

Daniel Ward

Lonesome Ghosts

20 September–13 December 2025

Lonesome Ghosts is the first solo exhibition by Oxford-based artist, writer and filmmaker, Daniel Ward. Working with text, installation, film and video, Ward's work explores the relationship between the collective practices and histories of image making in relation to political action and co-option.

Centered around a new long-format, single screen film of the same title, Lonesome Ghosts (2025) explores the ramifications of undercover policing in the UK. Organised into four chapters, the work moves between filmed and found footage, official police documents, evidence and personal testimony, and offers an examination of the complex affinities between personal commitment, state violence and visual culture.

Each chapter centres a different voice or material: a meeting with an exhausted and lonely political organiser; silent footage of a funeral filmed by an undercover policing unit in 1979; an interview with a photographer who discovered he was the target of police surveillance; and a filmmaker grappling with the dreams and failures of collective filmmaking. Threaded throughout the work is a mutual consideration of politics and visual depiction. Ward focuses on the camera as a central device and, in turn, the purpose of both documents and documentary, as well as collective and group work.

Produced by Ward over a three year period using an iPhone and an inexpensive digital camera, the footage and its treatment is, at times, intentionally out of focus or underexposed: subjects are kept slightly out of shot, or at the edge of the frame, encased in shadows. Ward's use of sound, from undefined field recordings to abstract audio samples, further emphasise the work's interest in representation and depiction, contributing to the film's underlying atmosphere of paranoia and fear.

Throughout the gallery and its external windows Ward has used samples from a redacted 'Tradecraft Manual', a guidance dossier released by the Undercover Policing Inquiry in 2018, that

outlines the Special Demonstration Squad's methods to conduct undercover work. These techniques are echoed in the testimonies of those heard on screen, where these same methods were experienced first-hand.

Lonesome Ghosts explores the idea that undercover policing and state surveillance is not a self-contained drama of isolation and paranoia affecting a handful of individuals. Instead, this exhibition takes this minor history as an opening to think through larger histories of commitment, filmmaking, failure, belonging and intimacy – and the opposing political ends to which these are employed.

Lonesome Ghosts is part of Peer's 2025 Programme, which addresses themes of inheritance, memory, health and home, all under the shadow of the rise of authoritarianism, and has included solo exhibitions by artists Mohammed Z. Rahman and Alexis Kyle Mitchell. Ward's exhibition is accompanied by a series of events as part of Peer's Talks, Events and Workshops programme.

BIOGRAPHY

Daniel Ward (Coventry, 1991) lives and works in Oxford. His work has been shown at HKW, Berlin, Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin, and the Museum for Photography, Berlin, amongst others. He was the inaugural recipient of the Michael O'Pray Prize in 2018, an award for new writing on moving-image art supported by Art Monthly and Film and Video Umbrella. He was commissioned by City Projects to write The Politics of Production, a report examining the conditions for producing experimental film in the UK, funded by Arts Council England and published in 2019. His writing has been published in Artforum, Art Monthly, Texte zur Kunst and New Left Review: Sidecar, amongst others. He is currently a PhD candidate at University College London, writing on 20th century British art, politics and film from 1982 to 1997.

LIST OF WORKS

Lonesome Ghosts (2025)

HD/2K

52 mins

TALKS, EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS

HOXTON FUN PALACE WORKSHOP, SATURDAY 4 OCTOBER

As part of The Hoxton Hub Health Network Fun Palace, Peer hosts a free drop-in creative family workshop that takes inspiration from Peer's recent mural commission At Home, developed by artist Mohammed Z. Rahman and Peer Ambassadors.

ARTIST TALK WITH DANIEL WARD AND RICHARD BIRKETT

THURSDAY 9 OCTOBER, 7PM

Join artist Daniel Ward and curator and writer Richard Birkett in conversation.

T.J. CLARK ON REALISM

WEDNESDAY 29 OCTOBER, 7PM

Art historian T. J. Clark discusses Daniel Ward's work, reflecting on realism's role in art and politics.

CAITLÍN DOHERTY RESPONDS TO LONESOME GHOSTS

SATURDAY 6 DECEMBER, 3PM

Writer Caitlín Doherty shares a response to Daniel Ward's exhibition

All events are free, suggested donation is £3.
Booking required. To book, please ask a member of Peer's staff at Front of House, or visit Peer's website:
<https://www.peeruk.org/talks-events-workshops>



SIX QUESTIONS

ELLEN GREIG (DIRECTOR, PEER): Your film, Lonesome Ghosts, is structured around four chapters. Your voice acts as a continuous thread and you move between interviews with various people, some whose identities are undisclosed. In this way, you bring together very different experiences and associations into a shared conversation about the impact of undercover policing. Can you tell me about the people you interview in this work?

DANIEL WARD: I never actually intended to make a work about undercover policing. I initially began speaking with people about their experiences organising in small political groups, specifically about the difficulties of doing so and the emotional problems that arise over time, like paranoia or frustration. I spoke to people who were mostly in direct action groups focused on things like policing, anti-war, climate change, or small networks with more general goals. They were groups of different stripes on the political left, though being part of 'the left' was less important to some, especially those focusing on a specific issue.

I had conversations with many more people than I filmed, and only a few ended up being recorded. I tried to ask questions about their personal involvement and reason for taking up political action, and often these questions were hard to answer. It is no surprise, I think, that the more reflective and open conversations in the film are given by people later in life. They are reflecting on their experiences, and have some distance from the events they are describing. I think they've found words for what happened, or what they went through – even if they still aren't sure what exactly happened. The first person you hear in the film, by contrast, is a much younger organiser. He is speaking after his group recently fell apart, and was happy to be recorded but not directly filmed. He is a little unsure how to answer some questions, but I think he provides an important insight into the confusion and misunderstanding that comes with working politically.

As I spoke with more people, however, at some point an undercover police officer would be mentioned without me even raising the subject. An example of this is explained in the film. In the third section I recall how I met and first spoke with the photographer Alan Lodge about his work – he has been photographing police operations for over forty years, along with free festivals, travellers, squatters (name a political movement and he was likely there) – and then he suddenly started talking about the well-known undercover officer, Mark Kennedy. Almost everyone I spoke with over a certain age had later realised they had known or interacted with an undercover officer, or at the very least were part of a movement that was spied on. This was the case with Judy Mazonowicz too, a filmmaker I'd been put in touch with initially by the feminist archive Cinenova, and who had been involved in various political groups and a film collective. We discuss her involvement in certain groups, how she reflects on that work now, and the role of making films at the time.

EG: Throughout the work you use the act of seeing, recording and memory as a way to question the validity of documentation and representation, which, of course, speaks directly to the experience of undercover policing and everyday surveillance. Can you expand on the film's use of focus, exposure, closeness and distance, as a way to determine validity or representation?

DW: This was at first a practical choice, as blur, distortion, or overexposure were solutions when working with people who didn't want to be filmed. Other interviews too, where the subject had agreed to be on camera, were often awkward or the answers too rehearsed. To put people at ease I often placed the camera at the far end of the room, almost out of sight. These interviews were by far the most interesting, and wouldn't have been as relaxed if the camera was placed too close. This way of working brought to my mind the problem of proximity and closeness, not just as a visual problem but as a social and political one too. A camera placed too close or too far away does not provide useful information to its operator, and a sound recorder with the recording level turned way up will pick up more than just a voice speaking. The sound is central to the work, and this too began practically. I was interviewing someone in a small flat and while relistening to the recording I could hear shouts, noises and arguments, which I decided to amplify later on with the help of sound artist Tom Richards.

The subject matter, however, also forces you to think about how the state and its opponents use visual tools. Footage used by the police must tick certain visual categories, like sharp focus or correct exposure. On the other hand, the photographer Alan Lodge spent his life documenting police operations, yet feels like he missed the undercover work being conducted against him and his community, as he was too close and too late to document it properly. How visual tools might be politically effective is not a settled question, I think, and distortion, blur or overexposure can perhaps be effective in the right circumstance.

These are, of course, all visual metaphors. Metaphors like distance and closeness, like 'indexicality' or the 'documentary', are simply meant to bring forward certain ideas or associations. The purpose of such metaphors in this work, I think, is to attempt to understand how these specific, small experiences sit in relation to a larger history: in relation to the state or the Left's endless defeat in Britain. These sounds, voices and images are symptoms of those larger histories.

EG: Silent footage of Blair Peach's funeral, filmed by an undercover policing unit in 1979, is used throughout the work, and is edited alongside footage you have shot in people's homes, and samples from official policing documents, scanned photographs and snippets of cartoons. Tell me about the use of fragmented materials to comment on different but converging narratives in the work?

DW: The footage of Blair Peach's funeral was uploaded to the Undercover Policing Inquiry website as evidence, where it is free to access. I stumbled across it after looking through other photographs, manuals and ephemera (it was simply titled DOC100.mp4). It is painful footage to watch, we cannot deny that, but it is also one of the few

pieces of visual material that we have: it is evidence of how the state and the police infiltrate the daily, personal lives of its subjects.

Why would the police document the funeral of a man they had killed only months before, what kind of a force targets even moments of grief and mourning? Or was it simply that this was the best opportunity the police had to record his friends and associates, and most likely, other anti-fascists? It is shocking, I think, simply because of how mundane and ordinary the footage is, and I highly doubt it was the only time they undertook such an assignment (the family of Stephen Lawrence, for example, were also surveilled for a long time). For me, the footage is key to thinking through this history – it depicts the ordinary, brutal nature of the British state. I try to clash it against other pictures of everyday life, to think through how 'the everyday' is structured by this form of depiction.

Yet sitting with these different interviews, recordings and documents for a long time on my hard drive, it was challenging to work out a structure that would piece together these very different associations or experiences. This is largely because the subject is redacted and deliberately obscured. It is hard to know where or how this history is best depicted, or where it currently exists. The first and last section of the film are reflective of this kind of uncertainty, where I am sure this kind of policing was present, but it is hard to confirm. To understand its effects, I felt these personal histories had to be compared and approximated to other material. Material like documents, images, sounds or statements, without any promise of truth or confirmation.

At times, the form was explicitly directed by those speaking. In the first section, the voice speaking suggests that everything became questionable in his life due to the paranoia and fear experienced by him and others. He was wondering what affected his relationships and political affiliations, essentially wondering where things went wrong. Judy too, suggests how a fragmented film might be more appropriate. These are fragments that make up our daily lives. Fragments such as a moment from the 1937 Disney cartoon 'Lonesome Ghosts' that was playing on an organisers television (where I got the title of the work from); footage from Judy's films with her collaborators in W.I.T.C.H; some of her personal scanned photographs that she shared with me; refilmed sections of a guide that outlines the Special Demonstration Squad's methods to conduct undercover work. Even the longer, simple straight shots of people speaking are broken and left in pieces, refusing to be a whole. All of these fragments had to be compared and contrasted in order to understand the significance and effects of both a wider political movement, and the everyday lives of those involved.

I hope this fragmented yet associative form attempts to think through certain questions: how we can piece together this history, how this history structures our daily lives (then and now),

and how the police use even the most private, personal moments to maintain a social order.

EG: Throughout the film you ask the people you interview to recite various texts. Where are these sourced from?

DW: The recorded conversations I had with people were extremely long. Not only did filming take place over many hours and days, but the conversations themselves took place over many months. As I got to know people I began to share different material like poetry, snippets of books or news articles with them. There wasn't any special logic or planning over what was shared, they were simply things I thought they might like and were influencing my thinking at the time. Judy, for example, who speaks in the last chapter, writes poetry so I shared some of what I was reading, such as Adrienne Rich, Sean Bonney and Amiri Baraka. Some of it she liked – such as Bonney, whose phrase 'Police Realism' was also used for the second chapter – though Judy did also tell me once she doesn't read other poets... so maybe she was just being nice.

Some of what is read in the film was also wonderfully unplanned. I had notes that I shared before and during the filming. At one point Judy took these notes and read comments from another organiser I interviewed, and used it as an opening to explain her own experience. She also read and rewrote a line from a T. J. Clark book, something I'd written down that I wanted to ask her about. But she simply misread my handwriting and read it differently, in her own (I think, more powerful) way. The only text cited without alteration is in the first section, from the book Partisans in an Uncertain World, by Paul Hoggett.

I like to think of this process of sharing and reading as a way to try and work out what ideas or texts might resonate now – resonate in their lives, for a 'politics' today, and for the subject we were discussing. It is like we were testing a theory or a text: testing it in different settings and scenarios, trying to find their limits and real possibilities.

EG: You did not work with a crew to produce this work, rather it was a long process of solo effort – meeting individuals, looking in archives, recording lengthy conversations. Tell me about the process of producing this work?

DW: It is a film made with very few means, and working alone causes a lot of doubt and uncertainty, but I believe the film would be less intimate if others had been involved. I hope it's clear from the interviews that they were conducted with an enormous amount of trust. I spoke with those I filmed many, many times. We became friends ultimately, I even slept on people's sofas before or after filming (of course, this means there were many things that I wish had been recorded!). I couldn't have had the same conversations with a sound guy lurking in the corner, or a producer worrying over

the budget as filming went over 7 or 8 hours... I don't want to exceptionalise this way of working, but it brings a certain level of independence and intimacy that's impossible otherwise.

I've spent a lot of time writing about how refusing standard or 'commercial' forms of filmmaking is not a circumstance but a choice. It allows for different ways of thinking, and if we want to understand the present as best we can we must develop new forms alongside it. In this instance I wanted to make a documentary, but a new kind of documentary.

EG: The film, in part, tries to outline how an atmosphere of fear and paranoia is actively created by the state, and reflects on the failures of the Left. Looking at this history now, what do you think we can learn from these experiences and what relevance do they hold for us today?

DW: The film and those speaking are cautious, I think. But perhaps they'd agree that instead of attempting to ignore horror and despair, this will likely need to be our starting point now. This is, in my view, what the film and those speaking seek out. They are seeking a politics, and an art, that brings 'ordinary', painful life into greater focus. No more dreams or false hopes, no more fantasies of utopia. A simple starting point, maybe. A politics that will begin with a simple refusal.

THANKS

Amy Budd, Dot Ward, Ellen Greig, Alan Lodge and Judy Mazonowicz

SUPPORTERS

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FORTHCOMING

Leah Clements

Apophenia

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Opening: 6 February, 6–8pm

INFO

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