

News release

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'Bata-ville: We are not afraid of the future'

A sad film about hope

London Screening at Hackney Empire on Friday, 9 September 2005 at 4 pm

Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future" follows 42 passengers on a unique coach trip across Europe to the origins of the Bata shoe empire in the Czech Republic. Against the backdrop of regeneration in their local communities, former employees of the now closed UK shoe factories in East Tilbury, Essex and Maryport, Cumbria were led by hosts Karen Guthrie and Nina Pope on a journey that sees the passengers reflect on their shared history and what the future holds back at home.

Shoe entrepreneur Tomas Bata - the Henry Ford of Eastern Europe - was a visionary whose ambition that his workers "work collectively, live individually" inspired Czech architects to design a Utopian town to serve the needs of workers employed at the shoe factory at its heart. Bata's town, Zlín in the Czech Republic, expanded exponentially in the early 1930's from a small village to a town able to accommodate his burgeoning shoe empire. This modernist prototype - with its shops, leisure facilities and homes - was replicated across the globe, including the small village of East Tilbury on the Thames Estuary, developed by Bata in 1932.

Inspired by the contrast between Bata's idealism and the more recent industrial decline of East Tilbury and Maryport, **Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future"** sees artist / film-makers Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie immerse their passengers in an experience that begins as a free holiday but soon becomes an opportunity for a collective imagining of what Bata's maxim "We are not afraid of the future" means for them in 21st century Britain.

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Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future" is a bittersweet record of this experience, following the passengers as they trace Bata's history through visits to - amongst other sites - a shoe museum, an aircraft factory and a cemetery.

As well as writing and directing the film, Pope and Guthrie adopt on-screen personae to orchestrate events and interviews. Wearing distinctive costumes, they perform the role of 'travel hostesses' throughout the film - a device that allows them to observe each passenger's journey with poignant and unexpected results. The film also records Pope and Guthrie experiencing their own catharsis when out of role but still on-screen. Part travelogue, part documentary and part art work, **Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future"** marks a shift in Pope and Guthrie's established practice.

Supported by an education programme and a website, **Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future"** was screened at regional previews in East Tilbury in Essex and Maryport in Cumbria. The film will tour to art galleries throughout 2005/06 and be shown at film festivals in the UK and worldwide. It will also be available to buy on DVD. For more information, visit <http://www.bata-ville.com>

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To attend the screening, arrange interviews, source additional images or for more information contact:

Charity Green Director of Development
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Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future" is a Somewhere project by Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie, developed by Commissions East. The film was co-produced by Somewhere, Commissions East and Illumina Digital Ltd. Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future" has been supported by funding from Allerdale Borough Council, Arts Council England, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the European Cultural Foundation, Screen East (through RIFE Lottery) and Thurrock Council, with an in kind contribution from the Czech Centre (London).

Editors notes:

1. Project origins

Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future" is the culmination of two years of intensive planning and research, which began when Commissions East approached Nina Pope to create a temporary site-specific work in East Tilbury, on behalf of Thurrock Council in Essex. Pope created a single destination travel agency in the former director's office in one of the now disused Bata factory buildings at East Tilbury. Visitors could browse, bring their own Bata related memorabilia and apply to go on the Bata-ville coach trip to Zlín in the Czech Republic. During Pope's research, the Maryport Bata factory, closed since the 1980's, came to light and she teamed up with long-term collaborator Karen Guthrie to develop a project that would unite the two communities once more.

2. The Artists / Film -makers

Pope and Guthrie will celebrate the 10th anniversary of their professional partnership with the launch of Bata-ville: "We are not afraid of the future" - their most ambitious project to date. Karen Guthrie and Nina Pope met in the late 1980's at Edinburgh College of Art, but did not collaborate until 1995 with the multi-media installation 'Somewhere Over the TV'. This was followed by one of the internet's earliest artists' projects – the groundbreaking live online travelogue 'A Hypertext Journal' in 1996. A succession of commissions for major institutions followed, including Tate Modern, Grizedale Arts and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (for which they won the Imaginaria Digital Art Award in 1999). In 2002, Pope and Guthrie produced and curated 'TV swansong' – a live webcast of specially commissioned artist projects.

Nina Pope lives and works in London, whilst Karen Guthrie lives in the Lake District and works both there and in London. Both maintain solo careers and academic posts at the Royal College of Art, London and St Martin's College, Lancaster respectively. Founding the creative organisation Somewhere in 1997, they are currently developing new work based on historical re-enactment, as well as a commission for Cinema City in Norwich.

3. Commissions East

Commissions East is the visual arts development agency for the East of England, providing an advisory and management service for commissioners, a programme of special projects addressing new areas of visual arts practice and a range of services for artists.