

Filmmaker to represent Canada at Venice Biennale 2009

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Film artist Mark Lewis is to be Canada's representative at the Venice Biennale 2009. (Mark Lewis) A film artist and photographer who deconstructs traditional filmmaking techniques is to represent Canada at the 2009 Venice Biennale of Visual Art.

Mark Lewis will be showing a new work he titles *Romance*, which will use the now-outdated film technique of rear-projection combined with digital technology.

Lewis, who was born in Hamilton, Ont., will stage a simple story, a romance, that will be imposed using digital technology on a rear-projection background.

"I'm interested in the way this process was developed for economic reasons in the film business to allow studios to bring the outside inside," Lewis said from Los Angeles, where he is working on another project.

"It was an experiment that came from economic concerns, but like high art, it produces a montage that's beautiful in itself."

Among the locations he will shoot his "rear-projection" images are an abandoned World's Fair site and a roller-coaster, both places that he said were "futuristic" in their day, but now seem relics of the past.

The Canada Council for the Arts announced Lewis as its choice for the 2009 Biennale on Wednesday.

"His work is often very still," Barbara Fischer, the curator who proposed Lewis as a Biennale choice, told CBC News.

"One has time to look at the whole image on the screen as if it were a picture."

Hollywood films are too full of action and dialogue and plot to be really seen by a viewer, Fischer said. Lewis examines the mechanisms behind such films in his work, she said.

"With traditional filmmaking, you cannot really examine what is happening.... Mark has a way of looking at film, the history of film, genres of film, techniques and methodologies of film that helps you see," she said.

Fischer, curator/director at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto, worked with Lewis on a 2007 exhibit that examined the history of contemporary art film.

Fischer said Lewis's experiments with stillness and movement in film often lend a great "sense of place" to his works.



Rush Hour, Morning and Evening, a 2003 film by Lewis, focuses on the shadows of pedestrians during morning and evening rush hour at a major urban intersection. (Mark Lewis) He'll attempt to capture the urban fabric, as he does with *Rush Hour, Morning and Evening*, which shows upside-down shadows of commuters or *122 Leadenhall Street*, in which the camera rests on a single building as people pass.

"He's worked in various locations across Canada," Fischer said.

His 2001 film, *Algonguin Park, September* was a restful image of a lake in the morning with mist rising from its surface. Lewis also created shorts that centred on Toronto locations such as Spadina Avenue, Vancouver's downtown or, in an earlier experiment with rear projection, actress Molly Parker in front of the Howlin' Wolf café.

Lewis started out as a photographer, but has become recognized and critically acclaimed as a filmmaker.

He attended Harrow College of Art in London, England, and the Polytechnic of Central London. He now lives and works in London.

His work is included in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Lewis is making a documentary on rear projection in collaboration with the National Film Board of Canada, the Van Abbemuseum of the Netherlands, Britdocart of the U.K. and Le Grand Café St-Nazaire.

The 53rd edition of the Venice Biennale, one of the world's most prestigious art events, will take place from June 7 to Nov. 22, 2009 in Venice, Italy.