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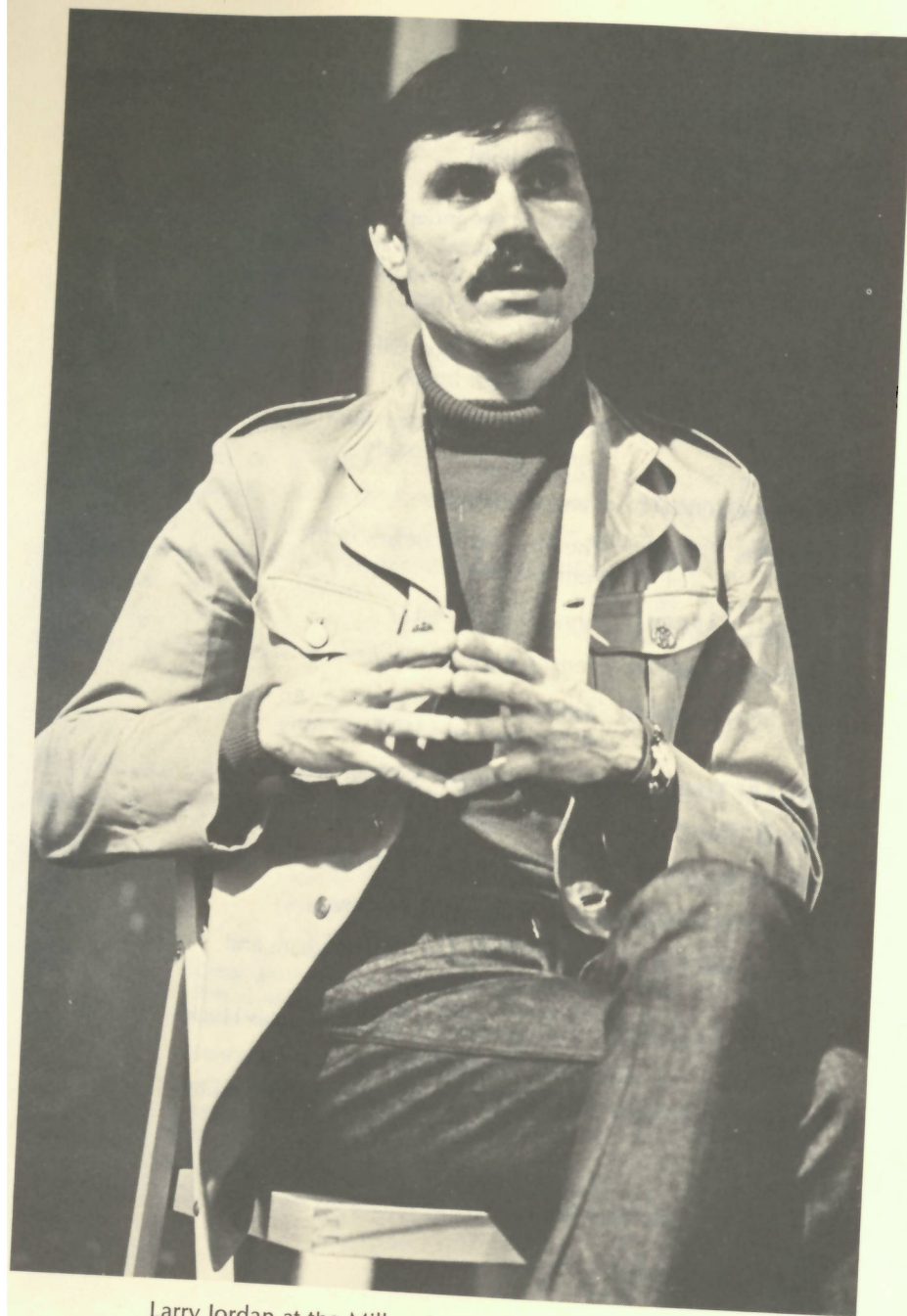
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## FILM JOURNAL







Larry Jordan at the Millennium (Photo Credit: Lloyd Eby)

## Survival in the Independent – Non-Commercial – Avant-Garde – Experimental – Personal – Expressionist Film Market of 1982

LARRY JORDAN

The basis of this present update is an article I wrote with the same title as the above (substitute "1979" for "1982") in *Cinemanews*, #79, 1979, and a rebuttal of same by Jonas Mekas in the *Downtown Review*, Spring 1980.

In that article I basically and somewhat verbosely proposed the idea that people don't pay much serious attention to our films because they aren't valuable, like the paintings of Warhol or the boxes of Cornell are. Mekas took serious exception to that notion.

I said that a lot of money gets spent each year in the private sector on art and that filmmakers get none of it, indeed have insulated themselves from the art establishment on various grounds, ranging from morality to envy.

I further said that the painters and sculptors I know are stimulated to produce new works by the sale of their old ones, and no one I know panders in style because a gallery prefers this style or that.

I went on to suggest that short personal film originals are saleable to collectors or museums, under the right circumstances; and that this would be just one option added to our faltering support system, not the salvation of it.

I know video artists, for instance, who have made and turned over the original tape on commission. Though differences in the materials and the costs exist, I saw no reason why short films couldn't be sold also. (Mekas's objections are on record.)

And then I sought to enumerate in that longer article answers to the objections which immediately spring to mind:

1. burial of the works in private collections,
2. corruption of art dealers,
3. sense of loss by the filmmaker,
4. preservation of the original,
- and more.

Since 1979, when I sat like a monk in a snow-bound apartment in Amsterdam, overlooking the canal and watching the birds dart and dive from the eaves of the buildings across the way and wrote that piece, I have talked to a lot of people about the idea of selling a film original of 5 to 10 minutes for \$10,000 to \$15,000. (To collectors this is not a lot of money if the work is sound.)

By and large, younger filmmakers don't know how they feel about it. Older filmmakers tend to be very interested; but they don't think it's possible. One older



filmmaker (Jonas) thought the whole scheme diabolical. Well, I never intended to sell us to Mammon. My intention was (and is) to help us survive the present decline of interest in the more and more films that fall under the above long heading.

I believe money is a Tool, not a Corruptor per se. I also think that we have put a lot more energy into moaning and groaning about the lack of money than in seriously looking for it. Composers of "difficult music" have societies with ties to funding. Photographers have made inroads in the sale of negatives or limited edition prints. Poets have a network of college professors who keep them circulating, teaching and reading.

We, of course, have our tours, out of which the airlines take most of the honorarium. If you are in New York, the Arts Council may be of some help. Lucky if you're Canadian or German. Otherwise, it's a cold world. And we all know what's happening to lab rates. How many people can teach more people how to make more and more disenfranchised films?

I have the feeling from Jonas' rebuttal he would prefer that we retain this almost insurmountable financial opposition to our work, so that only the spiritually committed survive. There is something to be said for that view. Certainly it pertains in the European art world. It is a survival of, if not the fittest, the most obsessive. And it might even solve the problem of diminishing showcases.

I don't know why something drives me to a more democratic position, possibly in direct opposition to all art tradition.

My personal view is that I don't make work to put into a small-scale replica of the commercial cinema, which includes distribution, publicity, a theater, audience and tickets at the door. When I work it is exactly as if I am painting or collaging. Why then do I have to depend on this system borrowed from the circus in order to display my work? What about, if not abolishing altogether the present model, adding another dimension to it and trying to interest an art collector in the original of my film?

That's where you run into the collector's problems:

1. The work is not visible in a room at all times.
2. It requires quiet, darkness and concentration for anywhere from three minutes to 45, or longer. (This is scary to some people if they're not being obviously entertained.)
3. Threading a projector and maintaining equipment and more.

I've taken the position that of course there are problems; but problems by definition are to be solved. I don't see impossible barriers.

Rudimentary suggestion-ideas for solutions include high resolution video screens (precluding total darkness and relegation to a mini-theater). Also this provides a continuous display capability; gallery facilities with bank vaults for storage of originals; legal and technical advice from gallery and filmmaker to facilitate ownership of an original, etc.

Plus, the filmmaker retains one print of the film for private and lecture use. (Better than painters, who generally have only a slide.)

In three years I haven't really gotten much closer to putting this proposal into practice, except to interest several well-known filmmakers, who are ready, if the sale presents itself, to comply.

When asked by the editorship of *Millennium Film Journal* to write this present update of the earlier position, my real purpose became one of putting forth a feeler

which might attract the necessary entrepreneur—that person with contacts in the world of art buyers who has vision and energy enough to surmount the many problems involved, and begin to raise the practice of personal film making from its present renegade status in the art world.

I still believe that if a museum presented a "film concert" of works sold into private collections for considerable money, many people would come to see that concert. Whether they "liked" or "disliked" the films is beside the point. I also believe that this interest (and controversy) would carry over into our co-ops, workshops, cinematheques and film groups, and would help revive these sagging institutions.

It is quite anomalous that a twentieth-century art form is so neglected in that century.

With no one collecting our works (and I'm not counting a few prints, which will deteriorate soon enough) our originals will deteriorate also. Filmmakers cannot afford proper preservation for their own films.

I think that through digital processes of the present technology, film originals have the capability of lasting longer than paintings. So throw out the old argument of nondurability. But the process costs money—to develop and to use. That's another reason the films need to acquire value first.

So, here's to the unknown possible person with a capacity to exchange new models for old and help the movement into a new phase in the Eighties.