

FOGG from the 60s to now

written by Dr. Sarah Breen Lovett May 2016

Since the 1960s to the present day Roger Foley–FOGG’s presence in the art world has been widely acknowledged,¹ however it has also been argued that his success in the commercial world is at odds with and at times has overshadowed his art career.² While FOGG sees no difference between these two types of work, as he maintains creative direction over both, it can be argued he has encouraged the perceived duality. Throughout the 1970s FOGG presented himself as two separate personas; on one hand, light artist Ellis D Fogg, was cryptic and quizzical, working on wild art projects more for love than money; while the other persona Roger Foley was the astute business man, working for large co–corporations to create spectacular events.³ Even his name Ellis D Fogg was conjured up by FOGG because of its simultaneous commercial connotation in relation to pounds, shillings and pence £sd and the art experience enhancing drug LSD. It is FOGG’S melting pot of commercial and art worlds that ‘LIGHTSHOWS 60s to Now’ explores, not to emphasise the differences between them, but rather to highlight the ideologies that are common to both.

FOGG has created spectacular lightshows for many entities, including; large corporations such as Hoyts, Christian Dior, Mirage, Ford, Australian Wool; for public figures such as Elton John, Paul Keating, Christopher Skase, Maggie Tabberer, Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee; Musicians such as Johnny O’Keefee, Daddy Cool, Tully and Tiny Tim; groups such as UBU films, Gija People of the Kimberley Western Australia, Sydney and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras and a Children’s Home in Noida, Delhi. While in the art world FOGG has exhibited in a Sydney Biennale, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, The Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney and was part of the highly influential art collective The Yellow House. Common to all his works is the medium of light, and the belief that light can act as a conduit for an unseen entity that connects us all.

FOGG’S arguably utopian ideology was born from a reaction to broader social and political concerns of the 1960s, he says these included “The Vietnam war, censorship, sexual liberation, state political and police corruption, the white Australia policy, republicanism, apartheid, the voting rights and civil rights marches in the USA and the treatment of

¹ Through peer review and invitation to be part of many exhibitions and events, as well as many newspaper and magazine articles such as James Gleeson ‘Through the Tunnel of Life’ Sun Herald Feb 21 1971; James Gleeson, ‘Is this a new dimension’ The Sun Feb 1971; Leo Schofield, Sydney Morning Herald 1989; Michael Symmons, ‘UNDERGROUND is all lit up’, Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday May 24th 1969

² Sally McInerney “The last of the hippies stages events for fun, art and big business”. Sydney Morning Herald 1980 ; Clair Tedeschi, ‘How to be a commercial and creative winner’ Sydney Morning Herald 1983

³ Julie Kusko ‘The lighter side of Roger Foley is ELLIS D FOGG’ Women’s Weekly , August 26, 1970

our own black people, women's liberation, the pill and contraception, abortion, sexual repression and the general repression, malaise and boredom of society...." FOGG says that he worked at making his "Lightshows reflect these concerns in a manner that was entertaining. Fogg productions experimented with the new 60s liberated freedoms producing interesting and spiritually uplifting, positive events. Psychedelic events in the original sense of the word – mind enriching, expanding ones knowledge and awareness."

For FOGG, the notion of expanding ones awareness was intricately linked to the idea of a universal one-ness. Universal one-ness was also being explored by other artists such as Martin Sharp (who founded the Yellow House). In fact, it was a discarded sketch of Sharp's called 'We are all islands joined beneath the sea' that FOGG cites as his initial inspiration for the idea of one-ness. FOGG'S other inspirations along this line of thought include anthropologist Carlos Castaneda's *spiritual awareness* and Humphry Osmond's *psychedelic awareness*.⁴ The psychedelic mind expanding nature of FOGG'S ideology is seen in all of his works, but perhaps most potently in his lightshows for music such as TULLY and Tiny Tim. FOGG created psychedelic environments with custom designed equipment, such as his Fogg Machine, the Colourorgan and Strobe made for FOGG by Bruce Jackson and Philip Story from the company JandS. FOGG goes on to explain "We used bright coloured lights in surreal ways with live performances by rock bands, jazz and symphony orchestras words, music and dance – with our indeterminate and ephemeral fog to stimulate the minds of the participants to concentrate on being 'together', to become 'One' with the universal brotherhood of man." In these lightshows FOGG had an underlying structure to the works, which the audience could simultaneously become lost in and understand, he says "I was exploring a way to have mind manifesting chaotic theatre with a beginning, middle and end. A controlled chaos to evoke a sense of freedom that would be more satisfying for the audience."

FOGG'S lightshows also became environments and installations that people could walk through. FOGG was known as an 'environmentalist' – one who created environments. As seen in his installations such as the 'Capsule Room' at the Yellow House where he was the head of the aptly named Space Environments Society. His most noted environment 'WOOM', an installation with Vivienne Binns, was created for Watters Gallery in 1971. This installation included the aptly named 'What Happens When A Circle Meets A Square', a projection work that employs the *moiré* effect of a series of squares laid over a series of circles. FOGG says, at the

⁴ New Delhi, India Exhibition text.

time of making the work you were either considered to be a *square* or a *hippy* and he is proposing a richness that comes from intertwining these perceived opposites.⁵

Surrealist and art critic James Gleeson wrote several reviews in praise of WOOM, which he called an “environmental happening,” and stated was “the most stimulating art event of the season.” The way that the audience could be enveloped by the lightshow was evident in Gleeson’s observation that “one is left with the impression that art has taken on a new dimension and that in the future it will involve the spectator as a much more active participant in the experience.” This inclusion of the audience can also be seen in many of FOGG’S large scale commercial events, and is perhaps documented most clearly at the 1989 Mardi Gras. For this, FOGG created a moving lightshow, where the truck itself was a psychedelic art work that projected images onto the streetscape. These projections blurred boundaries between the buildings and the revelers that partied in front of them. The spectators became the artwork, enveloped in a lightshow psychedelia.

FOGG has also distilled the psychedelic lightshow onto and into wall mounted art works, such as Martin Sharp’s ‘ABRAXAS’ which is the front cover for the 1970 book ‘Politics of Ecstasy’ by Timothy Leary. Sharp showed this painting in Sydney’s Yellow House in 1971–72 where it was damaged. FOGG later purchased it from Sharp’s mother and began to restore it with Sharp’s help. FOGG used the original in many Lightshows both in Australia and in Singapore by combining it with Lightshow projectors and later made ‘ABRAXAS REDUX’ with a Lightshow built in. Further, FOGG’S ‘Lumino Kinetic’ works can be considered to be frozen psychedelic lightshows, where one can become absorbed in the unmoving cacophony of light, colour and movement. Here, it is the movement of the body and eyes passing the work that creates the psychedelic effect.⁶

FOGG’S mandalas are another version of the wall mounted lightshow. Their slowly changing colours vibrate into the very retinas that observe them. These works are inspired by India’s colourful Gods and spiritualism, where the mandala is a symbol of the universe and the world as one. While FOGG says the spirituality of India has informed his practice since the 1960s, it is not until 2010 that he found the relevant Hindi term ‘Vasudev Kutumbakam’ which he says means “the world is one family, eternity, unity, completeness, universal love and joy.” The

⁵ Personal Communication with the Author 14th March 2013

⁶ Lumino Kinetic Art was coined by Frank Popper in about 1966 - He was then Professor of Aesthetics at Paris University, he wrote the book defining Kinetic Art in 1968 and was the curator of the Light Exhibition called ELECTRA in Paris in 1984

relationship of FOGGS Lumino Kinetics and Mandalas to his broader ideologies are outlined when he says “My friends and I felt that these shows and our Lumino Kinetic –‘light’ installations and mandalas would facilitate a concentration of love and positivity and would have a multiplying effect.” FOGG’s connection to Indian spirituality can also be seen in the lightshow he did for a children’s home in Delhi, for DIWALI. FOGG says this “is India’s major Light and Firework festival which marks the return of Lord Rama from exile and the triumph of good over evil, purity over impurity, light over darkness.”

FOGG’S ideologies behind his work are not just awareness of spirituality, but also of science. FOGGS cites scientific evidence that there is powerful unseen, immeasurable, interconnected phenomena that is common to all that exists on this planet and beyond. FOGG specifically refers to inspiration from biologists Rupert Sheldrake’s *morphic fields*, physicist Hugh Everett’s *many-worlds* and scientist Paul Davies explorations between *supernaturalism and materialism*. Specifically FOGG refers to the way that the vibrations of light particles affect us, evident in his ‘No Film Manifesto’ where he says “No Film can exist even when there are no witnesses as they also exist in the subatomic world of vibrations. The vibrations and spirit of the No Film from which everything we see or seem is made.”⁷ Within the LIGHTSHOWS exhibition these ideas are most clearly evident in the pre-recorded Wetshow from 1972 that was made specifically by FOGG in collaboration with Eddie van der Madden. This movie, originally shot on 16mm, was made in order to show synaesthesia, the apparent synchronicity between sound and light in our brain.

This fascination with light and its effects on our consciousness are also evident within *The Dreamachine* – a recreation of the flicker machine made by Ian Sommerville and Brion Gysin, as described in the Olympia Magazine, Number 2, 1962 which inspired FOGG deeply. While a more recent development of this work was made in 1992, with FOGG’S handwritten instructions on “How to Make your own Lightshow Environment on a Sunny Day”. In both these works the chiaroscuro of light and dark on the closed eyes has the effect of drawing ones awareness to altering frequencies in the light and the brain.

The connection between light and brain frequencies is but one example of a broader interconnectedness that FOGG explores in his work, evident in his statement “Scientists also know that every cell in the human body is identical to the original cell that split in two upon fertilization and that there must be some small bit of information that no one can detect that tells all those identical cells what to do. That information must be very

⁷ Point 9B in FOGG’s NO FILM FILM MANIFESTO -1967 after and in answer to Albie Thoms’ and UBU’s HANDMADE FILM MANIFESTO - 1967

small and sensitive, so is it not reasonable to suppose that the mass of conflicting gravitational fields caused by the stars and planets as they realign in the sky could have a, not insignificant, affect and effect on the development of our body physics and chemistry, our mind and spirit?"⁸ The significance of the microscopic on our existence is evident in the movie of two microorganisms playing in a drop of pond water called 'Life in a Drop of Water' made in 1973 by FOGG'S friend John Walsh, the microphotographic artist/scientist.

While FOGG'S ideas of interconnectivity and universal one-ness can be clearly seen in the environments, installations and wall mounted works discussed above, it can be argued that they are also evident in his more commercial works. In FOGG'S fashion shows the boundaries between the body and the space around them are blurred with misty fog, bodies emerge from parts of the architecture and set design as though they are one and bodies are enmeshed in a visual colour-scape where garment, body and stage become connected. However, It is perhaps FOGG'S most prominent commercial engagement of making the Christmas trees at Darling Harbour since 1995 that requires clarification on how they fit into his creative ideology. Rather than simply a Christian icon, FOGG sees the Christmas tree as an abstract expression of joy resonant with many aspects of multicultural Australia. The widespread consumption of Christmas trees in Australia, and indeed many countries across the world, points to an interconnected-ness between, not only the faithful, but also the faithless. FOGG's summarises this point of view when he says "I have decided to believe in everything – to respect all religions and all views no matter how contradictory they seem. I believe everything is true in the Multiverse of Parallel Universes...." Despite the popular culture, commercial nature of the Christmas tree, FOGG's thinking places it ideologically in context with his other art works, installations and happenings, which may be more readily accepted as 'art'.

Many of FOGGS works have enjoyed a popular appeal and commercial success, similar to the VIVID exhibition that includes LIGHTSHOWS 60s to NOW. A face-value reading of his commercial works does a disservice to the sustained rigour of a set beliefs evident throughout all of FOGGS work. His ideas of universal one-ness and interconnectivity have been present in all of his works. It is this, and his ability to blur the boundaries between the commercial and art worlds that places FOGG as a significant figure in the context of Australian art from the 60s to NOW.

⁸ FOGG personal text archives 2004.

What Happens When?

By Sarah Breen Lovett

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Roger Foley Fogg's *What Happens When A Circle Meets A Square* was made for his first gallery show called *WOOM*, with Vivienne Binns in 1971. The exhibition was an 'environmental lightshow' in the upstairs room, at Watters Gallery Sydney, and was considered by artist James Gleeson to leave one " with the impression that art has taken on a new dimension and that in the future it will involve the spectator as a much more active participant in the experience."¹ This notion of involving the spectator more in performance art and happenings was a particular point of interest for Expanded Cinema Artists of the 1960s-1970s. Fogg being a Lumino Kinetic Artist, contributed greatly to Australia's Expanded Cinema scene, and specifically there are particular characteristics of ... *Circle Meets A Square* that contribute significantly to breaking down a rigid dichotomy in Expanded Cinematic theory, that still resonates to this day.

... *Circle Meets A Square*, is a deceptively simple work, made up of a layering of complexities. On one hand, it could seem to be a formalist, straight laced experiment with science and geometry, arising from the literal meeting of a series of circles and a series of squares. Due to the transparency of its construction, there are no 'smoke and mirrors' that lead to its retinal impact. This aspect of the work could be argued as a form of Structural Expanded Cinema, which aimed to engender an engaged but critically distanced spectator, though a push and pull affect between the 'real' physical space of the spectator's encounter, an awareness of the 'constructed' nature of its affect and the perceived illusionary space of the image.

While on the other hand the work can be thought of as an extension of the psychedelic, mind expanding experiments that the 'other' Expanded Cinema artists were carrying out, as inspired by Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs's *Dream Machine* developed in 1958. In ... *Circle Meets a Square* the chiaroscuro interplay of black and white shapes creates a mesmerising moiré affect, which lulls one into altered states of consciousness. This all engrossing spectator activation is diametrically opposed (in text books at least) to the structural / formalist approach as outlined above, that aims at an engaged but sceptical spectator. It is the illustration that these two types of spectator engagement can co-exist that makes*Circle Meets a Square* a significant piece of work.

Going beyond this, however, there are more layers of complexity in ...*Circle Meets A Square*. On a metaphysical level, Fogg relates the work to Doris Lessing's *Marriage of Zones 3,4+5*, (1980) a science fiction novel about the meeting of various cosmic zones with different levels of spiritual awareness.² While, on a more physical level, Fogg says, at the time of making the work you were either considered to be a 'square' or a 'hippy', with this piece of work, Fogg is proposing a richness that comes from intertwining these perceived opposites.³ Therefore, it can be considered that *What Happens When A Circle Meets A Square* is all about being, more than the sum of its parts. It simultaneously proposes the fruits of various interactions between circles/squares; bodies/minds; image spaces/real spaces, individual perceptions/social contexts, and above all, for Mr Fogg, metaphysical vibrations and physical realities.

¹ James Gleeson, artist, writer and Australia's greatest surrealist. The Sun, Feb 1971.

² Personal Communication with the Author 30th April 2013

³ Personal Communication with the Author 14th March 2013