

Pittsburgh Film-Makers NEWSLETTER

Volume 7, Number 1, February 1977

PHOTOGRAPHY SERIES BEGINS MONDAY FEBRUARY 12

Under a special grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts PFMI will launch a new program of visits by distinguished photographers beginning next week. On Monday, Feb. 21, Arnold Gassan, author of A Chronology of Photography, will be in the PFMI Screening Room to show slides of his work and discuss the state of photography in the 1970s. Other visitors will be: Duane Michals on March 9, Friedl Bondy on March 28, Clyde Hare on April 11, Russell Lee on May 23, and Harry Coughanour on June 13. Each will discuss his or her work at 8 pm at PFMI, in the Screening Room and/or the Gallery.

PAUL MARETH TO SCREEN FILMS AT PFMI, IS PRINTED IN SIGHT & SOUND

PFMI member Paul Mareth is the next exhibitor in the one-person show series that so far this year has included an exhibition by Bob Gaylor. On Saturday, March 12, Mareth will screen his From the Womb of the Morning and Two Daughters, and premier his two new works, Sally and Jenny and Fragments of a Conversation. Paul also just had an article about the public broadcasting system in the United States printed in the British quarterly Sight and Sound. The piece is titled "Public Visions: Private Voices," and is in the Winter 1976-77 issue, pp. 14-17.

VICTOR GRAUER IS IN BUFFALO

One of the more prolific and vocal members of PFMI, Victor Grauer, is in Buffalo for the next several months on a special fellowship to study interfaces of music and film. While in that ice-bound city he will be participating in a seminar on Saturday, February 26—a discussion that ought to be one of the more important "think sessions" of American independent film. Joining Grauer in a discussion of the fundamentals of film will be Peter Kubelka, Paul Sharits, and Tony Conrad. Together, these four are the leading proponents of the so-called "flicker film." Sponsored by Media Study/Buffalo, the seminar begins at 2 pm in 126 Diefendorf Hall; it is open to the public.

SHORT TAKES

Roger Jacoby is the subject of one article and author of another in the latest issue of Idiolects (#3). Roger also has a show coming up at the Collective For Living Cinema on March 25. . . . Japanese-American film-maker Taka Iimura whose January 29 show at PFMI was frozen out by the gas shortage has been rescheduled for April 9. . . . James Broughton's new book on film, Seeing the Light, will be available for purchase at PFMI by the end of March if the publisher co-operates. . . . Upcoming visitors in the PFMI Screening room will be Peter Kubelka on Wednesday, March 30, showing his new film Pause!, Jonas Mekas on April 1 and 2 showing Lost, Lost, Lost and In Between, and a program of films from the Berks Film-Makers Co-op on Saturday, April 23. On Saturday, March 26 a program of films from PFMI will be screened at Berks (in eastern Pa.); persons interested in participating in that show should contact Dave Lee who is co-ordinating the exchange. . . . Coming classes this summer include animation, basic photography, a retrospective on Howard Hawks, and a study of the cinema of Stan Brakhage. The classes will be available for college credit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Two months ago (in the last issue) Victor Grauer's "Open Letter", a sharp criticism of the Screening Committee appeared in the Newsletter. I think it is my responsibility to answer this attack. Let me refresh your memories. The meat of Victor's letter is that our programming has become:

a hodge podge of what this or that
one who happened to be on the committee "liked"... without guidelines,
without purpose, without style and without a real knowledge of what is there to be programmed...concentrating on worn out museum pieces, film buff and nostalgia buff fodder and late night TV movie re-runs.

This kind of verbal muscle flexing makes wonderful reading in the bathroom but, unfortunately, contributes nothing and sheds light only inside the tunnel for those whose vision is so inclined.

To begin with our programming is not an unthinking "hodge podge". There has been a great deal of variety from week to week for the purpose of appealing to and maintaining the interests of a wider audience - which means greater audience support. The practical aspects cannot be ignored if our programming is to become viable enough to survive. Last year, through October, the financial failure of our programming cost PFMI members more than a thousand dollars that could have meant some badly needed new equipment or could have kept our paid employees off the unemployment rolls. As for the charge that we've picked programs we "liked", I would hardly expect anyone to propose a program he or she dis-"liked". The fact is that most of the programs scheduled have been seen by few or none of the committee members. We look for new material. We rely on each other's research. We take chances.

Regarding our concentration on "late night TV movie re-runs", this is nonsense and I invite anyone to check the record. Our current Screening Committee is responsible for all the programs on our calendar, other than the Thursday night films and the Broughton and Steiner programs, beginning with the Michael Snow weekend in November. We've also scheduled two last minute independent shows which don't appear on the calendar. The Thursday films are part of the PFMI school program.

I think Victor's letter reflects not only a personal dissatisfaction with policy, but also an unwillingness to participate constructively.

Brady Lewis

Brady Lewis
Screening Room Manager

REVIEWS

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On Roger Jacoby

by Jay Suszynski

"When I was a kid I took a watch apart and busted it, and that was the first time I realized that there was a craft to this sort of thing."

So explained filmmaker Roger Jacoby at the January 11 screening of his films at the Carnegie Institute's Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. The wit and the craft were both evident in the five films he showed that evening.

Mr. Jacoby's work is among the most highly energized of the independent film scene. His style often includes a randomly roving camera ("searching for beautiful things," as the artist puts it) across a specific set which usually involves a theatrical situation featuring the presence of former Warhol star, Ondine. As the camera travels, the first level of dramatic tension arises in the disparity between the soundtrack (which may be casual conversation as in Aged in Wood, or Bizet's The Pearl Fishers in Kunst Life) and the images on screen, which at times may become only distant fibers of the situation.

The most remarkable aspect of Mr. Jacoby's work is the fabulous array of textures and colors he achieves through processing his own film. L'Amico Fried's Glamorous Friends, for example, is a parody of personalities printed in part in negative color. It also contains sections of rapid cuts, superimpositions, flash color changes, and other obfuscations to the narrative such as splotches and scratches on the film surface. We are continuously reminded that film is not life, but is rather an expression of a particular interpretation of life, and Mr. Jacoby's dynamic tampering with the celluloid exponentiates the dimensions by which film communicates. This is not to say that L'Amico Fried is a jumble of inordinate images; it is, in fact, a tasteful, exciting, and humorous collection of shots with a marked sensitivity for screen composition.

Aged in Wood is stylistically the antithesis of L'Amico Fried. The film is a consistent gray tone with the screen acquiring a highly organic and mutable grain. Only on those unpredictable occasions when the texture subsides, do we glimpse the characters, but only as a hinted presence. They are phantoms of the film, revealed in dramatically awaited moments as a glinted highlight along the face, an outlined form seeping through the gray torrents on the screen. It is testimony to the notion that the audience's means of engagement with the film medium is the assertion with which one applies his attention and imagination to the celluloid itself, rather than to the document of a transcribed experience.

Dream Syphinx Opera } Mr. Jacoby has an obvious propensity toward opera. In Dream Syphinx Opera, a pastel-grained film of two lovers set to Rossini, he combines jump cutting with his erratically held camera to simulate the vibrato of the voice on the soundtrack. Floria opens with a silent dramatic narrative, then moves into a livingroom audition which he tempers with negative color, various lighting changes, and chemical modifications. It's as though he were precipitating an ontology comprised of the extra-visible light rays of the universe.

Roger Jacoby's most recent work, Kunst Life I and II, for which he received a National Endowment Grant to complete, consists of a series of separate shots (mini-narratives) which physically or metaphorically deal with the frustrations of the artist. The film opens with a knight (Ondine) incapacitated by his armor and at the mercy of his squire. The monologue, shadows, and inquisitive panning coalesce to keep the viewer interested and amused. The film moves on to an excerpt from a TV opera to a slightly embarrassed white-haired woman modeling an evening gown to a berobed duet of The Pearl Fishers to a woman's flute lesson, and so on. Throughout, the camera is continuously circulating, carving its way through the rooms (sometimes at floor level) like the knife of subjectivity slashing into bare truth, evoking the random coincidences of our views of reality.

Mr. Jacoby's work removes the viewer's authority to anticipate even the most fundamental cinematic expectations, which makes his films visually exciting and constantly intense.

FILMOGRAPHY:

Dream Syphinx Opera (1969-72), color, sound, 8 minutes.
L'Amico Fried's Glamorous Friends (1973), color, silent, 11 minutes.
Aged in Wood (1974), b&w, sound, 11 minutes.
Floria (1975), color, sound, 15 minutes.
Kunst Life I and II (1976), color, sound, 28 minutes.

Pittsburgh Film-Makers Inc. is a non-profit organization devoted to cinema, video, and photography. Located at 205 Oakland Ave. it is open from 10 am to 9 pm, Monday thru Friday, and 12-4, 8-10 on Saturday. PFMI welcomes members of any sex, race, color, creed, or national origin to its programs and activities.

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

ONE OF THE FOUR CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

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