



Ferroequinology

A film about railroad photography.



Ferroequinology

Documentary Press Kit

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Synopsis

Two artists enthralled by the uncanny lure of locomotion set out on journeys across America. Andrew Cross chases freight trains through the Black Rock desert in Nevada in pursuit of a perfect landscape shot. McNair Evans travels on an Amtrak train from San Francisco to Portland, sharing stories and making portraits with fellow passengers. Desolate carriages take on an otherworldly presence and time loses its grasp in this study of photographers in motion, capturing slow travel in today's increasingly fast-paced society.



Director's Statement

Railroad documentaries hold a significant place in film history. From Auguste and Louis Lumière's early experiments in *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* to the iconic John Grierson narrated *Night Mail* or D. A. Pennebaker's *Daybreak Express* - the movement, machinery, infrastructure and culture surrounding railroads has fascinated filmmakers since the birth of cinema. Ferroequinology draws on this established tradition and brings this potent documentary theme into focus for the contemporary era.

I became interested in railroad photography when visiting my hometown in the south of England. Returning via train for the first time in a few years, I noticed rail enthusiasts armed with cameras and binoculars lurking at the edge of the station platform. The apparent serenity of these people (largely elderly men) fascinated me as they slowly observed trains. I found a funny parallel with my own work as a cinematographer in which I am also stuck behind a lens, often obsessing over details of the frame and sometimes waiting hours on end for the perfect light conditions.

As I explored this world in more detail, the people I encountered and the images they created far surpassed a simple hobbyist caricature. I was drawn in by the technically challenging and at times innovative nature of railroad photography. Gravitating toward collaborators with particularly artistic sensibilities, I set about filming in ways that engaged directly with their creative work. Shooting in black and white helped to distance the film's cinematography from each character's photographic project and reflected the romanticised gaze many of these enthusiasts brought to their images as well as their often sentimental relationship with railroads.





Andrew and McNair became the sole focus of the film during our editing process. Their ideas, personalities and photography created a series of contrasts; exterior and interior, landscape and portrait, exuberant and reserved. Working with Nick Gibbon, the film's editor, I sought to interweave portraits of each character while focusing exclusively on their journeys and creative processes. Nick and I also wanted to evoke the feeling of taking a breath or slowing down which is central to both character's photographs as they explore the qualities of a landscape or a shared long-distance journey. This fed into a meditative pace and an emphasis on moments of reflection throughout the film.

During this project filmmaking acted as a method of expanding my viewpoint; exploring places and people at the fringes of society and using my cinematography experience in a way that hopefully shares our combined perspectives or passions. All the characters in *Ferroequinology* inhabit transitory and nostalgia-tinged environments of long-distance rail transportation which serve as a catalyst for our interactions, but their interests lie far beyond the trains themselves. Ultimately, this film embraces railroad photography as a reaction to today's increasingly fast paced society, revealing how its characters take time to appreciate and engage with other people or our natural surroundings.

Alex Nevill - January 2022

Alex Nevill (Director/Producer)

Alex Nevill is a filmmaker and cinematographer based in London, UK. He has photographed several independent feature films as well as short projects funded by Creative England, Channel 4, Film London and the British Film Institute. He completed an MFA in film practice at the Screen Academy Scotland and a PhD in film at the University of the West of England.

Key Credits:

Fishcakes & Cocaine (2013), 26min

Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival, London Short Film Festival, Glasgow Short Film Festival

Rob Curry & Tim Plester (Executive Producers)

Fifth Column is an artist-led film production company based in London, UK and founded by Rob Curry and Tim Plester. They seek to explore gray areas at the fringes of society, telling challenging and engaging stories that lie outside the mainstream. Their films have been financed by the UK Film Council, Ingenious Partners, the British Council, 4Docs.

Key Credits:

Southern Journey Revisited (2020), 1hr 15min

Sheffield Doc/Fest

The Ballad of Shirley Collins (2017), 1hr 34min

London Film Festival, CPH:DOX, Rotterdam

Way of the Morris (2010), 1hr 13min

SXSW Film Festival



Nick Gibbon (Editor)

Nick is a BAFTA-nominated creative editor with UK and European broadcast credits and international festival awards. Having graduated from the BA film programme at Edinburgh Napier University, Nick went on to win a short drama commission from BBC Scotland which premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Stemming from his own filmmaking, Nick more recently worked as an editor on numerous fiction and documentary films. His feature length credits include *Pablo's Winter*, *Colours of the Alphabet* and *Donkeyote* among others.

Key Credits:

Donkeyote (2017), 1hr 26min

Rotterdam, True/False, San Francisco International Film Festival

Seven Songs for a Long Life (2016), 1hr 23min

SXSW Film Festival, DocEdge New Zealand, DOXA Vancouver

Pablo's Winter (2012), 1hr 16min

DOK Leipzig, Documenta Madrid, Munich International Documentary Festival

Rob Walker (Re-Recording Mixer)

Rob studied film and media at the University of Stirling. He soon relocated to Los Angeles to study at UCLA, then worked at Red Zone Studios as an Assistant Engineer and at James Cameron's Digital Domain, working on *Fight Club* and *Red Planet*. Rob has since been involved with sound work on over 90 productions which have screened at Berlin, London, Cannes, Venice and Toronto Festivals as well as BBC, ITV, Channel 4, SKY TV, RTE, ARTE, TG4 and US PBS. He is currently Chair of the Association of Motion Picture Sound.

Key Credits:

Dau.Natasha (2020), 2hr 18min

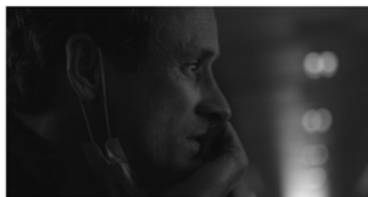
Berlin International Film Festival

The Works and Days (2020), 8hr

Berlin International Film Festival, International Documentary Festival Amsterdam

Pablo's Winter (2012), 1hr 16min

DOK Leipzig, Documenta Madrid, Munich International Documentary Festival





Technical Specifications

Runtime: 66 minutes

Country: UK & USA

Date of Completion: January 2022

Screening Format: DCP

Image: 1.85:1, 4K, Black & White

Sound: 5.1 mix

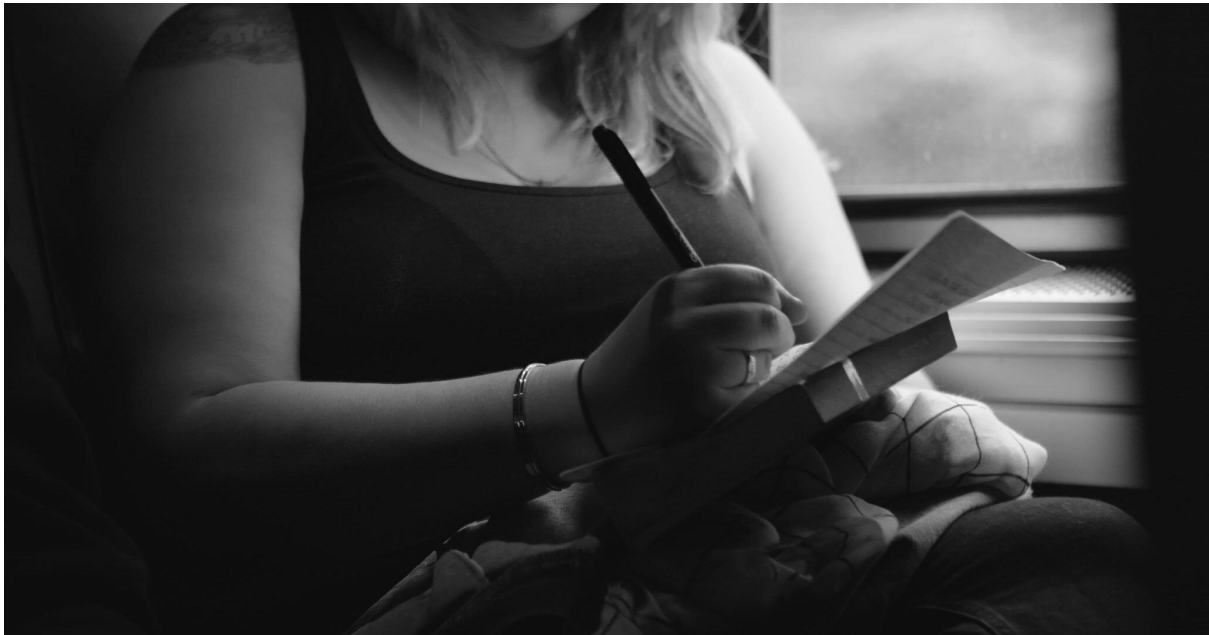
Screenings

10 June 2022, **Venice Institute of Contemporary Art** (USA)

12 March 2022, **Govett-Brewster Art Gallery** (New Zealand)

10 March 2022, **London International Documentary Festival** (UK)

27 January 2022, **Slamdance Film Festival** (USA), World Premiere



The cinema finds an apt metaphor in the train, in its framed, moving image, its construction of a journey as an optical experience, the radical juxtaposition of different places, the “annihilation of space and time”.

Lynne Kirby (1997)