William MacGillivray's

“I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art”

I will not make any more boring art” is the title, appropriated from a 1970s conceptual art piece by American artist John Hanham, of William MacGillivray’s new film. It’s an iconic title for a talented director and recipient of many tributes for such works as Stations and LifeClaustrophobic and questioners. Many have since made his master's degree at the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design (NSCAD), a centre of international reputation for radical experimentation in art education.

Concentrating on the period between the 1960s and the early 1980s, MacGillivray explains that hundreds of artists came to experiment in various arts disciplines with an emphasis on video and performance, all under the banner of conceptual art. Conceptualism takes many different forms while concentrating especially on the ideas of the artists rather than their physical object/product, as exemplified in this film.

Before the title, the film opens with a close-up of a television screen. A hand reaches in, clicks on the switch and we are greeted with a fairy tales. I believe in Arthurian legend. There might be for one brief shining moment something that the world never forgets; something that we can all share in, ... it might already be taking place here in a place called Halifax.

Cut to some grainy black-and-white footage of a German avant-garde artist Joseph Beuys being awarded an honorary degree from NSCAD. (This, by the way, is three years before Beuys, who was nine years old, was either going to be an artist or go to art school.) But in Argentina, the film shifts to Germany's Wodiczko is boring in a formal manner.

Interviewed in Germany and also from the Nova Scotia, the film includes records of a vintage portrait of the college's founder Anna Leonowens (the same “Anna” whose relationship with the King of Siam is fictionalized in the King and I — another quirky and little-known fact from this east coast phenomenon.)

Editors Angela Baker and MacGillivray slide and bump the scenes together with improvised musical threads. Later, we learn the rich score was composed by CCMC Toronto’s own much-acclaimed sound group including artists Nebby Kubota, Al Matteo and Michael Snow.

Counterbalanced with the beginning, the film wraps up in 1987 with Gary Neill Kennedy once again bestowing an honorary degree on filmmaker/visual artist/musician Michael Snow. He accepts the award graciously, congratulating NSCAD for its involvement with someone “as ambiguous as art. My sincere congratulations and very best wishes to those of you who are graduating in ambiguity.”

Cut to Snow performing with the CCMC and then a finish with Brian McEvoy’s early 1970s videotape performance Audio Visual Feedback. A close-up of the monitor, a hand reaches in to turn on the switch and that crazy world of art keeps on going and it's anything but boring....

Jane Fertleman