

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

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Visiting Filmmakers, Mike Kuchar, Lecture

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Bill Judson: This is Mike Kuchar, presenting a program of his films on February 28th, 1978.

Bill Judson: Good evening, it's a great pleasure to welcome for his first visit, Mike Kuchar. Mike is the, by 15 or 30 minutes, depending on which biography you read, the older of--

Mike Kuchar: It's one hour.

Bill Judson: One hour, okay it's getting bigger and bigger. One hour older, the oldest of the two Kuchar brothers, the Kuchar twins and I would hope that the program notes would give you some sense of the kind of impact that the films of these two extremely young men when they suddenly surfaced, late 50s and early 60s and I would only like to add to that just a couple thoughts of my own that have to do primarily with the apparent simplicity of a good number of both George and Mike's films and particularly Mike's films.

It's very easy on first viewing to, because of the apparent informality of these films, to think of them as a kind of informal, almost homemade kind of film and yet the more one looks at them, the more one realizes how much is there. I was thinking, for example, just he had copy of *Sins of the Fleshapoids* to look at which I just did in the last couple days and there are innumerable moments in that film that are so right. For example, the moment at which the Fleshapoids make love and there's a cut to a Greek vase and it's one of those absolutely extraordinary moments where the images are just exactly right and in many cases it's a rightness that again, I think that he would indicate, have to do with a certain dialogue that these films are in with other films or whole film traditions. In fact, that particular film *Sins of the Fleshapoids* ranges from that beginner film of *The Golem* back in the 20s to, I mean there's *Slaughterhouse Five* in there, there's all sorts of recent science fictions. There's a tremendous range of input from the commercial films but also always taken with a considerable number of grains of salt.

What I had done, I think that Michael probably put the questions to us just exactly how we'll structure the evening, but what I'd done was ask Mike to include at least *Tales of the Bronx* from the early films of the 60s so that it would, in effect, be a retrospective evening. Exactly what we do show will in part be up to you but I think it's crucial that we see at least that film from the 60s to get a sense of where his work is coming from and the nature of what it is that he's up to. He's of course, somebody who's been at this a long time for whom it is not a way of life but a life and it's my very great pleasure to welcome Mike, for his first time, to Pittsburgh. [applause 00:04:19]

Mike Kuchar: Thank you all. One thing I want to ask, how many people have seen *Sins of the Fleshapoids* because that will be the last film on the program but I know it's been around, it's had a few screenings here. Has anybody, are there many people who have seen it? Uh huh, actually quite a lot. What do you think? We have two other films, one other recent one I did last year, then I have another one I did with Red Grooms who does these sculptures and huge environment paintings. The last one he did was *New York City* which was an exhibit of some skyscrapers on Madison Avenue and I did a film with him which was - Which might be a little mature for this place but I don't know, what do you think? Should we show *Sins of the Fleshapoids*? [00:05:00]

Bill Judson: I don't know. I have a-judging from the word [crosstalk 00:05:05]. Why don't we--

Mike Kuchar: It's a long program anyway.

Bill Judson: I tell you what, so we don't make the program too long for those who want to have reasonable, normal life whatever that is, why don't we do *Tales of the Bronx* and through the films that you brought and then for those that want we can screen *Sins of the Fleshapoids* afterwards.

Mike Kuchar: Right.

Bill Judson: If people aren't still like, it's like you know, people are still like that because that way it'll be--We could do it that way.

Mike Kuchar: Yeah, fine.

For a word of introduction, in *Tales of the Bronx* it is 1968 and originally I was going to do a documentary, that was my originally started out to do that but somehow along the way it changed and it became something else and that's why I came up with this situation, I think it was something to do with me and my relations of-People in relation to my own problems and all I sort of left myself open. This is just to say a word about it. It began it was going to be sort of a documentary and it changed along the way.

Then the second film we'll see is *Light Sketches*. Now this film I wanted to work with certain elements of design, and one of my formats were I wanted to make these loops. This was done with black film, black leader and I'm into scribble scratches and then take it from there we photographed it but with the camera and some color film things and also I wanted to try combinations of different stocks of film, negatives and also with different filters and positive. I wanted to do a sort of A and B and combining them together and making a sort of pattern film but then taking scribble and sort of sometimes doing things with it and

transforming it maybe into things that become recognizable and then disintegrate them again. I was doing some sketches and then they were done very roughly, done with a lot of lines, building up lines in certain areas and eliminating them in others and trying to make a form that's recognizable with these sort of abstract patterns, just scribble line. Then it occurred to me, if I can get sort of the same essence but do it in film instead because I am interested in working in film, if I get the same kind of quality but only of course in movies you have the actual physical movement so I tried to conceive of a way of getting the same effect I was doing with these scribble lines but adapting it to film.

The two films along this line, this one it happens to be the second one in which I can still see for the things I can take it, that film will be the second film on the program and it's called *Light Sketches*.

The third film will be *The Myth of Valhalla* and the last time I did a filmmaking course at the San Francisco Art Institute usually it runs for about 6 weeks and I suppose like 3 times a week we'd meet and all but then the last few weeks I decided I'd like to try real work on a film and I only had one week to do it in. We had actually three shooting days which we thought worked very fast and also the budget was \$75. The thing is, a situation like this, is sometimes my brother he teaches there and it's a long span of time, like he's got about 4 months with his classes, and this way everybody could take turns directing and doing the lighting and operating the camera but in a situation like I had, to shoot in 3 days, I thought the best thing to do is I'd do it myself in other words but we'd talk it over and the reasons why I did this and that. Then the class itself would participate, act in it, and also help me with the light reader meetings and whatever.

So I presented, I thought it might be interesting but a kind of a theme that was sort of big and on a \$75 budget, I don't know, it seemed at first you look at it, I don't know if we can pull it across you know, but it was up to me. I tried to work with it then so to get across the essence which I hope maybe some of it will come across. Anyway, I enjoyed working with the class because after awhile you can talk so much about film and mute films and all but then there's something about having this kind of workshop thing where we all get involved in a project and work together and I like it. Somehow working on a film everybody has to work together and they get to know one another you know, and also try to tackle these problems and get these ideas across [inaudible 00:09:27] something more and added a little more interest to the class.

Then the film after that we have *Didgeridoo*. This is a film I didn't intend to make. I went on a tour in this foreign country and then it become apparent to me, I had access to a camera and also for my

birthday, I had turned 30 and they gave me 8 rolls of color film. This was KodaChrome II so I decided if there was an opportunity maybe I can make, while I'm here, I can make this short film which I could do in an afternoon. Like I did in about two and a half hours and so that's the story behind *Didgeridoo*.

Then the film after that we have *The Dwarf Star*. That film I did about six months ago. I got into drawing comic book stories. I got back into drawing so I had these comic strips that I did. I did one 32-page romantic comedy which had these two characters, which had it was a series of three stories and I never found any publishers. There was a publisher that did like my work but didn't quite get into the underground comics because the nature-They didn't- I guess something about they didn't particularly like the stories that I did or they didn't feel it adapted well to their underground books except this one guy who published *Man from Utopia*. [00:10:42]

You ever seen that Rick Griffin book? Black and white, sort of king-sized? He liked my work and he wanted to publish these stories. It all fell through, I don't know what happened, I think what happened is someone stole his DC collection and he totally got disheartened you know? Practically all twenty-five years of his life he was collecting these DC comics and he'd hunt them down so he'd get every issue. These were horror and science fiction and he's a comic book fan and then he wanted to make a comic book of his own and get people together and he wanted three of my stories but then when that happened he went into another depression. Though he bought half the amount of the work that I did, then the whole thing just fell through. I didn't know what to do, it was like a funny situation so I let him keep the originals of one story I did but anyway you got *The Dwarf Star*.

What happened was, after two years I got sick of drawing and I wanted to get back into film so I had three scripts left over there I was going to originally illustrate, I was going to do a science fiction comic book but I decided well look I have already the formats written down and even some of the sequences, the way the panels were. So I might not take those panels away I have lined up and shoot it because either way I already have my storyboard already written out. All I have to do now is film it in a way, you know, with the camera and just work with it that way. In a way, a lot of division was already set and also the unfolding of the plot. I did it and in some ways it did call for a lot of my drawings I had incorporated with it. It was a chance for me to draw, to incorporate my people with illustrations I would ordinarily have to do anyway for the comic book. I tried to make a blend of these two and put them together.

Most of the effects you'll see- By the way, the budget was \$300 and some of the effects called for some astronomically scenes so I had to devise ways to make them halfway believable. So fool around with all kinds of tricks that I could do mostly in the camera. The effects of the sea I did all in the camera except simple A/B roll and that's in order to put certain film starts together but otherwise I had to execute all these triple exposures and all within the camera and that just took- I needed the discipline, it was all right. I had to get a movement and start things going and get a feel like exactly when I'm to take readings, when I'm to fade in and whatever, and to get a movement going and then to have them overlap with scenes I already shot on other film. That sometimes gets very hair-raising you know when you realize you just spent five hours doing six impositions on a single roll and now you're putting it in for the sixth time and you're trying to- You can't make any mistakes because if you do all these other hours will get ruined so in some ways the stress under that is a little tough but anyway I needed the discipline you know. Hopefully some of the illusion will come across.

When I did the illustration for the background I found that the best thing to do in the path-I wanted to work fast so I found that using color pastels would be best instead of paint because paint would take me four times longer to do all the blending and all but with pastels if you just do it real fast and blend everything with microphones and just spray it. If I wanted a painted look I'd just over-spray it so that the palette would turn to a muddy pigment. Anyway, that's the story for *The Dwarf Star*.

Now *Sins of the Fleshapoids* is my first 16 mm film which I did, I think it was 1965 it was made. The thing is I wanted a Marvel comic book color, the covers of those Marvel comic books, they're really garish and outrageous with colors that'll make you sick. I wanted kind of a quality in the film and I decided I was shooting Kodachrome II, now it's Kodachrome IV and the thing is the kind of film when you make prints of movies, and that's what we see is prints, contrast gathers so usually the wisest thing to do is to not film it on a film that is very poky with color, the original, because then when you make a copy the contrast gathers and it gets uncontrollable. You can't, like the reds go wrong, they go too garish and all and colors are too hard hit. I'm glad I shot this movie like oh, a couple thousand feet, because I was told you know this is a terrible mistake because you know what happens when it prints it gets uncontrollable but then I found out when I got the print, true it did, but that's exactly what I wanted. Garish, outrageous color and for science fiction and with this kind of format that the movie sort of falls into, it was like right up it's alley. In some ways it sort of helped it along, I thought. [00:15:23]

It's interesting to see these different film stocks and the qualities they give you and then should try to- You get your essence from the atmospheres sort of the quality impact that they have with their colors or whatever.

As far as I'm concerned, I don't-Like I spend all my money buying all the equipment and film so I'm not able to pay as people when they occasionally needed to act in movies so I found the best thing to do is to use my friends and this way in some ways it's good because you can know what people can do and what they can't do because you know them or whatever so you know how they can pull off or what they can't do. Also what I find, it's sometimes is good to use people who always wanted to act but never got the opportunity. Like the woman on the poster for [inaudible 00:16:06], she always wanted- First she wanted to be a model but she never like made it, only once finally she did, she wound up on the cover of *Detective* magazine being strangled with a sponge. Only at that point she no longer had respect and she didn't want to show it to her mother or whatever. Anyway, I got into a pressure, I met her in Miami and all and she's been in a few of my films *The Craven Sluck* which stars want to take her from but actually she's in *Tales of the Bronx* this first film, she's got a part in it.

Well anyway, after *Tales of the Bronx* I'll be up to ask if you have any questions at all. [applause, end of lecture 00:16:49]

[applause , beginning of discussion 00:17:08]Yeah, one of the ways to squeeze the extra color out, I bought all that plastic fruit, it's already got outrageous color you know so I used that. One of the costumes I got from the thrift store was more involved than they ought to be. So many of the outfits of course had a big, huge dress was 25 cents so I was able to decorate the place a little more.

The first thing you know that boudoir with all the mirrors on the wall, I was working then as a commercial artist, I used to do photo retouching. We used to work for Harper's *Bazaar* and *TV Guide* so you touch color, extra chrome transparencies, and paint [inaudible 00:17:48] but anyway I had to run home from the job then and I got home about 6 and in 3 hours the cast was coming over so I had to put up that set like in 3 hours so I did all that mural as soon as I gobbled down dinner.

The couple dancing in the last scene- that lady did the dance and all, how's your husband? They had a whole routine and all. Always in a contact whenever she would be filmed, her dress had to be ripped off. That was a stipulation like how to work with her. They were a very interesting couple. He was, in a way, her manager and he used her in a lot of films. In fact, one of the people I met in my films I like to go to the

cinema-tech show, these were happening at lofts like Ken Jacobs and all. A lot of people would come and show their movies and all and sometimes we'd get interested in each other's work and would appear in each other's films and that's how I met like some of them.

That blonde lady, Lorraine, she was in the beginning you know, sometimes when you don't work with professionals and you want to at least get halfway decent-The idea to come at least halfway across but you're not using professional actors and sometimes it's very tough because you can't get the people to do what you meant them to do you know? So like that lady was raiding the refrigerator, I wanted to have her nervous and fidgety you know but the only time she could film was 9 in the morning and that's very hard for me because I'm so groggy and it was hard for her too but that was the only time we could get together. I said okay, raid the refrigerator and you're all desperate and fidgety and nervous and all, but she couldn't do it. It was unsuccessful every time she'd do the taping, it wasn't right, it wasn't what I wanted.

So I tried to rack half my brain, how can I get a performance? We kind of decided to slow the camera down, shoot it at 16 frames instead of 24 and I don't know if you're conscious of it, I don't think you are. I'm not anymore but what it is we're really looking at are going at the wrong speed so I slow the film down so she's actually, every movement she makes looks very much faster than what she actually did. Sometimes I find at least we can get halfway my ideas across or whatever I want the people to do. I have to sometimes play practical tricks with them and do things with the camera. Sometimes I find the thing might help me is lighting like if I can-If I want a depressing scene or something heavy and tragic, I try to do the best I can lighting the set before the actors come and if I can cause shadows that are very harsh and unflattering. Somehow when you look at it, like with everything photography in that it always has message in the mood no matter what whatever's going on you establish a certain look to it, sometimes that helps to get closer to what you want. You know, to help. [00:20:26]

If you have any questions about anything about Doo or any of my films-Basically I have a habit, I work with the same kind of stuff. I originally started-I have a crate splice, it's about \$15 and all but I edit all my films with that. It's not the best kind of splice but I find if you don't use the glue too often, in other words change it every 500 splices or something. Don't let it get the sort of motion in it, you won't see the splices that much. You can use a cheap splicer because I don't need to be in my films because there's extra expense and that's so you don't see splices and then you need extra equipment but I have to eliminate-I don't need that because it just is in my case when I work unless it's given to me or demanded if I get a commission job, which I have a few times. Then I have to go about it in a certain procedure you know. *Light*

Sketches was done, I was manual projecting scratches that were on black film projected on the wall with a white screen and I'd shoot through color filters. I also had a white plaster bust and I would project the scratches on to it and that's sort of how we got that. Plus, it's a combination of color negative film that I mixed together.

I did another film which is films like that but it's even more elaborate than I, I used live subjects and I sweep lights across their face but I wanted it to look like opaque paint so what I think I decided to shoot in color negative film with a dark background so it looks actually white but then light turns dark in negative because light is opaque in negative. Then if I shoot it through color filters, what happens is that it turns an opaque color and it looks sometimes like paint blowing in the faces.

You know, thinking about *Tales of the Bronx*, I mentioned that I started it as a documentary I wanted to go out. It was going to be like a sympathetic approach, it's also the people's problems and they were telling me and so they're telling me sort of what's been going on with them and how they sometimes react to problems and all. So I wanted to do like a movie sort of sympathetic way you know. A time happened mid-production I was having a rough time with my own problems you know, but sorry nobody had ears for me and in some ways I wondered why- I think probably that is the cost why it's hooked to this sort of caricature thing or else, how I say, I stood back and if anything we're all going to fall apart with things happening I just want to be a spectator and I don't want to take any viewers that show up or we'll all go to hell. I'll just watch you.

The scheme of the movie was you know, none of those things in the picture was anything that I projected and went out and bought specifically to put there, all that is the stuff of the people's places I filmed in. So here's that and the soundtrack would be nothing over 79 cents and I found an album that Honor Blackman, this British actress who is in the James Bond movies, she'd made her first album and her last. Ha ha. It was like a bomb and I saw it there in Woolworth's and I said "Well I'd like to sort of put that as the background to the film," but the-that was at a five or ten cent store when you do the sound tracks, what I can pick up there.

No, *Dwarf Star* doesn't have a sound camera so the thing was I had all this dialogue and I said how am I going to get that across? I decided probably in the future I bet we will be able to read each other's minds and suddenly I-Some ways also just interject something peculiar anyway-So I decided I'll have mind readers and [inaudible 00:24:01]. This way I can get all the dialogue in it in that way and you know in my mind I did a photograph of the pan of water and right behind this black

cardboard and so this bomb is lit from behind and all I did was photograph it in a pan of water. I agitated the water so it would cause the ripples and I photographed it on there and superimposed it on the images in the creep room.

I saw when plans when NASA came out and they actually have plans of replacing parts of the body, some of the astronauts that can withstand long journeys and also hostile environments and this is very interesting, it kind of haunted me. Sometimes it was like repulsive to me and also sometimes it comes to my mind, this is against nature that we do that, that's why for longer lives it's nature's saying we'd die instead of nature saying let's do it because in a way it's against nature. Also, you know I get-I thought that- I can stand there also then in a way it's very familiar and we're not tampering with it but also if it's in -If nature gave us the ideas that we can do these things and create a way of tricking than in a way it has given us these thoughts to do it. So in a way, is it really against nature? I don't think so. Plus I'm also very curious about what would happen 1,000 years from now so I don't know, I wonder. Anyway, that's what I think of that idea you know. [00:25:27]

Well, if anyone has anything that-Well thanks for coming.

Audience: I have one question.

Mike Kuchar: Yes.

Audience: You used to work with photo retouching?

Mike Kuchar: Yes.

Audience: Did that involve getting rid of blemishes and-

Mike Kuchar: Very much so. Only as far as a retouch because the director could go only so far then they'd forget, they'd leave things. Sometimes the models, they're really exquisite and they're really fine, which you get the little things that sometimes go wrong but one of the very things, once at the time, Susie Parker she was in an automobile accident and she had scars on her arms so that would always be the first thing I would go after.

Also, another model-Sometimes when I do the bells weren't quite right and those are fine- fine figures but the bells would be too tight and then the other side would bulge out and it would be up to me to sort of take them in and all. Also, all the food that you see, we would give them a wash with cotton swabs of orange and so lighting them up you know.

There's all these things and those are extraneous wrinkles I would take out. In some ways it's like transparencies, we would take like 10s and these would be the originals and like the models would get like \$1000 an hour they would get paid. It was very interesting work and also I think it might have helped me with my own color schemes and all but just to see some of the ideas were very smart and sometimes I could see what worked and what didn't and I could analyze them while I was working on them. I did it for like seven years and was quite good. Guy went to commercial art school, it was a high school, my father he graduated with a portfolio and all lettering and pay stubs and whatever. I thought the idea was to get your foot in the advertising art world because helping to start as an artist. It takes time, who knows if your work catches on and whatever, the thing is you work on it and all but time will tell and also fate. It has a lot to do with fate, who saves your work and what happens, where it leads to that but that's all like incidental and something to do but you need the work in order for anything to happen.

So what I was into was into-being cursed and all. I did it for seven years and then I left it and all and I had finished that film *Sins of the Fleshpoids* while I just about two years before I left it.

Audience: Sometimes it seems very fitting, you know?

Mike Kuchar: That's the thing, the lady too many times, I think one movie we had *The Craven Sluck* she found out retouched it and she said "You know, my stomach doesn't look good in this scene. Can you retouch it out and make me look thinner?" Ha ha. It wasn't always the positive thing because how could I do every little thing you know.

Eventually she became-She went into business herself, the acting fell through, then she began to go into hair weaving which was going to be revolutionized wigs. They take hair from the back of the head and they put it in front and they weave it, it would be like a carpet. I mean, her and her girlfriend, now this is an old African recipe or whatever, it was going to revolutionize the hairpiece industry. Her and her girlfriend got together with this lady with the African secret, like 10000 57th Street and then the first victim they did the trial on was my brother. He came home and he said notice my head and I looked at it and said yeah it looks a little fluffier today you know. Then he says well touch it and I touch it and you know it felt like matted rags. It was the oddest thing because you know when did they start tying tufts of hair into what hair you have remaining on your head and it was so odd. Well anyway, what happened was they got lost in the competition because a lot of the people they put the weave their own hair onto, it came off in the pools when they went swimming.

After that, it was a hassle, they had to give up that thing but then she's into something which I don't know but what it is is toilet bowls for dogs. You're going to have to take them out. This was for small dogs, it was poodles and other small cases, what it would be is that you would hook it up the old household toilet seat and then it had a trap door and it had an elaborate hose with a, in the middle of it, was this compartment you put in a little disinfectant pill so you can flush it after the dog has made you know? The only thing I didn't want to tell her was all -She's all hip on the idea- Dogs, it's against their nature because they don't like a confined area because all dogs their world is related to odor and they have to like sniff around and make a path. Something exciting, in order to-you know be inspired- but I don't know, that's the last time I heard from her. I don't know it went. The thing is she spent \$600 trying to train a dog to go to it. Then all of a sudden the dogs having a little trouble. [00:30:20]

You've all got that mind-reading thing but this is another thing I'm getting off-topic-Was there any other questions?

Audience: You split up with your writer about, was it 7 or 8 years ago?

Mike Kuchar: Yeah, with the first-When we started to do the 16 mm films we sort of went different ways.

Audience: Do you feel your films are different from his in a special way?

Mike Kuchar: Yeah. Well they are, in some ways, I guess technically the pace is slower and I use a lot of color. I tend to use a lot of color, he doesn't and I think there is a difference, yeah there is. With 8 mm films, you know I made about 2,000 8 mm films which we worked together on, but then we had our own ideas and he knows what he wants and I know pretty much what I want. We don't collaborate anymore because he might have an idea I just don't feel for it at the moment while I'm on something you know and I lined and I direct and photograph and edit all my films for a funny reason too because it takes so much energy to try to explain to somebody what I want to do when I could spend that energy doing it myself you know. Unless I find somebody I can work with and really see eye to eye but I'd rather in a way, if it sort of comes halfway close as they do, it's only because through my own lineup to get the visions in my mind or the feeling I want. It's only really me who knows, you know and so to try to explain it out to other people would just be exhausting you know because I've got all these other things to think about. You've seen our films and you would know we have a big difference.

Now if I could think of anything else-

Audience: A lot of the scenes in your movies there's a lot of wind blown, is that intentional?

Mike Kuchar: Yeah. I use the wind a lot but I did, you know in other films, I did a couple films on landscapes. My idea was I sometimes wanted wind to use to see a difference between photographing with a tripod and photographing with none. Of course, with a tripod everything is very stable, everything is anchored down and rooted and you've got a matted picture on the screen. Nothing really moves but anyways these landscape ideas, the main theme was to use wind or any elements that would set the landscape in motion and so we'd like use that and sometimes I would make the grass go like the sea or I would start the trees moving and cause clouds to cover the side of the building and I do, I like to play around with things like that.

I did some films that really I put the wind to use a lot, it's a main idea but I guess in this one *Sin of the Fleshapoids* her hair against the curtain's blowing.

Audience: This is sort of incidental but there was one piece of music in that that really stuck in my clog in *Sins of the Fleshapoids*, I can't, what is it?

Mike Kuchar: Romantic Symphony

Audience: What?

Mike Kuchar: It could have been the romantic symphony, there's a romantic piece you know. What we did was visit a friend, he composed something with pianos and electronic pieces and then all of a sudden I need a lush sort of sounding romantic music, I used a romantic symphony which is a Howard Hanson piece.

Audience: I think she means the reoccurring, the lead motif of the love scene.

Mike Kuchar: Yeah, that's it. The romantic symphony. It's a passage, Howard Hanson.

Audience: I heard it so much but I've never heard it in anything else.

Audience: What was the choral used in it? You said it was choral work.

Mike Kuchar: In *Sins of the Fleshapoids*?

Audience: Yeah.

Mike Kuchar: Oh.

Audience: [inaudible 00:34:07]

Mike Kuchar: The end, I did the sound after I finished. The picture is done, I put the sound on. The moaning, the labor pains was me only once I hit the low note do I give myself away you know but I had to do that myself.
[audience laughs 00:34:22]

Audience: Do you have any favorite films or movie actors and actresses?

Mike Kuchar: Yeah, sure I do. Well yeah, I went-There was this friend when I was a kid in the 50s, I used to go to the movie theaters and all. I used to like to a lot of Turner and Haywood movies and then the part of the films I like, I very much like Jack Smith and Gregor Marcopolis, they're so very inspiring to me. I like their ideas.

My brother, you know, he's teaching San Francisco Art Institute, he's got a thing- They're production classes- His idea is to make these real juicy, dramatic overstuffed plots and scripts and give them to people who can't act at all and to see the spectacle of them trying to cope with it and trying to purvey across is really oh and then he's turned out about half a dozen of these most peculiar movies but they're kind of, in some way, kind of unique some of them. We had-Of course you look at it as really something but his thing is you never tell them that they ain't, you know. He says "Oh, that's good, go on to the next." The thing is it's never let on that it's conscious but to do it and try to do it as straight as possible but to watch the faltering and people trying to cope with this script and trying to perform, I don't know, there's something perversely entertaining. Well that's his so he's been doing that. [00:35:58]

Audience: In the *Fleshapoids*, when they spill the fruit over, the woman, that is off of *Ivan the Terrible*.

Mike Kuchar: So I was told but I never saw the film, *Ivan the Terrible*, I never saw it. Probably the opulence, the things you would do with opulence. That's possible you know, it just occurred to me you know because a lot of the train of thought sometimes you're interested or you got an idea you're working on and you come out and realize somebody else too has been doing that but sometimes there's a lot you sometimes find other people doing the same thing that sometimes that you're doing or a certain kind of motif and theme with movies. I never used to believe anything psychic or whatever but I wonder if there's a lot energy and vibrations and foreplays going around because there is a ton of energy in whatever you do or try to put down in a big web of anything. No wonder that you sometimes picks up waves like that.

Yeah there was a time as far as commercial successes, I don't make my movies commercial-sized and I never even thought there would be either. I just do them because I enjoy, like I said, it gives me something to do, something to work on but I guess it'd be *Sins of the Fleshapoids*

is my most successful film. It came out when Camp Sensibility was just being realized, this was very early 60s and a [inaudible 00:37:33] tech bought a print that I had to make a French translation because it was years before *Barbarella* that film. You know they got the same thing *Barbarella* they did with the hands and all that, I wonder if they saw the film you know but I wonder if what he's done with *Barbarella* is six years of comic strip character I couldn't understand why they wouldn't have a thinking in the comic book bubble on top of the head you know.

Audience: Mike, there's a lot, speaking of other films, there's a lot of things in *Sins of the Fleshapoids*, a lot of reverberation sort of things but one of the things that occurred to me watching the thing is the way in which fast and slow-motion work in the film because like that whole period in the 60s was such a kind of intense and serious sense of ritual, things like *Chumwum* and some of the anger films things of that sort, what happens here is the fast motion, for example in the whatever the characters name is your brothers is beaten down the stairs, is all of that kind of psycho-esque is in fast motion and there are things in slow-mo when she throws the apple and all that but normally or in any other film and that slow-motion or fast-motion is used to kind of increase the vicarious, you know, the excitement of the moment. Yet somehow when you use it, it seems to be a kind of, it seems to maintain that ritual distance in some way and I was sort of wondering if you were thinking about other films when you were using those things or whether you just simply film some sequences fast and slow because they seem to need it?

Mike Kuchar: Yeah, exactly. Just whatever was necessary. I didn't think a ton, I just thought whatever might work however I convey what I wanted to do and I took a chance in a way but you see, it was intuitive. If I was to think, in some ways, how do I work it? Is it intellectual, do I really plan it out very much beforehand? Well I do, I plan out sometimes. In fact, I do more planning now but with these films *Sins of the Fleshapoids* I just went out and I filmed. I just started to get film in the camera and from there built on so what I was really doing, it was an exercise for me to get started with a movie, see what I'm getting and see how I can solve it and I wasn't even conscious at Berkeley of what I was doing but you know we all are motivated by our subconscious.

Sometime that would be a scene for a movie, I'd sit around and I don't know what to make, what should I do and all but then I'd realize sometimes what I just have to do is get people together, get my camera, and just confront them and then start doing something. If someone ever knocked at the door and asked to borrow something and you instantaneously said "No, I don't have it," but you do have it. You know, maybe I've done this and it really shocked me because it was instantaneous, it was like lightening you know but there's reasons

why you said that and then I think about why'd I say that and I realize there's a whole story there why I would say it because it's slight instances throughout that person but maybe not like that person and immediately said no, you know. [00:40:30]

Sometimes when I have to get people together and I have to film, I begin to bring out things like how I react to them or the environment I'm shooting in and in situations I have to think fast and I have to put myself out and what I'm doing is drawing off my own subconscious feelings and themes which are really there you know. Then I see, I can add on to it later when I've got something and then put a solution to it and so *Sins of the Fleshapoids* was strictly by instinct. I just went out and had a certain feel of the way I wanted the movie you know, and then I just went right ahead and hopefully like they would work and I guess theoretically I knew that a lot of the scenes might work or would carry us through but it was all about instinct. You spoke of slow-motion but there is no slow-motion in that. That lady, Donna Kerness, I liked using her because she was a dancer once with Al and Nicole Elias dance team.

Audience: But she throws the apple, that's not--

Mike Kuchar: No, that's regular speed you know. The thing she had a skill with modern ballet, she could move in such a way which was good because if you want to- Sometimes people will talk about charisma on the screen, they have to have something about them and she had this kind of way of moving because of her dance experience and so some ways that like helped and a lot of those people you know, like she would improvise a lot of their things and I would just photograph it and if she did anything overtly out of character I would barge in but a lot of things you know, was her doing and her choreographing her own self a lot of times. Only when they would step out where I'd really thought they stepped totally out of character and hinder the movie did I butt in.

A lot of the costumes, the robot, the man cow and that was his idea. He just went in the room and came out and said "How's this?" And you know it was good. We kind of thought the same and my brother that's all his outfit, I just said look greasy and awful you know.

Audience: Any time you mentioned a budget, it was really small and low-budget films, did you ever want to make a really large budget, great commercial film at all?

Mike Kuchar: That would be nice. Yeah, I filled out a few applications for grants here and there, every once in a while but I never got one and for some reason I like working on small budgets you know, because it takes a lot of thought, how can you even get some of your ideas across with that?

We had to cut a lot of corners but I feel that's kind of fun and a good exercise to do that you know. I speak of money sometimes but it's not really the major issue, I just speak of that because it's something else to talk about but it doesn't really matter that much you know. It doesn't come into my way of thought. If I was given a lot of money, sure it would be good to work on a big-budget film but-

Audience: How do you make a living now?

Mike Kuchar: Well every once in a while I teach film, that's what I've been doing. Or else, when things get rough, I grab any kind of odd and end jobs just for a while and sometimes I make a deal like lately I sold two films to European TV but they bought other films from me years ago. Every once in a while I get a commission job through word of mouth sometimes and there's a few distributors who like some of my work and they ask for specific prints and then they do the pushing. I'm not much of a salesman for my own work, it's hard for me to push and all. Then there's other people, if they show interest in it, I sort of leave it with them and sometimes that could lead to interesting things because they're willing to do the selling or they know of places where might be interested to show the work.

With my own exposure-You know it all came- I was making movies since I was 12 years old but then I had my partner [inaudible 00:44:15] and we used to just have shows with friends over. After dinner it would be nice, hey you want to see my latest work, and we'd pull it out and make it an interesting evening. Then with Cine-tech's and Walsh and sort of some of [inaudible 00:44:28] were interested in my work and then I had a whole pile of films ready and worked them out and things like that. I find now a lot of schools have filmmaking courses now and many films are being made and there's a lot of festivals going around and sometimes influential people go but a lot of curators from museums.

It's interesting, in the course of underground film, is that it's no longer called underground anymore. I guess it's really surfaced isn't it, it's been absorbed in society and also what else underground was you know, at the time, there was a hard censorship, there was a lot of things you couldn't do and also against the law. Of course now, there's no actually no censorship, well part of it's doomed because of that. There's also the interest in court cases and whatever. It's independent film now, it's called sometimes another word, Avant Garde or experimental. Frankly, every film is experimental because you want to- The experiment is if it's going to work or to what degree you now. As far as Avant Garde, I don't know, can you wake up in the morning and say "I'm going to be Avant Garde." I asked my son that you know, but there are ways to being Avant Garde and one of the ways is to be yourself

and perhaps you are. In some ways, by doing that, is Avant Garde because there are a lot of places you can't be yourself. You never can tell, some things you do but I don't know, I guess sometimes you just do something that you feel is the best way to do it and whatever you know, whatever happens from there you know, good. [00:45:59]

Any other questions? Well okay, thanks. Bye. [applause, end of discussion 00:46:17]

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