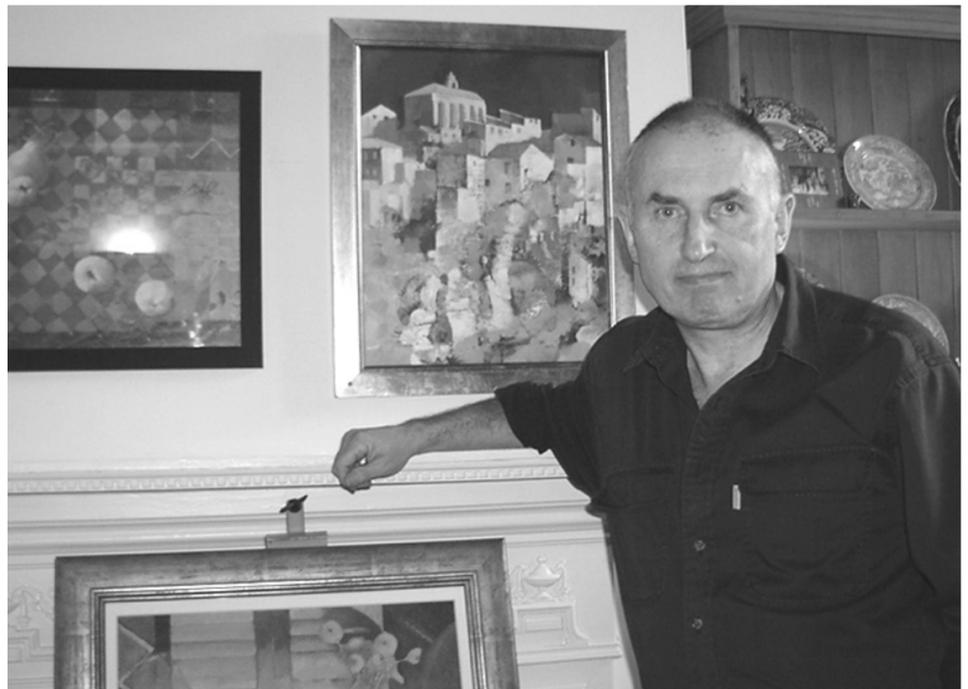
was equally pessimistic: "The big problem of the last years is that everyone is aiming high to compete with the American market, whilst low-budget films can never be seen in the cinema. We are missing a generation of art filmmakers; the successors of [UK Film Directors] Sally Potter [The Piano], Peter Greenaway [The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover] what happened to them?"

Active support

But not all was doom; BFI's Ms de Witt had a more optimistic view to offer, "... We do have some talent here and some smaller movies are getting the media coverage they deserve. There is a growing underground cinema and there are rising audience numbers at London Film galleries with exciting new programmes."

Ms de Witt also told *THE ARCHER* her own aspirations for improvements: "It's important for people who love cinema to have their own vision, to devote to it their own voices and pockets but also to write letters to the press on the issues that are not covered."

The message of the day was loud and clear: get active and support independent film: its survival will determine the future of cinema.



Tark Butler beside his paintings - photo by Toni Morgan

Local Artist holds Exhibition

By Toni Morgan

At a recent exhibition at his home in East Finchley, artist Tark Butler showed a collection of his paintings including vibrant Mediterranean scenes, atmospheric cathedral interiors, stations and still life.

A steady stream of visitors during the day were

able to purchase original paintings, limited edition prints and cards. Those of you who saw his earlier exhibitions will be pleased to hear that he is planning to make this an annual event - watch *THE ARCHER* for dates.

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