

The Australian Avant-Garde

Curated by Sally Golding, Joel Stern & Danni Zuvela of OtherFilm

March 2, 2010

Presented by Sally Golding

Australian avant-garde film history is characterized by formal investigation into themes of landscape, alienation and perception. While their works are in conversation with contemporaneous European and American filmmakers, experimental filmmakers in Australia have worked largely in isolation to produce highly developed experiments with split screens and mattes, optical sound, collage animation and optical techniques (such as colour separation processes). Using the landscape as motivation or a formal premise as a starting point, the films in this program reflect the iconic aesthetics and innovative approaches that shape Australian avant-garde film history from the early-1960s through the 1990s. The rare 16mm prints in this program are provided either directly from the filmmakers themselves or from the National Film & Sound Archive in Canberra, Australia. (OtherFilm)

Boobs A Lot (1968) by Aggy Read; 16mm, b&w, sound, three minutes

A montage of photographs culled from girlie magazines—three thousand tits in three minutes with music by the Fugs. In the days of blacked out nipples it achieved notoriety and even profitability by being banned by the censor for eighteen months under tough Australian censorship laws. Read's film symbolised this prime concern addressed by the activities of the Sydney based UBU Films cooperative (ca 1965-1970).

"A truly onetrack film" (Sydney Festival Programme Notes, 1968)

"An air of innocent purity." (Arthur Cantrill)

"Too many tits." (Tuli Kupferberg)

Biography: Manager and the public face of the UBU Films group in Sydney from 1965-1970. Aggy Read (1941-1998) was charged with smuggling after sending a copy of David Perry's film *A Portrait of Abigail's Belly* to the Oberhausen Festival in West Germany; the trial caused considerable outrage in Australia, and led later to the repeal of the archaic censorship laws that governed the importation and classification of motion pictures in 1970. Read was a keen hot air balloonist and croquet player, winning the Australian Men's title in 1997. His classic film *Boobs A Lot* caused a near riot at the 1968 Sydney Film Festival when it was first screened by new Director of the Festival David Stratton.

Halftone (1966) by David Perry (UBU); 16mm, b&w, sound, one minute

Explores the abstract graphic potential of newspaper photographs to create a visual score as well as produce optical sound.

Biography: David Perry (1933–) is an Australian photographer and filmmaker, based in Sydney. During work on the production of *The Theatre of Cruelty* in Sydney, July 1965, he joined Albie Thoms, Aggy Read and John Clarke in establishing UBU Films (named after Alfred Jarry's absurdist play *Ubu Roi*). This was Australia's first consciously avant-garde filmmaking group.

Man and his World (1966) by Albie Thoms; 16mm, color, sound, one minute

An "expanded cinema film" in which a single-second explosion is elongated to a minute, and re-presented in split-screen format.

Biography: The success of UBU Films and the legacy of experimental filmmaking in Australia in the 1960s can be attributed to the significant presence of Albie Thoms (1941–), who relentlessly proselytised for avant-garde filmmaking and personally engineered the development of a synergic support network for production, distribution and exhibition of films outside the industrial aegis.

4000 Frames, An Eye Opener Film (1970) by Arthur and Corinne Cantrill; 16mm, b&w, sound, 3 minutes

A montage of four thousand single-frame images builds up on the retina to create graphic superimpositions.

Biography: Arthur (1938–) and Corinne Cantrill (1928–) have been making films together since 1960. Their film work includes rigorous interrogations of the photochemical nature of film, the poetics of perception, and contemplation of the unique Australian landscape. They have also created a remarkable body of “live” and “expanded cinema” performances, and published the avant-garde film journal *Cantrills Filmnotes* from 1971–2000. They are highly respected, internationally recognised “elders” of Australian art.

Bondi (1979) by Paul Winkler; 16mm, color, sound, 15 minutes

The iconic Aussie beach scene at Bondi Beach is presented in composite images using in-camera matting techniques, dividing the frame horizontally into multiple sections. Amos Vogel has described this manipulation of pictorial space as “reminiscent of Max Ernst’s surrealist collages.”

Biography: Hamburg-born Paul Winkler (1939–) emigrated to Australia in 1959 and since then has created a remarkable body of unique films. Winkler’s films involve the use of specially-created film effects, including mattes and refilming, which result in utterly unique composite images which deconstruct both time and space. Winkler remains the only Australian filmmaker to be given a solo show at a major Australian art institution and his films are held in many important international art collections.

Rainbow Way (1977) by George Gittoes; 16mm, color, sound, 11 minutes

An experimental study of the effects of light on water. Lyrical abstract patterns are created through the reflection of sunlight through a number of prisms and lenses.

Biography: Sydney-based George Gittoes (1949–) is one of Australia’s most important artists, as distinguished as a war artist as he is a social documentarian. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Gittoes explored some highly creative approaches to the moving image, including holography, underwater photography and multimedia environments involving performance, dance and projections.

Waterfall (1984) by Arthur and Corinne Cantrill; 16mm, color, sound, 18 minutes

One of a series of three-colour separation studies in which the same scene is shot three times on black-and-white negative successively through red, green and blue filters. These three strips are printed onto one strip of colour stock producing both “strikingly realistic colour” and dazzling artificial multi-coloured tints where there is movement.

223 (1985) by Dirk de Bruyn; 16mm, color, sound, 6 minutes

One of a series of films (others include *Vision* and *Light Play*) exploring frameless film and direct-on-film techniques creating a play of light, colour, geometric shapes and patterns synchronised with synthesised music. Abstract and symbolic shapes worked directly onto film without the restrictions of frame lines are punctuated by the discrete frames of photographs from a family album in positive and negative.

Biography: Netherlands-born Dirk de Bruyn (1950–) has made numerous experimental, documentary and animation works over the last 35 years; has curated various programs of film and video art internationally; and written extensively about this area of arts practice. Recently de Bruyn has attracted national and international attention for his highly original expanded cinema performances involving multiple projections, vocal improvisation and live performance. Music by Michael Luck.

Mind’s Eye (1998) by Gregory Godhard; 16mm, color, sound, 5 minutes

“Comprised of over 1200 photographs, this roller coaster journey through urban Australian environments transports the viewer along the little-used z-axis of pictorial space.” (OtherFilm)

Biography: “Born in Sydney, Gregory Godhard (1966–) continues to (mis)spend his time as an animator, experimental film-maker and artist. He has produced, directed and animated twelve short experimental 16mm films. His films have screened in numerous festivals around the world, picking up the occasional award and funny-looking trophy.” (Gregory Godhard)