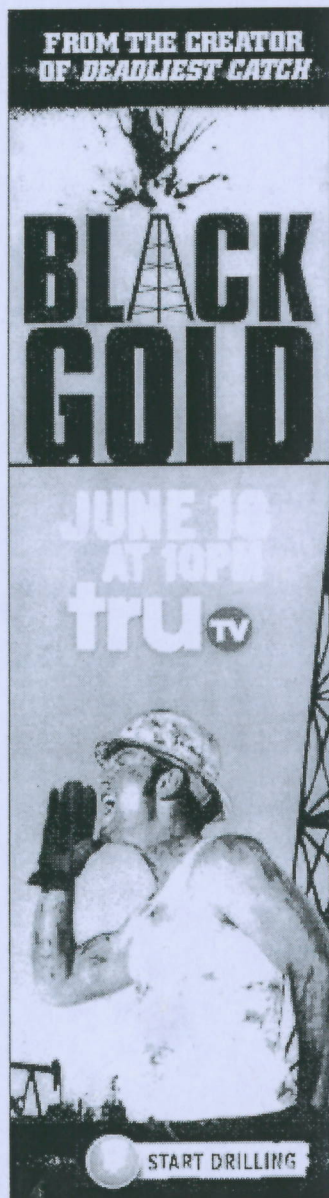




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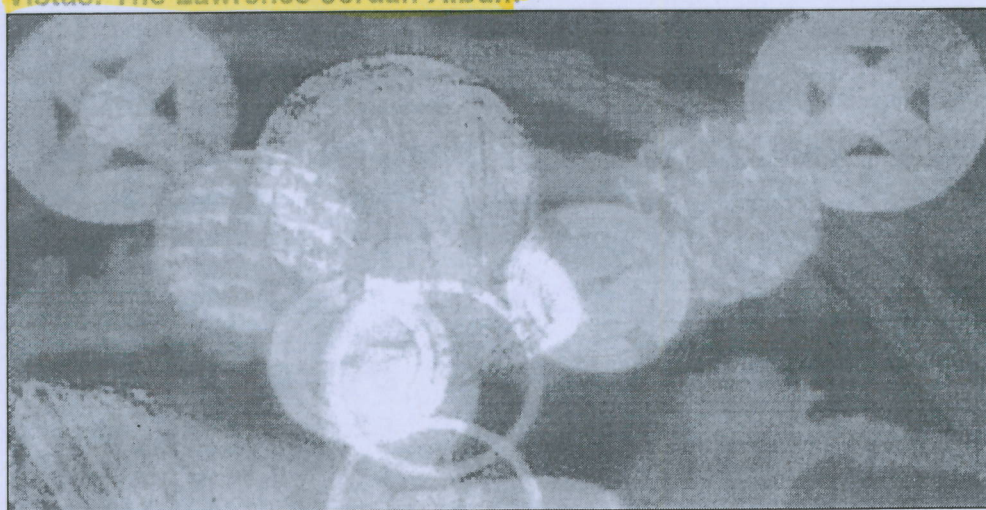


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On DVD

## Vistas: The Lawrence Jordan Album



We often forget how much actual art there is in the art of animation. Not so much skill or filmmaking acumen, but genuine, painstaking personal craft. After all, the genre is built on the drawing, the pen and ink providence that through motion, constructs an aesthetically pleasing perception of the world. It's what the Great Masters strived for when they put oil to canvas, or chisel to stone. It's also what directors and illustrators focus on when they put cells to celluloid for that all important imitation of life. Yet sometimes, concept transcends creativity, leading to something both revolutionary and retrograde.

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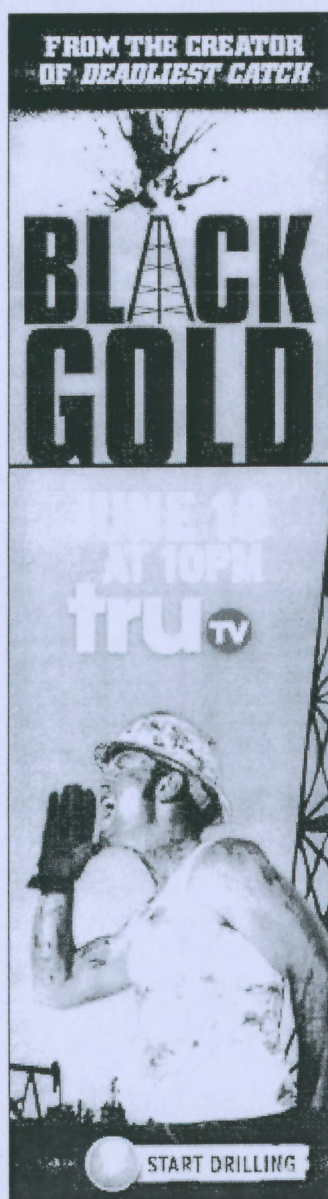


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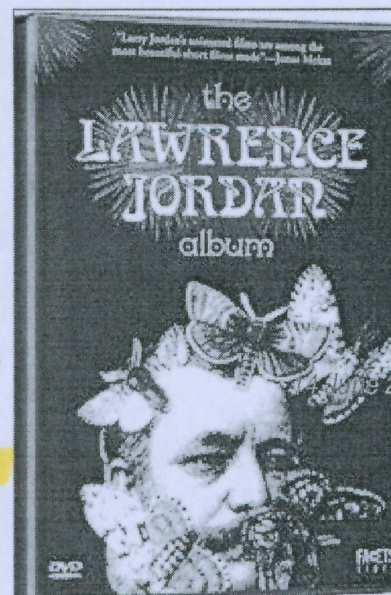
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Such is the case with Lawrence Jordan. Having been involved in making his "cartoon collages" since the '50s, the bay area maverick has seen both his Victorian styled stop motion cut outs and meditative live action tone poems celebrated as intense, inspired, and most importantly, artistic. Now, Facets Video has compiled a four disc DVD box set celebrating the man's career. Entitled *The Lawrence Jordan Album*, we get two sets of animation, and two additional collections of standard cinematic statements. Yet once viewed, it is clear that there is nothing "typical" about what this inventive, sometimes irritating auteur has to offer.



### The Lawrence Jordan Album

**Director:** Lawrence Jordan

US DVD: 27 MAY 2008

**OFFICIAL SITE**

Disc one takes us through the most typical of Jordan's work, with pieces ranging from 1961 ("Duo Concertantes") to 2004 ("Enid's Idyll"). Following themes typically built around particular classical compositions, the 10 presentations illustrate the main muse that the filmmaker follows. The second DVD delves into the other side of Jordan's passion. Known as "The H.D. Trilogy" (based on the poet Hilda Doolittle and her long form elegy "Hermetic Definitions") this trip through Italy, Greece and Britain serves as a statement about aging gracefully, and vitally, through a world seemingly ignorant of its history. Disc three returns to the careful collage style, the trio of films following similar pattern. The final DVD delivers seven more live action efforts, including the stellar "Sacred Art of Tibet".

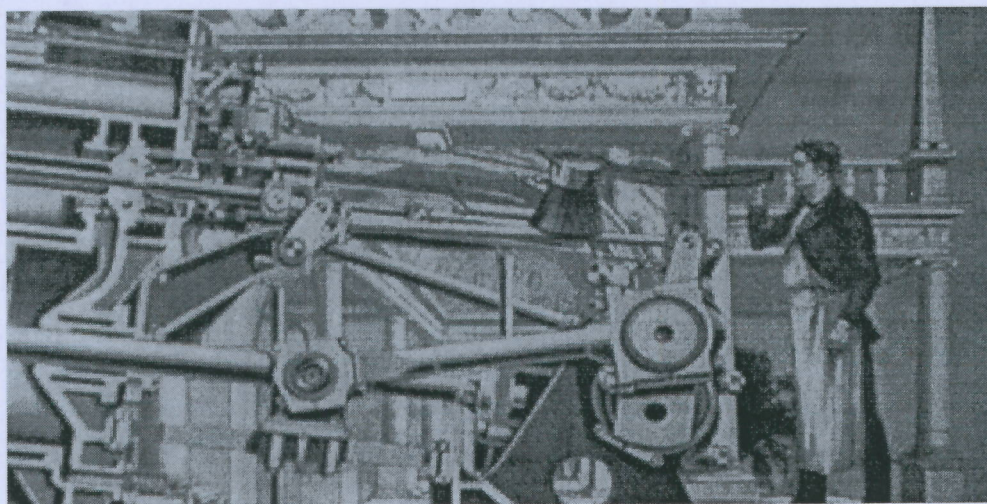


Together, these films tell a compelling story, the implied narrative centering on an idealist locked in a battle between the suggested and the sensible.



The first few films argue for a man exploring the very limits of a certain set agenda. As the gorgeous tones of the "Gymnopedies" or "Moonlight Sonata" play, Jordan juxtaposes images from ancient tapestries and etchings, old world wonders manipulated in such a way as to suggest Monty Python's Terry Gilliam without a sense of humor. Certain constants resonate throughout - the crying, all seeing eyes; the escape implied in the hot air balloon; the grace of the human body; the undeniable beauty in nature. When combined with Jordan's seemingly random approach (objects fly in and out of frame with minimal reference to anything storied or purposefully plotted), one gets the impression of an effervescent vision inspired by too many dreams and not enough drama.

Yet Lawrence Jordan's scattershot stratagem can be very effective. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Samuel Taylor's lyrical ballad about the seemingly supernatural events that occur to a sailor as he heads home, benefits from this wide open imagination approach. It's a masterstroke to take the arc poetics the material provides and provide some manner of visual association. The other animations of Disc three follow a similar pattern. "Sophie's Place" does try to intimate a central location and person, but the boundaries of such an idea are pushed, and then broken, time and again. Similarly, "Blue Skies Beyond the Looking Glass" gives us man (in the form of old Hollywood stars) vs. nature, the ephemeral and the exacting in close quarters combat.



Yet it's his live action work which resonates deeper. The "HD Trilogy", for example, explores elements that, even today, many filmmakers fail to bother with. Acting as a stand-in for both Doolittle and the poem's complex protagonist, actress Joanna McClure depicts aging sensuality with frank openness and abject honesty. There are times when she appears frail and fragile. In other sepia toned lights, she sizzles beyond what her beauty pageant betters could ever accomplish. As the material turns contemplative and more insular, Jordan investigates the intimate. McClure bravely responds with nude scenes, self-reflection, and a last act sequence where



all we see is her philosophical face, mind lost in deep thought. Some may see this trip through Italy and Greece (with a side trek through the cemeteries of London) as an extended travelogue. Sadly, they are missing the major point of this material.

The last disc is not so deceptive. Here, Jordan provides what some might consider straight forward documentaries. Of course, his clash of images style remains real and intact. Some of his subjects are fairly obvious. "Views of a City" looks at a burgeoning metropolis through the various reflective surfaces within, while "In a Summer Garden" and "Winter Light" are vistas captured in a self explanatory form. Perhaps the best example of what Jordan can accomplish with both his fact and fiction conceit is the vibrant "Sacred Art of Tibet". Using a voice over that explains the various deities in the country's religion, the filmmaker manipulates the material, double exposures and camera tricks creating an epiphany like look at the psychedelic dimension of faith. It stands as a fascinating piece.



In fact, all 'facets' of *The Lawrence Jordan Album* stand the test of time and post-modern temperament. As with any overview, the sudden sandwiching of movies that were never meant to 'play' together can be off putting. One sees patterns purposely avoided thanks to the displacement of years, and it causes a kind of fault the artist is far from guilty of. In fact, if one takes this box set as a gallery exhibit, a chance to view Jordan as a whole and not just a singular selection of one or two works, a prescience evolves. There is humor of the grotesque here, anatomical models dancing like chorus girls in a cheap vaudeville revue. Similar, Jordan applies a dream logic even more specious than David Lynch's psyche scarred scenarios. Yet there is no denying that what he forges is, as Ed Blank of the Pittsburgh Press referred to it as "pure film".

Indeed, *The Lawrence Jordan Album* could be subtitled "A Primer on the Language of the Artform". Like a grammar guide required of school children to understand the fundamentals, and the tenet bending nuances, of writing

and the resulting literature, this complicated creator reveres the rules, only to then break them with radical regularity. It's the perfect amalgamation of what many in creativity already know - you've got to perfect the basics before venturing out into the unknown. With their spinning orbs, buried pagan symbols, understated purpose, and overdone calculations, Jordan's work joins the ranks of other fringe finery. He may not deserve a place among the mainstream, but to understand the normative, one needs to know his formidable flights of fancy. They help put animation, and its internal element of art, into proper perspective.



—Bill Gbron 12:16 pm | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

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