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Artist who pioneered the psychedelic light show

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The light show was the one original art form associated with the psychedelic underground of the 1960s. Mark Boyle, who has died aged 70, was with his partner, Joan Hills, not only its pioneer in Britain but also its major poet. At the time of his death, he and his family were working on a contribution for the exhibition *Summer Of Love, Art Of The Psychedelic Era*, which opened at Tate Liverpool in late May.

Boyle first experimented with light projection in 1962, before incorporating it as an element in a series of performance events. Using powerful Aldiss projectors, often dangerous mixes of chemicals, 35mm slides, bodily fluids, insects and other small live specimens of fauna and flora, his light shows presented an endlessly mutating vision of reality on the move.

Throughout 1967 Boyle was regularly presenting his synaesthetic light show at the UFO nightclub - the heart of London's burgeoning countercultural scene - where he formed a partnership with the avant garde psychedelic group Soft Machine. Boyle and Hills allowed their projected chemicals and other subjects to move and react at their own speed, it being left to the audience to find connections between the random movement of the lights and the music's changing rhythmic structure. The following spring, effectively as integral members of Soft Machine, he and Hills embarked on the band's tour of America with Jimi Hendrix.

Boyle understood his projection of continuously dissolving patterns of light to embody "not just patterns of line shape colour texture, but patterns of experience". As with the rest of his work, the aim "was to do with not being exclusive. We're not going to exclude anything from what we make, whatever form it takes. There is no experience, no sensation, no aspect of reality we would eliminate." The light shows, which they stopped producing at the end of 1968, were a small part of a much wider practice that aimed "to include everything in a single work".

Born in Glasgow, the son of a lawyer, Boyle studied law at Glasgow University followed by a spell in the army before he met Joan Hills in 1957 (they were not to marry until 1999). At this point, all his spare time was spent writing poetry. Hills had studied art and architecture: it was she who encouraged Boyle to paint, and in 1959 they sold their first works to a local Harrogate collector. Being largely self-taught as an artist was an advantage to Boyle, as it had been to his friend Francis Bacon, encouraging a direct expression of a confrontation with reality.

This embrace of reality was the constant feature driving his work as he moved from making paintings, to making assemblages of real objects, to making exact transcriptions of randomly chosen areas of demolition sites.

One early epiphany had come when he came across his paint tins, lids and brushes accidentally stuck down on to some hardboard, and decided that they looked much better than his paintings. Just as his work embodied real objects, so he also included real occurrences by creating performance events or happenings in his home or on the streets.

Boyle had an unceasing sense of wonder about both the world and his work, and was sometimes happiest thinking about it as poetry, rather than strictly as art. In his hands, the ordinary, unregarded stuff of life became extraordinary. This was especially the case with his random earth pieces. In 1966 he and Hills perfected a way of making replicas of patches of ground, their first subject using this technique being Camber Sands, East Sussex. This was followed by the London Series, the locations of which were chosen by throwing darts at a map of London, followed in 1968 by the commencement of the World Series. Wherever the darts fell, that area - whether land or sea, motorway or piece of scrubland - was to be the subject of a work (Boyle had still not found a means of replicating water).

This "Earthprobe" echoed the contemporary exploration of the moon, and the construction of random earth pieces was characteristically not only concerned with the eventual presentation of the finished objects but in charting all aspects of the site, just as the project taken as a whole intended to project a picture of the world and everything in it. All the measurements, sound- and film-recordings and photographs, as well as each finished relief, taken together constituted the work. The Earthprobe project is still going on.

If being self-taught was one advantage to Boyle, the other advantage was his partnership with Hills. The paintings they had sold in 1959 had been created by both of them, but it had seemed too complicated to own up to the fact. Their close collaboration, using

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the name Mark Boyle, continued until the 1970s, when it was felt possible to admit that their work was made by Mark Boyle and Joan Hills.

In 1985 another shift was made when they first exhibited under the name Boyle Family, in acknowledgement of the fact that Cameron, Joan's son from her first marriage, had much earlier made a contribution to their work, and that Sebastian and Georgia, Boyle and Hills' two children, had been helping to make the work since either of them had been able to hold a screwdriver. Boyle's collaboration with his partner and children allowed him to erase any trace of his own personality or evidence of touch from the works, and he admitted in the 1960s that "as far as I can be sure, there is nothing of me in there". Even so, perhaps paradoxically, the works of Boyle Family are readily recognisable as the product of a singular voice that has changed the way in which we see the world, and like any family business his work has the possibility to live on and evolve after his death.

His wife and two children survive him.

· Mark Boyle, artist, born May 11 1934; died May 4 2005

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