

ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

• by B. Sternberg •

My job description at Canadian filmmakers' Distribution Centre reads "to distribute experimental films." To whom? That venues are open and willing, if not actually clamouring, for experimental films? For what exhibitors am I the distributor? The quick answer is simply none. The truer, but longer answer (isn't that always the way?) is many and various.

University film studies programmes can be counted on to rent or buy experimental films for their in-class use: Queen's, Concordia, U. of T., U. of Regina, Simon Fraser. But how do the films reach the general public? Some art galleries run programmes of experimental films sometimes. The Kitchener-Waterloo Gallery, when approached by filmmaker Richard Kerr, made a three-year commitment to 10 programmes per year. The series were curated by Richard and a catalogue accompanied each. Admission was free. The average attendance was 45 people. The resources of the K-W Gallery, the N.F.B. and the Canada Council were utilized.

The commitment to 3 x 10 screenings: that is, regularly-scheduled screenings, was wonderful, desirable and unusual. Most often programmes are one-time 'events', are expected to pay for themselves or make money for the gallery, are listed in schedules of movies shown at the gallery which might include documentaries on art, children's animations and European 'art' features. In short, experimental films are not yet curated or programmed like other contemporary art forms within the gallery's exhibition mandate. (Did you ever notice the "ex" in both exhibit and

experimental?) The Kitchener-Waterloo Gallery is now into its fourth year of programming and is extending its boundaries to involve the Princess Cinema, a rep house in Waterloo, as a venue for some of the feature-length experimental films in the series. The recent revival of independent rep cinemas might afford new possibilities. The extent to which these theatres, though primarily devoted to 'second-run' films, serve as alternatives to theatres chained to Hollywood can be judged by the degree of flexibility in their programming - both in film lengths and genres. The National Film Theatre in Kingston recently split a bill between *A Trilogy* by Barbara Sternberg, 46 minutes, and *On Land Over Water* by Richard Kerr, 60 minutes thereby making up the expected feature length. The Bloor Cinema in Toronto is running a series, Toronto Film Now, on Sunday afternoons in a split-the-gate deal with Toronto independent filmmakers. Organizer Michael Korican explains that the series is an effort by the film community to "reclaim commercial screen time in Toronto on a permanent basis." Upcoming is a collaboration with Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre to screen a pick of '85 Festival of Festival films: the Best of the Fest, Jan. 19, 1-5 pm. Five of the nine films to be screened are experimental.

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A few of the Artist-Run Centres (of which there are 80 across Canada) offer screenings of experimental films or invite a filmmaker to show and discuss her/his work: Western Front, Vancouver; S.A.W. Gallery, Ottawa; STRUTS Gallery, Sackville; Mainfilm, Montreal. A Space gallery, Toronto, has a committee for film as it does for the other art disciplines which has a budget to curate programmes around a theme, or the works of a single filmmaker - a solo exhibition - or even commission films for screening. "Notorische Reflexe", experimental films from Berlin and "Films by Men" selected by John Porter are two of their recent programmes.

Now are you starting to see what 'many and various' meant! There is only one centre in Canada which has as its mandate the exhibition of experimental films. The Funnel experimental film theatre, Toronto, was founded in 1977 and screens two to three evenings per week. Fifty programmes by Canadian and International artists are presented each season in the Funnel's 100 seat theatre. In many cases the filmmaker is present to discuss his/her work. The theatre is equipped for 16mm and 8mm projection.

Why is there only one such centre in Canada? Where can people find experimental films on a regular basis? How can awareness and interest develop without accessibility/availability? How can I be a distributor without exhibitors? The 'normal problems' facing art/culture in Canada: lack of education, funding and an attitude in this society which values art not as a good in itself but only to the extent that it is a money-making industry, are problems that confront experimental filmmaking as well.

There is, moreover, a confusion in identity and relationship between experimental film and Movies, between films and Art, and, recently, film and the new technologies-electroculture. Galleries may speak to me of movies they're playing when I'm trying to discuss experimental filmmakers, theatres consider these films Art and so not accessible for movie audiences and to exhibitors looking for the cutting edge in media, film is "old" (though barely a babe when compared to painting!). This 'identity problem' works against the inclusion/exhibition of experimental film in either cinemas or galleries.

I'm trying though!!

Art Fest premieres Budner film

MONTREAL - *J.W. Morrice*, a 20 minute documentary written and directed by NFB filmmaker Gerald Budner, had its avant-première at the 4th International Festival on Art held in Montreal Nov. 19 - 24.

Budner, whose career at the NFB includes several other films on artists, made *J.W. Morrice* to chart the travels and accomplishments of the great Canadian painter, whose art bridged the significant trends from the 1890s to 1924.

The film recreates Morrice's life through his paintings and archival photographs of the period, as well as through the words of Morrice and some of his contemporaries. The film's original score was composed by Canadian composer Eldon Rathburn. The film is narrated, in English by Christopher Plummer and in French by Pierre Nadeau.

The film was premiered as part of a comprehensive retrospect of Morrice's work, being mounted by the Montreal

Museum of Fine Arts. Starting on December 6, French and English versions of the film will be shown daily during the two-month exhibition. The film will then travel to Quebec City, Fredericton, Toronto and Vancouver.

To coincide with the Montreal presentation of *J.W. Morrice* and his works, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts held a symposium on the painter. Separated into four sections, topics for the symposium were: *Morrice and his Expositions*, which featured guest speaker Nicole Cloutier, curator of early Canadian Art at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and organizer of the exhibition; *Les Voyages de James Wilson Morrice*, hosted by art historian, Lucie Dorlais; *The Watercolours of James Wilson Morrice*, hosted by Toronto art historian, Irene Szylinger; and *Morrice and Matisse*, with art specialist John O'Brian.



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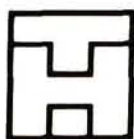
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