

• 12 July 2004

Top choreographer joins film tribute to surrealist heroine

Leading British dance choreographer Lea Anderson is joining University of Sussex media and cultural studies lecturer Lizzie Thynne in Sussex this week to make a film about one of photography's unsung heroines.

Claude Cahun (real name Lucy Schwob, born 1894, died 1954) - rebel, lesbian and Jew - was one of the greatest yet barely recognised photographers of the 20th century. Cahun came from a literary French family with a history of cross-dressing. She fell in love with her half-sister, Suzanne Malherbe, fell in with Andre Breton's Surrealist set in France, aided the Resistance in Occupied Jersey and narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Nazis. It is only recently that her life and startlingly modern work have been widely celebrated. Only 300 of her images survived the war and but for the interest of a few dealers her work and life would have been lost to posterity.

Depicted in one self-portrait as a cross-dressing female dandy with a shaved head and androgynous clothes decades before it was fashionable, Cahun defied and challenged accepted views of men and women, even those of the avant garde Surrealists. She also offered a striking alternative to the blonde glamour of the more famous photographer Lee Miller, another Surrealist contemporary, whose son Anthony Penrose will also be involved in the film. He is to play his own father, Sir Roland Penrose, founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, in scenes to be filmed at the family home, Farley Farm in Chiddingfold, East Sussex.

Now Lizzie Thynne, who has worked as a documentary maker for, among others, Channel 4, is to film Cahun's amazing story, including choreography by Lea Anderson, one of the leading names in British contemporary dance and a fan of Cahun's work. Anderson's groundbreaking work has included numerous dance pieces, cabaret, site-specific performances and the choreography for the 1998 film, *Velvet Goldmine*, starring Ewan McGregor.



Claude Cahun - a self-portrait from 1919.
 Courtesy of Jersey Heritage Trust
www.jerseyheritagetrust.org

The film, called *Playing A Part*, will include movement sequences featuring dancers from Anderson's company, The Cholmondeleys, based on some of Cahun's photographs, many of which are incredibly modern-looking self-portraits. Archive film footage and Cahun and Malherbe's own words and images, including extracts from their love letters are also used, as well as interviews with key critics and those imprisoned with Cahun by the Nazis.

The film, funded by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board, will be shown at major film festivals, including Berlin, London and Paris, at exhibitions and in galleries. Thynne says: "This is an ambitious and experimental piece, but there is a narrative element to it too because Cahun's life was so extraordinary. The aim of this film is to record an almost forgotten woman artist's achievements, her life-long partnership and her remarkable bravery and independence."

Notes for editors

For interviews with Lea Anderson and Lizzie Thynne, plus details of photo opportunities, please contact the University Press Office.

- For more information on Claude Cahun, see www.thisisjersey.com/art/heritage/claudecahun.html
- For more information on Lea Anderson see www.thecholmondeleys.org

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