

Luke Fowler

Patrick

The Modern Institute, Bricks Space

30th January – 4th March 2026

Preview: Thursday 29th January, 6 – 8 pm

By the time the mid-70s hit up until AIDS hit, it was a huge scene. And there were bath houses everywhere in town, big ones that took up three or four storeys of a building, like the Barracks. With that in combination with the rest of gay culture, there was a lot to be done and Patrick embraced all that and used his music to participate in art that took place in that scene. – Maurice Tani

Maverick gay music producer Patrick Cowley (1950–82) – a key figure in 1970s San Francisco’s Queer disco scene, pioneer of Hi-NRG, and creator of soundtracks for gay porn – is the subject of Luke Fowler’s *Patrick* (2020). In 1971, Cowley moved to the west coast from New York State, where he had studied English at the University of Buffalo. He involved himself in the city’s gay scene and joined Gerald Mueller’s Electronic Music Lab at the City College of San Francisco, coming to produce innovative, environmental synthesiser music for Fox Studio’s porn films and DJ at The EndUp nightclub in the city’s South of Market district. In the early 70s, Cowley was living in Haight-Ashbury and collaborated with singer and actress Candice Vadalla. At that time, she was working with The Angels of Light, a performance group which emerged from psychedelic theatre group the Cockettes. Patrick wrote and recorded music for their eclectic performances.

Although his musical DNA was steeped in disco, by the late 70s something new was in the air. Cowley helped craft and hone this new sound, which notably increased the BPM of disco and pulled focus on the synthesiser. As Maurice Tani notes in Fowler’s film, ‘Patrick wanted to be there at the top of the night where the tempos were the highest, 150-160 BPM or something.’ It wasn’t until Cowley released his 1978 remix of Donna Summer’s ‘I Feel Love’ and engaged in innovative collaborations with musician Sylvester that he gained a degree of notoriety and success. He released his own work on Megatone Records, which he formed with Marty Blecman in 1981. These successes were sadly cut short by a diagnosis with AIDS that year and his subsequent passing in 1982. Fowler’s camera lingers on the objects Cowley left behind, notably material relating to Megatone Records, which he filmed at GLBT Historical Society. Fowler also takes in his stomping grounds in San Francisco, notably focussing on The EndUp and the Electronic Music Lab. The film is soundtracked by Cowley’s visionary music with anecdotes and stories from his life recalled by his friend, former flatmate and sometimes musical collaborator, Maurice Tani. Other subjects captured in soft light by Fowler are more poetic but nonetheless key to the film’s seductive texture; water sinking in the sand of a beach, sap oozing evocatively from tree trunks, a loan container ship, a pair of jean shorts caught in chain-link fencing.

As with other works, Fowler plays with the style and political implications of conventional modes of documentary by de-syncing voice and image, editing in camera and showing his own involvement in the production. As a musician himself, marginal or experimental musicians and their archives have been a consistent focus of his 16mm films, from Canadian composer Martin Bartlett (1939-93) to musique concrète and electroacoustic composer Brunhild Ferrari. *Patrick* is no exception, sketching the outline of a key figure in both the popular and alternative history of music-making in 20th century.

Patrick is 20 minutes in duration and runs on a loop.

Luke Fowler (b. 1978, Glasgow) lives and works in Glasgow. He was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2012, and received the inaugural Derek Jarman Award in 2008. In 2014, MACK published Fowler’s first monograph of his Photo Archive. Fowler’s ‘Mum’s Cards’ was awarded the 2019 Scottish Short Film Award at Glasgow Short Film Festival and the prize for Best Short at Punto de Vista International Documentary Film Festival of Navarre, Spain. And his ‘Being in a Place: A Portrait of Margaret Tait’ was awarded the La Scam International Award 2023 at Cinéma du Réel. Selected solo exhibitions include those at: ‘Being in a Place – A Portrait of Margaret, The Modern Institute, Aird’s Lane, Glasgow (2022); ‘Index Cards and Letters’, The Modern Institute, Osborne Street (part of Glasgow International 2021); ‘Sightings: Luke Fowler’, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2018); Neubauer Collegium for Culture & Society at The University of Chicago (2016), ‘To The Editor of Amateur Photographer’, The Modern Institute, Aird’s Lane, Glasgow (2015, with Mark Fell); The Hepworth, Wakefield (2012); Inverleith House, Edinburgh (2012); CCS Bard Galleries, New York (2011); Serpentine Gallery, London (2009); and The Modern Institute, Glasgow (2009).