

Still Dreaming Remembering Phil Solomon

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presented in association with Canyon Cinema Foundation

Phil Solomon (January 3, 1954–April 20, 2019) was among the great avant-garde filmmakers of this era. Solomon's more than twenty films and digital pieces create an interior universe that has rarely, if ever, been surpassed in any medium for its intimacy, evocation of personal sensibility, expressive dream-like sounds and images, and for its sublime—and terrifying—sense of ambiguity between the recognizable world and its dissolution. Perhaps the last significant innovator of special effects on celluloid, Solomon magically transforms pre-existing images and sounds into dense landscapes that are sensual revelations. In Solomon's hands, home movie footage, early Hollywood personae and brief moments from classic *Twilight Zone* episodes become surfaces that contain hidden truths about the ephemerality of life, the mysteries of memory and the inevitability of loss. (Steve Anker)

Nocturne (1980/89) by Phil Solomon; 16mm, b&w, silent, 10 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Finding similarities in the pulses and shapes between my own experiments in night photography, lightning storms and night bombing in World War II, I constructed the war at home. (Phil Solomon)

A screaming comes across the sky.

— Thomas Pynchon: *Gravity's Rainbow*

Nocturne strongly evokes one of Brakhage's most exquisite films, *Fire of Waters* (1965). Its setting is a suburban neighborhood populated by kids at play and indistinct but ominous parental figures. A submerged narrative rehearses a type of young boy's nighttime game in which a flashlight is wielded in a darkened room to produce effects of aerial combat and bombardment. A sense of hostility tinged with terror seeps into commonplace movements.... Fantasy merges with nightmare, a war of dimly suppressed emotions rages beneath a veneer of household calm.... In *Nocturne*, found footage is worked so subtly into the fabric of threat that its apprehension comes as a shock ploughed from the unconscious. (Paul Arthur)

Remains To Be Seen (1989/1994) by Phil Solomon; Super-8mm/16mm, color, sound 17.5 minutes, , print from Canyon Cinema

Using chemical and optical treatments to coat the film with a limpid membrane of swimming crystals, coagulating into silver recall, then dissolving somewhere between the Operating Theatre, The Waterfall and the Great Plains. (Phil Solomon)

In the melancholic *Remains To Be Seen*, dedicated to the memory of Solomon's mother, the scratchy rhythm of a respirator intones menace. The film, optically crisscrossed with tiny eggshell cracks, often seems on the verge of shattering. The passage from life into death is chartered by fugitive images: pans of an operating room, an old home movie of a picnic, a bicyclist in vague outline against burnt orange and blue.... Solomon measures emotions with images that seem stolen from a family album of collective memory. (Manohla Dargis, *The Village Voice*)

The Exquisite Hour (1989/1994) by Phil Solomon; Super-8mm/16mm, color, sound, 14 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Partly a lullaby for the dying, partly a lament at the dusk of cinema. Based on the song by Reynaldo Hahn and Paul Verlaine. (Phil Solomon)

Mourning and melancholia. In *Remains To Be Seen* we hear the rhythmic scratch of a respirator and we see an elusive figure crossing a bridge. Death is bolder, more cruel in *The Exquisite Hour*. It's in the slacked mouth of an aged patient who's spied through a window, in a young girl's plaintive Hebrew song, in painfully vivid home movies from the '20s, in lions attacking. These films cut to the bone. (Manohla Dargis, *The Village Voice*)

[interval]

From: *The Twilight Psalms I-IV* (1999-2003) by Phil Solomon

Twilight Psalm I: "The Lateness of the Hour" (1999) by Phil Solomon; 16mm, color, silent, 10 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

A little Nachtmusik, a deep blue overture to the *Twilight Psalms* series. Breathing in the cool night airs, breathing out a children's song; then whispering a prayer for a night of easeful sleep. My blue attempt at a sequel to *Rose Hobart* [Joseph Cornell, 1936]. (Phil Solomon)

Restored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood CA.

Twilight Psalm II: "Walking Distance" (1999) by Phil Solomon; 16mm, color, sound, 23 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Inspired by Kiefer and Ryder, dedicated to Stan Brakhage.

Imagining one of those rusted medieval film cans having survived centuries, a long lost Biograph/Star, a Griffith/Méliès co-production, a two-reeler left to us from, say, the Bronze Age, a time when images were smelted and boiled rather than merely taken, when they poured down like silver, not be to fixed and washed, mind you, but free to reform and coagulate into unstable, temporary molds, mere holding patterns of faces, places, and things, shape-shifting according to whim, need, the uncanny or the inevitable... *Walking Distance* is a simple Golden Book tale of horizontals and verticals, a cinema of ether and ore... (Phil Solomon)

Mr. Solomon's supremely lyrical *Psalm* imagines a movie extracted from a rusted medieval film can left over from the Bronze Age. What unfolds on the screen suggests an ancient abstract painting encrusted with rust and sand behind which human faces half-form and disappear, suggesting eons of time and civilizations rising and falling. As the film's hues metamorphose in tandem with a shifting abstract soundtrack, *Psalm* evokes not only rust and sand but fire, wind and oceans as well, a never-ending cycle of creation and destruction. (Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*)

[interval]

From: *In Memoriam (Mark LaPore, 1952-2005), I-III* by Phil Solomon

All images for *In Memoriam* were captured from the video game *Grand Theft Auto*.

*where Mark and I,
boys of summer,
were allowed to roam and wander
without mission
without murder
“cheating” our way through the streets of polygonal horrors,
finding (to our continuing astonishment)
amusement,
poetry,
and
darkness,
just over there
at the edge of town...*

—Phil Solomon

***Rehearsals for Retirement* (2007) by Phil Solomon, digital video, color, sound, 12 minutes**

In the first work of the acclaimed trilogy *In Memoriam: Mark LaPore*, Solomon transforms atmospheric landscapes generated in *Grand Theft Auto* game-play, into brooding depopulated scenes haunted by figures occasionally glimpsed through shimmering light and seeming endless torrential rain.

*The days grow longer for smaller prizes
I feel a stranger to all surprises
You can have them I don't want them
I wear a different kind of garment
In my rehearsals for retirement*

*The lights are cold again they dance below me
I turn to old friends they do not know me
All but the beggar he remembers
I put a penny down for payment
In my rehearsals for retirement*

*Had I known the end would end in laughter
I tell my daughter it doesn't matter...*

—Phil Ochs, *Rehearsals for Retirement*

www.philsolomon.com

www.canyoncinema.com
www.sfcinematheque.org