

Film and Video Umbrella presents:

MerzBank

**A major new online art project inspired by Kurt Schwitters launching
April 2013**

www.merzbank.com

To ring in the new financial year, Film and Video Umbrella has opened **MerzBank** – a repository of artists’ online works that draw their inspiration from that trailblazing exponent of collage, Kurt Schwitters. Guided by his innovations in the visual arts, in spoken word, in typography and poetry, the project anticipates how Schwitters’ mercurial spirit might have flourished in the online world, while highlighting the debt that new forms of digital collage owe to Schwitters’ formative example.

In the spirit of Dada, April saw the launch of a digitally-streamed viral video of Schwitters’ famous ‘sneeze poem’, the preview of an interactive app celebrating Schwitters’ love of London, and a series of downloadable PDFs that compare the easy circulation of digital images with the limits on freedom of movement faced by people coming into the UK.

All three projects, by artists **Alec Finlay, Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard and Nick Crowe & Ian Rawlinson** can be seen on the merzbank.com website.

Alec Finlay’s contribution to **MerzBank** is an echo of Schwitters’ famous ‘sneeze poem’ of 1937, which he ‘scored’ to replicate the convulsive sound and shape of a human sneeze. Finlay compares the sudden burst of a single a-c-h-o-o to the flowering of the human rhinovirus (aka the common cold) as it develops and proliferates over time. Streaming continuously on the homepage of the ‘MerzBank’ site, a digital animation, made up of micro-particles of text, captures the beauty of the virus in full flow, while snapshot samples of it will be transmitted through social media, mimicking how the common cold insinuates itself within the general population.

London Onion, Kurt Schwitters’ poem to the city that became his home, has been turned by Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard into *Londonion*, a pocket-sized mega-mix of the original, updated for the present as a digital app. Centred on a performance of the poem by comic Stewart Lee, the piece combines verbal and sonic pyrotechnics with the potential for audience interaction that Schwitters encouraged in his art. It responds to the random sounds and fluctuating noise-levels of the immediate surroundings and is completed by short introductory videos, disseminated on YouTube and elsewhere, introducing *Londonion* to a wider online community.

Nick Crowe and Ian Rawlinson's *From An* is a series of downloadable PDFs that playfully re-imagines the 15 different application forms for residency and citizenship available from the UK Border Agency website, a project which also resonates with key aspects of Schwitters' life and reflects on our contemporary desire for freedom of movement.

Notes to Editors:

Kurt Schwitters (1887 – 1948) named his distinctive found material, which he called 'Merz', after a fragment of the German word 'Commerzbank'. **MerzBank** (and its web site address merzbank.com) puts these syllables back together again, adding a new twist to the trading of images, the creation of value and the exchange of ideas that circulates online.

MerzBank is commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella. Supported by Arts Council England.

Film and Video Umbrella commissions, curates, produces and presents film, video and other moving-image works by artists that are staged in collaboration with galleries and other cultural partners. Since the late 1980s, Film and Video Umbrella has been at the forefront of this vibrant and expanding area of practice, promoting innovation through its support of some of the most exciting figures on the contemporary scene. During this time, the organisation has commissioned and produced over 100 different artists' projects, ranging from ambitious multi-screen installations to shorter film and video pieces, as well as online commissions. www.fvu.co.uk

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