Margaret Tait
Programme 1

77 min
MON 23 AUG 20.00 Filmhouse 2

Director: Margaret Tait

Print Source: Scottish Screen Archive,
1 Bowmont Gardens, Glasgow, G12 9LR, Scotland, UK.
tel: +44 (0)141 337 7400 fax: +44 (0)141 337 7413

Aerial
UK/1974/No dialogue/Colour/B&W/16mm/1:1.33/4 min

Colour Poems
UK/1974/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/12 min

Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait
UK/1964/English dialogue/B&W/16mm/1:1.33/9 min

Portrait of Ga
UK/1952/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/5 min

Three Portrait Sketches
UK/1951/No dialogue/B&W/16mm/1:1.33/10 min

Where I Am Is Here
UK/1964/English dialogue/B&W/16mm/1:1.33/35 min

Margaret Tait programmes curated by Peter Todd.

Material things are only tools
Or they're nothing,
Food is a sort of tool,
Fire a warming tool,
And paint-brushes, pencils, cameras, books
All tools of a kind
For making a life
Or lives.
But too much food is a poison,
Comfort a permanent anaesthetic,
And too many paint-brushes, cameras, books
Waste away as toys.
A tool has the feel of a user's hand on it
If it's a real tool.
A tool that is fully used
Gets a bloom on it
From its own essential-ness.

Margaret Tait from The Hen and the Bees.

The relationships between film and poetry are explored in this programme which starts with
one of Tait's earliest films, Three Portrait Sketches (already a film in the form of three verses).
The films include Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait, with poems read by the poet himself; Colour,
Poems, with her own words: "I had started a poem in words, and I tried to complete it on film"; and others like Aerial which are themselves poems: "There's no narrative and no argument;
the theme's more like a musical theme, conjured out of the whole rather than presented as
points to be taken."

Where I Am Is Here, a poetic examination of the landscape of Edinburgh, was started before
the MacDiarmid portrait but after a break from filmmaking when she published three books
of poems (Origins and Elements, The Hen and the Bees, Subjects and Sequences). "I just felt
I wanted to make a film, but there was absolutely no point in making it specifically for a market,
say, when there just wasn't a market, and that the only way was to do it on the level of poetry."
Margaret Tait Programme 2

80 min

TUE 24 AUG 18:00 Filmhouse 3

Director: Margaret Tait

Print Source: Scottish Screen Archive
1 Broomport Gardens, Glasgow, G71 8LR, Scotland, UK.
Tel: +44 (0)141 337 7400 fax: +44 (0)141 337 7413

The Drift Back
UK/1957/English dialogue/B&W/16mm/1:1.33/10 min

Garden Pieces
UK/1998/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/12 min

Happy Bees
UK/1955/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/17 min

Place of Work
UK/1976/No dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/30 min

Tailpiece
UK/1976/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/10 min

Margaret Tait programmes curated by Peter Todd.

“Happy Bees was intended to be an evocation of what it was like to be a small child on Orkney; when, one (wrongly) remembers, it was sunny all the time, and everything is bursting with life. A film about what surrounds a child, so quite a lot of it is watched at the child level.”

All filmed on Orkney, the works in this programme shift from those like The Drift Back (a sponsored film, it records the return of a farmer, with his family, to the Island of Wyre) and Happy Bees (in which other people and places are the subject) to Place of Work; Tailpiece (both filmed at Buttoquoy House the family home), and Garden Pieces, her final film, where the largely unseen though sometimes heard filmmaker, is very much a part.

“The house is called Buttoquoy and is in Kirkwall. I was really trying to paint (as it were) this self-contained place – a house and garden, in among streets, with glimpses of the town and of the sea and islands from the windows – because I knew it so well, rather than tell any story about its having been the family home and so on. That, in fact, as a fact, doesn't show in the film except in the sense that because it was that, I could approach some of its secrets with confidence. By ‘secrets’ I mean just things like, which doors lead to where, how far the light reaches in, the feeling of being on the stairs and all sorts of other things which I have carried about with me without necessarily thinking about them, but which led me, eventually, to point the camera at one thing rather than another. And since I had helped to make the garden, and in the seven years up to the film had been working in it quite a lot, mostly by myself, I knew my way around those slopes and planes and bits of courtyard. So that’s why you probably do get a feeling of ‘presence’ in that film – my presence, there with the camera – perhaps the presence of other people who had been there before, and even your own presence in the picture, as you look at it.”
Margaret Tait
Programme 3
67 min

WED 25 AUG 18:00 Filmhouse 3

Director: Margaret Tait

Print Source: Scottish Screen Archive, 1 Bowmont Gardens, Glasgow, G12 9LR, Scotland, UK. tel: +44 (0)141 337 7400 fax: +44 (0)141 337 7413

Calypso
UK/1955/No dialogue/Colour/35mm/1:1.33/4 min

Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo
UK/1955/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/7 min

Orquil Burn
UK/1955/English dialogue/Colour/16mm 1:1.33/35 min

Rose Street
UK/1956/No dialogue/B&W/35mm/1:1.33/15 min

These Walls
UK/1974/No dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/6 min

Margaret Tait programmes curated by Peter Todd.

"I peer at things, I really peer at things through my camera viewfinder ... I do sometimes actually use it to help me see the thing, you know. I frame it for myself through the viewfinder and see it differently. It's not just the framing. It's something else you see (that comes) of looking through a lens. You peer more closely I think: follow it. And this is partly why I have developed a habit of using the camera hand held, because earlier on I wouldn't have dreamt of taking it off the tripod, you know. I wasn't exactly taught to do that, but you sort of take it in that the camera should be firmly on the tripod. But, there's a shot in Orquil Burn which led me to this. It was just a particular little bit of following the water running along and at a certain moment some little beetle or something gets on maybe just a leaf, gets caught in the current and goes whipping into some pods that are at the side of the burn, and I was able to follow it, you see, and it just made all the difference to that thing. In fact, somehow or other, it forms the whole film, that particular shot, so I felt the more I could get of this the better. And using a handheld camera obviously you can sometimes just get round the corner, so to speak."

The programme focusses on the earlier part of her work before the break from filmmaking when she published the books of her own poems and includes the early experiment with painting on film, Calypso; her first use of poetry, The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo (by Gerald Marley Hopkins); Orquil Burn, filmed in the landscape; and Rose Street her atmospheric portrait of the street in which she had her base.
Margaret Tait
Programme 4
72 min
THU 26 AUG 18:00 Filmhouse 3
Director: Margaret Tait
Print Source: Scottish Screen Archive, 1 Bowmont Gardens, Glasgow, G12 9JR, Scotland, UK.
Tel: +44 (0)141 337 7400 fax: +44 (0)141 337 7413

The Big Sheep
UK/1966/No dialogue/B&W/Beta SP/x 3/30 min

Landmakar
UK/1981/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/32 min

"Dialogue is everything. Landmakar is dialogue with landscape, a give and take, the recording of someone farming a piece of ground which looks wild and unfarmable, but isn't, has been given its shape - a film about how things keep their fertile shape, how we can, if we put in the steady work and thought, make things give of themselves and be more than themselves. It is about the dignity of this work. Voiceover makes voice become landscape - finally that's what we hear, when we look at it, the voice that's made it what it is and the way it makes the voice. It's another of Tait's paens to survival, and as usual she finds the image which will tell its viewer everything - a roof, patched and holding, even, as she pans along it, great spreads of grass all over it - this isn't just a film about living in a landscape, but one of being the landscape, turning into it yourself."

Ali Smith from Margaret Tait
(www.luxonline.org.uk/tours/Ali_Smith/alil1.html)

Two of her longer works both filmed in the landscape, Landmakar centres on the Orkney crofter Mary Graham Sinclair, who was Tait's neighbour at Anl. The Big Sheep (Coara Mor) is named after the "Cheviot sheep which replaced people in the glens at the time of the 'improvements'." Filmed in Sutherland where Tait had lived for a time in the 1960s, it is a journey through the Highlands where echoes of the clearances, and "handed-down memories still affect people."

"I don't think it's about the clearances exactly. You can't live there without some sort of allusion to the clearances because there's a feeling of them all around you. But if it's about anything it is about the place as it is now."
Margaret Tait 5

65 min.

FRI 27 AUG 18:00 Filmhouse 3

Director: Margaret Tait

Print Source: Scottish Screen Archive, 1 Bowmont Gardens, Glasgow, G12 9JR, Scotland, UK.
tel: +44 (0)141 337 7400 fax: +44 (0)141 337 7413

Aspects of Kirkwall: Some Changes
UK/1981/English dialogue/Colour/16mm/1:1.33/22 min

On the Mountain
UK/1974/No dialogue/Colour/B&W/16mm/1:1.33/32 min

Orquil Studio (extract)
UK/1999/No dialogue/Colour/Beta SP/4 x 3/10 min

Directors: Alex Prig & Alan Watson
Orquil Studio Print Source: Lux Distribution, 3rd Floor, 18 Shacklewell Lane, London, E8 3EZ, England, UK.
tel: +44 (0)20 7503 3980 fax: +44 (0)20 7503 1606
e-mail: info@lux.org.uk

Margaret Tait programmes curated by Peter Todd.

Change or suggested change is central to this programme featuring Aspects of Kirkwall: Some Changes, one of a series she made on her home town, and On the Mountain made around Rose Street in Edinburgh which had been her other major base. Both reflect her searching to explore the possibilities in her filmmaking. Aspects of Kirkwall is a series of five films covering a period from 1954-1981. Aspects of Kirkwall: Some Changes is the film she chose to be included in the screening of selected work on Channel Four Television in Films By Margaret Tait in 1987. On the Mountain remains one of the most remarkable and experimental films a filmmaker could make – incorporating a complete earlier work, Rose Street, in a new one, including academy leader, censor’s certificate and credit and end title. There is a dialogue between the two, the earlier shots and the recent ones which is not sentimental but reminds us of the resonances all places carry.

The final work in this programmes is an extract from Orquil Studio, a video of Margaret Tait’s last place of work with images of the studio itself and its contents including film cans, writings, equipment, and on the soundtrack, sounds from some of her films.

To Anybody At All,

I didn’t want you cosy and neat and limited.
I didn’t want you to be understandable,
Understood.

I wanted you to stay mad and limitless,
Neither bound to me nor bound to anyone else’s or your own preconceived idea of yourself.

Margaret Tait from Origins and Elements.