



Gerry Fox with his film: "Nothing is completely synchronised because the footage for the different screens was not shot at the same time"

Meet Anita Zabludowicz's first artist-in-residence

Filmmaker **Gerry Fox** talks to **Julia Weiner** about his installation portraying the capital's streets after dark

BAFTA-WINNING director Gerry Fox has for years made acclaimed documentaries about some of the best-known contemporary artists in the world, most of them for the *South Bank Show*. He has also been making his own art films for years, but they have rarely been shown — until now. Fox has been made the first artist-in-residence at collector Anita Zabludowicz's new art space in Kentish Town, North-West London.

So why, after years of collaborating with other artists, has he decided to concentrate on his own work? "A few years ago, I made a film about Robert Frank, a wonderful old Jewish photographer who lives as a hermit in Nova Scotia," he says. "In the film, Frank opened up in a way he had never done before, talking about all sorts of things

including what it meant to be Jewish.

"The film won a number of awards. But then Frank said that it could not be shown any more. It was quite a hurtful experience. He said to me that I should do my own thing and not live on other people. It was at that point that I decided that I really wanted to do some work for myself." Shortly afterwards, he met Zabludowicz and her curator, Elizabeth Neilson, who invited him to work with them as artist-in-residence.

The exhibition is entitled *Living London* and comprises a series of film installations shown on multiple screens. The first work that visitors come across is *Night In London*, in which film shot by Fox is projected not only on all four walls but also on the ceiling and floor.

"The idea was to completely envelop you with screens on every surface," Fox explains. He walked through the streets with his camera, but strangely most passers-by did not seem to notice it at all. The overall effect of the work is slightly dream-like. Fox explains why.

"Nothing is completely synchronised because the footage for the different screens was not all shot at the same time. You get a dislocation."

It becomes even more disorientating when Fox begins to play tricks, swapping the footage between screens so that the floor is projected on the ceiling. Eventually, the person through whose eyes we see London ends up in the river. "Pushing the cameras underwater was not easy but I did it. I took the view that everything had to be real," he explains. Indeed, the viewer has the sense of entering the murky water accompanied by a satisfying gurgling sound.

Several of the films are intensely personal. Fox shows the birth of his daughter and then films her crawling around Parliament Square in a musing on childhood. He explores the history of a street that has long fascinated him, Sidney Street in the East End, scene of an infamous siege of 1911.

"My grandfather was living in that street at the time. I think it was that

event that convinced his family to leave London and get the hell out," Fox explains, for he was born in South Africa.

He also sees connections with today's society. "Those under siege were touted as Jewish anarchists who were trying to bring down the state, and it is quite ironic that it's now a street full of Muslim people who are in a way the modern-day equivalent of the same thing — scapegoats for a society's anxieties," he observes. He also filmed at Ridley Road market, a place he loves. "Ridley Road used to be Jewish but now it is a market of the world," he enthuses. "I wanted to celebrate its diversity."

Perhaps the most personal piece of filming was in Nunhead Cemetery. In 1994, he did some filming in the cemetery with his choreographer sister Michele, but shortly afterwards she was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. She died in 1997.

"I felt strange that I had made a film with Michele in a cemetery and that so soon afterwards she was lying in a

cemetery herself. I could not go back for 10 years. But for this project I wanted to go back and say something of the magic of the place and the sense there is there of life taking over death because everything is so overgrown. I felt that was cathartic."

So what next? "It is going to be hard," he admits. "I have had this incredible opportunity and it will be quite hard to find a way forward. But I want to carry on doing this sort of work."

"I've done two pieces of work already, one about Venice. I am also going to go to Jerusalem. I hope to go there at the time of Passover and Easter and film the different rituals taking place. Then I am going to put them next to one another to say something about the way that religions coexist in that city. But I shall also have to carry on making films to earn a living."

Living London Gerry Fox is at 176, 176 Prince of Wales Road, London NW5 until April 20