

British Independent Cinema

—by Tom Urquhart

On Wednesday evening, November 8th, I attended a screening at the Art Gallery of Ontario of about a dozen experimental films from England. These films make up a package now on a North American tour arranged by the London Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

Peggy Gale of the A.G.O. introduced the evening to an audience of about 50-60 people. Annabel Nicolson (who is taking the package on its tour) later introduced and talked about some of the individual films.

The main emphasis of the program was on structural cinema with six independent filmmakers being represented: David Crosswaite, Mike Dunford, Malcolm Legrice, Annabel Nicolson, Sally Potter, and William Raban.

Most of these filmmakers have backgrounds involving painting and this influence was often in evidence; most pleasingly in "Hors D'Oeuvre" by Sally Potter. Using a process involving projection onto a ground glass screen, she achieves a richly textured effect and pastel tones echoing the pointillist technique of Seurat.

In "Slides" Annabel Nicolson combines vivid colours with widely varying textures, occasional real life images, and vertical movement to produce one of the most "painterly" and beautiful films I have seen.

Oddly enough, "Hors D'Oeuvre", "Slides" and several other films were silent. I found this to be rather a treat. Some experimental films try to make up in ear assault what they lack in visual interest.

If you think a film needs an image on the screen throughout, then you should see "True Love" by Mike Dunford. This one was silent and consisted largely of long dark pauses between which the camera would play gently over the bodies of two lovers lit warmly and softly. The images were textured and, of course, pleasantly nebulous with deep shadows causing them to appear very erotic. The dark pauses taunted the eye into searching more carefully for images before they appeared and also lent more importance to them after they appeared.

Most of the films were technically impressive, such as "Berlin Horse" by Malcolm Legrice and "River Yar" by William Raban. Most contained an encouraging degree of originality. If this program is any way of judging, I would say that the English are doing great things in experimental film and I look forward to seeing more in the future. ●

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