

# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

1979 - 1980  
12th Season

## CINEPROBE

An Evening with Larry Jordan  
(Petaluma, California)  
Monday, March 24, 1980 at 6:00 p.m.

Program: MOONLIGHT SONATA (1979; 5 min; color)  
THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER (1978; 42 min; color; narration of the  
Coleridge poem by Orson Welles)  
VISIONS OF A CITY (1957, edited 1978; 6 min; color; with Michael McClure)  
CORNELL, 1965 (1965, edited 1978; 8 min; color; with Joseph Cornell)  
OUR LADY OF THE SPHERE (1969; 10 min; color)  
entire program: 71 minutes

Larry Jordan is an accomplished avantgarde filmmaker whose works encompass both animated and nonanimated modes. To each mode, he brings a discreet and highly developed editing sense which juxtaposes disparate elements in a manner reminiscent of surrealism. In addition to his own work, Jordan has been a dedicated polemicist for the independent film: during the 1950s, while travelling extensively, Jordan helped to found the Camera Obscura Film Society (in conjunction with Bruce Conner) as well as establishing "The Movie," the first experimental film theater in San Francisco. The range of his interests reveal a great sensitivity to a wide-range of cultural achievements, a sensitivity which is matched in his animations by the source materials which he utilizes for his images.

MOONLIGHT SONATA, one of his most recent animations, is another in his series of "illustrations" to the music of Erik Satie, in this case, GNOSSIENNE 5. The subtlety of the imagery's movement is a conscientious attempt to mirror the simplicity and the directness of the music.

Jordan's most ambitious recent film, THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER, was the result of a long and very careful process. Jordan has described the genesis of this film:

"For seven years I had been planning this film, after the 1st edition Doré prints came into my hands in a completely surreal manner. After two scripts, I finally presented the third to Welles, who liked the idea and agreed to narrate.

"I wanted to depict the complete poem via the Doré illustrations, yet infused with dream-irrelevancies that would carry the film at least one step out of the realm of the merely filmic illustration of a poem. Working in my usual animated style, but this time with the long slow sweeps of the compound table, I tried to 'infiltrate' the world of Doré and Coleridge, through the agency of Orson Welles' deep, rumbling voice. When I realized that the color tint that shifted with the shot changes was not subtle enough for this film, it meant I was forced to optically print, or re-make the entire film, frame-by-frame on the optical printer - an ordeal which sent me off to recuperate for five months on a Greek island."

As with all his animated works, THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER depends on the literalized procedure of creating movement for still imagery.

Both VISIONS OF A CITY and CORNELL, 1965 are tributes to artists with whom Jordan has felt an intense correspondence. About the former, Jordan has written:

"I resurrected this film from neglected oblivion because, on viewing it in 1978, I found that it was one of those rare films that I have always deplored the scarcity of: documents of how it really looked in a certain place in a certain year. I also liked the mirror imagery and the subtle increase in the



tempo of the film to its conclusion. All images were taken from the various reflective surfaces of the city, and the original intention - the trapping of a man on this impersonal surface - seems both relevant and at the same time unimportant to me, in perspective. I am also pleased that there exists this filmic portrait of the poet McClure as he really looked in 1957, in San Francisco."

Regarding CORNELL, 1965, Jordan has written:

"The narration of the film itself is almost completely self-explanatory as to the origins and intentions in the film. I worked as Joseph Cornell's assistant during the summer and fall of 1965, during which time I shot four rolls of kodachrome 16mm film in and around Cornell's house. The scenes included a brief 'biographical glimpse' of Cornell and his work, as well as his working environment, which is perhaps the more valuable record now since it (the working environment) no longer exists, while the boxes he made do. I found the film difficult to complete as evidenced by the full thirteen years between the filming and the editing. I have worked on it a number of times in that period, but it has taken an unhurried maturation process to ripen to my own satisfaction, as we feel the growing, not the diminishing, of Cornell's influence as an artist in America. I believe the fascination with Cornell's work that was felt while he was alive, and the continuing fascination centers around a quality which is hard for me to describe. It is that quality, since I experienced it at first hand and over a long period of time, which I have tried to elucidate in the film: an aesthetic personality which never backed off from aesthetic experience, never divided personal enjoyment from art, never worked and then got drunk to relax from working, or horsed around with the creative process - and at the same time could encompass sentiment in the strongest displays of his art. This intensity finds a ready and willing audience, and is not merely the result of an individual dynamic style, but embodies much more universal qualities and, I feel, is quite worthy of perpetuation among artists of succeeding generations."

Although the majority of Jordan's works are in animation (he founded Studio Films, an animation studio, in 1961), he has also produced several dramatic films, distinguished by their usage of the editing process. These two short film portraits were created in the same manner, stressing post-production editing as a significant feature in the formal realization.

The qualities which Jordan ascribed to Joseph Cornell are ones which he shares; the strong display of sentiment, the intensity, and the individual dynamic style are evident in Jordan's most popular animation, OUR LADY OF THE SPHERE. This representation of a young man's phantasmagoric travels has a distinct narrative thrust, juxtaposing nineteenth century imagery with contemporary scientific imagery to suggest imaginative correspondences which define the present-day cultural landscape.

---Daryl Chin

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