

Restoring and Rediscovering the Los Angeles Avant-Garde

Wednesday, April 1, 2009 — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
Curated and Presented by Mark Toscano of the Academy Film Archive

Although cinematic experimentation “in the shadow of the industry” goes back as far as Hollywood itself, the 1960s and ‘70s in Los Angeles were a particularly vibrant and exciting time for experimental filmmaking. This program showcases a broad range of work made between 1963 and 1980, all in restored prints from the Academy Film Archive (and with thanks to the filmmakers). A few of these films have been widely shown but the majority have likely never screened in the Bay Area before, despite the fact that they were made less than a six-hour drive away. Particularly rare are the utterly unique and exciting work of Chris Langdon and the films of David and Diana Wilson, which have gone nearly unseen since they opened their Museum of Jurassic Technology in the 1980s. (Mark Toscano)

—— (1967) by Thom Andersen and Malcolm Brodwick; 16mm, color, sound, 12 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“I consider Thom and Malcolm’s film to be groundbreaking in its brilliant demonstration of the power of a rule to construct a film that unifies shots taken at different times and places. And it also noteworthy for the new model of the documentary film that it proposes. The brilliance of —— is that it refuses the power of montage as that idea has been conventionally understood, only to rediscover its power in a different form, on a new plane. Somewhere Eisenstein describes montage as that mode of construction that goes beyond representing the appearance of an event to capture the feeling of it. —— operates in this way, but in a realm that is particularly resistant to representation by means of images, that of memory.” (Morgan Fisher)

Sears Sox (ca. 1968) by Pat O’Neill, Neon Park and Chick Strand, 16mm, color, sound, 4.5 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“A short piece of commercial work done by three legendary L.A. artists. This piece was shown on loop projectors in Sears stores to promote an exciting and new young ladies’ clothing line.” (Mark Toscano)

Bondage Girl (aka *Immaculate Gate*) (1973) by Chris Langdon; 16mm, color, sound, 5 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.” (Mark Toscano)

By the Sea (1963) by Pat O’Neill & Robert Abel; 16mm, b&w, sound, 10 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“Organic and inorganic forms observed and captured at Muscle Beach are flattened onto slides beneath carefully applied cover slips, and prepared for closer examination.” (Mark Toscano)

Throbs (1972) by Fred Worden, 16mm, color, sound, 8 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“Demonstrating a wonderful, somehow exuberant restraint, Fred Worden explores the small epiphanies and nuanced areas of visual delight resulting from the energies created by the vibrant reactions of intermingling footage.” (Mark Toscano)

The Making of Americans (1974) by Roberta Friedman and Grahame Weinbren; 16mm, b&w, sound, 15 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“The words in the film are taken from Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans*. The subject of the passage is repetition, the idea that there are threads of similarity woven into the identities of ‘every kind of men and women,’ and that the device of repeating with variations can be used for the gradual uncovering of these essential qualities. Stein’s words are dissected and reconstituted in the film according to a strategy suggested by the text, being themselves repeated with ‘subtle variations coming clear into ordered recognition.’ Generally, I suppose, we were trying to make a film in which the subject, the method of organization and the means of presentation were all equivalent, so as to bring about a particularly intense coherency.” (Grahame Weinbren)

Pasadena Freeway Stills (1974) by Gary Beydler; 16mm, color, silent, 6 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“Possibly the most lucid, vivid and awesome demonstration of the building up of still images to create moving ones, *Pasadena Freeway Stills* simply, gracefully and powerfully shows us the process by which we are fooled by the movies.” (Mark Toscano)

Dead Reckoning (1980) by David Wilson; 16mm, color, sound, 9 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“A film which seems deceptively simple, *Dead Reckoning* comprises three identical-length shots which subtly address our very human tendency to want to give order to our environment and the poignant failure inherent to such an impulse.” (Mark Toscano)

Rose for Red (1980) by Diana Wilson; 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“An unusual, jewel-like homage to unity and discordance in filmic composition.” (Mark Toscano)

Turning Over (1975) by Morgan Fisher; video, b&w, sound, 13 minutes, tape from the Academy Film Archive

Documented live to tape in San Francisco, October 17, 1975.

Venice Pier (1976) by Gary Beydler; 16mm, color, sound, 16 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

“Shot spatially out of order on the Venice pier over the course of an entire year, Gary Beydler recomposed the footage in editing to make it proceed consistently forward in space, resulting in an intricate mixing up of chronology. Some cuts suggesting only a few feet of movement could actually represent a jump of months either forward or backward in time. The result is one of gauzy impressionism brought into vivid and breathtaking clarity.” (Mark Toscano)

Picasso (1973) by Chris Langdon; 16mm, b&w, sound, 2 minutes, print from the Academy Film Archive

Created April 8, 1973.

“When Picasso died I wanted to make the first post mortem documentary, as I knew would happen anyway, and cheaply. The film took four hours to finish from camera to print and cost a little under \$5.” (Chris Langdon)

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