

CONVERGENT CINEMA

Presented in collaboration with Pacific Film Archive and Prelinger Archives

Friday, January 22 at 7:30 pm
YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

While the history of Bay Area cinema-as-art is actively being excavated and revived, more workaday genres remain much less examined and often mysterious. As we begin to understand that the history of nontheatrical film isn't simply composed of parallel strands but rather woven from many threads that often intersect and interweave, we can start to spot lost art and artists in unexpected places, such as the vast body of advertising and educational films that struggles to survive deterioration and indifference.

This program revives a basketful of ephemeral films from the 1910s through the 1950s in which impulses to make films as art (both schooled and self-taught) intersect with didacticism and commerce.

SO THEY TELL ME (Warren W. Brown, 1919, 5 min., animated. Drawings by John C. Argens)

Resembling a slideshow of editorial cartoons, this minimally film takes a wry look at current events, often in a manner impenetrable to current audiences.

THE PENWIPERS and **GREEN PASTURES** (Joseph Sunn Jue, 1926, 9 min., clay animation. Produced by Ralph Wolfe)

Pioneer Chinese American filmmaker Joseph Sunn Jue (born ca. 1905-87) was mentored in animation by pioneer San Francisco producer Ray Duhem, and made at least three short stop-motion films for producer Ralph Wolfe; two of which are shown tonight. He ran Grandview Films in San Francisco's Chinatown, said to be America's only Chinese-language film production company, and during the 1930s opened a Kowloon studio where he made over 90 talkies.

COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION IN THREE FAMILIES (Gregory Bateson and Weldon Kees producing as Kinesis, 1952, reel 1 of 3, 33 min. excerpt from 75 min. film. Edited by Weldon Kees. Sponsored by Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute.) It is unclear whether the remainder of this film presently survives. Wilma Lloyd, a child psychologist, is said to have collaborated on the script.

This study of nonverbal communication echoes the taxonomic impulses present in Kees' and Jurgen Ruesch's unusual illustrated book *Nonverbal Communication* (UC Press, 1953), but is interesting both as an ethnographic film and as a work of the enigmatic, self-destructive Kees, last seen near the Golden Gate Bridge in 1955. While Kees edited shots of himself shooting into the film (presumably to bare aspects of the production process) this film seems to raise more questions about his visual preoccupations than it answers.

Other Kees/Ruesch/Bateson film collaborations at Langley Porter between 1951-54 were **APPROACHES AND LEAVETAKINGS**, **A PROBLEM CHILD BEFORE AND AFTER THERAPY**, **CHILDREN IN GROUPS** and **THE CHILD WHO DOES NOT SPEAK**.

WHEN YOU ARE A PEDESTRIAN (Ray Bainbridge producing as Progressive Pictures, 1948, 10 min.)

Oakland-based Progressive Pictures produced dozens of traffic and pedestrian safety films from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s. Distinctive and self-consciously artistic, Progressive's films used Bay Area streetscapes and roadsides as backdrops for their often-moralized cautionary messages. Progressive's company name is very likely no accident; several years ago, I noticed that filmmaker Kerry Laitala's print of leftist singer Vern Partlow singing "Old Man Atom" was produced by Progressive principal Ray Bainbridge. Further work by Bainbridge remains to be discovered.

TRIBUNE-AMERICAN DREAM FILM (Oakland Tribune and American Theatre, ca. 1924, 8 min.)

This visualization of the winning "dream of the week" (part of a series that lasted for an unknown amount of time) appears to be a homegrown American equivalent of French Surrealist films of the same period.

ART IN SAN FRANCISCO (unknown producer for The Californians, ca. 1944-45, 30 min. Photographed by R.S. MacCollister. Musical Direction: Richard Aurandt. Narrator: Tol Ware. Script and Direction: Heinz Berggruen) Courtesy of California Historical Society.

While San Francisco's moving image artists do not figure in this local survey of World War II-era or immediate-postwar art and artists, the film emphasizes the populist and democratic attributes of San Francisco's art scene and links local artistic sensibilities to the urban landscape.

A NEW NOTE IN MUSIC (Universal-International News, ca. 1959, 1:40 min.)

This newsreel clip (which may have been only shown locally) shows Harry Partch conducting students at Mills College as they perform on his instruments.

Notes by Rick Prelinger