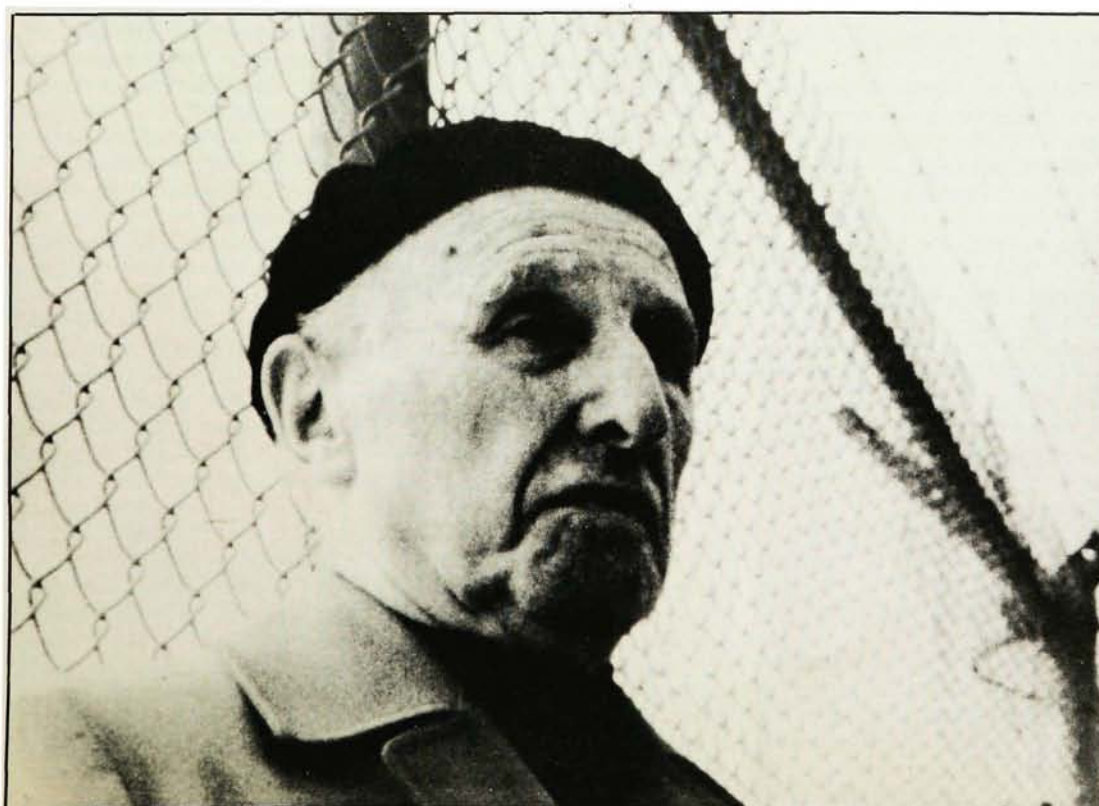


# Images '89

BY DONNA LYPCHUK



From Chris Mullington's video *Americans*.



*Father's Return to Auschwitz*, by Ivan Horsky.

This year's Images' Festival of Independent Film and Video suffered somewhat from a bad case of good intentions, which is not at all a reflection on the work that was screened, or to say that the Festival was badly organized. It's just that last year's event seemed so much more cozy and well-attended compared to this year's. Although attended by at least the same number of enthusiasts, screenings were spread out over five evenings at two different theaters. This had the effect of decentralizing the event. The crowds fragmented into either one theatre or the other, and it was physically impossible to see everything.

The Festival was further fragmented by the fact that it was curated and written about by nine different curators who had divided the programme into 17 different screenings. These screenings were further divided into two retrospectives: *Three Heads Are Better: The Videos Of General Idea* curated by Peggy Gale, and *Films For The End Of The Century: The Films Of Arthur Lipsett* curated by Ihor Holobizky; 11 thematically-related screenings curated by Sara Diamond (Vancouver), Frances Leeming (Ottawa) and Tom Waugh (Montreal); and four "open call programmes" curated by Richard Johnson, Brenda Longfellow, Midi Onodera and Andrew Peterson. This curatorial structure represents an ambitious attempt on the part of the board of directors of Northern Visions to be as comprehensive and representative as possible of the current state of film and video art in Canada. What appeared to be politicized and regional onscreen (the result of the all too familiar cultural problems of a small artistic community scattered all over a large country) worked well on paper in the form of a well-written and well-organized catalogue which strung everything together into a cohesive whole that left no dark corner of what it means to be an alternative "moving image maker," whether it be political, sexual, or otherwise, unswept.

Since it was virtually impossible to see everything, I concentrated on attending the screenings that I thought were the most diverse or perverse; that deviated from local (Toronto) traditions in film and video-making or that seemed unfamiliar or new.

*Donna Lypchuk is a Toronto-based freelance writer.*

# Reviews from Images '89

BY JANE PERDUE

## DISPLACED VIEW

**D**isplaced View is a film straight from the heart; an open diary dedicated to an aged grandmother. Director Midi Onodera takes a personal journey back to her family's unresolved past, when her father and grandfather were interned in World War II. Scenes from contemporary life juxtaposed with family album shots illustrate some of the complexities of being a third generation Japanese Canadian. As someone who is often complimented for her good English, Onodera responds with frustration, "I speak only English!"

Throughout the film, there is a sense of loss, some shameful truths, and a fierce longing to reaffirm her own culture and understand her family. The film is a rich treasure of the Japanese language, its pageantry, colourful costumes and traditional music. In the home, the camera caresses its subjects in a gentle and unobtrusive manner.

As Onodera queries her grandmother's and mother's acceptance of discriminatory conditions, she discovers her own identity and motives. The film is full of contradictions: within the director, within her cultural identity, and within her family's seeming acceptance of internment and her grandfather's subsequent death in the camp. Though constantly questioning her family's values, *Displaced View* is a personal statement of love, pride and cherished memories.

*DISPLACED VIEW* exec. p. Midi Onodera p. Jean Young, Michael Mclean sc. Midi Onodera d.o.p. Adam Swica of. Sarah Peddie trans. Tomoko Makabe narr. Suno

From Midi Onodera's *Displaced View*.

Yamazaki, Matsuye Mori, Midi Onodera. Produced with the assistance of the OFDC, the Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, Sec. of State for Multiculturalism. dist. DEC Films, MCANO Film Artists Inc. (416) 925-1065.

## 1932

**O**nly eight minutes in length, Susan Rynard's 1932 is a rich, yet haunting composite of dreamlike sequences. A woman takes an enigmatic trip into a surrealistic time warp. Each vignette is visually distinctive, almost like a painted canvas.

1932 begins simply in black and white, with the camera pointed at the bottom of a door, the tight angle including a mat and the veranda floor. Colour is introduced as a woman comes out of the door, picks up a bottle of milk, looks around, and returns inside. The camera is positioned as in the opening shot, and the colour gradually dissolves back to black and white. A freeze-frame concludes the first scene reinforcing an image similar to a monochromatic minimalist painting.

In another scene, muted browns and snowy rocks are background to a closeup of the woman holding a huge bouquet of brilliant red roses. Thrown across the screen, in slow motion, the lush flowers are held in a freeze-frame as the falling petals nestle against the pure white snow.

This freeze-frame motif links each scene as we are taken back in time, deep into a memory, or perhaps a hidden desire. A hollow silence echoes throughout the video that only allows for the occasional background noise – a bird,

footsteps, a clock ticking. The silence of the character speaks volumes.

Finally, in the last scene, she stands at a confessional and her thoughts pour out. But again, there is a barrier, a lack of access as she speaks in a foreign language. Her secrets are safe and the character remains as ambiguous as ever.

1932 d. Susan Rynard sc. Susan Rynard cam. Kim Derko, Susan Rynard orig. mus. P. Gmehting, J. Levis prod. crew D. Day, N. Drew, P. Fairfield, D. Joliffe of. Susan Rynard st. of. Susan Rynard, J. Levis l.p. Maria Leb, Guita Lamchesi post-prod. Charles Street Video dist. V-Tape, Antanae.

## SURVIVAL OF THE DELIRIOUS

**C**ombining myth and reality, *Survival of the Delirious* illustrates the horrors in both.

Playing dual roles, visual artist Andy Fabo retells the Cree legend about the "Windigo" – a giant that stalked the forests, wreaking havoc upon everything within his reach, causing misfortune to anyone contacted. Through reading the story, Fabo becomes as obsessed as the hunter searching through the woods with the intent to destroy the Windigo. A second narrative underscores a contemporary monster – the AIDS virus. Evil as the Windigo, this chilling actuality offers no salvation.

*Survival of the Delirious* is about fear of AIDS and fear for the future. Andy Fabo, an informed gay artist, visits a busy AIDS clinic in the daytime and in the dark is tormented by "real life" nightmares. A dense layering of images – from poetic landscapes and men making love, to medical symbols – is superimposed on Fabo's distinctive, fluid figures and texts.

A friend, Rob, is remembered as the first in their circle to die of what was then called GRID (gay-related immune deficiency). He was the one who "made the delirium a reality." Another man waits anxiously for his test results. Told that his HIV antibody results are negative, the camera closes in on a full head shot. A succession of abruptly cut, disconcerting stills show the relief on his face changing to anxiety as a voice-over warns that the tests aren't 100 per cent reliable. He must still take care, and keep in touch. Drums in the background lead us away from a pounding heart to the Indian legend.

Slipping in and out of a narrative/pseudo-documentary as experimental video can do so easily, *Survival of the Delirious* cleverly and honestly illustrates today's poignant reality for all.

*SURVIVAL OF THE DELIRIOUS* d. Micheal Balsler, Andy Fabo sc. Micheal Balsler, Andy Fabo cam.

Michael Balsler, Andy Fabo prod. crew Maureen Sless, Isabelle Rousset of. Balsler, Fabo l.p. A. Fabo, Wayne Boone, Marilyn Nazak dist. V-Tape.

## CORNUCOPIA

**G**eneral Idea is of a talented trio of artists (A.A. Bronson, Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz) who have collaborated since 1968. Known for their video art, sculpture, painting, photography, publishing and performance art, their main target over the years has been the media. As Peggy Gale, curator of "Three Heads Are Better" for Images '89, wrote in the catalogue, "General Idea play the media – as others might play the kazoo."

Understanding the vocabulary and means of manipulation, General Idea applies the media's tactical ploys with the highest level of irreverence. Designing their concept for the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion as early as 1971, this museum of ideas became public property. However, long before the arrival of 1984, and its actual construction, the Pavilion's 'ruins' were discovered, as depicted in the clever 'documentary' entitled *Cornucopia*.

At the beginning of the tape, the trio states, "General Idea has reintroduced destruction into the architectural process... Accumulated layers of function and meaning slip in and out of focus, creating a shifting constellation of images which is the pavilion itself". From the "Room of the Unknown Function", mysterious artifacts of dubious origin are infused with academic authority as the narrator elaborates on the cultural and social significance of the unearthed objects and drawings.

*Cornucopia* is presented in such a straightforward manner, using a traditional format that mimics many high-brow, high-art documentaries. Many of the "found" objets d'art, which were inspired by "accidental alterations" are given iconographical meaning. Pediments holding glistening ceramic cornucopias slowly revolve for the viewer to admire. Fragmented drawings of poodles are studied. This canine is a repeated motif, used by General Idea because of its "banal image, its desire to be preened and groomed for public appearances."

The hilarity of this "documentary" is exemplified, as we are told, by a drawing that depicts the idea that "One poodle's puddle is another poodle at sea."

General Idea's witty antics and tongue-in-cheek commentary on modern culture and our own myth-making always hit the mark. The year 1984 has come and gone but GI's work will continue to play devil's advocate with time and cultural barriers.



Opening night, I attended Sara Diamond's programme *Unsentimental Journeys: Working On Memory* at the Euclid Theatre which featured 11 works whose structure mimics or depends on the selective nature of human memory. The programme opened with *Our Normal Childhood* by Vancouver video artist Lorna Boschman, done in that flat documentary style that signifies that the content in this one is going to be everything and featured two women talking about how their early experiences with an abusive male in the family affected their lives forever. Similar in style, because it was so grounded in reminiscence as a form of documentary, was Alberta filmmaker Ivan Horsky's haunting *Father's Return To Auschwitz* which documented, in a universal, slick, well-made way, his aging father's strangely unbiting and sad return to the place of his internment during WWII. Equally archival, was Ian Doncaster's film *Rubblewoman*, (Alberta), which in a sense reanimated memory by animating photographs and footage of German women rebuilding post-war Berlin.

More abstract, was American Tom Kalin's visually and aurally melodious videotape, *They Are Lost To Vision Altogether* which was about the persistence and power of homoerotic imagery. *Measures Of Distance*, by U. K. filmmaker Mona Hatoum, adopted a similar lyrical strategy; it was like listening to a radio play accompanied by a series of very beautiful, but frozen, visual images.

Three of the works screened that evening, played with memory as a form of fiction, and therefore manifested themselves as dramas. *Freedom*, by American video artist Johanna Sophia, documents the life of a civil rights activist who flashes back to her past while she is in labour; the birth of her child is analogous to the idea of struggling for freedom. More derivative was Vancouver filmmaker David Tull's *The Width Of A Room*, which utilized the subconscious logic of surrealism and dreams to recall a tryst with a night porter in a hotel room, and Toronto video-artist Tess Payne played with

parallel plot lines referring to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in *By Way Of Fiction*.

One of the highlights of the evening was Alberta video artist Robert Milthrop's *Out Of Air*, which featured an interview with a young, chatty widow about her life in suburbia. This subtle and entertaining exposé turned into an outright roast of the subject by virtue of her own unselfconscious willingness to talk.

The next evening I viewed the four works that comprised an all Ontario-based programme called *Fresh Takes, New Narratives* curated by video-artist Andrew Paterson. The catchword to describe this programme is innovative, and it showcased works which dealt with animation, optical step-printing, matting, found footage and narrative fragmentation. *Catch Up* by Mike Shiell was a 3-minute animated film about a man's fantastic relationship with his cat. Another short film, *New Shoes for H* by Gary McLaren, fell within the limited scope of the experimental art mode; the only impression it left was retina burn from the giant H-shape that dominated the film frame for three minutes.

Christopher Mulligan's video travelogue of images, *America*, a 22-minute fourth of July extravaganza of American kitsch, incorporated such art school novelties as a rock'n'roll animated argument that Elvis Lives, a constant use of wide-angle camera (making the video look less like video and more like film), and contained what must have been the single most Diane Arbus-like macabre image of the festival—footage of a polio-ridden, drag queen named Miss Bunny singing about Hollywood. Also included in this programme, was a more mature offering from filmmaker Anna Gronau, *Mary Mary*, a film about a filmmaker trying to make a film featuring a hall of mirrors of altered negatives, extremely long travelling shots, and narrative doppelgangers from fairy-tales.

The subsequent programme that evening at Harbour front was *Gimme Shelter* curated by Tom Waugh, who was responsible for bringing a lot of international visions into the festival. This screening was devoted to the issue of shelter,

mostly lack of it. *Overdale* by Québécois video-artist Robert Craig, detailed in a lively, informative, and topical half-hour video, the fight of the citizens of Overdale in downtown Montreal to prevent their neighbourhood from condo-ization. *Des Squat Heureuses* by Quebec video-artists Mireille Audet, Diane Daoust, and Eve Lamont was a jazzy documentation of the housing crisis in Europe, and involved interviews with groups of female squatters living in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and France. Also screened was a documentary from India. *Voices From Bal Tapal*, by Ranjan Palit and Vaudha Joshi, which cinematically described a fight by farmers against the Indian government, which wants to turn their fertile coastal land into a missile range.

A little lighter in tone was Frances Leeming's programme *Double Checking The Fiction*, described as "a sampling of artistic production of, about, and from cultural investigations." *Quackery* was a short one-liner from Manitoban Rosalie Bellefontaine, that uses the metaphor of a square peg in a round hole along with a personal anecdote in order to discover what "it" is. *Fiddle Faddle* by Toronto video veteran Colin Campbell, was a very humorous 26-minute narrative about a cash-strapped video artist forced to write reviews, full of "wish fulfillment" fantasies complete with the ultimate "fuck you," sexual innuendos, and socially-inbred celebrities from the local Toronto scene.

Kim Derko's film *Scientific Girl* seriously sends up ideas about female hysteria and then sends them out in style (of the 1940s). Vancouverite Peg Campbell's short film *In Search Of The Last Good Man*, was a definite highlight, combining a quirky cinematic style, witty narrative, and cohesive costuming to make her point about just how shallow the '80s single girl can be.

*Bewitched, Bewildered And Bothered* curated by Richard Johnson was put together around the idea of irony and art. The three videos features, *The Complete Handbook For Video Artists*, by Ontario artists Rob Thompson and Ray Hagel, *Cannes Nominee*, by Robert Bennett (which

featured such art-school irony as great outfits and at least 20 versions of "These Boots Are Made For Walking"), and *Body Invaders* by Quebec filmmaker Tracy Nelson were so ironic (and self-referential) they ate themselves. All three were characterized by low-production values, as well as a lot of low content paced "ironically" out of context.

*Bewitched, Bewildered and Bothered* also featured Winnipeg filmmaker Guy Maddin's historical plague-era film *Gimli Hospital*, a critically-lauded, officially recognized work of genius (at least in the United States); a low-budget, dead-serious, deadpan answer to David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. Maddin is a filmmaker who can make a bad soundtrack and lack of lighting and props work to his advantage.

I wrapped up my attendance at the festival with *Desiring Bodies*, curated by filmmaker Mido Onodera. *Lamented Moments, Desired Object*, by video-artist Vern Hume from Alberta, examined aurally and visually the elusiveness of memory. Ontario filmmaker Gary Popovich, made cinematic love to a tree in his minute-and-a-half experimental offering *Caress*. Also featured was Andy Fabo and Michael Balser's award-winning video-tape *Survival Of The Deterious*, a story about a day at an Aids clinic that intertwines the experience with the Cree Legend of the Windigo, and Rhonda Abrams' operatic saga *Billy of Meek Cove*, about a girl who is raised by seals.

The best thing about Images is the rare opportunity it provides the general public to see alternative programming. It is unfortunate that a festival of this sort has to be such a rapidly assimilated event (a period of five days is not enough to absorb the material screened, never mind the material submitted to the curators that was not screened), and it should be more accessible to the general public. These films and videos should be assimilated gently, on an everyday basis, and be readily available films and videos-programmed on their own government-subsidized TV channel, as an alternative to the CBC. ●

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