Made in Hull

Drawn from life: Hull’s amazing start to its year as City of Culture Sean McAllister, the award-winning documentary film director, who is curating the opening event for Hull 2017 City of Culture. Picture: Tony Johnson. 13:42Monday 02 January 2017 From the highs and lows of the fishing industry to the 1980s rave scene and the city’s sporting achievements, Sarah Freeman takes a look at the opening event of Hull City of Culture 2017. 0 HAVE YOUR SAY When Sean McAllister was first approached to curate the opening event of Hull City of Culture 2017 his immediate reaction was to run away. However, the documentary filmmaker also knew that it if he did, he would almost certainly regret it. Born and brought up in Hull, his filmmaking career had begun while he was on the dole in the 80s and his fortunes have neatly mirrored the city’s own. For a while Hull became a byword for deprivation and on the annual list of ‘Crap Towns’ it was always right up there. However, its bid to become only the second-ever UK City of Culture was impressive. It said Hull wanted to step out of the shadows and over the last 12 months it will be hoping to make good on that promise. Animation director Zsolt Balogh in front of the Hull Maritime Museum. Picture: Jonathan Gawthorpe “It feels good to be in Hull right now,” says McAllister, whose most recent film A Syrian Love Story won him a Bafta nomination. “What I wanted to do was tell the story of the city itself. Hull has so many interesting stories to tell, but I decided that I wanted to focus on the 70 years from the start of the Second World War to the present day. “It was a neat timeline, which runs from pretty much Hull’s oldest living generation to its youngest. The war, I think, is a good starting point. Hull was the second most bombed city after London, but there were a lot of people who felt that it was ignored and the sacrifice it made never really honoured. Much of the rebuild which took place afterwards was really down to the character of resilience of the people and I think that’s worth celebrating.” McAllister knew that he wanted to use key locations and buildings in the city centre to lead visitors on a trail through the last seven decades and, as soon as he accepted the invitation to curate the opening event, he set about putting together a team of local and international artists to deliver his vision. Taking centre stage is animation director and video designer Zsolt Balog who has combined archive footage with cutting-edge CGI animation to create a panoramic 15 minute film which will be projected onto the Hull Maritime Museum, the Ferens Art Gallery and City Hall. Quentin Likely “I don’t want to show you too much as I don’t want to spoil the surprise,” says the artist who has a version of the projection on his laptop. “I don’t have any particularly connection to Hull, but sometimes I think it’s good to have a fresh pair of eyes on the past. Sean was very clear what he wanted, but once he’d given me the brief he also left me too it and it’s been lovely to have that degree of autonomy. “What I quickly realised was just how rich the story of this place is. Some of those chapters have been traumatic, some joyful and uplifting and I wanted to create a piece which would do justice to the story of this place. I didn’t want to sugar coat it, but I did want to leave people with a sense of optimism. “I also wanted it to say something both to the people of Hull and visitors who come from elsewhere. I wanted it to be entertaining, I wanted it to be educational, but I also wanted it to have a sense of drama. This is the opening event and I think it’s important that we lead from the front.” From the heart of the city centre, the trail leads through to Zebedee’s Yard where Leeds-based company Invisible Flock will unveil their sound installation 105+db, which is a celebration of the city’s football team. “We went down to the KC Stadium on November 29 to record Hull City versus Newcastle and turned our equipment on the crowd rather than the players,” says Invisible Flock’s Ben Eaton. “One hundred and five decibels is the point at which you can no longer hear individual voices and that’s what we wanted. We wanted to capture the atmosphere. The highs and lows, the key moments. “Fortunately Hull won on penalties, but it really wouldn’t have mattered if they had lost. Any dedicated football fan knows that Ben and the rest of the Invisible Flock team have also handed out Go-Pros to various Hull residents and the footage will be edited to form another work just further along from Zebedee’s Yard. “I guess we wanted our contribution to be about ordinary people, those who live and work here. Sometimes with these large scale events it can feel like having art imposed on a place and we really wanted people to feel they were part of it right from the outset.” It’s the exact same philosophy which underpins local artist Quentin Budworth’s contribution. A few months ago he put out an appeal for people wanting to recreate movie moments. There were just a couple of criteria. Hull had to provide the backdrop and those taking part had to provide their own props. “Perhaps unsurprisingly I had a lot of people wanting to do the Audrey Hepburn Breakfast at Tiffany’s moment, but it did seem to really spark people’s imagination and it’s been a fun – and often slightly surreal – project to work on. I don’t think I will ever forget the day down by the Humber Bridge with the guy who wanted to recreate the Tom Hanks film Castaway. He was taking ages to get out of his car and I wandered over to see what the problem was – it turned out he was making his own Wilson out of a basketball.” The result, called what else but Hullywood Heroes, also features appearances from Mary Poppins, Ursula Andress, Wolverine and Hull’s  own take on Rhys Ifans in his underpants from Notting Hill. It will again be projected onto buildings, but in truth the images deserve a permanent exhibition of their own. Budworth isn’t the only Hull artist who has been drafted in by McAllister. Bafta-winning composer Terry Dunn has created a new soundtrack for the Arrivals and Departures installation which explores migration and the journeys of those who had passed through Hull. “It’s a pretty decent canvas isn’t it?” says Dunn, stood on a walkway just across from The Deep which the piece will be projected onto. “I left Hull to follow a career composing music for movies, but Hull has never left me. As soon as I heard it was going to be UK City of Culture I wanted to be a part of it and it’s lovely to be able to tell this particular story. “Because of the docks, Hull has always been a place where so many people of different nationalities have passed through. Some have stayed and made their city their home, for others it was just a stop on a longer journey, but it is definitely part of what gives Hull its character.” Despite his initial reservations that he was the right man for the job, McAllister says that he has enjoyed curating the event and he hopes that together the various installations give a voice to a cross-section of Hull. “Right here we will recreate an 90s rave,” he says stood in the Myton Bridge underpass. “Or rather Jesse Kanda will. Now he’s a character. He generally wears a white robe and walks around without any shoes on. I did tell him that he might want to rethink his look when he came to Hull, but he didn’t listen.” McAllister says there has been almost universal support for the project – in fact only the owners of one building declined to be part of the project. He initially wanted to project Dignity of Labour which looks at unemployment among the young on a city centre Job Centre, but perhaps unsurprisingly the powers that be decided that wasn’t the kind of publicity they needed. “We might have something up our sleeves,” says McAllister, who has never been known to let a simple no get in the way of his plans. “Let’s just say you need to watch this space.” Made in Hull will officially open tomorrow at 4pm followed by a fireworks display at 8.17 (20.17). The event will run to January 8 and for more details go to hull2017.co.uk

Read more at: http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/our-region/east-yorkshire/hull/drawn-from-life-hull-s-amazing-start-to-its-year-as-city-of-culture-1-8313859