A film that will never be complete

At one level at least, Gustav Deutsch's assembly of found footage FILM IST (screening in the main programme) is surely unique. One piece of it – originally from a Brazilian soap opera – was used by a cleaning lady 'to clean the floor tiles.' Deutsch picked it up at a flea market. The emulsion was already destroyed, but for him, that only heightened the attraction. 'A lot of people have worked on this little bit of movie. The cleaning lady has used it for her purpose now I'm using it for my purpose. I'm showing it as a film again.'

In using this strip of damaged film, Deutsch says he is making his own, oblique reference to Jackson Pollock's famous remark about the emotion of a painting being in the paint itself. 'And, as Francis Coppola says, the emotion of a film is in the emulsion.'

Deutsch spent two and a half years scouring archives in search of his material. Much of it came from old East German educational films. He wanted to illustrate the links between film production and scientific research. X-Ray, he points out, was invented in the same year (1895) that the Lumiere brothers screened their first films.

FILM IST is packed with references to film history, science and to the likes of Stan Brakhage, Muybridge, the Lumieres and Michael Snow. Whether or not audiences pick up on these, Deutsch insists the film is accessible to everybody. Its imagery of birds flying, babies walking or cars crashing should be instantly familiar.

The film is not complete and never will be. Deutsch describes it as a work-in-progress and already has plans to add to the six chapters he has already assembled. This is the fourth time he has been to Rotterdam, which he describes as one of the few major festivals prepared to support his brand of experimental filmmaking. 'And there's still an audience for it.'
■ Geoffrey Macnab

• An extra screening of Film Ist is scheduled for Monday, 6.30 PM, in Venster 2.