

NOTES  
FROM  
A  
LOW  
ORBIT

Mark Lyken

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A  
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**Introduction:  
Notes from a Low Orbit**

Rachael Disbury

7

**Sitdown:  
With You and Around You**

Lauren La Rose & Khadea Kuchenmeister

13

**Critical Essay:  
Seasonal Beast**

Michael Pattison

27

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Rachael Disbury

Introduction:

## NOTES FROM A LOW ORBIT

Mark Lyken arrived in Hawick for a six-month residency with Alchemy Film & Arts in July 2021. Throughout his period here, Mark inhabited many roles for many people: documentarian, portraitist, chatty filmmaker, artist in residence, Hawick resident. Mark's approach of walking the town, chatting to locals, and even deciding on how to frame some of his images in response to remarks from passers-by, was complemented by direct collaboration with local groups such as Hawick Saxhorn Band, Hawick Acorn Project Initiative, Hawick Scrabble Club and Hawick Archaeological Society. This was to be a portrait of Hawick and its people.

Mark's residency coincided with an intensification of activity for Alchemy Film & Arts. 2020 had been a year of pivoting, adapting, and pivoting and adapting again. Taking our flagship event Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival online six weeks into lockdown forced us to strip back to some core pillars – connecting communities through inclusive and accessible opportunities, creating multiple points for critical and meaningful discussion, and celebrating the best of experimental film. The first of what became two digital festivals proved successful, with three times our regular audience joining us online for three intense days of film – livestreamed to global communities, for free, from a home broadband connection in Hawick town centre.

Alchemy is an organisation of duality. With experimental film often sitting somewhere between the world of visual art and the world of film, it's only fitting that our programme is manifold – committed to an annual international film festival, while also focused on a year-round community film programme. Between the 2020 and 2021 editions of our online festival, we intensified our methods and aims of working with communities. We connected with core services across the Scottish Borders, offering our own kind of service – supporting them to experiment through film and stay connected through digital means. This included working with a suicide bereavement group, gender-based violence services, services working with people living with disability, community interest groups, and NHS Borders.

In December 2020, my fellow Alchemy Director Michael Pattison and I began conversations with artists Mark Lyken, Jade Montserrat and Julia Parks, inviting them to Hawick to explore the lines, cultures and ecologies of our place. The community-oriented projects emerging from these three distinct residencies – each unfolding over a six-month period between 2021 and 2022 – would be complemented by a number of artist commissions, including Jessie Growden's *I've Only Been Here Half My Life*, a multimedia film installation connecting the artist's experiences of growing up as a woman in Hawick to the town's international textiles trade; Natasha Ruwona's *What Is Held Between Two Waters*, a speculative meditation on the River Teviot, Atlantic salmon and Hawick-raised Tom Jenkins (1797 – 1859), Britain's first Black school teacher; Leah Millar's *EarthyBody*, an exploration of land, riding and ritual that superimposes analogue shots of Hawick's landscapes and images of women's bodies; and Kerry Jones' *Moving Images*, a 1980s retro caravan converted into an eight-seat mobile cinema.

The resulting programme, *The Teviot, the Flag and the Rich, Rich Soil*, builds on Alchemy's existing relationships within local networks through distinct and integrated film programming which connects multiple artists and Scottish Borders communities. Focusing on place-specific ideas of rhythm and motion, rivers and lands, borders and boundaries, the project explores and activates ways in which we can





creatively (re)consider the environment in relationship to community, sustainability and cultural identity. Funded by Scottish Government emergency relief funds through Creative Scotland, this project is part of Culture Collective and is one of 26 participatory art projects across Scotland, shaped by local communities alongside artists and creative organisations.

Having enjoyed and screened his previous work, we knew Mark Lyken as a film and sound artist invested in capturing the underseen and underheard aspects of everyday life: his is an observational practice that calls attention to the lesser-known fabrics that thread through the cultural identity of a place, and to the ethics of image-making itself. Who, we might ask when watching one of Mark's compositions unfold, is being directed here? How does a town consent to portraiture of this kind? What social methods and political positions are necessitated by a creative response to its rituals and routines?

One of the conceptual distinctions we've begun to make at Alchemy – one of the political positions we've taken – is that Hawick is less a single community than a town inhabited by and rich with *communities*. Informed by this emphasis on plurality, Mark engaged with many distinct communities in ways that were responsive and reciprocal: as detailed in the extended interview with him published in this book, he leveraged his own background and expertise to make short films for Hawick Saxhorn Band and Hawick Acorn Project Initiative. While such shorts are promotional, they are shot and made on the artist's terms – communicating the services provided by these groups in exchange for their own contributions to Mark's film.

Similarly, donations were made to Water Witches, a local group of wild swimmers, and to Hawick Boxing Club, whose young members appear in the film. Such contributions are complemented by other artist commissions: Miwa Nagato-Apthorp and Seán Dowd's musical set piece exemplifies the film's broader tension between staged and unperformed realities, while analogue stills shot for the film by River Uhing, a young photographer living in Hawick, are reproduced in this volume.



One of the tensions intrinsic to this way of working is between capturing an all-encompassing viewpoint – the type of self-endorsed history you might find on a town's Wikipedia entry, for instance – and something that is partial, subjective, lived. Both the texts and images collated in this book speak to this tension: they reveal a Hawick you'll know and a Hawick you might not, committed to screen and print by someone who was, for six months, simultaneously a visitor to and a resident of the town. Waking up, going out, meeting with people on their terms, Mark carefully defines the artistic parameters of his rubric, actively seeking out the incidental and asking what magic might eventually happen if he sets up his camera and waits. And waits: this is a low orbit in which a chance encounter with an early-morning dogwalker has as much significance and urgency as the arrival of a town's fairground in the hot days of summer.

Lauren La Rose  
Khadea Kuchenmeister

Sitdown:

## WITH YOU AND AROUND YOU

**Sitdown is an Alchemy Film & Arts series of artist interviews, published to complement its residencies, commissions, and other programme activities. In the following Sitdown, which took place on 8 December 2021, Mark Lyken spoke to Lauren La Rose, Project Coordinator of *The Teviot, the Flag and the Rich, Rich Soil*, and Alchemy's Project Trainee Khadea Kuchenmeister about living in Hawick and working with its communities, the tensions between staged and observed realities, and the limitations and opportunities of being a filmmaker.**

Set photography by River Uhing.



**Alchemy Film & Arts: Mark, let's think back to five and a half months ago when you first arrived in Hawick as Alchemy's artist in residence. Talk us through those first few weeks. What was it like getting settled into life in Hawick and also getting used to a new camera?**

Mark Lyken: I was just trying to get my bearings initially. Obviously, it was helpful having a flat bang in the centre of town as a base camp. And I would just walk with the camera as far as I could in each direction. I started to build up my own personal map of the place, shot by shot. Having a new camera gave me licence to go out and shoot without feeling too much pressure. In my head, I was thinking, "Oh, these are just test shots." So, I wasn't feeling that need to nail everything. At some point, I actually started making the film but fooled myself into thinking I wasn't.

At that point, it was purely observational, documentary-esque. Not that I ever try to hide the fact that I'm filming. In fact, the opposite. I want people to know what I'm up to. But the camera I've got now, it's a bigger cinema camera. And so, when people see it, they tend to approach me and ask what I'm doing. And that's a large part of how I get to know people.

**We talked about this, back in July or August. You described this 'chatty filmmaker' persona and you had business cards printed. How did that shift from walking around the town and building a geographic map to introducing yourself and filming people in the town?**

I think that people coming up to me and asking what I was doing kickstarted that conversation, and having the business cards made it easier and somehow validated it. Also, by having to find a way to talk about the work and what it might be, the idea of the project being a film portrait of Hawick emerged very early on, to succinctly explain what I was doing out and about with the camera.



I was able to say, “Well, I’m building a kind of portrait of the town, and I’m interested in how people might fit into that picture.” And there were a few almost identical responses. “Oh, so you’re filming people doing what they do.” And I began using that.

I guess filmmakers spend half of their time editing in dark rooms with the blinds closed. It’s pretty antisocial! But I’ve been lucky enough to make back-to-back films recently. So, I’m in dark-room hermit mode half the time, and then suddenly, I’m back in communities making a film and having to interact with people in rapid-fire succession.

### **You have to bring the energy?**

Yes, and that’s not my natural mode of being. It takes me a while to warm up to that! And then there’s the underlying anxiety in making the kind of work that throws you into sometimes awkward social situations, and part of it is managing that anxiety and even working with it.

This project has had high levels of community engagement. Most days, I’m going into different situations with different groups of people and trying to figure out how best to work with that particular group, mostly by listening. How to put people at ease and try to capture the kind of material I am interested in.

I think that over the course of this residency I’ve become ‘chatty filmmaker’. Initially, it was a role, but at some point, I became aware that I was less anxious and just waking up and going out and doing it, without overthinking it. I’m not sure at what point that happened and I’m wondering if it will gradually wear off again!

**You made this all-encompassing portrait of Hawick, as much as it can be from a single perspective. Instead of focusing on a single group, or a single person, you decided to engage a lot of different groups and a lot of different people. What was that like as a method, to cast such a wide canvas? What were the highlights or the challenges?**

In my last couple of films, I worked with individuals or small groups of people, where there was perhaps more time to develop one on one relationships. It’s easier logistically, physically. I mean would it have been okay for me to focus on one or two people for this project? No one ever said I couldn’t but I felt that this project needed to be broader than that.

I think once we started talking about portraiture, you don’t want to put pressure on one person or a group to represent a whole place. But I’ve been careful to acknowledge from the start that I’m only here for six months and whatever I end up making can only ever be a snapshot. It’s a portrait but not a definitive portrait. And in this way, I’ve cast a wider net than I have in previous films. I’ve been amazingly lucky.

This is also the first time that I’ve worked with somebody in an organisational role, which brings its own tensions. I’ve been used to working as a lone filmmaker, so someone else making contact on my behalf might pitch things in a slightly different way. It also gives me less time to establish that relationship with participants, which can often be cemented in the first five minutes of meeting them, so if it’s not me making the initial contact, or it’s not quite pitched correctly it can be difficult to make up that lost ground. The flip side is it allows me to focus on making the film rather than organising logistics and seeking permissions. It’s hard to give up that control though. Having someone else on the ground with an eye on making sure everyone is safe and supported is brilliant though and feels necessary.

**Yes, because sometimes we didn’t always know what to expect when we were out filming together.**

That’s true and that’s what’s great but also terrifying about making this type of work. Some people have a very fixed idea of how things are going to go and also what they assume you are looking for. It’s about managing expectations but also realising, “Okay, this is something different now. This is interesting.” And just rolling with it.

The camera in some ways makes all the labour behind each shot invisible, like the relationships that are built through all the conversations leading up to each shoot. Hawick does have a history of observational documentary, with the film pictorials from the Hawick Film and Video Group, and the printed pictorials from the Hawick Archaeological Society. But it seems that, as much as your film is capturing people in their everyday lives, there was a kind of orchestration or sense of performance, such as with Hawick Saxhorn Band.

I've been moving that way with my last two films, *1300 SHOTS* and *Waiting for the Buff to Rub Me Out*, which are both fictionalised portraits, but largely based on the participants' lives and driven by their daily routines. They're observational, in the mode and the style, but they're carefully staged up to a point but with room for improvisation. An important shift has been in thinking of things that feel staged or performed as positive rather than negative things. This project has given me the opportunity to take this further and craft what I've been describing as set pieces, which are peppered throughout the film.

Initially, I had an idea to work with the local brass band. Maybe to ask them to perform a drone piece, because I'm into that music, right? But what does that have to do with the band and their history? I realised I wanted to celebrate the legacy of the band, without asking them to necessarily change what they do. But how about if we locate their performance somewhere unexpected? And that was the idea behind having them perform under a railway bridge along the old Waverley Route, the railway line. A way of celebrating the band, and reactivating the old railway, the loss of which is still keenly felt. This led to the idea of the band marching down the track and past the camera.

**It was quite surreal.**

Yes, surreal is a good way to put it, but also magical. And one of the great things about this project is it's allowed me to collaborate to a



much greater extent and to commission small pieces of work that have become an integral part of the larger film. I've been able to pay people properly for their acting services and to donate to organisations like the Saxhorn Band. In terms of production, it's things I've never had access to before.

**There is an important connection in your film between ritual and play, which is particularly captured with the Saxhorn Band. They are also one of the oldest community groups in Hawick. How important was it to capture the moments after people finish performing when they're just chatting to each other?**

Those are the moments that I really enjoy. These activities could serve as warm-ups to the real event, which is the downtime between takes. What happens when the band is finished performing and are just hanging about? And that's where the magic is. I'm really interested in those moments, in the packing away or the setting up. I want to include the stuff that is normally cut out.

I want to focus more on activities and strategies that allow for unselfconscious, perhaps joyous moments to unfold in front of the camera. And that's kind of what happened with Seb [Lord] and Esmé [Babineaux]. I had lots of footage of the new footbridges being craned into place up and down the river. And then, during one of my early walks, I discovered one of the decommissioned bridges was now propped on old railway sleepers by the recycling centre. My first instinct was to run across it!

### **It was funny watching you run across!**

It was easier to just show Seb and Esmé what I had in mind! I wanted them to engage in a recurring activity that existed for its own sake so I just got them to run across the bridge, then loop back, and just keep doing that circuit until they couldn't run anymore. It was so much fun, and I remember grinning from ear to ear. And afterwards, when they were out of breath, both exhausted, and just kind of leaning against the railings. I quickly reframed and got this lovely shot of them both just sitting opposite each other. And it was that revelation: "How would I have gotten this otherwise?" Even if what I originally intended to be the main event, the running across the bridge, ended up being the way of getting this unexpected, unguarded shot. Also, it was important to let people know that the camera is always rolling so they know exactly what they are signing up for.

### **This project was part of a six-month residency. What can it not be? Why is it a feature-length film, and why can't it be, say, a series of shorts, or an installation? There are extended shots that might not make it into the film, for example. How do you arrive at these decisions? How early on did you know what this film couldn't be?**

The material dictated the form and a feature felt right from quite early on. It's never going to be a definitive portrait of Hawick, or a documentary portrait either. It's always going to go through my filters and experiences and I'm always going to focus on things that

I find interesting. I guess I can't get away from that, but I can try and negate it somewhat and try to collaborate as much as possible.

I do work intuitively, in these discrete blocks, vignettes that hopefully connect together, not necessarily in a narrative, but with a satisfying flow. That's not to say that some footage might not work well in an installation context. I'm always open to that. I often have splinter films that work in dialogue with the main work but it's hard to know until I start editing.

### **As we were coordinating the shoots, the fact that it was going to be a feature-length film made it easier to engage as many people as we did.**

Yes, and people are also really into the idea of an old-fashioned premiere. People are like, "Oh, can we get dressed up?" Like, it just repeatedly became this thing, that at the end of this, we're going to come together again and celebrate this thing, and we're going to get dressed up!

### **It became very celebratory. We also had a lot of fun at the Scrabble Club!**

Totally! And how do you tap into the local Scrabble Club when they have no social media presence, don't seem to advertise and yet have been running for years and years? It's all word of mouth. If you know, you know. I find that fascinating, that there are all of these groups and activities going on in Hawick but some of them are so under the radar they seem almost like secret societies!

### **You get a feel for that from the film stills. It feels very observational, but in a way where you're located, where universes are happening with you and around you.**

I've been very conscious of that. I've made films before that are more akin to street photography but I've been questioning that way of working. I'd rather be more engaged and more rooted in place than passing through grabbing what I can. I guess overall, the idea

behind the film is that all of these activities could be happening in Hawick on any given day. The title of the film itself, *Notes from a Low Orbit*, feels like an acknowledgement that my time in Hawick is limited and that what I make will only ever be a snapshot of a time and place, but I'm very grateful to be invited into people's worlds even for a short while and have the opportunity to better understand what makes the place tick.

**You've challenged yourself in terms of making short films for the bike recycling centre at HAPi [Hawick Acorn Project Initiative] and for Hawick Saxhorn Band, in exchange for them participating in the film.**

Alchemy has been instrumental in targeting what those organisations needed, and in what that exchange could be. Part of it was shifting my thinking away from simply making a promotional film in exchange for access, and towards making something collaboratively that is as much part of the artistic process as the main work.



There's been a massive learning curve throughout all of this as I've been gradually trying to move towards a more socially engaged practice. But then actually realising what that means in practice. It's so much bigger. I guess that's the unseen side of the project. There is the film itself but also the background relationships that have been formed during production that will outlast the project and that's the beauty of working with Alchemy who are embedded in the town and can continue engaging with the people I have worked with.

**A lot of the film has been approaching people and asking them to pull back the curtain, either at work or in everyday life. Speaking of ethics, what have you learned? How have your own comfort zones changed?**

There are certain practical limitations with my mode of filmmaking, that kind of fixed camera, the static shot, letting things unfold. It's a very particular way of working. It's not very responsive.

I was filming at the local market, and the stallholders asked me to remind people that the market was still active when I show the film. Their initial impression was that I was making a TV documentary and that the film could help bring people back to the market. I tried to explain the kind of work that I make but I found myself tongue-tied and thinking, "How can I help?" Should I be making a different kind of work? How do I leverage my position to make things happen?

I've always felt I existed on the fringes and felt quite powerless, but elements of this project have made me realise that I do have a political position. That's scary but also quite exhilarating!



## SEASONAL BEAST



To play at being human for a while  
Please smile!

– ‘Sea Song’, Robert Wyatt

The alien has landed. “Morning!” In Hawick, you greet newcomers and neighbours alike. Mark Lyken, armed with a movie camera, passing for some kind of resident, attracts the grunts and sniffs of a passing resident’s dog. Compelled to engage, the filmmaker clacks his tongue at the canine, quelling its temper, before the creature backs off.

The interspecies encounter that opens *Notes from a Low Orbit* takes place on a fog-cloaked Miller’s Knowes, site of Hawick’s telly relay transmitter, which towers over the artist’s recording device in a morning mist whose cold, silver glow is befitting of a science fiction set. If the uninterrupted quietude of this opening hints towards one kind of film – slow, serious – the audibly jovial salutation that Mark sends another person’s way comes as something of a relief.

Any worthwhile film made about Hawick must be down to earth. It is interactions like that just described which ground the work in a humanity and a humour that complicate assumed binaries between artist and audience, filmmaker and participant. Mark’s methods allow the inquisitiveness and interventions of other people – as well as their pets and livestock – to contribute to the picture. Amidst the industrial chugs and atmospheric hums of a family farm’s early-morning routines, a cow straight-up glares down the barrel of the filmmaker’s steady-stare weapon, breaking the fourth wall and undercutting all assumptions of an artist extracting content by means of surreptitious surveillance.



When, in another scene, a model starts to suggest creative ideas to their photographer, questions of who's directing whom emerge as central themes. There's the film's considered framing, yes, but there's also its collision of happenstances, its impossibly rhythmic pile-up of incidents. Realities are exposed as staged, authored, the work of someone deeply invested in the ways in which a town's cultural identities are shaped, intuited, lived.

In astronomical terms, a low orbit refers to the zone just outwith a planet's atmosphere that's also near enough for convenient transportation, communication, observation and resupply to be possible. As its title and structure suggest, *Notes from a Low Orbit* might be viewed as a series of vignettes humbly captured over the course of two days: evidence collated by some far-flung, time-travelling hunter-gatherer who takes refuge up in the hills, venturing into town to catch blink-and-miss episodes of terrestrial wonder. Alongside typical scenes of labour shot inside textile mills and a cable drum production plant, there are more fleeting attractions: a funfair, a bike race, a popup outdoor breakdancing showcase keenly observed and admiringly imitated by local kids.

The unflinching and mechanical rigidity of *Notes from a Low Orbit's* gaze is especially emphasised in compositions teeming with in-frame movement. Consider the scene shot at Hawick Pump Track, or those at Hawick Boxing Club. In both, young participants cycle through frame or shadow spar and combat one another in an undirected choreography utterly independent of and indifferent to where Mark's camera is pointed.

If such scenes call visual attention to a world of limitless possibilities beyond the tripod-locked frame, others tantalisingly nod towards a meanwhile-and-elsewhere through sound. Every cut or crescendo to a new composition and soundscape here expresses not merely an intense curiosity for the present moment. Each edit also communicates an anxiety of missing out on some accidental, extraordinary cinematic set piece unfolding at another locale.



As such, looking and listening become imaginative acts. What are otherwise dead-still compositions become gags conjured by our collective imaginations. In a scene in which a curiously well-behaved dog receives a shave, we might begin to wonder if the animal is a regular and paying client, there of its own accord. Later, as if on cue – as if willed into being by some powerful, telekinetic spectatorship – a Škoda growls to a halt in front of a garage boasting that classic, prohibitive bark: NO PARKING AT ANY TIME.

Time is fictional. The two-day picture painted here is distilled from material captured across a period spanning seasons. I love the way Mark compresses such scenes into something more fabricated and suggestive, the way he draws out micro-narratives and teases at the idea of them unfolding in parallel across disparate sites of action. One resident, engraving a headstone in his living room, looks out the window just in time – apparently – to see the Tour of Britain speed along Hawick High Street.



Don't such sequences imply multiple, out-of-joint chronologies? The town hall's bells, residing somewhere in the dark attic behind the Scots Baronial building's four-face clock tower, are missing their F# key: a quarter-hourly reminder that time advances even when its usual markers are only half-functioning. Another scene, of two teens running themselves to giddy exhaustion across one of Hawick's decommissioned bridges along the Teviot, highlights the circularities and polyrhythms playing out across the larger canvas. Though united in their play, the runners proceed at different speeds and with different energies; one of them laps the other. As one orbit staggers to a stop, another proceeds along its own trajectory.

Eventually, a strangeness emerges; a ghostly sense of ritual. Along the stretch of old railway track that snakes through the town's eastern embankments, histories slam into one another. Torn up by the Tories in 1969, the site of the former Waverley Line is reactivated, quite brilliantly, by Hawick Saxhorn Band in a moment evoking what the

surrealists called the marvellous. Meanwhile, in Hawick Film & Video Group's 42-seat community cinema on Croft Road – converted from a sweetie shop in 1964 after the club made *Sons of Heroes*, its DIY tribute to Hawick's defining Battle of Hornshole – a class of primary school pupils enjoys a movie. Sitting en masse, the children fidget in thrall to the flickers of light before them. Their Hi-Viz vests recall earlier scenes of Hawick's flood protection scheme, whose bridge-transporting spectacles also bring citizens together in ritual union.

In *Notes from a Low Orbit*, Hawick is affirmed as a place where things *happen*. Returning to the same viewpoints allows Mark – and us – to take stock of variables from one moment in time to the next. A snapshot measure of change, his portrait accumulates an understanding of the town through snippets of its routines and rituals. Bin collections are made, the fog shapeshifts through and over its streets, a projectionist methodically shuts down a cinema booth at the end of another day. In ways that are remarkable and in ways that are not, places reiterate themselves, self-permutate, find new ways to live.

Hawick, then, is an album of not-quite-identical postcards. The film's methods are affirmed no better than in that truly beguiling duet, midway through, by two local residents performing Robert Wyatt's 'Sea Song' inside a former mill space in Scotland's most landlocked town. Hawick, as the beautifully sung lyrics to that haunting number go, looks different every time.





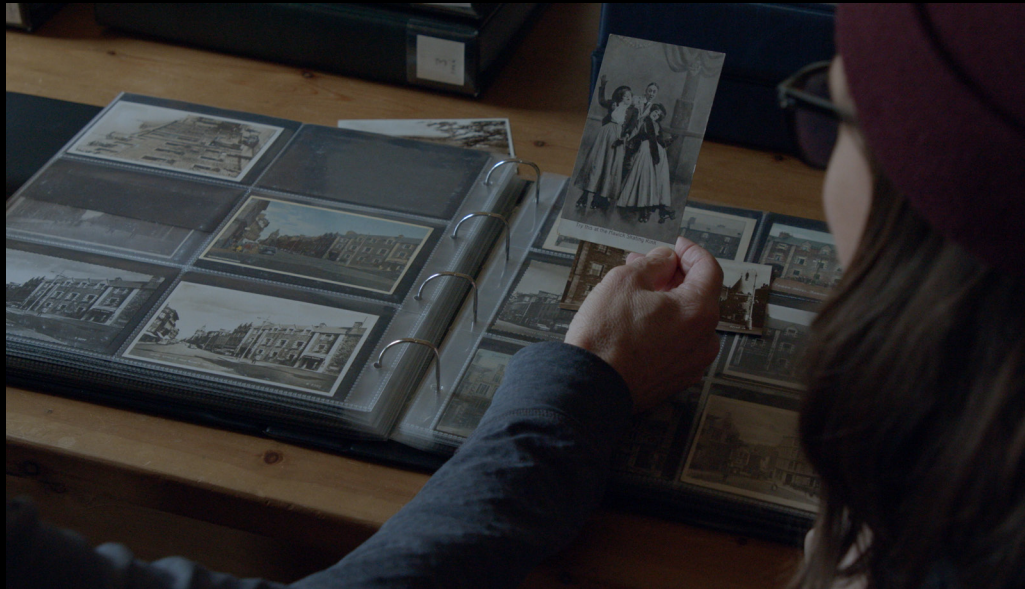


















# NOTES FROM A LOW ORBIT

## **Direction, Camera, Edit, Sound**

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## **Commissioned by**

Alchemy Film & Arts

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Hawick Saxhorn Band

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Brian Emmerson

Isobel Emmerson

Stephen Hewson

Moira Hume

Evelyn Jackson

Gordon Jackson

Scott Jose

Rudy Kanhye

Lauren La Rose

Sebastian Lord

Ian Lowes

Ying Lu

Ava Mikael

Ian Murdie

Greig Murray

Nathan Murray

Miwa Nagato-Apthorp

David Peacock

Kate Rayner

Lindsey Renwick

Sean Robson

Catherine Scoular

Michael Scoular

Alexa Seagrave

Pippa Sinclair

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Katherine Somers

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River Uhing

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Viv Walker

Suzie Walls

John Wilkinson

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## **Thanks to**

Kevin Brown

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Simon Corbett

Karen Dixon

Walt Holland

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Khadea Kuchenmeister

Andy Macfarlane

Bob Mitchell

Claire Riddell

Frank Scott

Kirsty Scott

Martin Slater

Tom Swift

Richie True

Gumpy Walker

Kathryn Welch

## **Thanks to**

Askern UK Ltd

Drumlanrig St Cuthbert's Primary

School

Hawick Acorn Project Initiative

Hawick Boxing Club

Hawick Film and Video Group

Hawick Flood Protection

Hawick Pump Track

Hawick Saturday Market

Hawick Saxhorn Band

Hawick Scrabble Club

Johnstons of Elgin

Live Borders

Paws Parlour

Room 2 Manoeuvre

Scottish Borders Council

Scottish Borders LGBT Equality

Scottish Borders Rape Crisis Centre

Slaters Showtime Funfairs

Standhill Farm

Teviot & Tweed Barbers

The Water Witches

Trinity Primary School

Ying's Chinese Therapist

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Filmed on location in Hawick, Scottish

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Soft Error 2022

**THE TEVIOT, THE FLAG AND THE RICH, RICH SOIL** is a programme of artist residencies, film commissions, discussion events and community engagement exploring the borders, boundaries and lines of Hawick and the Scottish Borders, delivered by Alchemy Film & Arts.

Taking place between July 2021 and December 2023, the programme engages artists in working with communities to consider the pasts, presents and futures of Hawick while researching and investigating the town and wider region's cultural identities in relation to land, water, industry, territory, place and environment.

**ALCHEMY FILM & ARTS** is a cultural organisation invested in experimental film as a means of generating discussion, strengthening community, and stimulating creative thought.

We connect artists and audiences within Hawick and the Scottish Borders through a diverse range of year-round events – including exhibitions, commissions, residencies, community filmmaking workshops and an annual film festival.

**MARK LYKEN** is a film and sound artist based in rural Dumfriesshire, Scotland. His practice pairs observational and durational modes to explore the ethics of image-making, the tensions between structure and chance, and the underknown routines and rhythms that define a place and its people.

During his six-month residency with Alchemy Film & Arts, Mark developed *Notes from a Low Orbit*, a feature-length study of the town, its communities and the rituals that inform their everyday experience.

*Notes from a Low Orbit* received its world premiere in Hawick at the twelfth edition of Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival.

