

TO THE BEAT! Scanning the Pages of Pop

Sunday, May 6, 2007 — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

To the Beat (2006) by Thad Povey and the Scratch Film Junkies; 16mm, color, sound, 7 minutes, print from Thad Povey

What are Scratch Film Junkies? We are a group of digital filmmakers—a spin on the term, since we truly use digits, the ones on the ends of our hands. We're making films by hand, direct animation as it is known, with the purpose of exploring the possibilities of truly analog work in a digital world. This is a quilting bee with celluloid as fabric and sprockets for stitches.

This should not be seen as a retreat from the state of things, but a means to find what strengths the art form has that are parallel to that which is computer generated. Even given the greatness of film's history, one hundred years is a small period compared to the centuries-long development that the traditional art forms have enjoyed. We believe that much of what is great and unique in the art of handmade filmmaking is still to be revealed and digital technologies have much to offer in support of the art form, as opposed to the contrary notion of a replacement technology.

All films are handmade for your optical pleasure—do not take with other medications!

To the Beat: A toast to the beat of life. Ein Prosit.

Contributing junkies: Colleen Silva, Vivian Dwyer, Danielle Booth, Robbyn Leonard, Isabel Povey, and Thad Povey. Music by Steven Garling. (www.thadpovey.com)

Krypton is Doomed (2005) by Ken Jacobs; digital video, color, sound, 34 minutes, tape form the maker

In his 5th floor walk-up on the Lower East Side, Jack Smith was determined to complete the beautification of his kitchen cabinet. AIDS was pressing. His friends pitched in, accepting slave status. Jack demanded this and Jack demanded that but because he wanted it perfect (as he had wanted his films to be perfect), and because perfection proved elusive, the remodeling finally had to be abandoned. Each friend going his or her own sad way. We are living under the imminent threat of GODS. The Republican ploy of allying with the religious right for votes is proving shortsighted (grasping individuals tend to be shortsighted) and, as in Iraq, our own religious crazies are now avid for fulfillment. Of prophecy. You've got to hand it to those who resist, for the sake of the grass and the animals and the children, and for the preservation of the occasional work of art among the Fabergé eggs, and who knows but that they will succeed against all odds and swerve their respective societies away from sure doom. We like to think so, and it's easy to, after a lot of movies and the fact that all the living are beneficiaries of the ones who made it through—through normal attrition, that is, all those Papas and especially Mamas that did succeed in sending forward their young. In the late 1930s two Jewish teenagers came up with the story of a couple that sent their infant child on a lone trip of escape through space from an exploding planet. We all know the story: the boy would survive on Earth but would have to keep his identity secret. Were Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel dreaming out loud? Was Krypton the Old World heading into WWII and was the child escaping the fate of the Jews of Europe? The Jews then, all of us now. Jack's friends failed to convince him to make a will. "Why bother?" he asked. "To protect your work in the future." "The future?" Jack replied, "The future will be worse." (Ken Jacobs)

Adam (2006) by shalo p; digital video, color, sound, 10 minutes, tape from the maker

ADAM TEXT: 1. Digital waves toss a remnant of pop video ashore, a seemingly uncomfortable interview with pop sensation Adam Ant in Japan. This in turn morphs into a movie about the transience of not only celebrity pop culture but also of persona, and where strength can be found there. 2. Pop sensation Adam Ant faces ridicule, colorful dance routine ensues. I prefer number 2.

SHALO TEXT: I don't know what to write about myself other than that I produce a visionary television show. (shalo p)

Mouse Heaven by Kenneth Anger; digital video, color, sound, 10 minutes, tape from the UCLA Film & Television Archives

I'm finishing a film I've already shot. It's a study of animated toys of a rare nature. These are collectables of early Walt Disney toys. I've always loved Mickey Mouse since I was a little boy and I'm outraged about the current Disney company's attitude to Mickey Mouse. I mean they think they own it but all the children of the world own Mickey Mouse. And I have devised a way to star Mickey Mouse in a film that the current Disney company can't legally object to, by filming an antique toy collection of early Disney toys. And it's just a coincidence all those toys happen to be Mickey Mouse. I'm actually being very respectful of early Mickey Mouse. I hate later Mickey Mouse, because from *Fantasia* on the Disney people decided to humanize the mouse, remove his tail—which is a kind of castration—and turn him into a little boy who is a sort of a goody-two-shoes. And he's no longer the mischievous, sadistic mouse that he was in the beginning. He used to do nasty little tricks like twist the udders of cows and things like that. And that's the only mouse I'm interested in, I mean this kind of demon "fetish" figure. ("Anger Rising," Kenneth Anger interviewed by Dnyl of T.O.P.Y. Chaos www.chaosmatrix.org/library/chaos/topy/angerris.txt)

Everyday Bad Dream (2006) by Fred Worden; digital video, color, sound, 6 minutes, tape from the maker

"Isn't there anybody out there who isn't afraid of pissing off his or her audience? Of doling out what at first may seem like 'punishment,' but in fact is just a forceful re-education of the senses? I can't believe I need to say this in 2006, but here goes: powerful cinema must not only address our minds. It has to engage our bodies, and while sometimes that physical challenge can be lyrical and poignant, sometimes it has to pierce our eyes with a light we simply cannot shut out. Within this aggressive modernist logic, only by diving into the wreck of our previous perceptual habits can we round the corner into a new, skull-shaking version of beauty. Brakhage knew this. So did Sharits, Menken, Harry Smith. Peter Kubelka and Rose Lowder and Luther Price and Lynn Marie Kirby still know this. And by God, so does Fred Worden. *Everyday Bad Dream* doesn't scramble the sensorium the way *Automatic Writing* [2002] and *The Or Cloud* [2001] do, but in its own way *EDB* is more methodical. [...] In describing *EDB*, Mark McElhatten wisely reference[s] Robert Motherwell's paintings [...], but the shape, if not the color, of this yellow anchor recalls a late Frank Stella wall relief, something optically flat but suggesting spatiality. The cursor dot appears and reappears at several points throughout the piece, holding steady in a central blinking position, like a beacon, but then starting an almost imperceptible spiral. (Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema*, anyone?) The flicker halts a bit at around minute three, only to build a fuller head of steam. But even in these moments of visual respite, Worden's dense, pulsating soundscape keeps the anxiety quotient very high. [...] But part of the frustration (and excitement) of the audio track is its refusal to become an all-over din. We hear distinct bits [...], but they roll in and out of earshot like the tide on fast-forward. *EDB* is overpowering; it impresses its overall shape on you like some kind of structuralist acid-bath. But by the time it concludes it's also strangely relaxing since, unlike most nightmares, we can use our lucidity and cognitive capacity to acclimate to it, learn its tricks, watch its assaultive forms become pretty, a fistfight evolving into modern dance. And then, as with most bad trips, we discover the Big Bad is really rather commonplace. But in this case (and here's why I see *EDB* as a sort of rejoinder to Anger's *Mouse Heaven*—there, I said it), Worden locates a primal fear in that which is all the more sinister for being all around you, day in, day out. Cartoons used to tap into these anxieties of the world shifting its shape beneath our feet. One man made millions paring away that dread. But [...] it doesn't go anywhere. It's just pressed further and further down into the image, seeping into every facet of our lives." (Michael Sicinski, "Reviews of New Releases Seen, October 2006: *Everyday Bad Dream* (Fred Worden)" www.academichack.net/reviewsOctober2006.htm)

Like picking shards of broken glass out of pile carpet on a hangover morning. (Fred Worden)

The Two Minutes to Zero Trilogy (2003–04) by Lewis Klahr; 16mm, color, sound, 33 minutes, print from the maker

Two Days to Zero (2004) by Lewis Klahr; 16mm, color, sound, 23 minutes, print from the maker

Two Hours to Zero (2004) by Lewis Klahr; 16mm, color, sound, 9 minutes, print from the maker

Two Minutes to Zero (2003) by Lewis Klahr; 16mm, color, sound, 1 minute, print from the maker

A feature length narrative compressed 3 different times into 3 separate films of diminishing duration until the synoptic is synopsized. A crime story told 3 different ways concerning the events of a two month period leading up to, and immediately following a bank robbery. The imagery has all been appropriated (the fancy, art world sanctioned term for stealing) from 4 issues of an early 1960s comic book version of the then popular, American TV show *77 Sunset Strip*. (Lewis Klahr)