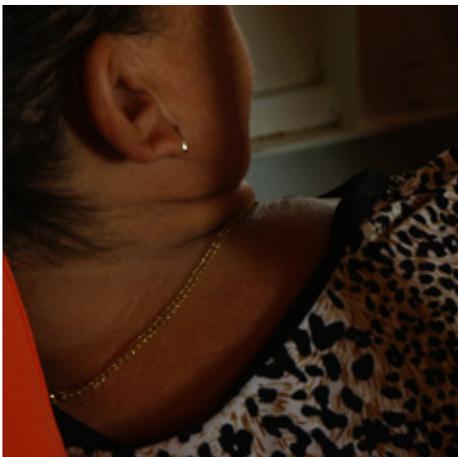
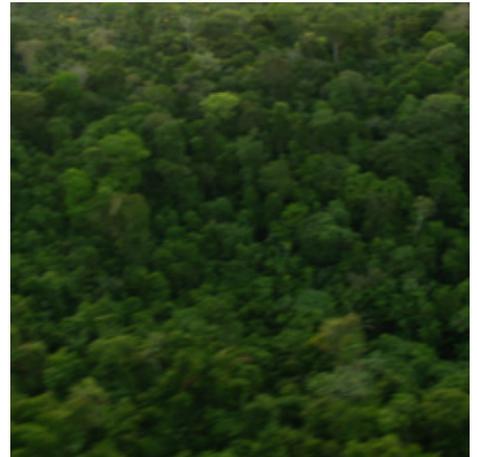


## Melanie Smith

Admission free  
11 April - 15 June 2014

Born in the UK, Melanie Smith moved to Mexico 25 years ago and has become one of their most celebrated contemporary artists.

Her first UK survey exhibition includes film, photography, painting and sculpture.



Includes the première of a new film, *Fordlandia* (2014), shot in an abandoned city and rubber plantation built in the Amazon in the 1920s by Henry Ford.

Melanie Smith, film stills from *Fordlandia*, 2014.



### Exhibition presented with

Museum Boijmans  
Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

Contemporary Art  
Centre, Vilnius

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\* FUNDACIÓN JUMEX ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO  
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MK Gallery  
900 Midsummer Blvd  
Milton Keynes MK9 3QA  
[www.mkgallery.org](http://www.mkgallery.org)

## Introduction

Melanie Smith (born Poole, UK, 1965) has lived and worked in Mexico City since 1989. Although influenced by painting, Smith works in photography, installation, film and video as well as paint. Her practice has emerged alongside other artists and writers living in Mexico, including Francis Alÿs, Carlos Amorales and Cuauhtémoc Medina. This first survey of her career, from the early 1990s to the present day, focuses loosely on works that relate to the artist's experience of migration; travel, adventure and utopian aspiration combine with disorientation, dislocation and abstraction in the search for a brave new world.

## Middle Gallery

The video ***Spiral City***, 2002 is shot from a helicopter as it circles above the urban sprawl of Mexico City. It shows an aerial view of the city's streets and buildings slowly fading to white as the camera spirals higher and higher. The process of gradual disintegration or abstraction is a common feature in many of Smith's works and is also demonstrated in the ***Six paintings of urban views***, 2006. The film itself is also an homage to the iconic earthwork *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, by American artist Robert Smithson (1938-1973) - a frequent visitor to Mexico in the 1960s - and his writings on 'de-architecturalised' sites, entropy and ruins. The filmic quality of *Spiral City* transforms the buildings into crystalline blocks, undergoing a gradual erosion, where structures slowly collapse and decompose.

## Cube Gallery

***Xilitla***, 2010 is a visual exploration of one of the most enigmatic and hidden places in Mexico. The film is named after a small town in Mexico, where the British aristocrat and poet turned Surrealist collector Edward James (1907 - 1984) built a fantastical garden between 1960 and 1984. Set in a subtropical rainforest, natural waterfalls and pools are interspersed with towering Surrealist concrete sculptures and unfinished architectural structures. In Smith's film, workmen carry a large mirror along the jungle paths and through the pools, reflecting the image of the garden, once again echoing works by Smithson, such as *Yucatan Mirror Displacements*, 1969. The unusual vertical format of the projection and the incongruous soundtrack further disrupts stereotypical images of exotic landscapes.

Also shown in the Cube Gallery is the new film ***Fordlandia***, 2014 which relates to a new industrial world that car manufacturer Henry Ford created in the Amazonian rainforest in the 1920s. The mission was to produce the largest amount of rubber in the world and technicians, machinery and prefabricated homes were shipped from the United States to create a copy of a U.S. town. Despite the vast investment, Ford's dream turned into a disaster and very little latex was ever extracted in Fordlandia.

The film is a visual diary that provides a critical reflection on Ford's ambitions, tracing a battle between American ingenuousness and nature. It also challenges the image of the Amazon jungle as a metaphor for terror and cruelty, referencing writers and film-makers such as Thomas Whiffen, Werner Herzog and Joseph Conrad, whose accounts portray an aggressive, racist, romantic and intensely male-identified landscape. By focussing on the flora and fauna, the natural indigenous life of the region, the film serves to underline the absurdity of Ford's endeavour and situates the natural world in opposition to these colonial visions.

## Long Gallery

In the Long Gallery, a number of large museological vitrines contain hundreds of objects, paintings, photographs, collages and clips that echo, extend and supplement the films. Like a Surrealist collection, these items were accumulated over many years, part souvenir, part source material, part prop. Titled *263 thoughts on insubstantial subjects and matter*, 1995 - 2014, they are intended to operate in the same way as automatic writing and free association, offering information and context as well as tangents and diversions.

Smith's early work, particularly, was influenced by life in Mexico City, recording its chaotic energy, density, vibrancy. On her arrival in Mexico, Smith became aware of the importance of the colour orange in the definition of urban space in the city and in the flood of cheap plastic goods distributed by stores and street stalls. Vitrine 1 includes ***Tianguis II***, 2003, a disorienting two-screen video that drifts around the ramshackle structures of a street market's empty stalls, while the slides in ***My World***, 1995, and the adjacent ***Orange Lush I***, 1995, are part of a vast accumulation of orange objects, foraged and gathered from street markets, to create a kind of archaeology of the future. In contrast, green plastic items often mimic the natural world, from fruit and vegetables to plants, like those in ***Green Lush***, 1998-9 where synthetic, pre-packaged foliage becomes a substitute for the lush vegetation in Smith's tropical films.

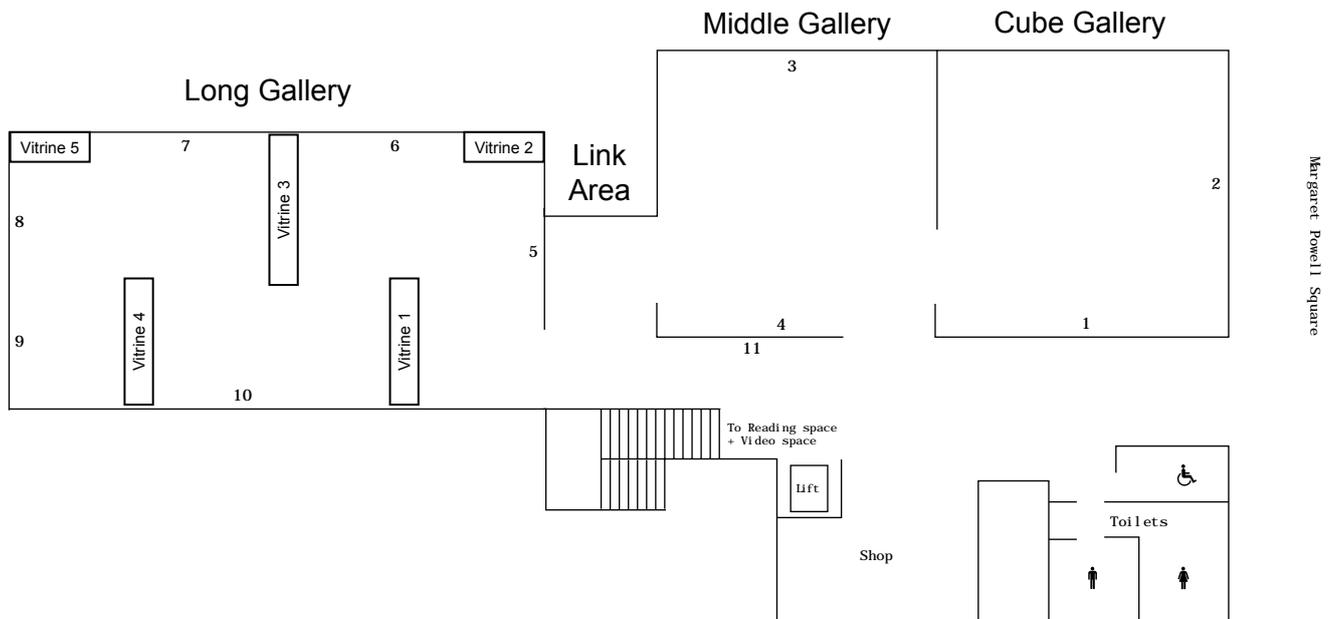
Vitrine 2 introduces ***Bulto***, 2011 a video made in Lima, Peru, which is split, in this exhibition, across four separate screens. Together, these fragments provide a narrative for a mysterious ungainly pink package as it is driven, carried and dragged across different landscapes and scenarios. The package evokes the *fardo funerario* or Pre-Columbian funerary or mummy bundles, bodies wrapped tightly in textiles. Like a foreign alien, this ambiguous mass takes on a symbolic, psychoanalytical significance as it obstructs, interrupts and hinders the normal flow of life.

Vitrine 3 brings together material related to industrial buildings (Ford factories in the USA), the colonial world (Baroque wooden frames), modernist architecture (Milton Keynes) and ruins (Xilitla), as well as items made of rubber and Ford toy cars, in a nod to the *Fordlandia* film. Vitrine 4 relates primarily to exotic adventures, tropical islands and various animals in a *robinsonade* assemblage, echoing Robison Crusoe's adventures, that evokes ideas from colonisation to survivalism. Vitrine 5 links to abstraction, one of the primary interests in Smith's early work. It includes *Parallax of Failure*, 2008, a four-part split screen video showing a cyclist struggling to ride off into the distance with a blank canvas precariously hanging on his back.

This series of ten collages, *Collages for Fordlandia 13-22*, 2014, use technical drawings of Ford car parts and medical records of workers in Fordlandia superimposed with flora and fauna taken from a number of books. These pieces summarise the relationship between mechanical or scientific / medical material and natural phenomena that drove Smith's interest in the film *Fordlandia*. The three pink paintings, *Bulto 3, 5 and 6*, 2010, all emerged from the film, *Bulto*, building on its carnal, exotic or more nebulous associations, while the view in *Painting for Fordlandia 3*, 2014, in the corridor, echoes the aerial perspective of the concrete jungle in *Spiral City*.

Seen together, this broad group of works, produced over 20 years, provide a lengthy and meandering journey that explores building homes, settlements and new cities, driven by remarkable visions, ambitions and fantasies. In Melanie Smith's hands archaeological remains and architectural ruins mingle with nature as an eager process of excavation and discovery melds into a faded and enigmatic sense of the past.

List of Works



Cube Gallery

- 1. *Xilitla*, 2010  
Melanie Smith / Rafael Ortega  
Video transferred from 35mm  
11:46 min
- 2. *Fordlandia*, 2014  
HD video  
29:43 min

Middle Gallery

- 3. *Spiral City*, 2002  
Melanie Smith / Rafael Ortega  
Betacam S.P.  
05:53 min

- 4. *Six paintings of urban views*, 2006  
Acrylic on MDF

Long Gallery

- Vitrines 1 to 5:  
*263 thoughts on insubstantial subjects and matter*, 1995 - 2014  
Collected and fabricated objects, and films
- 5. *Green Lush*, 1998-9  
Plastic objects, lights and wood
- 6. *Orange Lush*, 1995  
Plastic objects and wood
- 7. *Collages for Fordlandia 13 - 22*, 2014  
Collage
- 8. *Bulto 6*, 2010  
Oil and acrylic enamel on MDF

- 9. *Bulto 3*, 2010  
Oil on Canvas
- 10. *Bulto 5*, 2010  
Oil and acrylic on enamel

Foyer

- 11. *Painting for Fordlandia 3*, 2014  
Acrylic enamel on acrylic

All works courtesy the artist,  
Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich  
and Nara Roesler, São Paolo

## About the Artist

Melanie Smith was born in Poole, UK in 1965. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Reading. Smith has lived and worked in Mexico City for the last 25 years and represented Mexico at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. She has exhibited widely in the United States, Europe and Mexico, with works held in major museum collections worldwide. Her solo exhibitions include: *Bulto*, Museo de Arte de Lima, Lima, Peru (2011); *Xilitla*, El Eco, Mexico City, Mexico (2010); *Parres - Trilogy*, Miami Art Museum, Miami Beach, USA (2008); *Six steps*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, USA (2004) and *Spiral City and Other Vicarious Pleasures* which toured from Mexico City to USA (2006 - 2009). She has produced three artist's books: *Red Square Impossible Pink* (2011), *Parres* (2008) and *Spiral City and Other Vicarious Pleasures* (2006). [www.melaniesmith.net](http://www.melaniesmith.net)

## Events Programme

See website for full listings  
[www.mkgallery.org/events](http://www.mkgallery.org/events)

### Thursday Scratch Nights

Thu 17 April / 7pm / Doors 6.30pm / Free / Book via Eventbrite  
**Talk: The Future City Debate - Mobility and Infrastructure**  
Presented by The Fred Roche Foundation

Thu 24 April / 7pm / Free  
**Artist Moving Image Programme: 21st Century Pop**

Thu 1 May / 7pm / Free  
**Talk: City Visions - Arts & Heritage in MK**

Thu 8 May / 7pm / Free  
**Talk: City Visions**  
Speakers Linda Inoki; Gerd Korteum; Julia Upton

Thu 15 May / 7pm / Free  
**OYAP Trust: Young Leaders in the Arts**

Thu 22 May / 7pm / Doors 6.30pm / Free / Booking via Eventbrite  
**Talk: The Future City Debate - Priming the Local Economy**  
Presented by The Fred Roche Foundation

Thu 29 May / 7pm / Free  
**Artist Moving Image: Keren Cytter**

Thu 5 June / 7pm / Free / Booking via Eventbrite  
Artist Film Screening:  
**Emmett Walsh and Patricia Valencia - 12/21/12: Illuminations**

Thursday 12 June / 7pm / Free  
**Talk: Growth, Change and Governance**  
Presented by The Fred Roche Foundation

### Friday Film Nights

Presented in collaboration with Independent Cinema MK  
Screenings start at 7pm and tickets £5 (concs £3) unless otherwise stated. Pre-book at the Information Desk

Fri 18 April at 4pm  
**Family Film Screening: From Up on Poppy Hill** (2011)  
Dir. Goro Miyazaki (Cert. PG, 93min) / Tickets £3

Fri 18 April  
**Frances Ha** (2012)  
Dir. Noah Baumbach (Cert. 15, 86min)

Fri 25 April  
**Mexican Cinema: Los Bastardos** (2008)  
Dir. Amat Escalante (Cert. 18, 86min)

Fri 2 May  
**Mexican Cinema: Leap Year** (2010)  
Dir. Michael Rowe (Cert. 18, 94min)

Fri 9 May  
**Milton Keynes Film Network shorts**

Fri 16 May  
**Mexican Cinema: ¡Que Viva Mexico!** (1931)  
Dir. Sergei Eisenstein, Grigori Alexandrov (Cert. PG, 30min)

Fri 23 May  
**Mister John** (2013)  
Dir. Joe Lawlor, Christine Malloy (Cert. 15, 95min)

Fri 30 May at 4pm / Tickets £3  
**Family Film Screening: The King and the Mockingbird** (1980)  
Dir. Paul Grimault (Cert. U, 83min)

Fri 30 May  
**Mexican Cinema: Y Tu Mamá También** (2001)  
Dir. Alfonso Cuarón (Cert. 18, 106min)

Fri 6 June at 4pm  
**Family Film / Short Animations: Box of Delights 1** (2012)  
Dir. Various (Cert. U, 43min) / Tickets £3

Fri 6 June  
**Mexican Cinema: Heli** (2013)  
Dir. Amat Escalante (Cert. 18, 105min)

Fri 13 June  
**Mexican Cinema: Blue Eyelids** (2007)  
Dir. Ernesto Contreras (Cert. 15, 98min)

### Access Tour

Monday 2 June / 2pm, free but booking essential  
**Audio Described Tour**  
Tour of the exhibition for those with a visual impairment.  
Pre-book at the Information Desk

### Closing Event

Saturday 14 June from 4pm  
**Exhibition Closing Event**  
Talk by Dr David Stent (West Dean College); Mexican food;  
Live Event: Open Music Archive – Barragán Sound System  
Tickets free / Booking via Eventbrite