

# ArtSway

Contemporary Visual Art in the New Forest



## Nathaniel Mellors: The Time Surgeon

6 October – 25 November 2007

### Teachers' Pack

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SWAY PARISH COUNCIL



# **Nathaniel Mellors: The Time Surgeon**

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***The Time Surgeon* is an absurdist film**, partly inspired by Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and Chris Marker's experimental film *La Jetée* (1962). The eponymous central character of *The Time Surgeon* employs verbal descriptions of torture, in combination with the fast-forward and rewind buttons on his Sony portable to send his tape-bound



'Victim' shuttling forwards and backwards in time.

'Victim' is steered through significant historical events, visiting 1960s New York and Renaissance France as well as Jesus' crucifixion at Golgotha – arriving inside the body of Christ by mistake, causing the abortion of Christ's conjoined 'sensible twin', before finally meeting GOD – who requests the end of the art-work.

**Nathaniel Mellors' ad-hoc sculpture, psychedelic theatre and satirical films target the**



**question of who controls language.**

*The Time Surgeon* is a new film-based installation co-commissioned by ArtSway and the Biennale de Lyon 2007. This work was created while Mellors was artist-in-residence at ArtSway this year, with much of the film being shot on location in the New Forest and other scenes filmed in London and Amsterdam.

*The Time Surgeon* is installed in ArtSway's main gallery space and consists of two large-scale projections – one projected onto a polystyrene block and the other on the far wall of the main gallery. Once inside the main space, the viewer is immediately disorientated, as the space is incredibly dark. ***The Time Surgeon* is actually installed across all of ArtSway's galleries, using video and sound.** In the two smaller galleries, one to the left of the main space and one to the right, the installation is complemented by sound emanating from the main film running in the main gallery. The work is one hour in length, and it is possible to view the work for a shorter time, and at various stages of the narrative.

**Nathaniel Mellors** (born Doncaster, 1974) graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2001 and lives and works in London and Amsterdam. Selected solo exhibitions include *Hateball* at Alison Jaques Gallery (2005) and *Profondo Viola*, Matt's Gallery (2004). He is currently artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, and is exhibiting *Hateball* in *The Present Order is the Disorder of the Future* at De Hallen Haarlem Museum. Nathaniel Mellors was selected for a residency at ArtSway in partnership with the Arts Institute at Bournemouth's text + work programme.

The following themes and ideas are highlighted **black bold** in the **Exhibition Information section of this booklet** – which is based on a gallery handout that accompanies Nathaniel Mellors' exhibition at ArtSway, a document that is intended to provide visitors insight into his work and ideas.

Below are suggestions and ideas that are designed to stimulate working with your students in general art & design classes, as well as across other subjects – such as English Language and Science. All of the ideas below are loosely linked to suggestions for areas of work that can be found on the National Curriculum website.

### ***The Time Surgeon is an absurdist film,***

The characters in *The Time Surgeon* are not placed in what we would consider a 'normal' environment. The Time Surgeon himself appears to ply his trade in a corner of a disused slaughterhouse, with his 'Victim' seemingly imprisoned – although conscious and 'alive' – within the confines of an old cassette tape. As the narrative plays out, with the Time Surgeon sending Victim through time, the film abruptly cuts to scenes of 'GOD' playing the drums; to a 'chorus' writhing in pain in the New Forest, and to three 'Tree Men' suspended in trees, also in the New Forest.

- ***How can you characterise the idea of what is 'absurd' to your students? Perhaps a useful tool could be a TV programme or film of Monty Python to show to your students. Ask them then to create a story that has 'absurd' situations in it – based on an experience in their own life. This could be filmed, or could take the form of a drawing or painting.***
- ***Once this has been done, lead the class in a discussion of their artworks, and ask them to try and characterise another thing that is 'absurd', or something absurd that they think has happened in their life.***

### **Nathaniel Mellors' ad-hoc sculpture, psychedelic theatre and satirical films target the question of who controls language.**

Mellors' films are often exhibited as part of an installation in the gallery setting. He will on some occasions take costumes and props from his films, and exhibit them alongside his videos in the gallery. These props – which could be viewed as independent sculptural objects in their own right – are made from a variety of materials. For example – an earlier sculpture *Forces of Evil* (2006) is made of wood, pink sand, seashells, gravel, blu-tack, polystyrene and toilet paper.

Language is used to often comical, absurd effect in Nathaniel Mellors work – and is in some instances repetitively spoken to the point that it appears to break down, and reform. An example of this is the 'chorus' who, towards the end of *The Time Surgeon* repeat the word 'bastard' over and over again until it begins to merge into one continuous word.

- *Lead a discussion in class, and ask your students to think about materials that can be used to make a sculpture – ask them to be as creative and imaginative as possible with their suggestions. Make a list of the materials, and ask your students to bring their favourite 5 from home (if possible) to the next class. In the next class, ask them to build a ‘prop’ for an ‘imaginary movie’ of their lives, or the life of a relative.*
- *Ask your students to think about words and how we use them. Who tells us what words we can and cannot use – is it teachers; writers; historians; the government? Can we say things such as ‘God says you are a bastard’ without offending anyone - how can we explain to them that it might be a joke? Bring a tape recorder into class, and ask your students to repeat a word over and over – such as ‘seashell’! Play back the tape – the phrase will probably break down and become unintelligible, or will sound like another word. Is it still the same word, or something new?*

## ***The Time Surgeon is actually installed across all of ArtSway’s galleries, using video and sound.***

Not all art-works – especially contemporary art-works – are two-dimensional objects attached to a wall in a white gallery space. Nathaniel Mellors work is installed across ArtSway’s three galleries – all of which have been painted black. Inside the main gallery are two large-scale video projections – one of which is projected onto a polystyrene block in the middle of the gallery.

- *For an end of year project – before the summer term, or just before the Christmas holidays, involve your students in making an installation to place their work. This could be all of or part of the classroom, the foyer of the school, or perhaps the school library. Use coloured paper that can be pinned or taped to change the colour of a wall. Use lights to change the atmosphere of your exhibition space, and consider unusual ways in which to show your students work – such as hanging from a ceiling, or placing it on the floor.*

**Page 6:**      **Images from Nathaniel Mellors: *The Time Surgeon***

The following images are installation shots and video stills from *The Time Surgeon*.





## Page 8: **FREE Guided Tours and Workshops at ArtSway**

ArtSway is keen to welcome school groups visiting the gallery. Please see the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet for more information. **Please note:** we would only be able to accommodate between 20 and 25 children in the galleries per visit.

### **Free Guided Tours**

One of the best ways to experience an artist's work, as opposed to looking at images in books and on the Internet, is to actually visit a gallery to see their work in the flesh. ArtSway has hosted many school group visits in the past, offering Guided Tours around the gallery by the Curator, Exhibitions and Education and Audience Development Officer.

The tours sometimes involve PowerPoint presentations, but usually consist of ArtSway's staff taking the students from work to work, explaining the origins and content of the works on display. A tour will usually end with a question and answer session.

On some occasions it may be possible to have the artists present for a school visit.

### **Free Workshops**

ArtSway employs a wide range of artists to lead workshops. However, they are all professional artists who will charge a fee to lead a workshop. If a school is interested in scheduling an artist to lead a workshop, please contact the gallery. Contact details are in the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet. In some instances we will provide an artist free of charge.

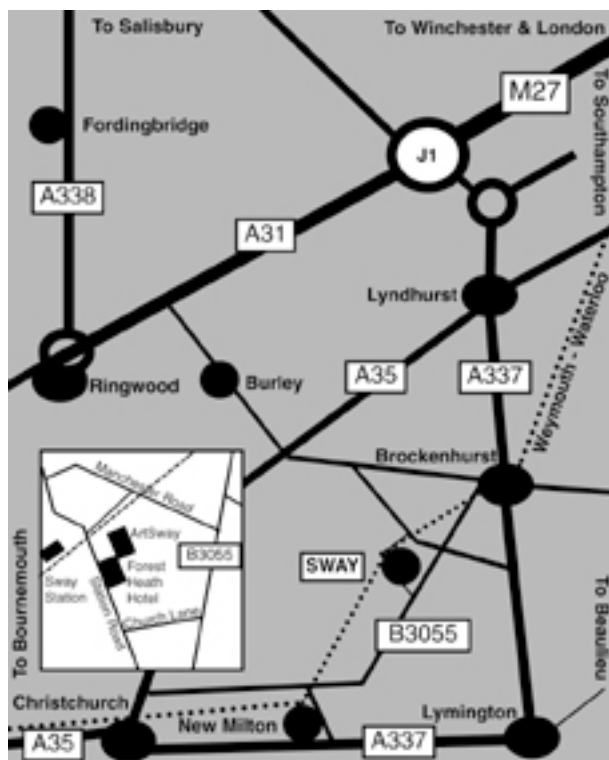
There are a series of **FREE** one-hour workshops available. These workshops take place after the tour of the exhibition, and involve simple drawing and paintings techniques and are based on the themes outlined in the **Themes for Lessons and Workshops** section of this booklet.

### **A Timetable of a Typical School Visit to ArtSway**

- 10.00am – 10.10am: **Introduction and welcome to ArtSway.**
- 10.10am – 10.30am: **Tour of the exhibition.**
- 10.30am – 11.30am: **Workshop activities.**
- 11.30am – 11.45am: **Discussion and round up of activities.**
- 12.00pm: **End of workshops and school visit.**

The following is information for school groups visiting ArtSway for **Guided Tours and Workshops**.

### Getting to ArtSway:



**By Rail:** Sway Station is on the London Waterloo to Weymouth Line.

**By Car:** Follow signs to Sway from Brockenhurst, Burley or Lymington, then follow signs for Village Centre & Train Station. ArtSway is just behind the Forest Heath Hotel on Station Road.

**Access:** All parts of the gallery are accessible via level access.

**Parking:** ArtSway has its own car park that is reached along the access drive between the surgery and chemist on Station Road in the centre of Sway.

### Etiquette and Good Behaviour in the Galleries

Works of art are very fragile and cannot be touched. The installation *The Time Surgeon* is in a very dark space – if children run about they could get hurt. We ask that children visiting the gallery take care both of their own safety and of the artworks on display. Teachers and their assistants are responsible for their groups. At the beginning of the tour the relevant ArtSway staff member will give a brief explanation to the visiting children of what they can and cannot do in the gallery.

### Contact Details for ArtSway

If you would like to discuss a visit to ArtSway, or what we could offer in terms of educational resources, please contact:

**Peter Bonnell, Curator Exhibitions and Education on Telephone: 01590 682260 (extension 14), or Email: [peter@artsway.org.uk](mailto:peter@artsway.org.uk)**

**Address:** ArtSway, Station Road, Sway, Hampshire, SO41 6BA

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**Email:** [mail@artsway.org.uk](mailto:mail@artsway.org.uk) **Web:** [www.artsway.org.uk](http://www.artsway.org.uk)

**Opening Times:** Tuesday to Sunday, 11am – 5pm. **Admission is FREE.**