

FILM SECTION
MUSEUM OF ART
CARNEGIE INSTITUTE

INDEPENDENT FILMMAKER: PETER KUBELKA
Tuesday, March 29, 1977
8:00 PM

Filmography

- 1954-5 MOSAİK IM VERTRAUEN (MOSAIC IN CONFIDENCE), b&w/color, sound, 16 1/2 min.
1957 ADEBAR, b&w, sound, 1 1/2 min.
1958 SCHWECHATER, black, white & red, two sounds, 1 min.
1958-60 ARNULF RAINER, black and white frames, black and white sound, 6 1/2 min.
1961-6 UNSERE AFRIKAREISE (OUR TRIP TO AFRICA), color, sound, 12 1/2 min.
1966-76 PAUSE!, color, sound, 12 min.

Peter Kubelka, born in the Austrian capital, Vienna, March 23, 1934, has been an independent filmmaker since 1952. This evening's program is a retrospective screening of all of his films since that time, concluding with his most recent film, the long-awaited PAUSE!

Although primarily a filmmaker, Kubelka's conviction of the importance of film has led him into other activities in support of this medium as well. To cite but a few instances: he had a central role in founding the Austrian Film Museum in 1963, where he remains a curator; he designed the well-known "invisible theater" in use at Anthology Film Archives between 1970 and 1974, a screening facility intended to strengthen one's viewing experience by eliminating incident intrusions on eye and ear; he organized an extensive screening of independent American works in Paris during 1976.

Most importantly, however, he has continued his own work with the concentrated intensity for which his films have come to be known. The following excerpts from published articles and interviews are intended to suggest the nature of these films, although -- as Kubelka has insisted -- there is absolutely no substitute for the viewing experience itself. He has remarked that "my films give the greatest pleasure to those who know them by heart." B.J.

"Kubelka's cinema is like a piece of crystal, or some other object of nature: it doesn't look like it was produced by man; one could easily conceive that it was picked up from among the organic treasures of nature." Jonas Mekas, Village Voice, Oct. 13, 1966

"When I was 17 I already wanted to devote my future life to film-making; I don't know what led me to that, since I grew up in a region of Upper Austria where there was no information about good cinema at all. The films I had seen at that time were a small selection of the worst commercial things -- I was never inspired by masterpieces of cinema in my work. I now see masterpieces in cinema and acknowledge many great films, but I never really had anybody whose inspiration I would follow. In the early days the man I respected most was Carl Theodor Dreyer, whom I still respect as much as then -- but, as you can see, my films are very dissimilar from his.

"My father was a musician, and from very early childhood I was brought up with music all the time. I was a Vienna choirboy....I had the normal education of a musician's child. Through this, I was used to the standards of Bach and Beethoven, and it was a discontent with the situation in the cinema that drove me to work with it. I tried to get a film education -- I was at the Rome film school, and I visited film studios -- and I was always horrified by the men in whose hands I found the medium. Amongst other things, what I try is to get into cinema the standards that had been set by Bach and Piero della Francesca." P.K., Cinema, No. 9, 1971, p. 29

Q.: "When one looks at the use of images in MOSAIK that are representational, and then one moves to ADEBAR and the following two films, other differences are apparent. SCHWECHATER has images, but they are certainly abstract, and yet you do not talk of these films as abstract films or think of them in those terms."

P.K.: "The discourse of abstract and non-abstract I have never had. I don't think of any of my films -- not even the completely image-less ARNULF RAINER -- as abstract. The term abstract belongs, really, to before the war and is a name for a certain movement in art. There is no abstract art, there is no abstract painting, there is no abstract music, in the real sense of the word."

Q.: "There is a difference, however, between an image which is representational and the sound relation to that image when the image connotes certain things and a purely image-less frame, clear or black leader, which is connected to sound -- which does not have the same kind of sense...It does not call to mind other things. And this is something you use in your films."

P.K.: "You can represent: for example, in music with pure tones, you can represent elements of nature such as, let us say, the dynamics of a river rolling softly or a storm going on. You can represent that in a painting without depicting the sky and the tree that is moving. This was not my problem. Although when I was young there was a sort of religious partition in the arts. You were asked: "Are you an abstract artist or a representational artist?" I have never liked that, and I did not see the problem this way."

"The way from MOSAIK to ARNULF RAINER was a path directed by the search for the essence of cinema. (...) When I made ADEBAR after MOSAIK I had had enough of the amorphousness of the narrative cinema, and I wanted very much to discover for cinema possibilities which were near the possibilities of music. This was, for example, metric rhythm, even rhythm."

1000 Eyes, Feb. 1977, p. 19. Interview
with David Shapiro

"In his early twenties Kubelka made MOSAIC IN CONFIDENCE, an intricate expression of love, humor, despair, and death. It remains an excellently conceived and edited film. (...) ADEBAR is a one minute long dance edited to evoke a sense of the passing of time and the memory of pleasure. SCHWECHATER, also one minute, transforms a scene of elegant drinking into a subtle figure of color and motion. Those who know the pleasures of wine can fully appreciate this film. ARNULF RAINER, a six minute film of black and white leader refuses simple description here. Its means are the simplest of any possible film and it is the fullest expression of its maker's complex personality to date. (Arnulf Rainer is a contemporary Austrian painter whose images figure in Kubelka's latest film, PAUSE! B.J.)

"In AFRICA Kubelka fused the scope of his first film with the control of his next three. His achievement recalls the success of the operas of his fellow Viennese, Mozart. I have heard vegetarians and critics blind with hatred for all Middle-Europeans interpret this film as a simple satire on the businessmen-hunters who commissioned it. Any fool could make such a satire. Kubelka has shown us some of the pathetic foibles of his sponsors, true. Yet he loves their humanity; and his film is proud, brave, silly, innocent, bored, and excited at once. The crucial irony and glory of this film is its vertical montage of sound against image. Bits of conversation are put in the Sphinx's mind, a grand savage lady dances to the noise of several hunting scenes ... One could go on for pages describing the delicate interconnections of sound and image. This is a film that marks the beginning of the sound cinema and a highpoint in the tradition of THE GREAT TRAVELERS. I cannot name ten films which are greater." P. Adams Sitney, New Cinema Bulletin, May 1967

"Peter Kubelka's films move with the rhapsody of precision. Nowhere else in cinema have I been so stuck to a sense of everything being just right; a unique pleasure to say the least. There are at present a multiplying number of films which use techniques similar to Kubelka's, and which attempt similar effects; but for all the experiment rampant now, his visions of absolute time transcend and show up all that is merely modern." Ken Kelman, Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue

"Peter Kubelka is the perfectionist of the film medium: (...) see his films! (...)

"Each works, as he did work to make each one an expression of his whole being at the time of making: and, thus, no two of his films are in any way alike -- each film being as distinct from every other as any moment of a man's life may be if he lives it fully ... which is to say: to perfection! His, thus, is opposite to that 'Perfection' the academics lay claim to (and can have) thru formal imitation. His is: 'I only make what I like! - not what I might think appropriate or ideal or perfect, and so forth - but just what I like as I look at it again and again in the making: and I know that film is made of 24 still pictures every second - so there must be no frame of it left in the film which is not absolutely necessary to the whole work' because that frame will detract from the total, will have its effect in weakening my experience of the moment. (...)

"And his works are sound films. Here, at last, is a film-maker's ear that creates in contrapuntal accord with his eye in the making. He achieves, this, too, thru his sense of the perfect - so much so that if, for instance, ADEBAR is projected even one frame out-of-sync the whole track becomes exceptional "background music" but in no sense the experience of his making ... and if the projectioning is perfect-sync-ed (the distance between gate and sound-reader exactly 26 frames) the experience is an indescribably new one for any with eyes and ears to see/hear it. (...)

"These films must, very truly, be seen and very truly seen and heard to be believed!" Stan Brakhage, Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue

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