About ‘ReFocus’ for ‘Perduto Padre’

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My father spent a great deal of time documenting our family life but unfortunately we have very few photographs of him. This regret developed into a wish to focus closely on the photographs of him that do exist at different stages in his life, projected as a series of black and white 35 mm slides. A looped fragment of his rarely-seen first film made in 1964 was also projected, using his Bell & Howell Autoload Standard 8 film projector.

Dad always carried a 35mm camera, a cine camera and a slide film camera, perhaps wanting to record and document everything that mattered to him, or possibly feeling more himself with a camera at hand. His earliest cameras from the 1950s-60s are shown on tripods in this installation: a visual presence of photography as process that represented one of his main interests away from work. The sounds of the whirring reels of the Bell & Howell Autoload Standard 8 film projector, and the sensation of seeing dust particles lit up in its beam, are well remembered from our childhood.

The section of unedited Standard 8 footage projected within the installation is at the start of his first film made in 1964, and shows my younger sister and myself ( aged 3 ) playing in our garden in Keston, Kent. We are trying to interrupt the process of being filmed by pouring water on his feet on a sunny day, and so negotiate a mutual space for play. Pushing me on the swing while filming, Dad captures movement in a more experiential way. Re-seeing these unedited silent film reels has been interesting, as the edited sections became overseen when transferred to low quality video with classical music that changed their meaning: the actual footage restages our narratives in different ways.

Projected through a 1958 Liesegang Fantax-Automat slide projector, the images of my father are seen in context and then in further detail: attempting to refocus through close ups on seeing him more clearly. He is shown as a boy and then after a four year internment in a Prisoner of War camp in Germany during his early twenties. His outraged memories of seeing a friend being shot while drawing from a window at Oflag V-B may have led directly to his early support of my chosen life as an artist, alongside my Mother’s encouragement. My parents are seen holding hands for their engagement photograph in front of a ferry to Brittany, echoed again in the last photo taken of Dad standing, at their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 2003. Dad fell and broke his hip a month later, and Mum cared for him at home against hospital advice for five more years before he died in 2008. His presence still seems to be part of our lives particularly preparing for this exhibition.