

Tanya Leighton

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‘I’ve seen a hell a lot of change’: Legendary Hackney film director launches 50-year retrospective in Shoreditch

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A celebrated Hackney director is putting some of his best-loved works on display in Shoreditch to celebrate 50 years of filmmaking.

John Smith’s *Introspective* will run for 10 weeks at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and the Close-Up Film Centre, during which time viewers will be able to catch weekly screenings of 50 of his films created between 1972 and 2022.

Walthamstow-born Smith has been a Hackney resident for most of his adult life and draws inspiration from the borough he calls home and the changing landscape of the streets around him.

His most famous film, *The Girl Chewing Gum*, was filmed in Dalston.

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Smith said: “I’ve seen a hell of a lot of changes in Hackney since I first lived here in 1974. Everything is phenomenally different, which is interesting as many of my films are shot in Hackney.

“Something which appears to be a very mundane record of the present day eventually becomes this historical record.

“I just get very aware of the passage of time and how we see the world changing.

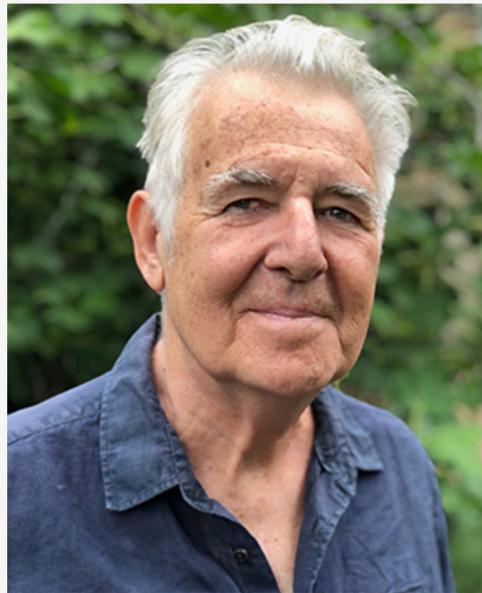
“Looking back at some of my older works made in the 70s, you could think some of the people walking by were actors wearing costumes!”

Introspective came about when fellow film director and creative Stanley Schtinter happened upon the soundtrack to *Blight*, Smith’s 1996 film made in collaboration with composer Jocelyn Pook – the first score she produced before being picked up by Stanley Kubrick to score *Eyes Wide Shut* – and wanted to create a limited edition vinyl.

Rather than just putting on one event to publicise the vinyl, produced by purge.xxx, Smith was given the opportunity to display many of his works over a longer period of time.

To celebrate the survey of works, Smith will be joined in conversations at the ICA by Pook, filmmaker Carol Morley, and musician Jarvis Cocker, who has described Smith as his “favourite British filmmaker”.

Meanwhile at Shoreditch’s Close-Up, Smith will sit down separately with authors Iain Sinclair, Juliet Jacques and Erika Balsom, as well as filmmakers Alia Syed, Ian Bourn and Schtinter.



Smith pictured in 2021. Photograph: courtesy John Smith

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Smith added: “Normally the problem for me is what to select from the work I’ve made over the years because I like to show some older work as well as more recent work – now I get to show 50 of them.

“[Developing *Introspective*] was a completely strange, organic process.”

***Introspective* kicked off on 1 October and will come to an end in December.**