



MANCHESTER'S CORNERHOUSE turns 20 this year. No longer a precocious teenager, the Cornerhouse has matured to adulthood and is now established as the international centre for cinema and contemporary visual arts in Greater Manchester and the North West.

Cornerhouse was launched in 1985, seeking to promote cinema and the visual arts at a time when Manchester was already at the forefront of the alternative cultural universe, exemplified by the iconoclastic Factory Records.

The Cornerstone was the product of a partnership between North West Arts, British Film Institute, Manchester City Council and the now defunct Greater Manchester County Council. All believed that Manchester needed a regional film theatre and a contemporary art gallery so the two were brought into being together in one building.

The Cornerhouse complex takes its name from its location on the junction of Oxford Street and Great Bridgewater Street. It is sited midway between Manchester's city centre and its extended university district.

In Manchester's dog days the building had been a carpet shop. However, it had stood empty on the site throughout the 1970s, with only its status as a Grade-II listed building preventing its demolition. The city council eventually stepped in and bought the site and agreed to rent it out to Cornerhouse for a peppercorn rent, the proviso being that the location be used for the arts and culture.

Cornerhouse is owned and operated by Greater Manchester Arts Centre, which is an independent charitable trust. The complex now consists of three screens, three art galleries, a publishing business, café, bar and bookshop.

# A cultural oasis

Manchester's Cornerhouse cinema and arts venue turns 20 this year, reports **PATRICK McDONNELL**

Cornerhouse caters for the discerning cinemagoer with its 100% specialist cinema programming policy, as defined by the UK Film Council, including arthouse films. Its three screens can cater for a total audience of 525. Cinema 1 has a seating capacity of 299, Cinema 2 has 168 seats and Cinema 3 has a capacity of 58 seats. All the screens are equipped with 35mm projection — Cinema 1 has Century projectors, while Cinemas 2 and 3 features 35mm Westar projectors. Additionally screens 2 and 3 are equipped with 16mm Fumeo projectors. All the cinemas feature Dolby Sound systems — Cinema 1 is fitted to the Dolby SRD standard, with Cinema 2 fitted with Dolby SR film sound.

Looking to the future Cornerhouse is currently investigating the next phase in cinema development, digital projection. It was one of the first in the north-west to instal digital projection in 2003. It is currently using a prototype Digital Projections machine and an EVS Broadcast Equipment server as part of a pilot scheme with venture capitalist in new media, the Arts Alliance Media. Cornerhouse is also part of the UK Film Council's Digital Screen Network and is to instal Christie Digital Systems 2K DLP Projectors.

Overseeing the film content and booking programme for the Cornerhouse screens is Linda Pariser. She was formerly at the bfi as programme advisor, responsible for advising and booking films for seven client venues and was revenue funding officer for four of the venues. Following a move to Cardiff, Pariser worked as cinemas programmer at the Chapter Arts Centre, and was also responsible for the programming of the 2-screen cinema and managing the

cinema department with its staff of six. In 1997 she moved to Cornerhouse as cinema director. She also serves as festival director and film programmer for Cornerhouse's ¡Viva! Spanish Film Festival and its UK/Dublin tour.

Scheduled for July is a season examining the relationship between art and pornography in moving pictures.

**Director Dave Moutrey is Cornerhouse's chief executive. He has been responsible for the seamless integration between the two areas of Cornerhouse's expertise in the picture arts.**

Previously he was director of Arts About Manchester and he helped establish an arts marketing consortium in Australia. Moutrey is also the company secretary for the Association of Independent Film Exhibitors, among other appointments.

Due to its unique set-up of screen and exhibition areas Cornerhouse is able to span both the moving picture and still picture environments to create a synergy between these two quite distinct disciplines — imagine the National Film Theatre and Hayward Art Gallery in the same building. This allows a cross fertilisation between the two art forms, and Cornerhouse attracts over 200,000 admissions a year to its screen and gallery spaces.

Previous exhibitions have included Damien Hirst, Chris Ofili and Peter Greenaway. Cornerstone has an education programme that complements the exhibitions to present a wide variety of events, including evening lecture programmes, practical workshops, artists' talks and school workshops. An exhibition of the work of Californian experimental filmmaker Pat O'Neill in the picture galleries and an

accompanying film programme in the cinemas is scheduled for the end of the year.

To celebrate its twentieth birthday anniversary in October, Cornerhouse is indulging in a screening 20 of the most memorable films from the last two decades as chosen by the centre's patrons, be they visiting filmmakers from Cornerhouses's history, through local film critics, to its staff, but most importantly — its audience.

Linda Pariser urges those in the Cornerhouse catchment area to: "Cast your mind back and choose three films from anytime between 1985-2005". To do so, Cornerhouse will utilise another of its marketing successes, its website, to collect and collate the results. Voters are allowed three choices in order of preference with number one being top choice. "The three choices gives us options depending on the title's availability. If the first isn't available, then the second choice is activated, and so on," she said. The films with the highest scores will form the 20 films shown in the 20th Anniversary Season.

Cornerhouse seeks a further contribution from its audience by either writing a programme note or introducing a screening of the 20 films that will be shown that month.

Pariser says: "It will offer the opportunity for people to try their hand at film criticism via the written or spoken word. It will give people a chance to remember the last 20 years and to think about what the next 20 years holds for us."

Seconding that Dave Moutrey says he has high hopes: "I am looking forward to another 20 years of new audiences for fantastic cinema through innovative programming at Cornerhouse. We plan to be as vital in 2025 as we are today."

**The Cornerhouse has cinemas, gallery spaces, a bookshop and dining areas**

