

Worlds Within Worlds Remembering Owen Land

Friday, November 4 at 7:30 pm — Artists' Television Access

Among filmmakers, George Landow/Owen Land (1944–2011) was frequently ahead of his time and always profoundly original. In the 1960s, arguably the golden age of so-called lyrical filmmaking, Landow's own early films explored the physical properties of film and the paradoxes of visual representation in ways that anticipated the next decade's vogue of "Structural Film." Of course, by that decade, disdainful as he was of formulae and labels, not to mention wary of reductionist academics, the artist (who became "Owen Land" in 1977), was elaborating an irreverent oeuvre that included bizarre pseudo-documentaries and mis-directed educational films and which eschewed stereotypical "avant-garde" expressivity in favor of an industrial non-style that served as a paradoxical platform for his deadpan comedy, inventive wordplay and sophisticated theological speculations. (*Steve Polta*)

Remedial Reading Comprehension (1970) by George Landow; 16mm color, sound, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"The first image is a female head, horizontal and more or less suggestive of three-dimensional space. The next to last image is the same head, which becomes a white silhouette in a shallow white (not black) space. Compare the two grains of rice—wholegrain (brown) and processed (white). The white rice grain has lost its 'essence' (the germ) just as the silhouette has lost its three dimensionality. One thing this suggests is the process of removing substance to get a 'purer' product. The filmmaker himself appears in the film, yet he tells us it is about us and 'not about its maker.'" (LUX)

Film in Which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, etc. (1966) by George Landow; 16mm, color, silent, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"The richest frame I have seen in any film when you take into consideration all movements lines the beautiful whites, and reds and blacks... The kinetic and visual experienced produced by Landow's film is even more difficult to describe... There is humor in it (the blink); there is clear Mozart—(Mondrian)—like sense of form..." (Jonas Mekas, *The Village Voice*, July 1975)

The Film That Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter (1968) by George Landow; 16mm, b&w, sound, 9 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"I found the title in the *Upanishads*. This film had already been in my mind for a very long time, this type of film. I wanted to do a film which dealt with drawings which somehow had a life of their own, which existed in the same space as real objects and yet still had their own two-dimensional space. It is a film of drawings and people. It is utterly simple, my most simple film." (George Landow)

Diploteratology (1967) by George Landow; 16mm, b&w, silent, 7 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"This is an analogical film, and in order to understand it one must be acquainted with the process by which it was made. An image was selected, in this case the image of a woman hired to be part of the display at an amusement park waving to a passing boat filled with tourists. [...] Frames from this image were then heated in a specially modified projector, projected and refiled. The melting of the film engenders all of the subsequent 'images'. The analogy is between this process and basic operating procedures of the system of which we are all a part, sometimes called 'creation;' the suggestion is that death (the destruction of the initial image) is not an end but merely the next stage. Perhaps the amusement park scene is only a preparation for its transformation into the 'diploteratological' (a word meaning a monster with two heads or other [body] parts [...] it would [not] normally have images. There are three main types of 'abstract' images: macrocosmic, suggesting planets; visionary, suggesting mythical battle scenes; and microcosmic, suggesting cellular structures." (George Landow)

Thank You Jesus for the Eternal Present (1973) by George Landow; 16mm, color, sound, 6 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"A visual mix consisting of a conversation with Howard Cohen, who I met at an International Auto Show in New York City." (George Landow)

On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious, or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed? (1979) by Owen Land; 16mm color, sound, 18 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"Freud established that jokes were structurally akin to dreams in their use of condensation, displacement, representation by opposites, punning and 'nonsense'. All of these strategies are much in evidence in (Land's) marvelously duplicitous *On the Marriage Broker Joke*... [Land] is so clever and original a filmmaker as to make most others—not to mention his critics—seem flat-footed by comparison. *On the Marriage Broker Joke*... harks back to Buñuel's early work. Not only is it structured like a dream and filled with sexual imagery, but like *Un Chien Andalou*, it smacks of being an insider's joke played upon the avant-garde. Where Buñuel used the insights of psychoanalysis to satirize Christianity, [Land]—with an almost equal perversity—reverses the process and uses Christianity to send up Freud." (J. Hoberman, *American Film*)

—intermission—

New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops (1976) by George Landow; 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"*New Improved Institutional Quality*... is the further autobiographical adventures in the land of educational institutions and I.Q. exams. Landow turns his wit on himself with references to *Film In Which*... and the original *Institutional Quality* and again plays with the absurd sense of space and scale to parody not only himself but the dreamlike aspect of illusion in film." (Deke Dusinberre)

Wide Angel Saxon (1975) by George Landow; 16mm, color, sound, 22 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"*Wide Angle Saxon* deserves to become a landmark in Landow's development as a film-maker, for in it he presents a complete in-depth critique of his religious beliefs, his own film aesthetics, and the larger context of the experimental and structural films to which these relate. In fact, the film might be subtitled 'The New American Cinema Reaches Enlightenment.' His approach is Kabbalistic in that he quotes extensively from other films, which means that his points are phrased in the language of these texts. *Wide Angle Saxon*, unlike most Landow films, has a clearly stated narrative line: our hero, ruminating on the Biblical command to give up worldly possessions, discovers that he is alarmingly attached to them; this realization eventually results in a moment of enlightenment while he is in the very act of watching an independent film at the Walker Arts Center. (B. Ruby Rich, Film Center, Chicago)

Undesirables (1999) by Owen Land; 16mm screened as video; b&w, sound, 11 minutes

A "completed fragment" of a film begun by Owen Land in San Francisco, c. 1997.

"The screenplay was originally written (in 1997) as a response to a semi-serious remark made by Stan Brakhage in 1971: 'Someday Hollywood will probably make a film about us, the American experimental film-makers of the 1960s. I wonder which movie stars they will cast to play us.' It incorporates all of the paranoid conspiracy theories that have been around for the last three decades. (Owen Land)

The Box Theory (Ireko Riron) (1984) by Owen Land; video, color, sound, 16 minutes, tape from The Kitchen