

Second Atlantic Film & Video Festival



CONGRATULATIONS!
to the winners of
the second Atlantic Film
and Video Festival
Thanks to all participants,
volunteers and suppliers

FÉLICITATIONS!
aux gagnants du deuxième
Festival de film et de vidéo
de l'Atlantique
Merci à tous les participants,
les volontaires et les fournisseurs

AWARDS

BEST FILM: *Miller Brittain* (Kent Martin, Charlottetown)
BEST DIRECTION: Kent Martin for *Miller Brittain*
BEST OVERALL ENTRY: *Miller Brittain*
BEST SOUND: *Transitions* (Barbara Sternberg, Sackville, N.B.)
BEST EDITING (VIDEO): *In the Name of Jesus* (CBC-Newfoundland)
BEST EDITING (FILM): *Sarah Jackson* (Ramona Macdonald, Halifax)
BEST SCRIPT (VIDEO): *Star Reporter* (Cordell Wynne, Halifax)
BEST SCRIPT (FILM): *Transitions* (Barbara Sternberg)
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY IN FILM OR VIDEO: *River of Light* (Walter Delorey, Cape Breton)
BEST CHILDREN'S ANIMATION: *The Magic Carpet* (Torquil Colbo, St. John's)
MOST PROMISING FILM OR VIDEO MAKER: Prize shared by Peter Wood, James Casey, Brian Saunders, Chris White and Cathi Beattie, for *The Grave Quakes*, produced for Cable 5, Moncton
BEST INDEPENDENT VIDEO PRODUCTION: *Star Reporter* (Cordell Wynne)
BEST VIDEO PRODUCTION: *Christopher Pratt - His Art and his Poetry* (Charlotte O'Dea, Avalon Cable, St. John's)

CERTIFICATES

BEST DOCUMENTARY FILM: *Miller Brittain* (Kent Martin)
BEST EDUCATIONAL FILM: *Patterning* (Marie Wadden, CBC-Newfoundland)
BEST EXPERIMENTAL FILM: *Transitions* (Barbara Sternberg)
BEST DOCUMENTARY/NEWS JOURNALISM (VIDEO): *In the Name of Jesus* (CBC - Newfoundland)
BEST EXPERIMENTAL VIDEO: *The Grave Quakes* (Brian Saunders, Peter Wood, James Casey, Chris White, Cathi Beattie, produced for Cable 5, Moncton)
BEST VARIETY/ENTERTAINMENT: *Dicky Goes to School* (Wayne Guzwell, CBC - Newfoundland)

HONORABLE MENTIONS

FOR SOUND EDITING: *River of Light* (Walter Delorey, Cape Breton)
FOR MOST PROMISING FILMMAKERS: Charles MacLellan and Eric Bagnell, for *Peter Paul*
FOR USE OF MUSIC: *Miller Brittain* (Kent Martin)
FOR VIDEO: *Où c'est que je m'en va asteur* (Betty Arseneault, Nicole Lejeune, Michelle Paulin for *Femmes en focus*, Bathurst)
FOR VIDEO: *Disconnection* (Michael Coyle, produced by Video Theatre, Halifax)

SPECIAL JURY AWARD FOR WIT: *Rock and Girl* (Arthur Makosinski, Fredericton)

COMMERCIALS

BEST COMMERCIAL: Trayton Adair Productions
HONORABLE MENTIONS: Caledon Advertising
Bruce Law and Associates, Halifax

tell a packed house of Atlantic filmmakers what the future held for them from the perspective of these various organizations but, as the best-laid plans will, this one went astray. Right from the moderator's opening remarks the panel was sabotaged by Tom Burger, who was sitting as representative from the Fish or Cut Bait Collective. He had specific grievances against the CBC and NFB who had apparently refused to support his collective in its efforts to produce films about the working man. Whenever one of their agents spoke, he denounced them for "the fascization (sic) of art." And he had general grievances against the other filmmakers, whom he accused of being "security cleared." His intent seemed to be to swing the discussion away from the future of the film industry in Atlantic Canada. He was partly successful. Few officials were able to withstand his heckling and the topic withered on the vine. By the time vigilantes in the audience had convinced Burger that it was in his best of interests to shut up for a while, it was too late to proceed with a nice, orderly chat. Their blood lust aroused by the fray, the audience began to attack the panel for the various, perceived failings of its various institu-

tions. Half of the independents wanted to know where was the CBC (or NFB, or pay-TV) when you needed it. They felt they weren't getting enough official support. The other half of the independents were disdainful of official support. They said they wouldn't take a grant if you paid them. It was all very eloquent but left the guests with little to say in response, so they didn't respond. The only concrete, helpful suggestions that emerged were from the pay-TV people, who promised boom times were a-coming for the Canadian independent filmmaker. They quoted CRTC regulations which state that 45 per cent of gross subscribers' revenues must be spent of Canadian production. It's a crapshoot, they said, but if pay-TV takes off, then so will the independents. Findlay MacDonald, head of the regional Star Channel, went so far as to say that the future of pay-TV was dependent on the future of the independent producer. "We have more money now than has ever been spent," he promised.

The forum, and the festival, ended shortly thereafter. Together they had established the identity of the Atlantic film industry.

It is a fighter. And it's hungry. ●

Coming together

The evening the awards were presented, a hundred people sat down for dinner together and realized that they constituted an Atlantic film industry. Never before had the filmmakers from the four Atlantic provinces come together to celebrate their filmmaking and to measure their growth and strength.

The progress since the 1976 Atlantic Film Week - the last occasion I had of screening a number of Atlantic films - is remarkable. Then, it looked as if the National Film Board regional office in Halifax would come to dominate filmmaking in the region. The film co-operatives were willing but their films were weak, and only three independent production companies were at work. In Newfoundland, Memorial University had cornered the market on educational films and videos dealing with social intervention.

Judging from the recent output, it is clear that the National Film Board's regionalization strategy has worked well in Atlantic Canada. Although the best over-all entry and best film, *Miller Brittain*, was an NFB production, the number of fine independent productions was important. The Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op and the New Brunswick Filmmakers Co-operative both entered accomplished films (*Transitions* and *Peter Paul*, respectively) and private production companies seemed to flourish, making sponsored films, documentaries and working in conjunction with the CBC/Radio-Canada and the NFB. Even rugged independents like Walter Delorey and Neal Livingston found it possible to live at the end of the world on Cape Breton Island and produce personal films of high technical caliber. But more on the films a bit later.

What was not often said during the festival, but which bears comment in this day of policy change, is that the NFB has helped make an industry possible without dominating it. The NFB has trained and encouraged talent, looking

the other way as independents come in the night to use editing tables and photocopyers. It has given generously of its experience, and has sent the occasional filmmaker to Montreal to learn a skill or complete a film. While taking credit for those films it has produced from day one, it has assisted numerous other films over which the independent filmmaker maintained control.

The Board, with its production offices in Halifax (English) and Moncton (French) and its outpost in Charlottetown is an easy target, and the brunt of several criticisms. Indeed, many of its own productions lack imagination and even focus. But when its insertion in a community causes the community to become alive with activity, and when that activity comes of age, then the National Film Board is most certainly fulfilling a vital function, and one which truly corresponds to its original mandate of fostering films by Canadians, for Canadians.

Some of the best films - including Kent Martin's *Miller Brittain* which won five awards - were films about artists. Martin had already shown considerable feeling for documentary form with *Moses Coady* in 1976, and his mastery has grown. Working from a script written by NFB regional head Barry Cowling, the film reconstructs the life and death of the Saint John, N.B. painter whose art was immense, difficult and often tortured. The artful script, the use of Brittain's paintings and the strong marriage of the camerawork and editing made the film an easy winner in the film category. A more pedestrian work, *Christopher Pratt - His Art and his Poetry*, was made by Charlotte O'Dea and produced by Avalon Cable in St. John's, winning best video production.

From Halifax, Doomsday Studios produced *Sarah Jackson* by Ramona Macdonald. In the film, artist Jackson explains her interest in working with new

FESTIVALS

materials, and experimenting, and doesn't mind if things don't turn out as expected: a very different sort of artist from the moody, obsessive Miller Britain. The film's strength is its insistence on the work of the artist rather than on her person, and the virtue of the film is that, at ten minutes, it runs just as long as it should. MacDonald picked up the editing award for *Sarah Jackson*.

Finally, the CBC produced *Lindée Climo*, the portrait of a young painter living on Prince Edward Island. Once a bona fide sheep breeder, Climo covers canvases, doors and government walls with fantastic, lyric animals, probing her own feeling for nature and producing popular art of the finest sort. Had filmmaker Janet P. Smith been more selective in her use of interview material, in which Climo often repeats herself, the film would have been better.

This "soft" use of documentary seemed typical. There was little realization that documentary films can also serve as an arm with which to drive home a point of view, creating controversy and arousing people. Few films dealt with social criticism. *This Business of Living*, ostensibly about the circumstances of a small fishing family, turned into a dialogue between the filmmaker and the fisherman and was singularly uninformative about its subject. *Ocean Meets the Sky* documented the Long Island to Bermuda race of the big yachts but had no particular point of view; one wonders whether it had been sponsored by the race officials, or simply filmed as entertainment. It could have worked as brilliant satire; in one scene the captains, crews and wives from Long Island gather in a Bermuda garden party to celebrate the arrival of their million-dollar yachts... But the satirical opportunity was missed, and the film will be easily forgotten. An NFB production, *Gulf Stream*, had similar problems. Unclearly focused, mixing dull animated sequences with some of the most riveting camera work seen at the festival, the documentary failed to address its subject clearly.

Diary for a Place in Time, also produced by the NFB, was an excursion by John Brett to the Queen Charlotte Islands in B.C. to film the Haida totems and tell

their story. The tale had already been told by B.C. filmmakers, and Brett's film, once the Board had shown off its rough edges, fell too easily into a standard NFB mold. Gone was the refreshing inquisitiveness of his *Two Brothers*, a rough but more interesting film.

In an attempt to promote discussion, *Offshore Oil: Are We Ready?* addressed the problems of offshore drilling in the North Sea, and measured the impact of the activity on communities in Norway and Scotland. Experts gave their opinions, and situations similar to those in the Atlantic provinces were explored. Co-produced by the NFB and Memorial University, the film was adequate but not as provocative as one might have wished. The use of the North Sea situation seemed to distance the discussion, and the lack of any inclusion of material from the Atlantic region was a remarkable omission.

The one documentary which dealt brilliantly with its subject - and which did indeed provoke and disturb - was Phil Comeau's *J'avions 375 ans*. Comeau used the anniversary (and the re-enactment) of the arrival of the French on the shores of what is now Nova Scotia to deal with the situation of the Acadians today, who make up 10% of the province. The documentary was well-controlled, and the interviews - beautifully edited - were intercut with contemporary Acadian music whose rock'n'roll rhythms alone are vigorous enough to sustain a people. The film rigorously avoided any use of Acadian folklore to present an unexpectedly modern view of Acadians, and their aspirations. The lack of attention given the film during the festival may have been more a function of the Acadian situation than a reflection of the quality of the film. The film stands as yet another justification of the NFB's Moncton production office.

Similarly, the video production *Où c'est que j'm'en va asteur* made by Femmes en Focus of Bathurst, N.B., presented an aggressive and provocative use of documentary, otherwise missing in the general selection. It won a special mention for its producers.

It was a genuine pleasure to view *Transitions*, an experimental film made by Barbara Sternberg at the Atlan-

tic Co-op. The film ran away with awards for Best Script, Best Sound, Best experimental Film and made Sternberg one of the most promising filmmakers on hand. This multi-layer film was intelligently conceived, and painstakingly executed. Sternberg describes it as a "film about transitions: the times and spaces in between, between asleep and awake; between here and there; between being and non-being. Transitory motion, disconnectedness, repetitions, layers of image and sound over a central image of a woman in bed..." That's a large order, and to realize it successfully is a major coup.

Transitions is an AFCCOOP film, made by a filmmaker who cut her teeth on video and Super 8. *Peter Paul* is a first film, made out of the New Brunswick Filmmakers Co-operative with assistance from the NFB, produced, written and directed by Charles MacLellan. A Maliseet Indian remembers the time when his tribe lived more easily, before the Whites did away with their way of life. Using archival photos, intercut with Peter Paul cutting bark in the forest for a birch-bark canoe, the film is perfectly balanced and tells a modest story of enormous proportions. It is a considerable achievement for MacLellan. These films and others indicate that the co-ops are producing finished films with high technical standards. Although the rough edges are still obvious on other co-op films, they gain in originality what they may lose in terms of production values. *You Laugh Like a Duck*, a co-production between AFCCOOP and the Winnipeg Film Group, assisted by both the Atlantic and Prairie offices of the NFB, had no real structure beyond a series of short interviews with kids strung end to end, but some of the material was exceedingly fresh and entertaining. Given more time and continued support, the co-ops should be able to harness the imagination evident among many of the young filmmakers.

There is less to be said for the commercial houses working in the Atlantic region. They were seriously hindered by the lack of a "sponsored film" category in the festival. Promotional films like *Taste of History*, made for Corby Distilleries, could hardly be judged as a documentary, though it filled the requirements of a sponsored film adequately. As for the military recruiting films like *Navy* and *A Young Man's Challenge*, they were exceedingly bad. Perhaps the military should remove their advisors from the production of such films, and let the filmmakers have a free hand.

A recurrent problem with many of the films was length; they were simply allowed to go on too long, reducing an initial effectiveness. *River of Light* by Walter Delorey was a case in point. A nature film with fantastic camera work and imaginative sound, the 28-minute film would have run better at half the length. Similarly, *La poutine râpée*, which should have been a short, funny look at the making of potato dumplings in Moncton, turned into a seemingly endless hour-long documentary. While Delorey worked on his own and put seven years into the making of *River of Light*, and should perhaps be indulged, it is more difficult to forgive Radio-Canada which produced *Poutine* and should have better guided the film's director.

Another severe problem was drama. Only two films were entered in the dramatic category, *Jenny Koo Koo* by Ken Stetson and *South Pacific 1942* by



• Spaces between being and non-being in Barbara Sternberg's *Transitions*

Paul Donovan. The jury chose to award neither, though it seemed clear that Donovan had control of his material while Stetson's film should not have got into production without several more rewrites. Interestingly, many Atlantic filmmakers seem a bit squeamish about Donovan's films; as if it were not alright to make entertaining feature films there. Seen in the light of recent production in Montreal and Toronto, Paul Donovan's first two features, *South Pacific* and *Siege*, place him among the more talented and original filmmakers working in Canada. *Siege* should make him one of the more successful filmmakers as well. One can only hope that he stays put in Halifax and continues to work on projects of his own. His kind of originality in features is a hopeful sign, and other Atlantic filmmakers should take heart.

If the Atlantic film community was able to come together in October, most of the thanks must go to Mike Riggio who, last year, realized that the region was ripe for its own festival and organized the Atlantic Film and Video Festival for the first time. It was a gamble, and oftentimes a thankless job, taking on the responsibility of organizing a festival in a region where distances are great and communities are isolated. The festival this year, directed by Andrea Shaw and assisted by Harold Rennie and Shelagh MacKenzie of the National Film Board, proved that Riggio had been right. Where little existed six years ago, a community has come alive, delivering some excellent productions and promising still more.

Connie Tadros •

• Growing mastery: Kent Martin walked away with five awards

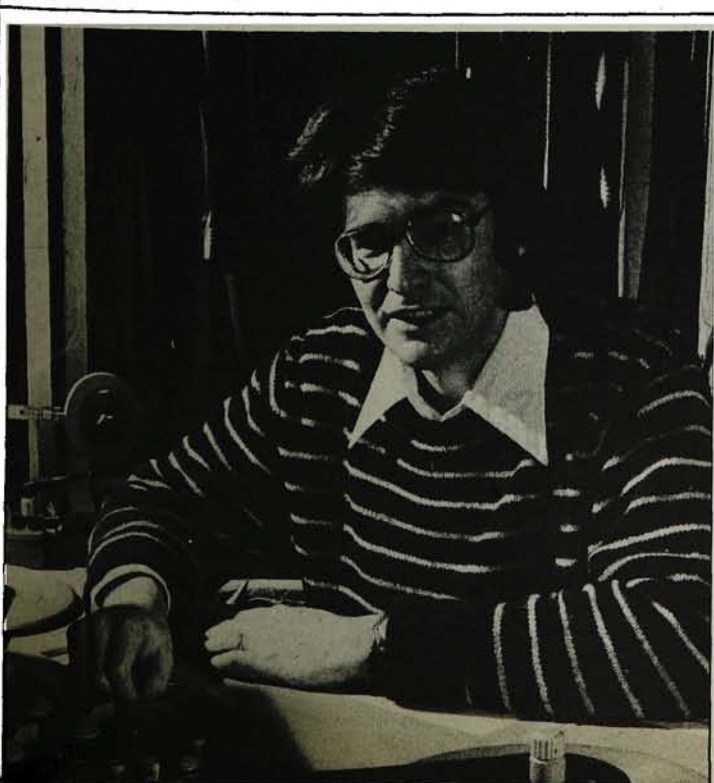


Photo: Camera Art