

Shine On Films by Michael Robinson

Sunday, April 27, 2008, 7:30 pm — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

You Don't Bring Me Flowers (2005) by Michael Robinson; 16mm, color, sound, 8 minutes, print from the maker

Viewed at its seams, a collection of *National Geographic* landscapes from the 1960s and '70s conjures an obsolete romanticism currently peddled to propagate entitlement and individualism from sea to shining sea; the slideshow deforms into a bright white distress signal. (Michael Robinson)

The General Returns from One Place to Another (2006) by Michael Robinson; 16mm, color, sound, 11 minutes, print from the maker

Learning to love again, with fear at its side, the film draws balance between the romantic and the horrid, shaping a concurrently skeptical and indulgent experience of the beautiful. A Frank O'Hara monologue (from a play of the same title) attempts to undercut the sincerity of the landscape, but there are stronger forces surfacing. (Michael Robinson)

Tidal (2001) by Michael Robinson; 16mm, color, sound, 7 minutes, print from the maker

A love story told through the newly haunted home my parents shared for twenty-eight years. (Michael Robinson)

And We All Shine On (2006) by Michael Robinson; 16mm, color, sound, 7 minutes, print from the maker

An ill wind is transmitting through the lonely night, spreading myth and deception along its murky path. Conjuring a vision of a post-apocalyptic paradise, this unworldly broadcast reveals its hidden demons via layered landscapes and karaoke, singing the dangers of the mediated spirit. (Michael Robinson)

Light Is Waiting (2007) by Michael Robinson; digital video, color, sound, 11 minutes, tape from the maker

A very special episode of television's *Full House* devours itself from the inside out, excavating a hypnotic nightmare of a culture lost at sea. Tropes of video art and family entertainment face off in a luminous orgy neither can survive. (Michael Robinson)

"If you see one 11-minute video this year, make it Michael Robinson's magnificent, hilarious, and terrifying *Light Is Waiting*. The primordial, extreme slo-mo soundtrack is like a glitch mix from beyond the grave by DJ Screw. Robinson's seizure-inducing blasts of stroboscopic light rival those of the Austrian film experimentalist Peter Tscherkassky.

"And I haven't even mentioned the Olsen twins.

"Ashley and Mary-Kate Olsen, that formerly pint-size pair of formerly perfectly interchangeable human products, are part of *Light Is Waiting*. Robinson uses episodes of *Full House* as source material. His video's first big punch line arrives after a two-minute unfiltered blast of the sitcom replete with laugh track, bad fashions, and Candace Cameron's feathered hairdo.

Robinson's deployment of this clip is akin to a magician juggling TVs. He then mines the show's trip-to-Hawaii episode—a colonialist trope that dates back past *The Brady Bunch* to another Robinson, last-name Crusoe (and that fires up a torch that's been passed forward into the *Survivor* era)—in a manner so kaleidoscopic it's hallucinatory. A three-eyed John Stamos' version of "Rock-a-Hula Baby" turns into a Godzilla dirge, as his white-pantsed rump does the bump with itself. One Olsen twin becomes one two-headed Olsen twin, then turns into two Olsen twins forced to smooch each other.

Light Is Waiting exorcises American pop cultural demons via video the way Kenneth Anger did with film in 1964's *Scorpio Rising*." (Johnny Ray Huston: "Twin Olsen meltdown," *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, April 16–22, 2008. www.sfbg.com/entry.php?entry_id=6145&catid=110)

Chiquitita and the Soft Escape (2003) by Michael Robinson; 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes, print from the maker

What began as an effort at proving nostalgia to be a purely mechanical process became an argument for the opposite through its assembly. Twin attempts at structuring images of home and loved-ones collapse in the face of the romantic. (Michael Robinson)

All Through the Night (2007) by Michael Robinson; digital video, color, sound, 4 minutes, tape from the maker

A charred visitation with an icy language of control. (Michael Robinson)

Victory Over the Sun (2007) by Michael Robinson; 16mm, color, sound, 13 minutes, print from the maker

Dormant sites of past World's Fairs breed an eruptive struggle between spirit and matter, ego and industry, futurism and failure. For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory; nothing lasts forever, even cold November rain. (Michael Robinson)

In the 1913 Russian Futurist opera *Victory Over the Sun*, the sun is torn from the sky and entombed in a concrete box, a metaphor for the early 20th century notion of "modern man" rejecting the old and embracing technological and industrial innovation. Considering these notions of forward thinking utopianism, Robinson's film is a dizzying collision of Ayn Rand, Axl Rose and Skeletor amidst a landscape study of structures at World's Fair sites. (Images Festival 2008)

Exploring the poetics of loss and the dangers of mediated experience, my work is, at its core, concerned with mining the manipulative potential of cinema in the creation of progressive thought. While my films contain no characters, dialogue or plot in any traditional sense, I would argue that they are narratives, played out by the various visual, sonic and textual elements that haunt them. Borrowing the formal skins of structural film, the emotional cues of pop songs and a woozy toggling of public and personal memory, my work strives to cultivate new resonances between seemingly disparate elements, harnessing the surface connotations of specific landscapes, texts and songs as psychological triggers, ripe for reconfiguration.

Between the years 2000 and 2002, I produced a series of intensely personal short films concerning the death of my father. After having the distance to digest and question this elegiac practice, I became interested in the possibility of unraveling and subverting the same veins of nostalgia and beauty I had unassumingly conjured in these earlier works. Subsequently, my films have become increasingly layered, aggressive and altogether self-implosive in their schizophrenic relationships to seduction, spectacle and trust. Working primarily in 16mm film, I strive to underscore the medium's aesthetic excess as a means to both indulge and interrogate the pleasures and problems of the romantic. I would like to think that as my films have become more visually beautiful, they have concurrently become more furious.

Forcing assortments of essentially non-narrative elements through the familiar comforts of the narrative arc, my recent work attempts to gently guide viewers through fantastical worlds with serene confidence, only to leave them adrift as these worlds turn, twist and collapse. It is my hope that within the resulting disorientation, viewers may perhaps find the clarity to ask themselves how and why they were misled. In making this space for self-questioning, I am interested in generating experiences of revelation in regards to the very nature of seduction, entertainment and control.

One cannot expect to change the world through a work of art; all I can hope to do is supply an audience with the space to think and feel for themselves. That said, each piece should, within its own internal logic, demand progress and allow itself the freedom to erase and rebuild whatever version of the world it sets its scopes upon. (Michael Robinson)

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