

# For a Winter

## Remembering Jonathan Schwartz

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presented in association with Canyon Cinema Foundation

In his short life, filmmaker Jonathan Schwartz (1973-2018) created a striking body of 16mm and digital video works of deep lyrical sensitivity and a wisdom beyond his years, works which embody exploration and introspection, which caress and patiently observe the world, and which masterfully fuse color, light, gesture and sound into rich and concise, if always expanding, form. Blending travelogue, personal reverie, familial portraiture and literary allusion, Schwartz' subtle and open-ended films sing with observational grace while presenting intimate, at times troubled, portraits of friends and family in the context of an infinitely complex and conflicted global community. And with an uncanny kindness and a brooding sense of mortality, Schwartz' films contemplate love, aging, intimacy, generation, loss and hope. (Steve Polta)

*[The films of Jonathan Schwartz] both lacerate and console as we confront his unique cinematic expression of sorrow, disquiet and exultation.* (Irina Leimbacher, Punto de Vista Festival: Pamplona. 2019).

**for them ending** (2005) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

swallowed up in the sky, the sound sustained by echo, always fading.

the nature of a season, moving forward with growth or death or growth.

or I was wondering how to make New England fall colors linger so if you couldn't visit soon the yellow oranges and reds would still be waiting for you (Jonathan Schwartz)

...a poem made of imagery from a gardening volume, a book of flower prints, and the sound of a firework display. The images of the colored flowers, when added to the sound of pyrotechnics, become a graphic representation of exploding buoyancy. Like in a Lewis Klahr film, the images appear to collage a story-driven narration. There is motion created by the succession of cuts, and by the hand-handled camera movements so essential to Schwartz's style—allowing a non-aggressive, handcrafted, and detail-oriented approach to the world. Movement is more essential than any possible tale. The camera follows the shape of printed instructions, drawing verses in the air. The vivid texture and colors of these images transform the ink into trails of meaning, ways to translate inner subtleties into corporeal nature. (Monica Saviron)

**for a winter** (2007) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

for a winter without much snow, we can all see the evidence in the exhales.

or I was wondering if shadows pass faster and faster then, collectively, we might all see you by our sides. (Jonathan Schwartz)

**in a year with 13 deaths** (2008) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Light painting and nature imagery are captured in 13 shots of different points of luminescence, on the 13th anniversary of Schwartz's mother's passing, and as an homage to Rainer Werner Fassbinder's personal *In a Year with Thirteen Moons* (1978). [...] As the circular sound repeats itself, Schwartz's film also remains unended—he seems to know that these motifs are not resolved, they are not behind, but below consciousness, and he will not sign off with his name and year, as he does with the rest of his work. (Monica Saviron)

**happy birthday** (2010) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

...is a celebration of Schwartz's son's days since his birth. Its lyricism manages to address a feeling of nostalgia for the filmmaker's own childhood. Both darkness and light already confront the early steps of the infant, yet he advances entranced and unafraid—he is a ski jumper through a universe of legacies. Here, sounds of nature and of vinyl records, the inside and outside world, play one after another in a manner surprisingly close to harmony. Chosen by Rutkoff as the program's final piece, its flip side, athletic jumpers here cross the frame in reverse direction, following F. Scott Fitzgerald's most famous take on life: "so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." (Monica Saviron)

**between gold** (2011) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 11 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Of a dividing line, division of light, gestures and glances, a body of water, against two continents, amongst a time of reflection, in a space that is external, or internal... (Jonathan Schwartz)

**a preface to red** (2010) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 6 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Schwartz' work exists as a dialectic all its own, with a kind of wry fascination with things and a tinkerer's yearning to take them apart and put them back together again. *A Preface to Red* exhibits this attitude, while at the same time displaying a rather unexpected level of formal aggression from the usually sedate Schwartz. Beginning with the night-time tail-lights of a traffic jam, *Red* soon enters daylight with a series of bright forms in the titular hue. Many are composed against the hot color temperature of the Turkish sun, and before long, the Constructivist beauty of Schwartz's semi-ethnographic fragments (not dissimilar to Warren Sonbert in their brevity and aesthetic exactitude) is being overpowered by a violent, ear-damning sound design wavering somewhere between white noise, stadium cheering, and the cyclical whinny of an unseen factory machine. (According to Schwartz, it's a field recording from inside a tunnel near a harbor.) Schwartz is to be commended for having thechutzpah (so rare today) to generate pointed, rigorous discomfort, and as *Red* progresses and concludes, the purpose becomes clear. In the final shots, we see people filing onto a bus, and a close-up of a loudspeaker (perhaps indicating that this otherwise everyday occurrence has become "news"). Some lives, some places, exist under the squall of permanent pressure. And sometimes, the perspectives we try our best to bracket out just hang with us, like a ringing in our ears. (Michael Sicinski)

**animals moving to the sound of drums** (2013) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 8 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

That fall it was not intentional to have a Galway Kinnell book on the table near where the caterpillar in the doorway, feeding on our offerings, became the butterfly, feeding on honey water, staying in our house until we let it go. Or it was not known about the deer in Putney or that the baby birds in the raspberry bushes would cry to us in summer. A beloved, old friend once visited Vermont to do some work for Galway Kinnell and she described a stone table in the field where they ate meals in the afternoon—it sounded like a song and so I looked at the book and from *Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight* here is that line: "The still undanced cadence of vanishing." (Jonathan Schwartz)

**a set of miniatures: a certain worry, (an aging process), a kind of quiet** (2014) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 9 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

a kind of quiet situated amid the in between of ascending and descending. it seems hard to land and when this happens something else might disappear. an aging process located in the peonies blooming and in the early summer river and in the light that falls across playful bodies. a certain worry enveloped in the covering of the ground, illuminated around a face, light on something ferocious, touch upon something gentle. (Jonathan Schwartz)

**winter beyond winter** (2016) by Jonathan Schwartz; 16mm, color, sound, 11 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

...confirms his gift for lyrically transposing what's close at hand, in this case drawing a reverie of fatherhood from the short, sharp days of New England winter. The camera moves from laden trees to dazzled earth while on the soundtrack a boy reads from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. How strange it is to hear this text in the child's slightly bored voice, innocent of the narration's buried heartbreak. From here we follow an older man carrying skates and a boom mic into the woods. He turns a few elegant arcs around a small pond, the camera watching from the side before shaking off its melancholy and taking to the ice. One skater holds the image, the other the sound; the shot is their union. As Martin Buber wrote, "All real living is meeting." (Max Goldberg)