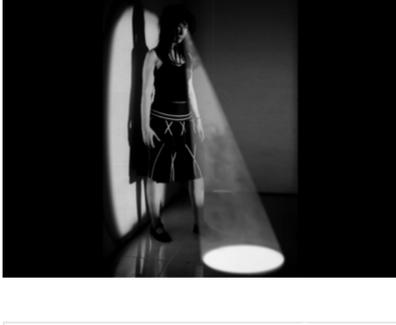


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### The projectionist UK artist Lindsay Seers plays with film history in her Images Festival installation

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BY DAVID BALZER    April 06, 2011 12:04

LINDSAY SEERS EXTRAMISSIION 6  
(BLACK MARIA)  
To Apr 30. Tue-Sat noon-5pm.  
Gallery TPW, 56 Ossington.  
416-645-1066. [Gallerytpw.ca](#)

"I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking." Christopher Isherwood's famous words from his 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin*—the source of the musical *Cabaret*—could be the tagline for UK artist Lindsay Seers' bizarre, humorous new installation at Gallery TPW, which runs to the end of the month as part of the Images Festival's Off Screen program.

Entitled *Extramission 6 (Black Maria)*, the installation is a major work for Seers, part of a magical-realist autobiographical series, the third installment of which was performed live at Workman Arts at St. Anne's Parish Hall last week. Essentially, *Extramission* probes Seers' personal experiences through film history, psychology and image theory. In *Extramission 6*, a faux-documentary housed inside a huge black shed, she is literally a camera. The film tells the story of her life, first as a mute child who is brought to speech through seeing herself photographed, then as a young woman who learns she can take photographs with her body and finally as a mature artist who has metamorphosed into a projector, light beams streaming from her eyes, supervillain-like.

The shed has taken Gallery TPW a considerable amount of time and effort to produce, and it is, over and above the film inside of it, the main attraction here. (Compare and contrast its dark, ghostly presence with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *Phantom Truck*, currently showing at The Power Plant.) On first entering the gallery, you are baffled by the shed's immensity; the film is audible, but the entranceway to it is obscured (it's around the back), and the light from the film becomes a beacon as you take a seat inside.

With Seers' bracketed title in mind, film-history nerds will recognize the allusion immediately. The shed is a replica of inventor Thomas Edison's Black Maria, arguably the world's first film studio, which opened in 1893 in New Jersey. The structure shows up in Seers' film as a maquette that she mysteriously carries with her and leaves behind in Rome for a friend to find.

For Seers, the Black Maria is a metaphor for personhood. Edison's original contraption was makeshift and tar-papered; since early film required a tremendous amount of light to be properly exposed, it was built on a turntable so its retractable roof could catch the strongest sunlight all day long. Seers' younger persona in the film is similarly arduous. Frustratingly taciturn (at least according to her gravely voiced mother), and burdened with the supernatural ability to record life through her eyes (and develop it on paper in her mouth), Seers struggles to make her art meaningful to others.

When the film tells us of Seers leaving the maquette behind, with the added note that Edison's Black Maria was similarly abandoned 10 years after its creation, the metaphor becomes clearer. Edison produced films at the Black Maria for the kinoscope, a coin-operated contraption that accommodated one person at a time through a viewfinder. It took other film entrepreneurs to liberate celluloid from these confines and into the theatre. Film history is a series of progressions like this, with older modes being left in the dust like disused cocoons.

In her evolution at the end of the film into a projector, Seers embodies this progression: instead of being Isherwood's passive camera, she has somehow gained the power to direct her gaze outward. Thus the film is more than a statement on the path of the artist; it is, quite earnestly, about everyone's struggle to bring their inner self outward—for the entire world to see and, with hope, to understand.

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