

Center of Gravity: Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley

Program 1

Five Artists: BillBobBillBillBob

October 17, 2017 at 7:00pm — San Francisco Art Institute's Osher Lecture Hall

presented in association with

Canyon Cinema Foundation and the SFAI's Graduate Lecture Series

Curated and Presented by Tanya Zimbardo

As friends living in Marin County, Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley began making films together in the 1960s that foregrounded their personal experiences while examining issues of family, parenthood, partnership and domestic life in the context of artist filmmaking in Northern California. Featuring original soundtracks, their collaborative and solo films explore the poetics of everyday life, from portraits of motherhood to close studies of various bodies. Nelson, who is now based in Sweden, and Wiley were among the earliest members of the cooperative Canyon Cinema. An influential force, Gunvor Nelson taught at SFAI from 1970 to 1992.

A personal tribute to artist friendship, this 1971 filmic collaboration reflects on a moment in time in the lives and careers of Bay Area legends William Allan, William Geis, Robert Hudson, Robert Nelson and William T. Wiley. These painters, sculptors and filmmakers and their circle associated with Funk art enjoyed a certain freedom on the West Coast to forge their own territory and forms of expression. Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley were drawn to documenting the spirit of how this close-knit group, affiliated with SFAI as students and faculty, were "working together, dreaming together, and had this unusual and interesting rapport (Nelson)." *Five Artists* offers a collective portrait of the everyday life of these artists and their families in Marin County. Alternating between color and black-and-white footage, Nelson and Wiley interweave non-synchronous commentary by the artists and their acquaintances. (Tanya Zimbardo)

Five Artists: BillBobBillBillBob (1971) by Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley; 16mm, color/b&w, sound, 70 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema Foundation

"Visually dreamlike and surrealistic, [Gunvor Nelson's] films mix the impressions of a moment with memories and dreams that rush to the surface only to be pushed back by the reality of the present." (The Arts Commission of San Francisco, 1986).

Scott MacDonald: *Your consciousness of structure is already evident in Five Artists: BillBobBillBillBob.*

Gunvor Nelson: *You're one of the few who's seen that film in these last years!*

MacDonald: *It has a prologue and an epilogue and within, a series of carefully arranged sections, with, however, a lot of free-form specifics.*

Nelson: *Right*

MacDonald: *From the nineties perspective, there's a strange gender dimension to the film: certainly by 1991, there are both male artists and female artists in the homes you document, and yet the focus of the film is entirely on these five guys; everyone else and everything else is subservient to them.*

Nelson: *Well, we were aware of that. But it happened that those five men were working together, dreaming together, and had this unusual and interesting rapport. Documenting it was Dorothy's idea, and it was fine with me.*" (Gunvor Nelson interviewed by Scott MacDonald: *A Critical Cinema* 3)

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Center of Gravity: Gunvor Nelson & Dorothy Wiley, program 2—Short Films 1967–1973

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