



# Video Culture

The real superman steps up in *Call It Democracy*

by Colin Campbell

Video Culture Canada's mandate is to promote work in video from the home video producer to the 'high-end' computer studios through an international competition held each year. The winners and honorary mentions are then broadcast on Pay-TV's MuchMusic. I viewed only the tapes of the Canadian winners and honorary mentions, so I can't speak for the quality of the tapes in the other categories. Within the various categories, there are subsections. For example, in the Student Video-Computer Graphics category, there is *Art 3/4*, *General 1/2*, and *General 3/4*. A little confusing, but I'll try to keep it as clear as possible.

The winner in the category mentioned above in *Art 3/4* was Marsha M. Herle's *Forbidden Colors*, produced in Regina. A young woman's voice talks in the first person about her grandmother's death and the break-up of her own relationship with her boyfriend. The images are comprised of various detailed shots of her apartment, the dripping kitchen faucet, the floor being swept, clothes being put in a hamper, a teddy bear and so forth. The woman talks about loss and loneliness, and attempts to rationalize the two events. At the end of the tape we finally see the woman's face as she gazes into a mirror. The tape is competent, without much risk-taking or innovation either visually or narratively.

*Call It Democracy* by Bruce Cockburn won the Canadian Commercial Music Video category. The handout from VCI describes it as 'one of the few

Canadian works entered...that demonstrated any kind of message or social concern amid the vacuous world of the singing heads and lingerie set'. Unfortunately, the collage of Third World images set in rhythm to the music does nothing to either identify the country(ies) or the issues. We see people being beaten, people fighting factory workers sewing baseballs, intercut with images of Reagan and Mulroney. Hardly illuminating, and once again conflating the entire Third World into this unidentifiable mass of social strife. Images of violence set to rock music have long ago lost their seductive powers. Now they merely offend.

*The Crab Song*, by Red Herring of Vancouver, B.C. won an honorary mention in this category. The soundtrack of the dub I watched was indiscernible, except for the one line, 'God is a crustacean', with the image of a man holding a crab in one hand, mic in the other, over a pot into which the crab is eventually dropped. The tape was a visual one-liner for sure.

In the *Art Video-New Media* category, in the sub-section called 'TV Art' (whatever that is), the winner was Toronto video-performance artist Rhonda Abrams' *The Myth of The Fishes*. A mini-opera where the three characters sing their lines in operatic style (they are professionals); the tale is about the mayhem of leisure fishing. The novice is horrified once a fish is caught and bludgeoned to death, then thrilled when, after she has gutted the fish, it slips from her hands into the water and swims away.

The tape is funny, jarring and unexpectedly touching. This tape is one in a series of three pieces about people put in Nature where everything and everybody emerges from the encounter with physical and emotional scars.

*L'incident Jones*, by Montreal's Marc Paradis was the winner of the same category, subsection *1/2* *Video Art*. I've viewed this tape many times in the past couple of years, and never have been able to discover what the incident in the title refers to. There is a great deal of coy smiling and coy laughing between four (one presumes) gay men, with a music score by François Senneville. Perhaps this is the model the CBC used for its safe-sex ads; the ones where no one ever touches, undresses, or does anything, and if you turn down the volume, can't tell whether these people are selling furniture or, in *L'incident "Jones"* case, a picnic and plane trip package.

The winning tape in the Commercial Production, Computer Graphics, High-End Computer Graphics subsection, was *Le Game*. It is a collaborative effort between the CBC Engineering and Production departments, the University of Toronto's Dynamic Graphics Group and the National Research Council of Canada. *Le Game*,... is a unique pilot project that set out to test the feasibility of combining images captured by a camera and images constructed by a computer while the camera is moving the audiences' point of view." The content is negligible, while the technology is definitely 'high-end'. 'Over-the top', as they say in England.

*Syntax Error in 84* by Pierre Zovile of Montreal won honorary mention in the Computer Graphics Personal Computer subsection. A techno-tape which damns and praises technology in the same breath, it is comprised of processed images of machines set to a synthesized soundtrack. It ends with the message: "No matter who or where you are, there are thousands of machines ready to save your life and thousands of

machines ready to kill you." Y'all take heed now.

The Video Culture International Inc. 1986 Competition had 24 winners and 26 Honorary Mentions in the 11 categories. The winners and Honorary Mentions tapes were played on the Pay-TV MuchMusic channel, with all the attendant commercials for rock video, concerts, and Big Macs. The members of the jury were Barbara London, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Toronto artist Noel Harding, Montreal artist Jean Gagnon, Daniel Richler of CBC's *The Journal*, Don Munroe, director of Andy Warhol's TV NYC, and Michael Heydon and Anne Howard of MuchMusic. ●

**THE CRAB SONG** d. Enrico Renz m. Red Herring Info: (604) 875-9047

**CALL IT DEMOCRACY** d. Ron Berti m. Bruce Cockburn dist. Total Eclipse A Film Group  
**FORBIDDEN COLOURS** d. Marsha Herle d.o.p. Marc L.p. Rhonda Info: (306) 586-3081

**SYNTAX ERROR IN 84** d. Pierre Zovile. Boris Wanowitch prod assist. Alain Bergeron. Bill Vorn music machines/ machines Alan Lord. Jean Mignault. Raymond Pilon dist. Videographe

**L'INCIDENT JONES** d. Marc Paradis m. François Senneville voice Yves Dionne piano Allan Crossman l.p. Benjamin Baltimore. Stephen Jones. Simon Robert

**MYTH OF THE FISHES** d. Rhonda Abrams singers Elizabeth Dobie, John McKeown. Suzanne Vanstone m. r. Abrams. J. McKeown cam. D. Martinovic audio Joe Bennaroch dist. V Tape

**LE GAME** p. CBC Engineering project d. Catherine Richards video dir. C. Tremblay. S. Goodship. M. Proulx prod. dir. Mino Bonan. G. Rajotte. Maurice Day U of T co-dir Alain Fournier comp. anim. Colin Hui, Tom Nadas

**NRCC Robotics Dept:** David O'Hara, Doug Taylor, S. Elgazzar m. Normand Roger p. Guy Rajotte distrib. Radio-Canada Engineering