

PRESS RELEASE

MARCHING PLAGUE

(USA 2006. Cert 15)

A new film from Critical Art Ensemble

Commissioned and produced by The Arts Catalyst, the science-art agency

Part of the AV Festival 06

6.45pm Saturday 4 March 2006

Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle

Tickets:£5/£3

Also showing at ICA London, 6 May 2006

The World Premiere of a new film, ***Marching Plague*** by Critical Art Ensemble is presented on 4 March at Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle. Filmed on location in Stornoway, North West Scotland, this film presents a powerful critique of UK-US bio-weapons research and addresses the paranoia surrounding bio-terrorism. It centres on the recreation of secret sea trials conducted by the UK government in the 1950s, investigating the airborne distribution of bacterial agents. Commissioned and produced by The Arts Catalyst, the science-art agency, ***Marching Plague*** will be screened as part of the AV Festival (www.avfest.co.uk), and is followed by a panel discussion with Steve Kurtz and Steve Barnes of US art collective, Critical Art Ensemble.

Charting the history of germ warfare research, the film seeks to expose the relative ineffectiveness of this mode of attack compared with more conventional terrorist weapons. It aims to address and dispel some of the public's fear of bio terrorism which has increased in recent years. Critical Art Ensemble, led by Steve Kurtz assert that this exaggerated fear is based on incomplete awareness of the facts – and that this fear has been exploited by governments for decades in order to divert funds from legitimate medical research.

When bubonic plague research trials took place on the Isle of Lewis during the Cold War, the British military began to explore whether germs could be used as a naval weapon. Their tests proved that germs were as unreliable and unmanageable on the sea as they were on the land. This film recreates the trials (using the same harmless bacterial stimulant used in the first tests) with similarly inconclusive results. As Kurtz says "We wanted to show how crazy these germ warfare programmes are. Just like the navy back in 1952 we didn't manage to hit the target, but did get ourselves covered with the stimulant," he says, "The only thing we successfully did was to poison ourselves. Theoretically."

Kurtz, the founder of Critical Art Ensemble is currently at the centre of one of the most controversial court cases thrown up by George Bush's Patriot Act.

In 2004 when his wife Hope died naturally of heart failure at their home, Kurtz called the authorities. The Police, finding science equipment and art materials for Critical Art Ensemble's ongoing work called in the FBI and Kurtz was detained and investigated for bio-terrorism. He was later charged with mail fraud and wire fraud. He faces up to 20 years in prison and the US Justice Department is still seeking charges relating to biological weapons.

The Arts Catalyst is an arts organisation that actively makes connections between art and science through commissions and strategic projects. Since 1993 The Arts Catalyst has worked nationally and internationally to promote understanding and cooperation between the arts and sciences. It seeks new ways to involve artists, scientists and the wider public in a discourse about science in society, its direction and impact.

The Marching Plague is supported by Arts Council England.

www.artscatalyst.org

www.critical-art.net

More information on the case surrounding Steve Kurtz's legal case:

www.caedefensefund.org

www.avfest.co.uk

LISTINGS DETAILS

Saturday 4 March 2006, 6.45pm

Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle

Tickets are available from the Tyneside Cinema Box Office on 0191 232 8289.

Price: £5/£3/ Free with AV pass

AV Festival 06 www.avfest.co.uk

The AV Festival 06 is the UK's newest, and largest, international festival of film, digital arts and music, electronic art, games and new media.

Saturday 6 May 2006 (times to be confirmed)

ICA, The Mall, London, SW1

Box Office: 020 7930 3647 www.ica.org