

Michael O'Pray Prize 2026 ...

MAKING AN APPLICATION

Sample Pitch Submissions

By Michael O'Pray Prize 2025 Winner Ricardo Reverón Blanco and Awardees Oliver Dixon and Emily Morely.

The Michael O'Pray Prize is an award for new writing on innovation and experimentation in the moving image. The prize is open to all early-career writers based in the UK and is free to apply to.

Applicants are invited to send a proposal or pitch for a new text, alongside an example of previous writing. Three of the applicants will be selected to realise the proposed text. To support applicants with the submissions process, we are pleased to present three example pitches from the Michael O'Pray Prize 2025.

Find out more about the prize, application process and eligibility [HERE](#).
If you have a question or query, please get in touch: admin@fvu.co.uk.

Ricardo Reverón Blanco

Michael O'Pray Prize 2025 Winner

Commissioned Text: [*One must have blind faith in ideology*](#)

Spoken deadpan in *Coffea Arábica* (1968), this phrase is both a performance of obedience and its unraveling. Nicolás Guillén Landrián, working within (and against) the Cuban state film apparatus (ICAIC), used satire, fragmentation, and irony not merely as aesthetics, but as encrypted survival. This text will trace how Landrián's formal deviance became political dissent: experimental cinema as sabotage.

Landrián's *Coffea Arábica* (1968) looks like a film about coffee production. But what emerges, through Godardian jump-cuts, re-edited propaganda, and a dizzying overlay of consumer slogans, is a portrait of state control disguised as utopia. This masterpiece becomes a parody of the utopian 1968 Green-belt agricultural project. Referencing Lévi-Strauss, Kafka, and Frantz Fanon (whose work appears visually and thematically), Landrián builds a visual lexicon for life under surveillance, one where meaning is never where it seems.

The essay will adopt a slightly collaged form reflecting Landrián's own technique, to move between close readings (e.g., *Reportaje, Desde La Habana...*), translations of my native language, theoretical threads (Agamben on bare life; Glissant on opacity), and archival suppression. It will explore how his formal vocabulary; looping images, sudden ruptures, irreverent voiceovers, was a refusal of the coherent revolutionary subject demanded by the state. Not just dissent, but diffraction.

This isn't just about censorship. It's about how experimental cinema becomes a cryptographic language under dictatorship, a methodology which develops one's own criticality for people to think for themselves instead of being fed propaganda from the state. The refusal to "speak plainly" becomes an ethics, a necessity. Landrián's legacy, long obscured, is now resurfacing in restored screenings and new critical scholarship: what does it mean to re-watch a film meant to evade watching?

In revisiting his work now, amid renewed global anxieties around authoritarianism, the essay will propose Landrián not as marginal, but central to current concerns: a key figure in the history of artists' moving image, and in the ongoing project of thinking politically through form.

References:

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Oliver Dixon

Michael O'Pray Prize 2025 Awardee

Commissioned Text: [*Communist Dislocations*](#)

How can experimental filmmakers probe the aporia of a left politics in disarray? Almost fifty years ago Berwick Street Film Collective released their now revered experimental political documentary *Nightcleaners*. Working almost entirely with cinema vérité footage familiar to the campaign film mode, the collective rejected the expected agit-prop form and instead edited the footage into a fractured array of downturned faces, disconnected voices and black spaces. The collective shifted the political documentary away from the coherent, collective subject of the campaign film, with its expectations of working-class unity, towards the blockages to this victorious subject, as the prior formal model became inadequate in the face of an emergent precarious workforce for which previous modes of organisation were insufficient. In its splintering of faces, labouring bodies and voices *Nightcleaners* asks: how can we locate the dream of socialism in those worn out bodies and faces for whom socialism is as fanciful as asking for the moon? How can we trace the communist horizon in an era of its absolute waning?

For Marc Karlin, a key member of the collective, such a line of questioning, was to drive his work for over two decades post-*Nightcleaners*. This essay offers a reading of Karlin's oeuvre as one deeply affected by the late 20th century dislocation of the emancipatory horizons of May '68 and the '70s liberation struggles to the margins. Focussing on his use of durational tracking shots, in-shot montages and abstracted voice-overs, I argue Karlin continually translates this dislocation as a problem of an unstable and unsettled visual imaginary; the political task for an emancipatory politics, Karlin repeatedly insists, necessitates the detection of images that speak its language of desire.

Responding to contemporary interest in Karlin's work, including a recent screening and an upcoming *Nightcleaners* anniversary event, as well as a broader return to British independent film history, this text situates Karlin in his historical contexts while insisting on his relevance for a latent political film culture today. A return

to Karlin's work, I suggest, might invigorate the political terrain of experimental documentary and show us the distanced contribution filmmakers might make in imagining a left politics today.

Emily Morely

Michael O'Pray Prize 2025 Awardee

Commissioned Text: [Opensecret](#)

I propose a review of the so-called "Internet Cinema" emerging from the international screening series *Opensecret*, approached through the lens of Orientalism. Programmed (and often directed or edited) by Dana Dawud, a Palestinian artist in exile in Dubai, these films provoke a new and interesting engagement with Professor Edward Said's theory in the light of culture and nation as they relate to the borderless (?) remixing capabilities of the internet. I argue that Dana uses what I call 'digital orientalism' as a form of what-could-be-called resistance. Works like *Monad* (2024) and *Palcorecore* (2023) will form the bulk of the review, and I will relate it to an emerging genre/style of 'corecore' and the late 90s Japanese style of 'denpa'.

Touring from Johannesburg to Tehran to New York, *Opensecret* assembles a body of work that blends AI voiceover, overexposed digital footage, ambient noise, and low-res collage drawn from corecore and post-corecore aesthetics. In one video, a blurred still of an East Asian girl slumped at a computer dissolves under a monotone AI reading: "The image is conjured by blurring experts, by open secrets, by that which fetishises itself and drops that fetishised layer like snake skin. "Internet cinema is full of visual motifs drawn from 1990s Japanese denpa/heisei internet anxiety culture and the soft erotics of the pre-Raphaelites- reappearing in flattened, digitised form. This review will explore how *Opensecret* revives and mutates the structures of Orientalist representation, to explore the statelessness/borderlessness/lack of identity of the internet. Dawud's blurring and overexposure

of Tiquunian Young girls represents a refusal to make fully "available" or "legible" images in the context of oppressive state surveillance. Full of images of an Imagined Eastern Past that we recycle in an eroticised way in order to make sense of western technological change, this piece will engage works like 'Palcorecore' with Serge Daney's observation that "there is no image of Palestine."

With thanks to Ricardo Reverón Blanco, Oliver Dixon, and Emily Morely for their generosity in sharing their pitches.

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The Michael O'Pray Prize is a Film and Video Umbrella initiative in partnership with Art Monthly.



Supported using public funding by
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