

the career of

Norman McLaren



I. Introduction

A study of the history of film in Canada cannot over-emphasize the remarkable genius of Norman McLaren. His animation films have brought both delight and wonder to thousands of people here in Canada and in other countries around the globe. Len Lye, the Australian film pioneer who first painted directly on film, once commented,

"When a film by Norman hits me, I stay hit. Sometimes, he simply rocks my kinetic heart, other times he spins it. Once his work sunk me — I'll tell you how: there I was, looking, when suddenly there came this meat-cleaver of a film effect. It split me clean down the middle of my spine. One side fell to the right and the other to the left — then, wham, I slapped together again. I can still feel the effect; just, wham! It was one of the most electrifying feelings I've ever got out of him. So I'm for Norman McLaren. I don't think we can appreciate him enough."¹

As a discussion on McLaren's films and the various techniques involved would require a detailed description to be adequately covered as well as a very lengthy personal interview with the animator himself in order to do justice to him and his work, this paper will not focus on this aspect. Rather, the career of Norman McLaren will be presented, with an insight as to his personal motivations and the influences on his work; a detailed filmography follows at the end of the paper.

¹From "Norman McLaren", *Journées Internationales du Cinéma d'Animation, Cinématèque Canadienne, Montréal (1965)*.

II. The Career of Norman McLaren

Norman McLaren was born on April 11, 1914 in Stirling, Scotland, near the birthplace of John Grierson. His father's family were house painters and interior decorators; his mother's, farmers. From about the age of 9 he went to movies regularly and saw such animated films as "Felix the Cat", "Mickey Mouse", and Disney's "Silly Symphonies", all of which impressed him very much. He took no serious interest in them until 16 or so, when he saw his first Russian films, by Pudovkin and Eisenstein; suddenly he became very excited about film as a medium because of his interest as a painter in what made paintings move, i.e. how motion was manipulated in film, especially in mobile abstractions.

As a student at the Glasgow School of Art from 1932 to 1936, he specialized in interior design. There he became interested in motion pictures, arranged for showings of experimental films for his fellow students, and helped form a production group. Because he did not find painting and drawing satisfactory due to the lack of motion and movement in them, McLaren turned to film. From a downtown theatre, he begged a worn-out 35mm. print of a commercial film and painstakingly scrubbed off its fading images. He was left with about 300 feet of clear film on which, using only a brush and colored inks, he painted an abstraction of colors. He then projected this first effort at film to see what kind of motion resulted. Unfortunately the School only had a very old 35mm. portable projector which chewed up the film; after about three screenings the film was completely ruined.

What stimulated and encouraged McLaren? "I had started dreaming of pictures that sort of have movements in them, moving forms and so on. I listened to music a lot of the time, and forms suggested themselves in motion to me, just naturally, while listening to the music."² About a year after his first film, McLaren saw a short by Oscar Fischinger, an early German film-maker who made a whole series of abstract films set to music, mostly nineteenth century semi-classical music. "This particular film I saw was set to Brahms's Hungarian Dance No. 6 . . . and it was entirely abstract, but very fluid abstraction . . . It was very fluid forms — the music is quite fast and this was for me the realization of a dream. I dreamt of forms, and here was someone else dreaming of different forms

²As told to Don McWilliams, in an interview for "The McGill Reporter", Volume 1, Number 35, April 28, 1969.

to music, but he actually had turned it into a movie. I was greatly influenced by that film."³ In late 1935, McLaren discovered Len Lye's "Colour Box" and realized that not only was someone else using the same technique as he (that of painting directly onto blank film) but was doing it better. Thus, McLaren continued his exploration of abstract film at the School even more keenly.

Meanwhile, McLaren's anti-war sentiments had grown quite strong: he made a 15 minute silent film called "Hell Unlimited". He then went to Spain as a cameraman for "The Defence of Madrid", a film on the Spanish Civil War; as soon as it was shot, it was brought back to England, edited, and then shown at special screenings where funds for international aid were collected.

When John Grierson, head of the British General Post Office Film Unit (or just the GPO), was serving as judge of amateur films, he noticed McLaren's talent and invited him in late 1936 to join the GPO in London. McLaren received his film training at the GPO under Alberto Cavalcanti and Evelyn Cherry (then Evelyn Spice); directed four films there; and also began experiments with synthetic sound. For a short time in 1939, McLaren left the GPO to join Film Center, a London company making documentary films for private industry, where he made one film, on gas cookery.

Later in 1939 the war broke out and McLaren moved to New York. He supported himself by painting pictures and by directing a short film for NBC. Then, hearing the Guggenheim Museum of Non-Objective Art might be interested in buying some abstract films, he went to work with pen and paintbrush. Lacking sound equipment, McLaren composed synthetic, hand-drawn soundtracks.* Several independent films followed, including one in collaboration with Mary Ellen Bute. In New York he continued experiments with synthetic sound, developing a technique which produced a chromatic scale over a five-octave range.

In 1941, John Grierson, who had just become the head of the new NFB, again invited McLaren to join him. With Canada at war, McLaren's first films were fresh innovations of tediously worked over home-front themes: the importance of savings and war bonds, the dangers of idle gossip. Even during this period of forced pro-war sentiments, he managed to continue his experiments with cameraless animation. In 1944 he was made general supervisor of the "Chants Populaires" series, a group of short films to illustrate several popular French-Canadian folksongs; he made three of these films using novel techniques. After the war had finished, McLaren was able to return to his true interest, that of creating mobile abstract cameraless films.

For a brief period in 1949, McLaren was sent by UNESCO to China at the tail-end of the civil war. There his task was to determine the usefulness of films, filmstrips, and posters to teach health rules to people who could not read or write. During his stay in China, he also trained a small group of Chinese artists in animation techniques. McLaren had been in China only two months when the communists overran the village where he was living. Eight months later, when his work was completed, a friend helped him to travel to Peking and arrange for his passage home. Since McLaren's return, UNESCO has enlisted the services of other NFB artists, who had their animation apprenticeship under him to work in visual education projects in various parts of the world.

In 1950-1 at the NFB, McLaren made two experimental 3-D animation films at the request of Raymond Spottiswoode for the Festival of Britain. The two stereoscopic films were done both with a motion-picture animation camera and with some sequences painted directly on film; two-dimensional

³*Ibid.*

*This technique was picked up from early Russian and German experimenters and developed by McLaren. The inspiration to do this arose from economic grounds as much as from technical curiosity.



A Little Phantasy

drawings on paper and on film were made to appear three-dimensional. A key factor in creating these optical illusions was the ability of the animation camera and the optical printer to produce double exposures with extreme accuracy. These films were shown at the festival and also at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1952.

McLaren viewed stereoscopic films as going one step further — an added sensory element to the film form, on about the same level of color. Not only could his film-paintings have those dimensions of duration and movement which are missing from static art, but also they could move through space, which McLaren found extremely kinetic. Lack of public interest in 3-D made it necessary for him to stop exploring this aspect of motion.

For the past few years, McLaren had become increasingly interested in surrealism, “the believing you should let your subconscious control what you do as much as possible.”⁴ In the making of “Phantasy” from 1948-1952, a pastel film, “Some of the things, images and movements that turned out sort of surprised me, I don’t know what they meant in terms of the pictures as a whole, or in terms of their absolute meaning. So I can’t interpret it. It’s subconscious. It’s quite possible for people to take many different meanings. I think that’s the value of surrealist art . . . It’s rich with subconscious connotations and association.”⁵ Many viewers of “Phantasy” find some connection with the story of the world or the creation in the Bible.

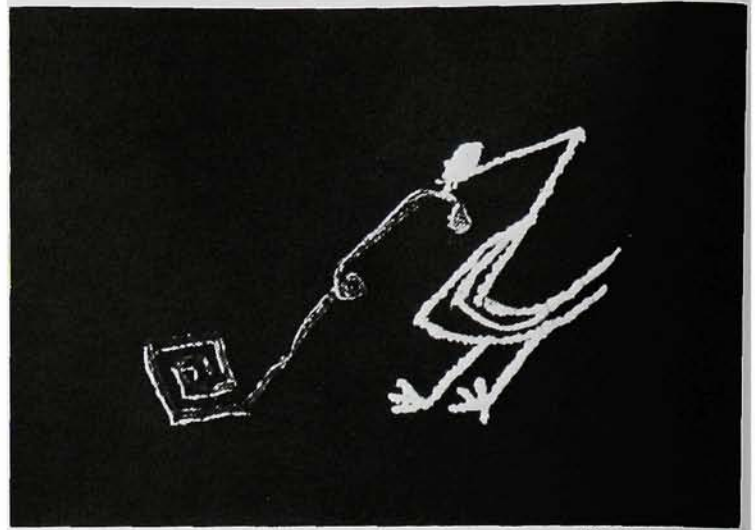
Out of the emotional strain and his sense of personal involvement in the tragic conflict of men during his stay in China as well as his strong anti-war sentiments came “Neighbours” in 1952, which has been hailed as the most eloquent plea for peace ever filmed. “Neighbours”, as well as being a strong statement, still remained an exploration of movement through the technique of “pixillation”*, the method of giving humans and objects the freedom of animation. The sound track was created synthetically, by photographing cards on which were hand-drawn images of sound increments — a technique which McLaren himself had developed.

In 1953, UNESCO again borrowed McLaren for the training of film workers for fundamental education projects in India. He spent a year there giving instruction in the making of audio-visual materials for use in health education. Since that visit, there was a marked change in the structure of most of his films; namely, to begin with a simple theme and to develop it in increasing complexity and tempo, exactly in the manner of Indian classical music. “I found myself creating that kind of structure without consciously being aware. It was only

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

*A term used slightly at first by McLaren himself to describe this particular method of animation.



Blinkity Blank

after I had done it a number of times that I realized that actually the same structures were behind the usual piece of Indian classical music. I found it very satisfying. But it wasn’t a conscious attempt to take something Indian and do the same thing.”⁶

Upon his return to Canada one year later, McLaren earnestly set forth on developing various techniques he had already experimented with or previously thought about. Such films as “Blinkity Blank” (1954) and “A Chairy Tale” (1957) exemplify the beginning of several trends in his work. These may be described in two general ways: first, production of animation of images and/or animation of sounds (synthetic sounds) without the use of a camera, i.e. cameraless animation and second, production of films using the conventional camera to animate paintings in unusual ways, e.g. the pastel method, to animate real objects and human beings, to produce synthetic sound, or to achieve a combination of these in one film. Over the past twenty years virtually all of his works have been masterpieces and have won him several awards.

His recent film “Pas de Deux” (1967) deserves special mention. Generally thought of as his most beautiful film, it is a ballet danced to the rather haunting music of a Panpipe and photographed in starkest black and white. By printing the negative in multiple images with each frame reproduced up to eleven times, McLaren captured movement just past and movement yet to come in a most aesthetically-pleasing flow of shimmering motion. This chef d’oeuvre is an extraordinary success on three levels — aesthetic, sensual, and intellectual; already it has won about two dozen awards at various film festivals around the world.

For the past few years, McLaren has had to lead a rather quiet life due to a minor heart ailment. His enthusiasm for animation film production has not dampened, however, as he is still hard at work at his drawing board at the NFB. As innovation is still vital to his outlook on film technique, he recently has been experimenting with a computer graphic system by drawing images directly into the computer by the use of a light pen. Canada and the world can still look forward eagerly to more masterpieces from this incredible genius of animation film.

In conclusion are three quotes by Norman McLaren about his work at the National Film Board.

“To sum up, the conception and execution of most of my work for the NFB has probably depended on four things:

- 1) Attempting to keep at a minimum the technical mechanism standing between my conception and the finished work.
- 2) Handling personally the mechanisms that do remain; in as intimate a way as a painter his painting, or a violinist his violin.
- 3) Making the very limitations of these mechanisms, when brought in touch with the theme, the growing point for visual ideas.

⁶Ibid.



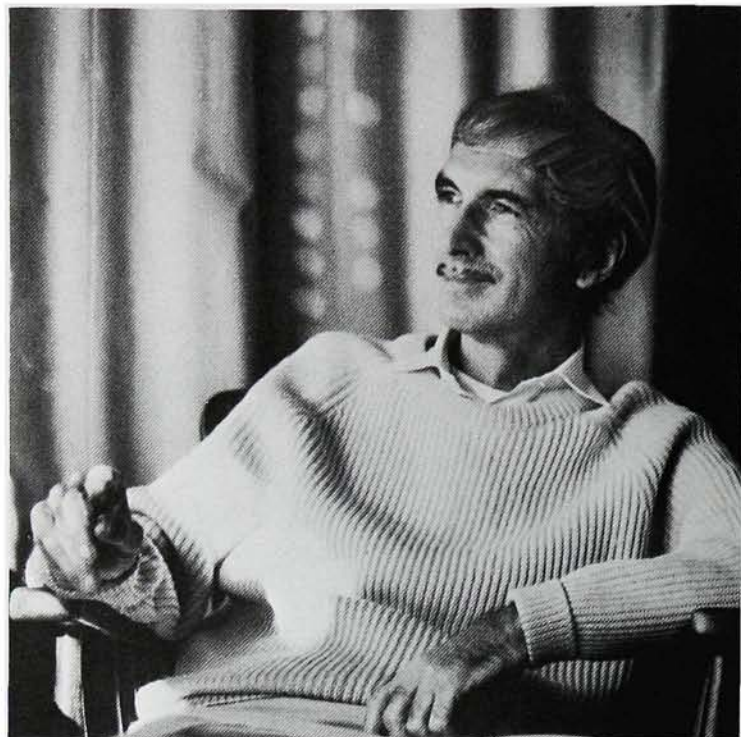
Ballet Adagio



A Chairy Tale



Shooting A Chairy Tale



Norman McLaren

4) Making sure of a chance for improvising at the moment of shooting."⁷

He described this concept in another way by writing about his films:

"... their making is a one-man operation from start to finish. I have tried to preserve in my relationship to the film, the same closeness and intimacy that exists between a painter and his canvas. This is rather difficult, for in one case only a stick of wood with a tuft of camel hair intervenes between the maker and the finished result, and in the other, an elaborate series of optical, chemical and mechanical processes, which become a perfect breeding ground for lack of intimacy, frustrations, ill feeling and hostility between the artist and his finished work.

And so my militant philosophy is this: to make with a brush on canvas is a simple and direct delight – to make with a movie should be the same."⁸

Finally, a statement about his colleagues:

"Sometimes I get the impression from articles people write about me that I make my films almost single-handed. Now, this is a quite erroneous impression. Usually it's with one or two people. We form a small team. Most often it's been with Evelyn Lambart, but almost as frequently with Grant Monro. On the music side it's with Maurice Blackburn. So there's usually three people on the team."⁹

⁷From "Animated Films", *Documentary News*, May 1948

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹As told to Don McWilliams, in an interview for "The McGill Reporter"

III. Conclusion

Not much more can be said about Norman McLaren that will not sound like flattery. In final conclusion of this paper on his career are several quotes by his fellow workers in the industry, who often have been the most critical observers of his films.

John Grierson –

"I enjoy the honor of having given Norman McLaren his first film job, but he was already a brilliant amateur. I could not have missed him anyway: he was from my own home town in Scotland. His experimental film unit first at the GPO, then at the NFB has been an inspiration to everyone around him, a constant reminder of what a dedicated talent can mean to the cinema. If there is such a thing as pure movie, be sure that

McLaren has been one of its greatest exponents."¹⁰

Arthur Lipsett –

"There is now a widespread awareness that the artist today must help to remove the fears associated with our new technologies, that he must help to humanize them.

"It seems to me that Norman's response in relation to this has always been true, that his responsibility as an artist has been implicit in his total work. I believe that his films, in this respect, will never lose their significance."¹¹

Claude Jutra –

"McLaren is potential perfection. He is one of the few artists I know who develops outside of any compromise, and whose growth has been aimed solely towards an absolute. The substance of his work is infinite and infinitely remote, but it is not inaccessible. A single step towards the infinite, or better still the impossible, is preferable to the dazzling fulfilment of a preconceived compromise... They (McLaren's films) will erupt with brilliant flashes, as in "Blinkity Blank", and illuminate, for a fraction of a second, a landscape too vast for the eye to grasp in its totality. What we DO see sears the retina and brands itself on the memory. It is vision of the unknown, denied us until then. An original, almost blinding vision.

"McLaren is an omniscient, at the crossroads of art, science, technique and feeling. His work is total creation."¹²

George Dunning –

"Norman McLaren is a phenomenon almost as surprising and unique as the phenomenon of animated film itself. His name is synonymous with experimental animation to all students of the medium who have followed its development for the past twenty-five years and who have looked even further back. The medium is still in an infant stage because nearly everyone except McLaren who has worked in it has treated the medium from a creative graphic point of view and not as part of cinema, that is MOVING pictures. He is a great teacher, constantly alive to exploit the most unlikely leads to a new discovery and has awakened both artists and audiences to the medium."¹³

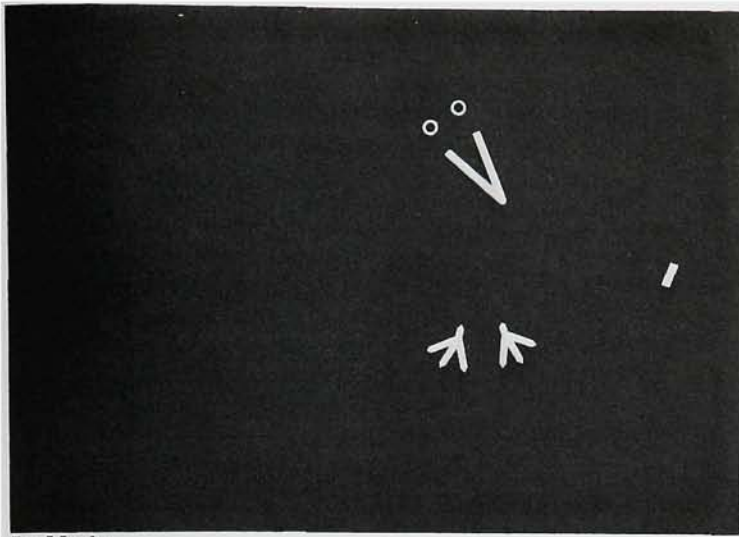
Enough said!!

¹⁰From "Norman McLaren", *Journées Internationales du Cinéma d'Animation, Cinématèque Canadienne, Montréal, 1965.*

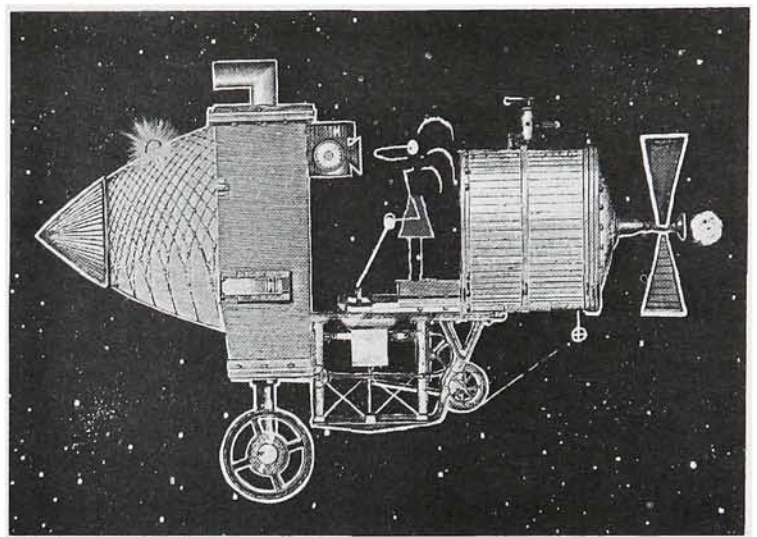
¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

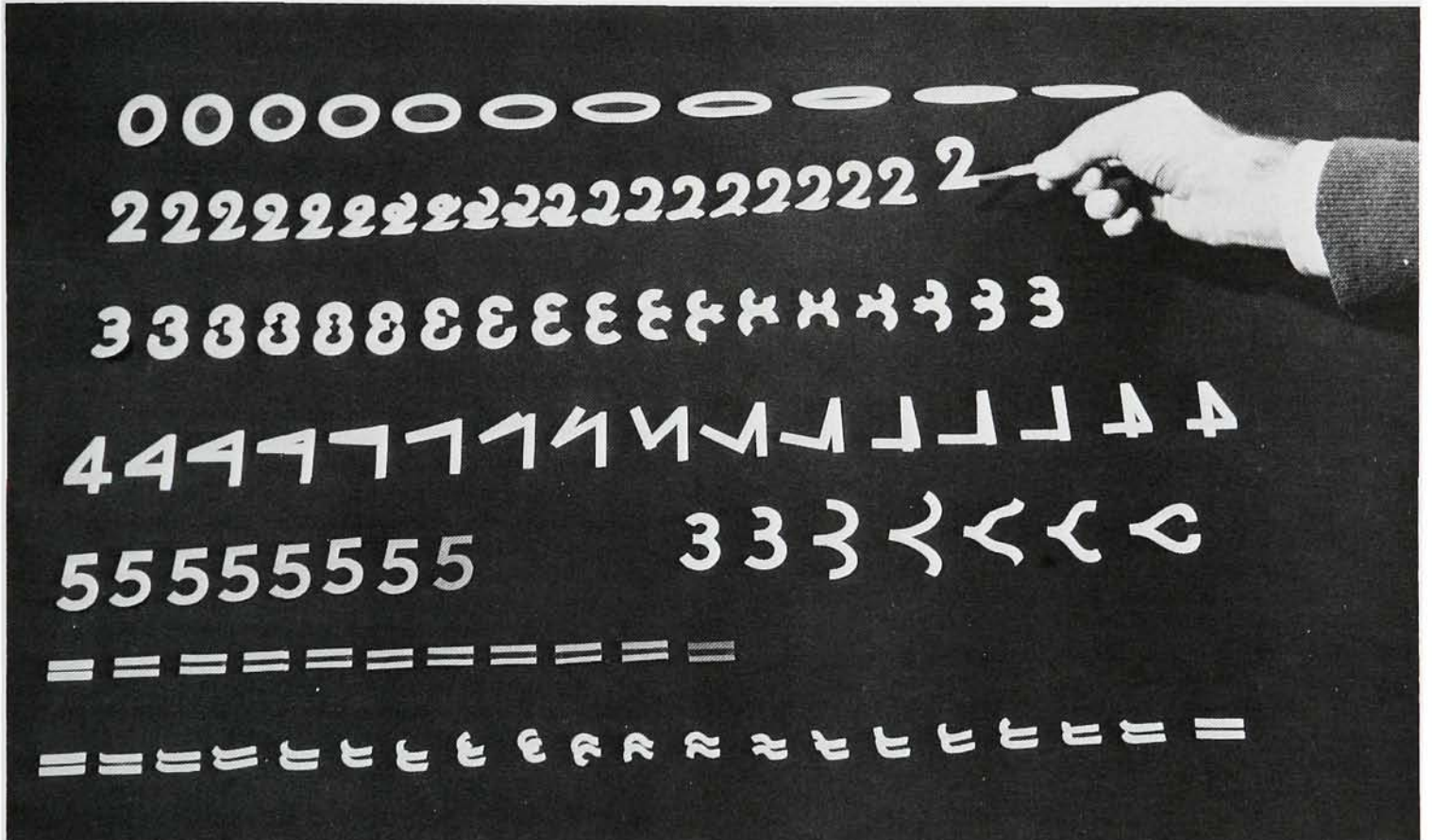
¹³*Ibid.*



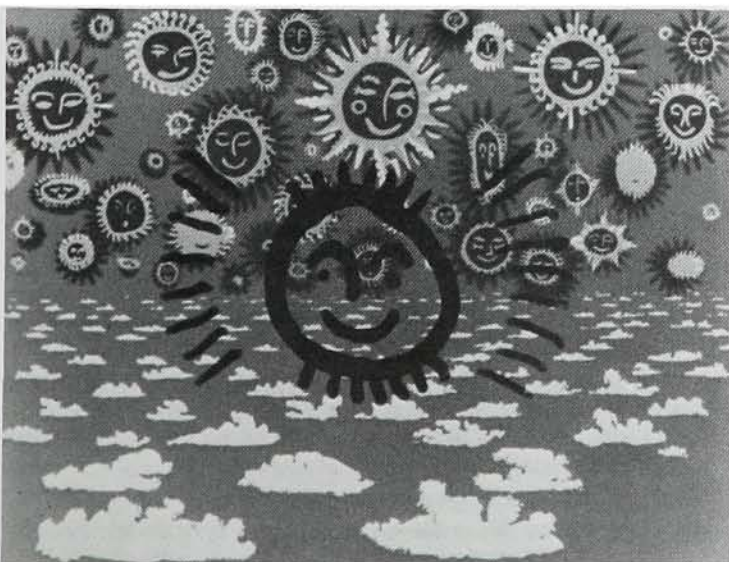
Le Merle



Christmas Cracker



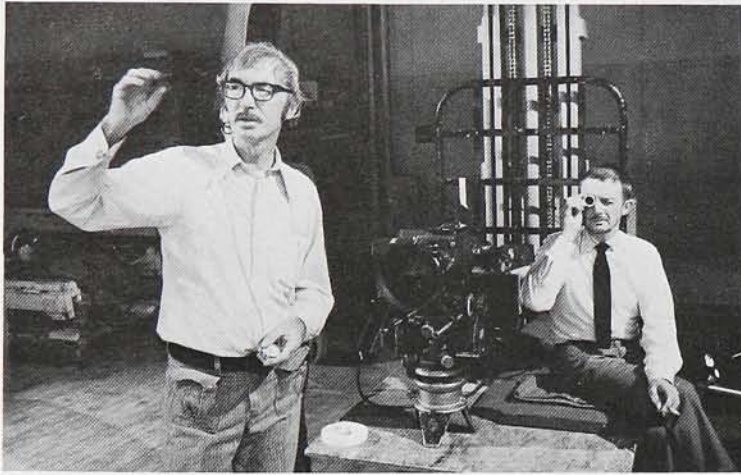
Rhythmic



Now is the Time



La haut sur ces Montagnes



Norman McLaren

IV. Filmography of Norman McLaren

1914 Born

Glasgow School of Art Period (1933–1936)

1933 (Untitled), 35 mm, silent, 300 feet
(a hand-painted abstraction made with colored dyes; the first attempt to draw directly on film, with Stewart McAllistair)

“Seven Till Five”, bw, 16 mm, 10 min, silent
(school activities from 7 am to 5 pm; a formalized documentary of a day’s activity at the GSA)

1935 “Camera Makes Whoopee”, bw, 16 mm, 15 min, silent
(a school Christmas ball; conventional animation, models and frame-by-frame movement of objects, with trick-camera effects)

“Colour Cocktail”, Dufaycolor, 16 mm, 5 min, silent
(live shooting, slow-motion, play of lights on colored paper; camera movements to be played with synchronous accompaniment on disc)

(Five Untitled Films), Dufaycolor, 16 mm, silent, total of 1000 ft.
(short advertising films for a local retail meat store; used in window display projections)

1936 “Hell Unlimited”, bw, 16 mm, 15 min, silent
(coproduced with Helen Biggar)
(an antiwar film using both animations and real-object photography, with diagrams, animated maps, puppets, and live shots)
Cameraman for “Defence of Madrid” directed by Ivor Montagu
(a Spanish Civil War documentary)

General Post Office Film Unit, London Period (1937–1939)

1937 “Book Bargain”, bw, 35 mm, 10 min, sound
(a documentary on the printing of the London phone directory)
(Synthetic Sound Experiments), discarded
(first attempts with drawing directly on motion-picture film with pen and ink, resulting in a considerable range of semi-musical sounds, mostly percussive)

“News for the Navy”, bw, 35 mm, 10 min, sound
(a documentary film)

“Mony a Pickle”, bw, 35 mm, 2 min, sound
(a fantasy, publicizing the Post Office savings bank, in which furniture is animated by live photography to tell a story)

“Love on the Wing”, Dufaycolor, 35 mm, 5½ min, sound
(a fantasy publicizing the new air-mail service, made to the music of Jacques Ibert’s “Divertissement”; hand-drawn cameraless technique used, plus photographic multiplane backgrounds)

Film Center, London Period (1939)

1939 “The Obedient Flame”, bw, 35 mm, 20 min, sound
(a film on cooking gas made with animation and regular photography)

New York City Period (1939–1941)

- 1939 Directed a New Year’s Greetings film for NBC
 “Allegro”, color, 35 mm, 2 min, sound
(an abstraction with both picture and synthetic sound hand-drawn frame-by-frame)
 “Rumba”, bw, 35 mm, 2½ min, sound only
(a synthetic sound composition – no visuals – made by the cameraless method, drawing sound-forms directly on raw film)
 “Stars and Stripes”, color, 35 mm, 3 min, sound
(a fantasy on the American flag in which “stars” and “stripes” perform activities to a sprightly march tune; frame-by-frame hand-drawn pictures with recorded soundtrack)
- 1940 “Dots” (first called “Scherzo”), color, 35 mm, 2½ min, sound
(similar to “Allegro”)
 “Loops”, color, 35 mm, 3 min, sound
(similar to “Allegro”)
 “Boogie-Doodle”, color, 35 mm, 3½ min, sound
(an abstraction, hand-drawn directly on film, with boogie-woogie music played by Albert Ammons)
 Script and lyric writing for unidentified motion pictures for Carvelle Films, Inc., New York
 “Spook Sport”, color, 35 mm, 9 min, sound
(coproduced with Mary Ellen Bute)
(a semiabstract visualization to Saint-Saëns “La Danse Macabre”)

National Film Board of Canada Period (1941–Present)

- 1941 “Mail Early for Christmas”, color, 35 mm, 2 min, sound
(a fantasy dance of the Christmas mail, set to Benny Goodman’s “Jingle Bells”; frame-by-frame hand drawing with multiplane travelling backgrounds)
 “V for Victory”, Warnercolor, 35 mm, 2 min, sound
(a short film set to a Sousa military march publicizing war savings; cameraless animation)
- 1942 “Hen Hop”, Warnercolor, 35 mm, 3 min, sound
(a rather fanciful hen dances to barn dance music to incite rural populations to buy war bonds; cameraless animation)
 “Five for Four”, Vitacolor, 35 mm, 4 min, sound
(a film publicizing war savings set to the rhythms of “Pintop’s Boogie” by Albert Ammons; cameraless animation)
- 1943 “Dollar Dance”, Vitacolor, 35 mm, 5½ min, sound
(a film on the dangers of inflation; music by Louis Applebaum and lyrics by Norman McLaren and Guy Glover; frame-by-frame hand-drawn pictures with moving backgrounds)
 Animation Department at the NFB set up by McLaren
- 1944 General Supervisor of the “Chants Populaires” series (CP series)
 “Alouette”, bw, 35 mm, 3 min, sound (CP series)
(paper cut-outs illustrating the folk song)
 “Keep Your Mouth Shut”, bw, 35 mm, 3 min, sound
(a film publicizing a campaign against war gossip, with live shooting and animation of objects; assisted by George Dunning)
 Designs the animation of a terrestrial globe for “Global Air Routes”
- 1945 “C’est l’Aviron”, bw, 35 mm, 3 min, sound (CP series)
(a film of white gouache drawings on black, using the staggered overlapping mix technique to achieve a moving multiplane effect)
- 1946 “Là-haut Sur Ces Montagnes”, bw, 35 mm, 3 min, sound (CP series)
(an illustration of the folk song made with animation camera and pastel method)
 “A Little Phantasy on a 19th Century Painting” (also known as “Isle of the Dead”), bw, 35 mm, 3½ min, sound
(a film based on the painting “Isle of the Dead” by Arnold Brecklin; produced by the pastel method)
 “Hoppity Pop”, color, 35 mm, 2½ min, sound
(three decorative motifs to barrel-organ music, with frame-by-frame hand-drawn pictures)

- 1947 "Fiddle-De-Dee", color, 35 mm, 3½ min, sound
(cameraless abstraction, made largely without reference to the frame divisions in the film, set to a Gatineau Valley old-time fiddler's spirited rendition of "Listen To a Mocking Bird")
"La Poulette Grise", Kodachrome, 16 mm, 5½ min, sound (CP series)
(illustration of Anne Malenfant's rendition of the folk song, with pastel method animation)
- 1949 "Begone Dull Care", color, 35 mm, 7½ min, sound
(codirected with Evelyn Lambart)
(similar to "Fiddle-De-Dee", set to music played by the Oscar Peterson jazz trio)
Goes to China to work on a UNESCO experiment in fundamental education and trains many Chinese students in the art of simple animation techniques (supervises several student films)
- 1950 "Pen Point Percussion", bw, 35 mm, 7 min, sound
(a documentary showing McLaren's technique of hand-drawn sound on film; designed as an introduction to "Dots" and "Loops")
"Chalk River Ballet", color, 35 mm, sound (uncompleted)
(an abstraction bearing homage to the uranium-bearing river, in collaboration with René Jodoin)
"Around is Around", English Technicolor, 35 mm, 10 min, sound
(an experimental 3-D film made for the Festival of Britain; a co-production of the NFB and the British Film Institute)
(abstract stereoscopic animation using cathode-ray oscillograph to generate mobile patterns; assisted by Evelyn Lambart)
- 1951 "Now is the Time", English Technicolor, 35 mm, 3 min, sound
(an experimental 3-D film made for the Festival of Britain; a co-production of the NFB and the British Film Institute)
(paper cut-outs and direct drawing on film, with stereoscopic animation and stereophonic sound)
- 1952 "A Phantasy", Kodachrome, 16 mm, 7 min, sound (begun in 1948)
(a semi-abstract, semi-surrealist essay made by the pastel method and using some cut-outs; music for saxophones and synthetic sound by Maurice Blackburn)
"Two Bagatelles", Kodachrome, 16 mm, 2½ min, sound
(two short films in which the principles of animation normally used to put drawings into motion are used to animate live actors, i.e. frame-by-frame animation of human beings)
(the two films are a short waltz, "On the Lawn" – a male dancer performs gliding waltz steps to the accompaniment of animated synthetic sound – and a fast march, "In the Backyard", with a racing accompaniment by a calliope)
"Neighbours", Kodachrome, 16 mm, 8 min, sound
(this film, using frame-by-frame animation of humans, is a simple parable about two people who come to blows over the possession of a flower; won an Oscar in 1953)
- 1953 Leaves for India to participate in another UNESCO project
- 1954 "Blinkity Blank", color, 35 mm, 6 min, sound
(image flashes of fantastic animals mating and fighting one another in intermittent animation; scratched at intervals on blank 35 mm film, with instrumental music of Maurice Blackburn supplemented by McLaren's drawn sounds)
- 1956 "One Two Three", uncompleted
(a film used as a test for "Rythmetic")
"Rythmetic", color, 35 mm, 8½ min, sound
(cut-outs of numbers given life and motion to prompt interest in classrooms and literacy programs; assisted by Evelyn Lambart)
- 1957 "A Chairy Tale", bw, 35 mm, 9½ min, sound
(co-directed with Claude Jutra)
(live actor animation showing pas de deux of man and chair; Eastern music on Indian instruments by Ravi Shankar)
- 1958 "Le Merle", color, 35 mm, 4 min, sound
(paper strips animated to illustrate actions of the blackbird in the folk song)
- 1959 "Serenal", color, 16 mm, 3 min, sound
(semi-abstract illustration of a West Indies drumband tune, etched directly on 16 mm film with a vibra drill and colored, largely without reference to the frame divisions of the film)
- "Short and Suite", color, 35 mm, 5 min, sound
(abstract cameraless animation, in the manner of "Fiddle-De-Dee", etched on film with a vibra drill; music is an ensemble of jazz by Eden Rathburn)
- "Mail Early for Christmas", color, 35 mm, 30 sec, sound
(another version of an earlier film, this time with cameraless animation etched on film with a vibra drill)
Makes credit titles for the television show, "The Wonderful World of Jack Paar"
- 1960 "Lines Vertical", color, 35 mm, 5½ min, sound
(experiment in pure design by Norman McLaren and Evelyn Lambart – lines, ruled directly on the film, move against a background of changing colors in response to music)
"Opening Speech", bw, 35 mm, 7 min, sound
(originally made for the official opening of the Montreal Film Festival; McLaren attempts with absolutely no success to deliver a speech via a recalcitrant microphone)
- 1961 "New York Lightboard – Welcome to Canada", bw, 35 mm, 8 min, silent
(publicizing film for the Canadian Tourist Bureau)
(cameraless animation combined with frame-by-frame animation of individual drawings on small pieces of paper and with cut-out letters; the film was designed for use in a special advertising lightboard on Times Square in New York City)
- 1962 "Lines Horizontal", color, 35 mm, 5½ min, sound
(abstract variation based on a single line; made by optically turning each frame of "Lines Vertical" by ninety degrees; music by Pete Seeger)
"Christmas Crackers", color, 35 mm, 9 min, sound
(animation of a human being)
- 1964 "Canon", color, 35 mm, 10 min, sound
(Norman McLaren and Grant Munro demonstrate by animation and live action how the musical canon is constructed; with cubes, cut-out silhouettes, human beings, and one cat)
- 1965 "Mosaic", bw and color, 35 mm, 5½ min, sound
("op" art in film; a single tiny square, tossed on the screen by McLaren himself, divides into many segments, eventually forming a colorful mosaic; made by combining parts of "Lines – Vertical and Horizontal" to produce a ballet of points)
- 1967 "Pas de Deux", bw, 35 mm, 13½ min, sound
(a film of two ballet dancers; by exposing the frame as many as ten times, a multiple image of the single dancer and her partner is created)
- 1969 "Spheres", color, 35 mm, 7½ min, sound
(a play on motion, against a background of a multi-hued sky; by Norman McLaren and René Jodoin)
- 1971 "Synchrony", color, 35 mm, 7½ min, sound
(a film on the pyrotechnics of the piano keyboard, with novel optical techniques to compose the rhythms on the soundtrack)

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