



Look-alike. Les Carlson brings Canadian painter David Milne back to life in CBC - T.V.'s *A Path of His Own*

A Path Of His Own

p./d. Paul Caulfield narration/sc. Pat Patterson ph. Mark Irwin. Paul Caulfield ed. Tom Berner loc sd. Victor Gamble m.comp. Jean Cloutier exec. p. Don Haig p.c. Film Arts & Mirus Films col. 16 mm. running time 57 min.

A Path of his Own opens appropriately with the details of a winter landscape. Soon, Les Carlson, as Canadian artist David B. Milne becomes visible in the distance, skiing across the fields. Until his death in 1953, the natural landscape was Milne's favorite habitat. It was also the infinitely renewable subject of his paintings.

A solitary, in spirit if not always in fact, Milne (Carlson) speaks directly to the camera, alone, standing at the sites of many of his works. Occasionally he is seen performing some manual tasks at his woodland cabin, but never painting. This is wise, because the depiction of an artist mulling over the choice of pigments and slashing away at the canvas serves only to trivialize the creative process.

Due to make-up, and his own physical characteristics, Les Carlson looks very much like the artist. He is a soft-spoken Milne, contemplative, confident, with a

sort of melancholy cheerfulness. He is like a benevolent ghost, returning to his haunts to explain himself to us. Carlson's portrayal is further authenticated by the use of Milne's journals, letters, and unpublished autobiography for all of the actor's monologues. This is not drama as such, but it is an effective method of presenting some aspects of the artist's character.

Milne's psychological problems, marital

breakup, poor health, and financial difficulties form a narration written and spoken by Pat Patterson. An attempt to dramatize any of these situations would have necessitated a longer, very different film, potentially veering towards distracting melodrama.

Interspersed with the narration and Carlson sequences, are shots of drawings, photographs, newspaper clippings, and, of course, Milne's paintings. Unfortunately, much of this comprehensive visual information is lost on the small, imprecise television screen. (The film was shown on CBC-TV's *Spectrum* series in October.) The pace of these sequences suggests that of a rushed gallery-goer. Producer/Director Paul Caulfield expanded the project from its originally planned 30 minutes.

Nevertheless, a good general presentation of the diversity of Milne's work is given, from his quiet landscapes of New York state and Ontario, to the anti-landscapes — strikingly similar to one another in tone — of Europe after WWI and the Bronx slums, to his fantasy and still-life paintings of the forties and fifties. The film accents the importance of place to Milne and his art: a familiar emphasis to those who believe that the Canadian art tradition — and even national consciousness — is dominated by the natural landscape (as exemplified by *The Group of Seven*).

David Milne once said, "*Feeling* is the power that drives art. There doesn't seem to be a more understandable word for it... though there are others that give something of the idea... aesthetic emotion...

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SHORT FILM REVIEWS

quicken... bringing to life... Or call it love: not love of man or woman or home or country or any material thing, but love without an object... intransitive love." A full understanding of Milne's words and

works cannot be acquired from an hour-long film. But *A Path of his Own* serves as a valuable introduction — perhaps the most a cinematic study of art can hope to do.

Gerry Flahive



Fine and Mann's larger-than-life characters playing poker in *The Only Game In Town* — certainly the only one with Plasticine puppets

Only Game In Town

p. sc, d, ed. David Fine, Ron Mann voice artists Izzy Manhiem, David Fine, Bob Lord, Joe Frost, col. 16mm, running time 7 1/2 min., dist. International Telefilm.

The Only Game in Town, by two young Toronto filmmakers, Ron Mann and David Fine, is an animated short featuring four Plasticine puppets engaged in a game of poker.

The story pits Michael, a bored, reluctant young card player, against three veteran poker players who want him to "join the club," and learn some of the unspoken rules of the game — how to cheat at poker and get away with it.

One of the veterans is Michael's father, and the card game quickly turns into a metaphor about the struggle between the generations.

Michael, who complains he is always losing, is advised to keep playing and get more experience. "Just look at us," admonishes one of the veterans. "We've worked damn hard to get where we are. We're mighty proud of it. You can't come here and expect to win just like that."

After one particular round, the owner

of the deck of cards is declared the winner even though Michael has the best hand. "It doesn't matter," he is told. "It's his deck."

When Michael declares that what he really wants to play is "Fish," one of his father's pals sneers. "Your son wants to be a bum."

Finally, after hearing about the need to respect "the foundations that this country was built on" (namely, poker), Michael walks out. The veterans pause briefly — "The kid's throwing his life away," says one — then resume their game.

Although the seven-and-a-half-minute format doesn't allow much time for character development, and consequently the characterization is somewhat flat and stereotyped, the arguments are clear and succinct. The tight script is a pleasure to follow.

And the quality of the Plasticine puppet animation is especially impressive, their gestures and movements aptly and subtly caricatured — a barely perceptible nod of the head, or a raised Plasticine eyebrow conveying volumes about the relationships portrayed in this thoroughly enjoyable little film. One looks forward to seeing more of David Fine's and Ron Mann's future work.

Jaan Pill

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CFTA	cover 2
Canadian Film Sound Soc'y	70
Canadian Motion Picture Equipment Rental Ltd.	10
Canadian Musicians	42
The Character Talent Agency Ltd.	22
Chris Stone Audio Productions	33
Concordia University	17
Derek Smith Limited	57
De Wolfe Music of Canada	21
Editors Cut	61
The Editing House	56
Faces	17
Film Arts	63
Film Opticals	15
Film Score Associates	24
Golden Toad Music	23
Hagood Hardy	27
Kodak	54
Michael Devine	72
Milton Barnes	44
Mobius Productions Limited	25
Morley Shragge Multimedia Music	44
Motion Picture Guarantors Inc.	60
The Music People	62
National Film Board	58
Panavision	cover 3
Reindeer Films Ltd.	31
Ron Harrison	25
Simon Fraser University	47
Sonolab	cover 4
Spot Lab	61
Synchro Sound Ltd.	50
Trainco Talent	2
William Skolnick	71