

A FILM BY THEODORE SIMMONS

UPPER AIR

PETER MACQUEEN

ELEANOR D'SOUZA

LOUIS CUNNINGHAM



UPPER AIR

A couple's weekend in the hills goes off track when they have to share their walkers' hut with an eccentric resident.

Synopsis



Summer is ending when Ethan and Sam head into the English Lake District for the weekend looking for some quiet time together. On arrival, they encounter Isaac - an eccentric older resident who has made their bothy of choice his temporary home. What follows makes the couple see their casual vacation and unique surroundings through very different eyes.

technical specs: available to festivals in 4.6K 2.40:1 with Dolby 5.1 Sound, DCP or file



About The Film



This short has been in development for a while but its themes speak to our recent experience of living through a pandemic and memories of lockdown.

As lockdowns restricted our lives, especially the lives of the elderly and most vulnerable, a question moved in from our collective peripheral vision: what's the difference between existing and fully living? Although UPPER AIR was first drafted over a year before the pandemic, similar preoccupations are what lead Isaac, in the film, to set himself up on the fells to paint following the diagnosis of a health problem - and to do so without notifying his family and friends who come searching for him.

UPPER AIR is a comedy-drama with what one early reader of the script described as an 'air of gnomic mystery' that 'borders on magic realism'.

There is nothing explicitly supernatural in the film because there doesn't need to be, the landscape of the Lakes has magic enough!





Director's Note

This project came from personal experience – my Grandfather had a very regimented lifestyle but in his last years took to painting the Cumbrian valley where we live with surprising passion. Some of the most youthful-spirited people I know are older people and several have mentored me or provided inspiration at different moments in my life. In a time where older people are often politically and socially siloed versus other generations I'm interested in what they can teach us about being young!

I'm also interested in the cultural figures of the eccentric, the hermit and the legacy of Romanticism in the landscape of the Lake District. Cinematic influences ranged from Ingmar Bergman, through *Withnail and I*, to contemporary filmmakers like Ruben Östlund. There are echoes of mountain literature in there – from Kagerō Nikki to Wordsworth.

UPPER AIR explores the different layers of experience and idealisation we paint over the natural world.

Theodore Simmons, Cumbria, UK

Meet The Cast



Peter Macqueen is a stage and screen actor based in Cumbria. His one-man shows have been well received by audiences and critics. On-screen, ***Supernova***, released July 9th, sees Peter play Clive, in the beautifully moving feature film starring Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci. He portrays a very different character as William in the ghostly horror feature *The Creeping* alongside Sophie Thompson and again as Wolfman in *Wolfboy*, both in post-production. During lockdown, Peter turned the camera on himself and filmed *The Butterfly Collector*.



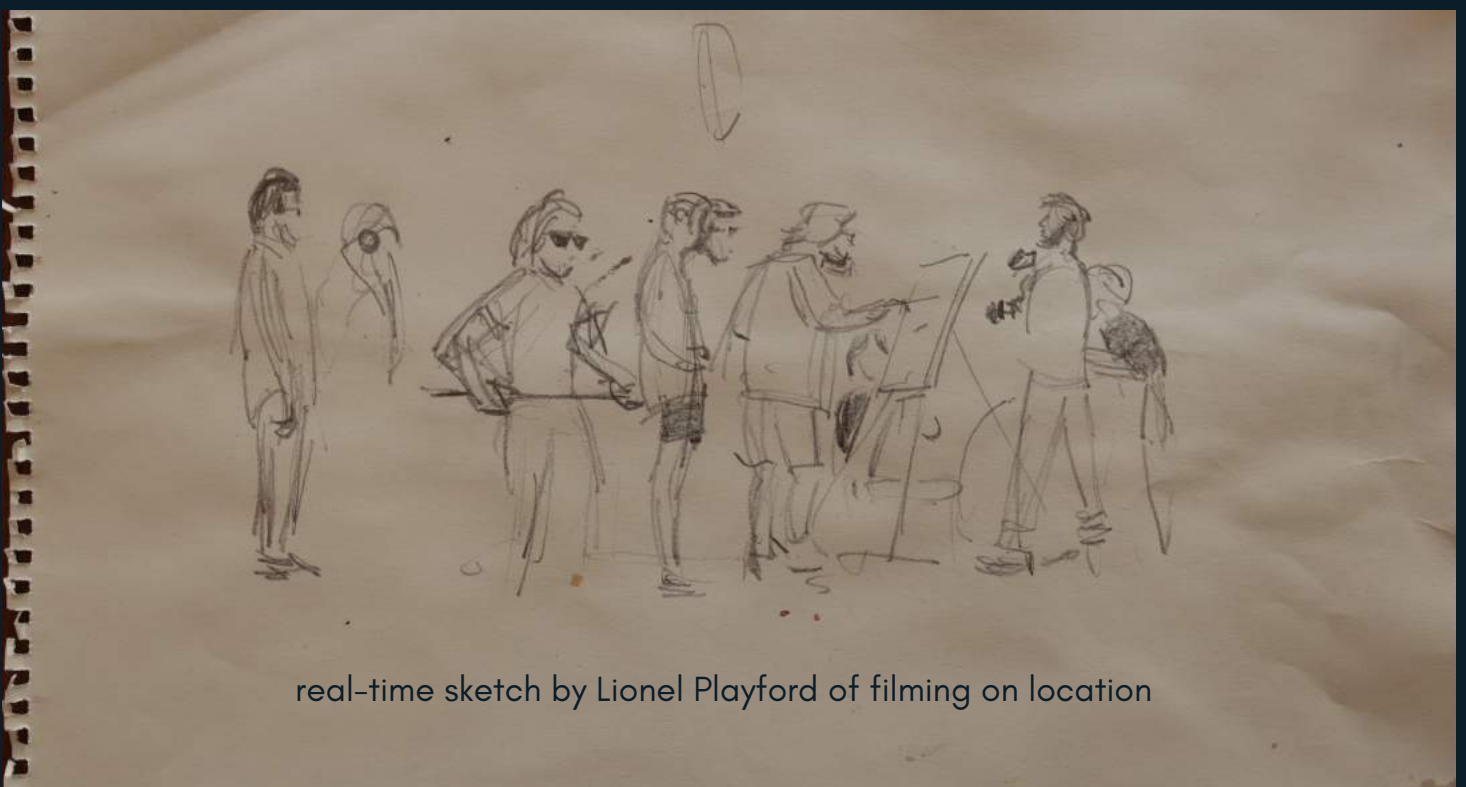
Louis Cunningham is an actor and recent graduate of Worcester College, Oxford. Louis, represented by Tavistock Wood London, has been performing from a young age, starting onstage. While at university, he produced, directed and acted in theatre productions from small studio spaces to the larger Oxford Playhouse. Alongside theatre and his studies, Louis has acted in a number of short films and webseries such as *Pillowtalk*, as well as landing small professional roles in *Wonder Woman 1984* and *Bridgerton* S2. He's currently playing Louis XVI in the BBC Canal+ series ***Marie Antoinette***.



Eleanor D'Souza won Best Supporting Actor in the Oxford Drama Cuppers competition in her first year at university and has continued to appear on stages and screens, including roles in *The Importance of Being Ernest* and *Tiktok Millionaires*. She finds comedy work to be particularly enjoyable.



Lionel Playford is a landscape painter living and working in Cumbria. He first started painting landscapes in the 1970s and, after a detour into shipbuilding, returned to painting full-time in 1987. His work is commissioned, exhibited and held in collections nationally. Lionel recently appeared on the Sky Arts' series **Portrait Artist Of The Year.**



real-time sketch by Lionel Playford of filming on location



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FAQs

What was it like to make UPPER AIR under covid conditions?

So much of the film takes place outside in these beautiful open locations, which enabled us to shoot really safely. For the interior scenes, our small crew adhered to safety regulations. Editing the film was a strange experience as successive lockdowns meant there was often nowhere to go except into the edit, mirroring Isaac's ritualistic situation in the film.

What was it like filming at these locations?

It was interesting as some of the cast and crew were urbanites and some were locals and there were varying levels of fitness. Ironically, the director got lost in low cloud and mist one morning while we were walking up and only found his way back to the production by getting directions from an off duty mountain rescue volunteer.



Why were you drawn to the locations?

The Dir. wrote the script with the Buttermere Bothy locations of Warnscale and Dubs Hut in mind but we searched for a while for the right tarn, one which felt remote enough but was also accessible for equipment. Eventually, we settled on Blea Tarn as our Producer Liv grew up nearby what is another famous Lake District location. FX was done in post-production to remove people and cars from sound and vision, even a wedding party taking photos on an inflatable rubber swan!

What role does landscape play in the film and its visual style?

Throughout the film landscape plays an integral role in creating atmosphere, we tried to compose shots that felt like moving paintings. We favoured extreme wides which emphasised the openness of the landscape and utilised a narrow aperture to maintain detail and give a painting-like quality. We shot almost entirely without artificial light favouring manipulating natural light.



What role does music play in the film?

Our Dir. was keen on finding music and musicians who spoke the themes of the film, so he approached **Pecq** after seeing their collaboration with water and climate scientists. These pieces give the film cinematic scale and reflect landscape processes through music – for example water flowing through the valley!



<<< Find out more

What about Isaac's quotations?

The cryptic voicemail messages Isaac leaves his family and friends in the opening scenes he reads from Kagerō Nikki's *The Gossamer Years*. Isaac's reverie after painting sees him quote from Wordsworth's *The Faëry Chasm*, 1820, a poem exploring where nature's magic reveals itself.

Upcycled Sounds Retweeted



pecq @pecqband · 19 Mar 2021

Our electronics & string orchestra piece is being screened at @unescoWATER's #WorldWaterDay2021 event on Monday, with a discussion on water scarcity.

osj.org.uk/osjevent/when-...

#ambient #electronica #contemporaryclassical #modularsynth #composer #orchestra



Screening Stories...



Hinterlands International Rural Film Festival
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