



Robert Jekyll assembling his panel "Homage to Soleri"

one chooses the sheets of textured glass and colors, to the conception of the design, and to the final technical craft of completing the work of art.

The film itself is structured in a style fitting the process of the art it describes. It begins bound within an almost classic documentary tradition of the narrative voiceover explaining that 'the workroom is where the art begins,' and yet it gradually develops on a freer, more personal level. One feels the freedom of the colors and of the inspired designs through the images of the stained glass bursting in a quick even rhythm. Linear camera movements follow the lines in the design. The skeletal architectural designs and plans are animated and clothed through a series of superimposed images of the various stages of the final work of art. As the finished stained glass design quickly takes form through the rhythmic fashioning of an expert familiar with his craft, so the images in the film are tightly edited towards the end; one is left with the same satisfaction of a well crafted work of art.

Of all textures and layers explored and developed in the film, the most important is that of light and shadow and its effect on colored glass. The artist begins by holding up the glass against a blank grey/white sky, and slowly throughout the film the glass constantly changes as the light varies through different times of the day and different seasons. The world moving

behind the glass becomes an integral part of the textures and colors of the work of art, humanized, as Jekyll explains, through the glass, much the same as it is through the lens of a camera. Life is shown meshing with art, breaking one's image of art as works to behold; the film instead invites participation as it emphasizes the accessibility of the artform by revealing the process.

Painting with Light reflects the excitement and imperfections of an editor cutting a tight fourteen or so minute film that is never boring yet may sometimes too quickly cut away from a beautiful image. This Canadian filmmaker has the sense to make the film available in both French and English; the film is being distributed by the Canadian Film Makers Distribution Centre.

Florence Jacobowitz

OUR CULTURAL FABRIC

d. Kit Hood, sc. Soo Millar, ph. Bob New, Carl Harvey, ed. David Leach, Stephen Withrow, sd. Andy McBready, p. Linda Schuyler, p.c. Playing With Time Inc., (year) 1978, col. 16mm, running time 27 minutes, dist. Playing With Time Inc.

Over the past decade a wealth of material has emerged which has as its central focus cultural signs and symbols and their ideological role in society. However named, whether called semiology or cultural studies, works such as Roland Barthes' "Mythologies" or John Berger's book and film series "Ways of Seeing," have provided excellent examples of the kind of analysis possible for considering everyday social phenomena and their relationships with cultural perceptions. It is within the frame of such semiological endeavours that the film **Our Cultural Fabric** should be assessed, since it has set for itself the goal of "exploring the relationship of clothing with cultural and racial stereotyping" (to quote from its publicity folder). Yet, there is a striking naiveté about the film, as though its makers were unaware either of the historical precedents within their own line of attitudinal and cultural interrogation or of the inner workings of their own cinematic project.

"The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe," says John Berger. Since this is clearly the territory within which **Our Cultural Fabric** is operating, the film should withstand scrutiny on the same grounds. Produced for the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, and partially funded by governmental sources, **Our Cultural Fabric** was obviously intended to be a film which demystifies "foreign" styles of dress in order to enhance our understanding of cultural mores and differences. Clearly, this kind of film can contribute to easing tensions within a country embodying such a multi-racial and multi-cultural mix as does Canada. However, this project's brilliant potential is fulfilled only in tiny moments throughout the film. We see an East Indian explaining the cultural and religious significance behind the wearing of a turban and we watch the process by which he puts it on. Two interviews with Black Canadians reveal the social and, in the case of the Rastafarian, the religious significance of wearing their hair unstraightened and natural. East European immigrants discuss the clothing of their original homelands and the ridicule they have received

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photo from Canadian Pacific Archives

High hopes in *Our Cultural Fabric*

ed when so attired in Canada, while the filmmakers reveal through the juxtaposition of magazine stills and live models the way in which high-fashion has co-opted "peasant" styles of dress. As well, the filmmakers interviewed a professor of anthropology who is able to explain the symbolic and practical rationales behind a wide variety of dresscodes. There are moments of subtle humour, irony and even bitterness which emerge throughout *Our Cultural Fabric*, as well as the few fascinating explanations of cultural customs like those mentioned earlier. But such moments are kept short, oddly enough. Instead, the filmmakers have structured their film around a bizarre intrusion which, for me, reveals their own unacknowledged perceptual bias.

Intending *Our Cultural Fabric* for the youth market, to be used in high schools and other educational settings such as churches, libraries and synagogues, the filmmakers shaped their material around the device of an intentionally obnoxious game-show panel which indulges in snide cultural slurs, inane babble and aimless energy. Evidently, the filmmakers felt that only by alluding to the glittering schlock of most television culture could their film appeal to this particular age group — an assumption which itself is simply another form of stereotyping. Even

more problematic, the inter-cutting of this panel with the other material creates, at times, the obviously unintended effect of crudely "commenting" on a previous interviewee. For instance, an immigrant discussing his native attire is punctuated, through editing, by the shriek of the game-show whistle, which serves to unintentionally send-up his remarks.

It seems to me that the filmmakers may have been confronted by the prevalent fear of boring a teenage audience. Not trusting the strength of their original subject to fascinate any age group, they undercut it through using a device — the game-show panel — which actually comes to occupy the privileged place in the film in terms of screen time allotted, verbal dominance, visual energy, and in being the editing "peg." The resulting emphasis in the film is given over to scenes and remarks which are prejudicial in nature.

Our Cultural Fabric is only the first in a series of films exploring cultural differences and intended for a youthful audience. If the filmmakers trust in the strength of their original idea, as well as in their audience's sincere interest in learning about cultural differences, they will no doubt turn this into a fascinating series.

Joyce Nelson

cinema canada

