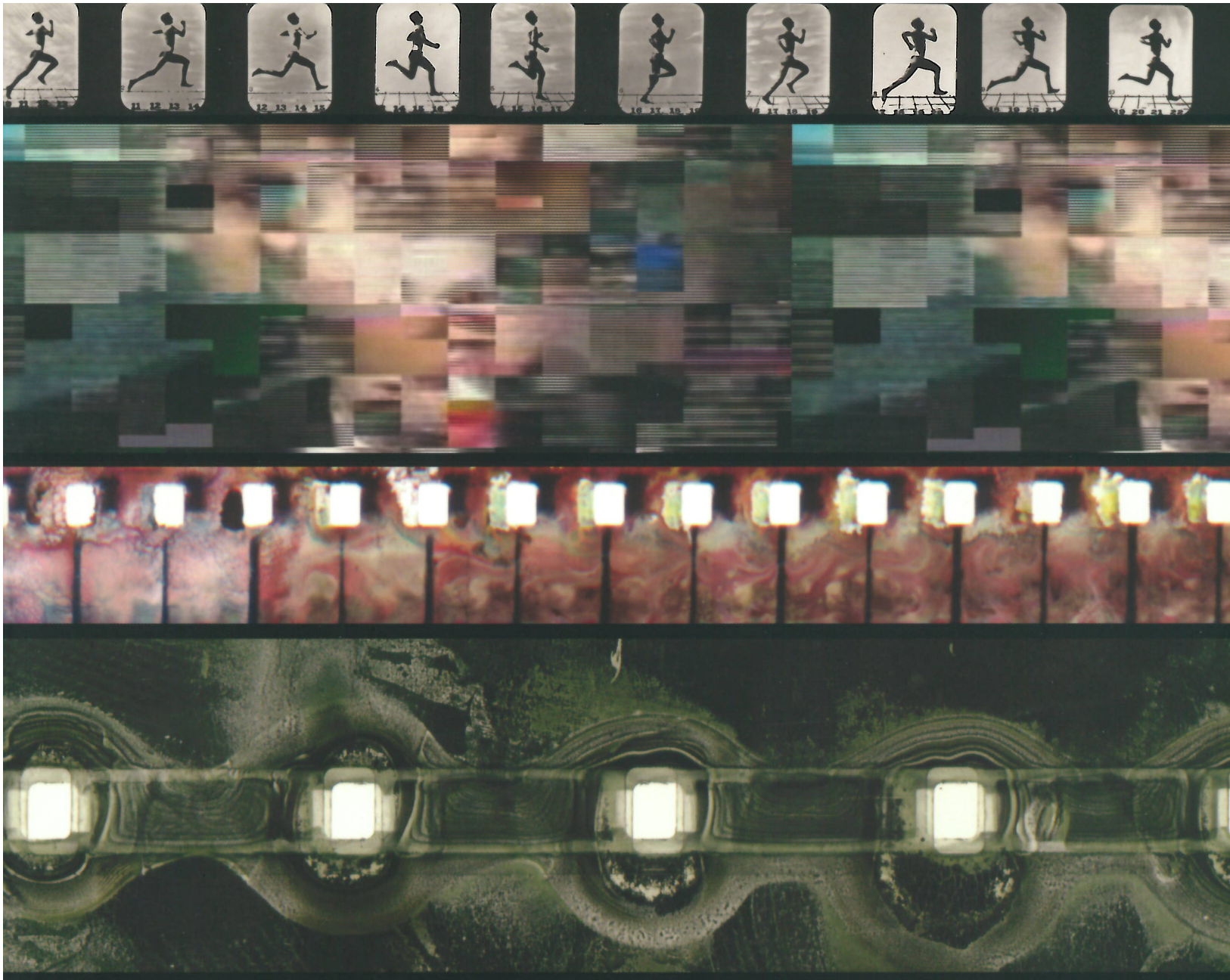


radical LIGHT

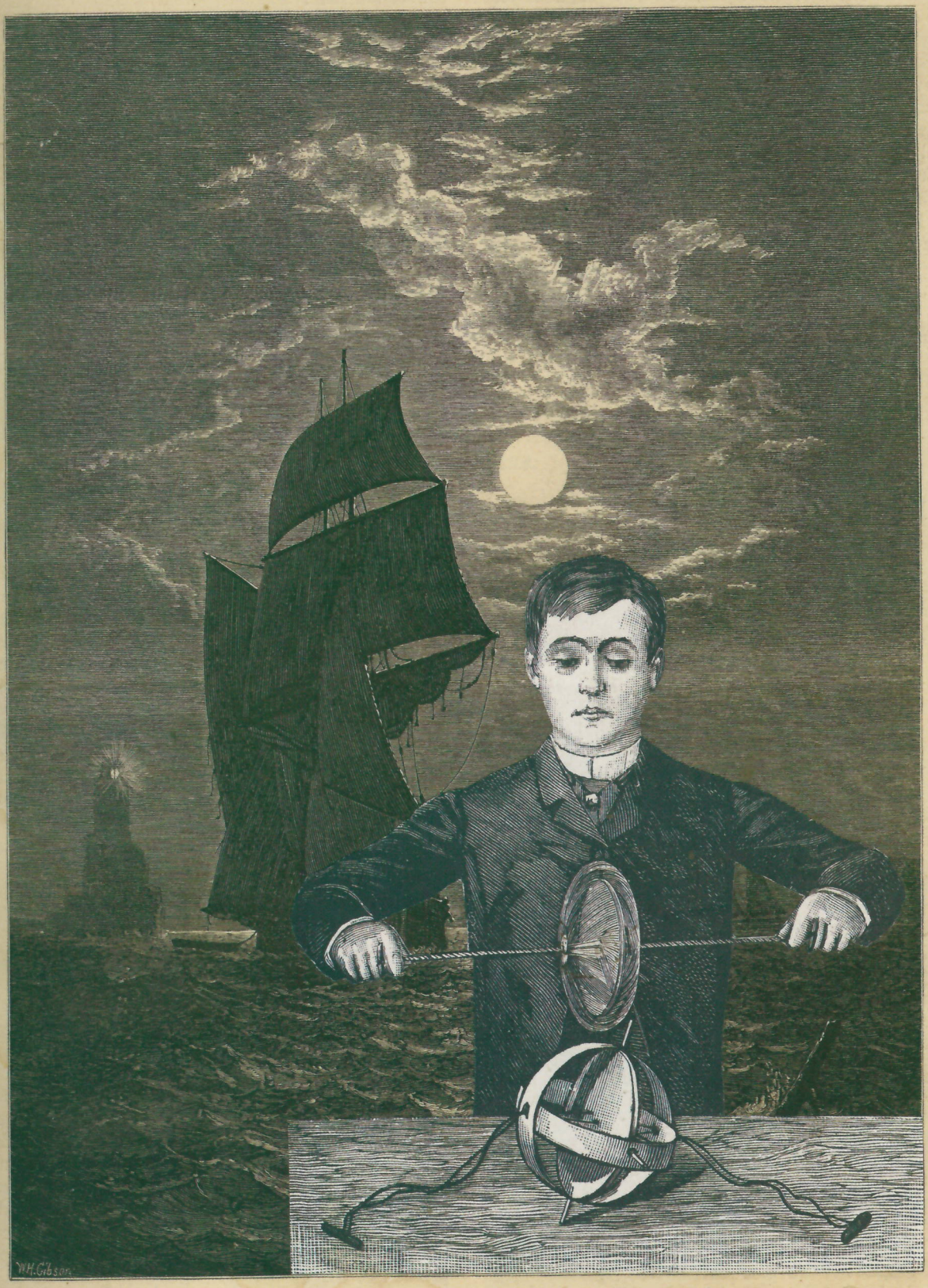
Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000

EDITED BY ■ STEVE ANKER ■ KATHY GERITZ ■ STEVE SEID

ARTIST PAGE

Lawrence Jordan

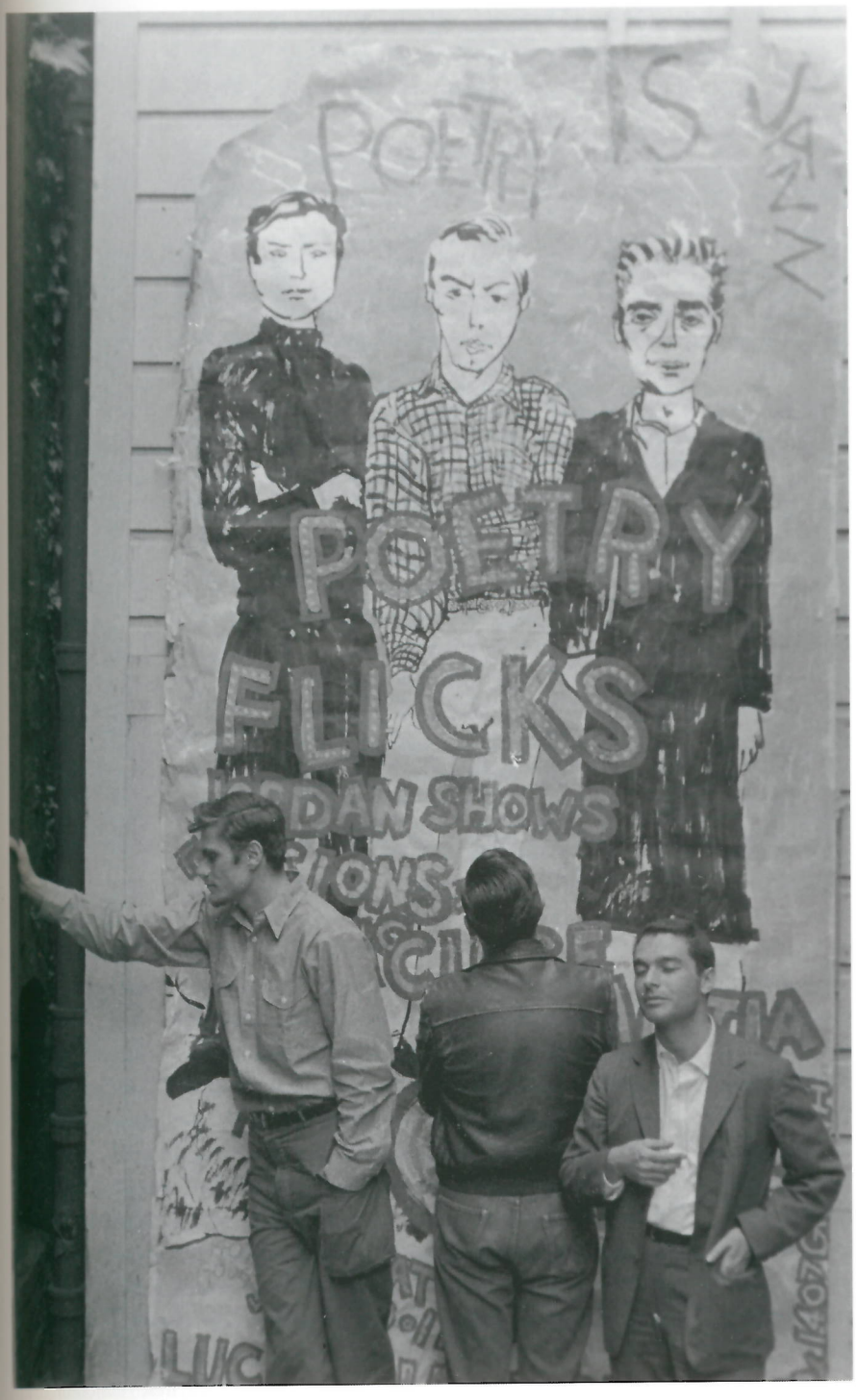
2003



Long Island Sound by Moonlight.—From a Painting by M. F. H. De Haas.

The Venue Vanguard: Artists as Exhibitors, 1955–1965

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE JORDAN BY KATHY GERITZ



Steve Anker and I talked with Lawrence Jordan in his garden in Petaluma on March 23, 2001. I conducted a follow-up interview in March 2009. Jordan has been making films for more than fifty years, including collage animations and lyrical films as well as a number featuring noted Bay Area artists. After a brief stint at California College of Arts and Crafts, Jordan taught at San Francisco Art Institute from 1968 until his retirement in 1999.—Kathy Geritz

I came out here to the Bay Area in 1955. Several other people whom I was close with in high school in Denver, Colorado, did as well. Stan Brakhage had come first, then I came, followed by Walter Newcomb, Yvonne Fair, and Robert Benson, all of whom appeared in either my or Brakhage's early fifties films (and I was in Brakhage's, and he was in mine). We moved here because we'd heard about poets and painters in the Bay Area. That was the main attraction; we hadn't yet heard of filmmakers.

When we got to the Bay Area we somehow learned that Charlie Chaplin had had a studio at Niles Canyon, and so, on a romantic notion, we thought we'd start a tour of our films there. We had a Bell & Howell projector and a few films of Stan's and mine. We drove there in my old Chevrolet and a trailer with camping equipment, rented a gymnasium at a school, and, at the appointed time, set up the projector. Not one person came! We went and asked a farmer if we could camp in his eucalyptus grove and then sat around the campfire and read H. P. Lovecraft. We came back to San Francisco. I guess you'd call that a reality check.

I soon became aware of what [the commercial artist and filmmaker] Frank Stauffacher had done at the San Francisco Art Museum—the Art in Cinema series. That was all over, but there were still a few remnants around. I remember that several of us went to Hy Hirsh's[1] in 1955. He had a flat in North Beach, I believe, with an entire wall of floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with LP vinyl records. He must have had a good portion of all the LPs that had been published at that time—classical, folk. He made 3-D films, and my memory is that you could look at them without glasses, but I'm not sure. He had two Bell & Howell projectors that were linked mechanically frame for frame by a rod between them as he showed the two parts of the film. When you looked at the screen you saw rings turning in three-dimensional space. It looked perfect. All this business about how to get 3-D—I never quite understood the huge difficulty, because in 1955 I saw perfect 3-D in his flat in San Francisco.

Today there are dozens of places you can go any weekend to see cultural events. Then, when anything was happening, a lot of people came. They'd hear by the grapevine that it was happening. No press. There would be fair audiences, between forty and maybe even a couple hundred at times. I showed all the films I had completed to date in 1955 at the Six Gallery. I remember handing a leaflet around and calling a few people; everybody just showed up—painters, poets, and a few filmmakers. A lot of us grouped around the Six Gallery because it was completely owned and operated by artists.[2] And Madame Labaudt had a nice, small gallery on Gough Street that she rented for $10. Probably about 1957, I showed the first version of

OPPOSITE Cinema Guild Theater, Berkeley, 1957

PAGE 79 Lawrence Jordan, *Poetry Is Jazz* (variant), c. 1957, with Lawrence Jordan (left), Michael McClure, and Philip Lamantia

Visions of a City [1979, begun 1957] there; it was fifteen minutes long and had no sound track. As we showed the film, Michael McLure [who is in the film] and Philip Lamantia read their poetry. George Herms came; it was one of the first times I met him.

The art scene in San Francisco was quite small. Everybody got to know everybody else—anybody who was doing much that was creative—except that separate scene around the Art Institute, Nathan Oliveira, Diebenkorn, and those people. They were out on another trajectory. The people I ran into were Christopher Maclaine, Jordan Belson, Patricia Marx, and Dion Vigne. Vigne made a few films, but he was making the scene of being a filmmaker more than he was making films, and he was setting up some showings. At that time the main person arranging film screenings, believe it or not, was Jordan Belson. I went to several of their screenings; maybe twenty people would come. Vigne and Belson would show their own films, Chris Maclaine's, Pat Marx's, and other local filmmakers, Belson and Maclaine were the most active—and the most brilliant—filmmakers. I think I went to one screening on [the poet and artist] Gerd Stern's houseboat in Sausalito and one at the Fugazi Hall in North Beach, which became a place where poets read. When Allen Ginsberg read *Howl* there, I decorated the hall with a bunch of stuff I had.

All through the period between 1955 and 1960, I was addicted to going over to the Berkeley Cinema Guild, and Pauline Kael, who programmed it, was very important to me. She would let me in free. I got quite an education in early and classic foreign films. Other filmmakers didn't connect with her, but she was showing dramatic features I loved. That's why I started in film, after I saw Eisenstein, Cocteau, René Clair at Harvard. I remember over in Oakland somebody at one of the colleges, maybe Mills, had a tiny film society for one semester, and I saw early motion films like Man Ray's. It was totally mind blowing. I didn't know you could do that with film. I didn't know you could just plasticize the screen. That made me aware of something very different from what I'd seen in Cocteau and Eisenstein.

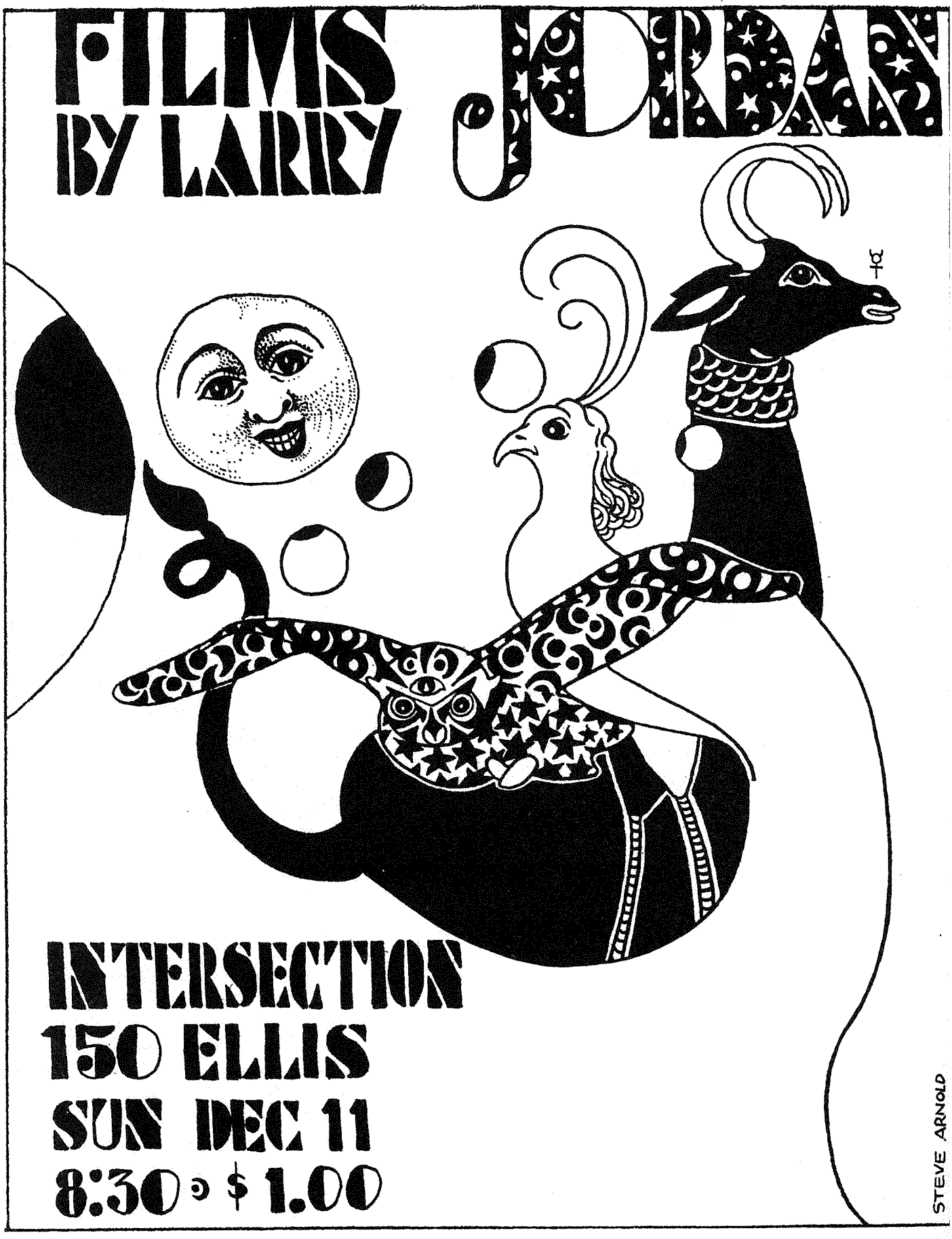
I took one summer and went to New York, and then came back to San Francisco. Around 1957 I met Bruce Conner, but I had already been corresponding with him. He came from the same hometown as Michael McClure; they were early friends. I'd met Michael and Joanna, and I used to go to their place a lot. Michael said, "There's somebody you should get to know, Bruce Conner, who is at the University of Colorado finishing his master's degree in painting. He's showing films like you're making—experimental films—at the University of Colorado, and it's immensely successful. They're getting, like, six hundred people coming for these showings." Bruce Conner is evidently one of the people who started the phenomenon of experimental showings being big-time in colleges all across the country.

The idea developed that when Bruce got to San Francisco we would start some kind of exhibition, because there was none here. We had to make our own venues to show film. What Jordan Belson and Dion Vigne did was very spotty. Bruce and I started Camera Obscura Film Society soon after he got here in 1957.[3] Bruce did the artwork for the programs. We had a place in a church on Washington Street near Van Ness where we showed the films. A lot of the films didn't have sound tracks. Bruce was an absolute genius at picking records to go with the films. (I've learned since that the first wave of the avant-garde—Richter, Man Ray, and all those people who made films in the early twenties, which are known mostly as silent films—*never* wanted those films to be silent. There's no purism of the silent film.) We ran that film society for maybe a year and a half. We got little announcements in the paper, and we had a small following, maybe fifty people. I think there was a membership. We showed Kenneth Anger films, Maya Deren, . . . Broughton, and the earlier experimental films, the twenties stuff from MoMA—Man Ray, René Clair, as well as Keaton and Chaplin. Who was making films? Brakhage, Belson, me. Then Bruce and I got tired of running a film society because we wanted to make films. We got some core members of the audience involved in running it after we left.

What drove me for many, many years was the desire to start a movement of independent film like they had going a little bit in New York with Maya Deren and Willard Maas. Stan had left the Bay Area. He didn't really like it. I think he thought nothing was happening, or was going to. But I thought something could be done commercially for experimental film. When you're young, you think you can do things, and you just do them. I had this strong model of the Berkeley Cinema Guild that showed you could possibly be successful showing 16mm films. A lot of stuff happened in a three-year period; it's hard to sort out the time line. My memory is that when I started to remodel an after-hours joint into a theater, the film society was over and there was again no place to show our films, but they may have overlapped.

Chris Maclaine and I tried to start a theater together, but he got paranoid before it even got going. We knew we needed to raise money, and he had a kind of girlfriend with a trust fund or something. Chris and I went down to L.A. to talk to the lawyer in charge of it. It seemed to me that the lawyer asked perfectly reasonable questions. I was shocked when Chris dubbed this guy an enemy and then turned on me. I saw that it was rampant paranoia, so I said, "We can't do this together." But I still wanted to open a theater, so I got a lease on a place on Kearny Street, off of Broadway; I got a couple of partners. It was 1958. Bruce Conner would come over and help until he broke his ankle pretty badly. I got a 16mm theater built and installed, incredibly enough. It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I was living upstairs, because I had the lease on the whole building, $250 a month, and it included two apartments. The owner thought having a theater in there was going to be a good thing. It was pretty primitive. About ninety to a hundred seats. It was called The Movie.

Before it opened I was exhausted. I knew I could never run the place and make films, so for a few hundred dollars I sold my share to the partners. They didn't really know what to do with it, but Bill Rainey and his wife, Joanne, somehow came along and picked it up, and for a number of years they ran it as an experimental film theater.[4] I was in my mid-twenties, and they were probably late thirties. They did some remodeling. Then, as it became a foreign film/experimental theater, the decor got better; and then when they got out, the decor became very fancy as it became a porno house. They showed *Hamfat Asar* [1965]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here after I finished it. But during that period the program wasn't pure xperimental; they were probably showing mostly foreign films, clas-cs. They were very loyal to Kenneth Anger, and he lived in one of the partments for a while, the place where I had lived while I was making he theater. I'd go and visit him there, and he'd be painting the fan on a rint of *Eaux d'artifice* [Kenneth Anger, 1953] in emerald green.

Doing that theater had burned me out on film showings. But it hadn't urned me out too much; I made a basement theater. I lived on Prentiss treet, near where San Francisco's Farmers' Market used to be, and had whole house, my first garden. The basement was a full basement, so I ad a film studio there, and every once in a while we showed films. We ad the first showing of *Anticipation of the Night* [1958] by Brakhage and ve showed *Yantra* [1957] by James Whitney. Jordan Belson came, but by hat time he had no use for these films. I was just finishing working for Brandon Films, so I could take home all those great films.

The jobs that I had at that time were maintaining the 16mm film ibrary at SFMOMA—they had part of the big New York MoMA collection—and working at Brandon Films, maintaining their 16mm distribution prints. Part of my job was to inspect the films and cut out sections that had been damaged and order replacement footage. The opening of *Circus Savage* [2009], the twelve-hour autobiographical film I've just completed, is footage I cut out of Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*. As I remember, I was very generous with what I cut out because I knew where it would go.

The first footage I shot had been at Harvard in the winter of 1951 to 1952. It ended up in *One Romantic Adventure of Edward* [1956, with Brakhage playing Edward]. I began working with graphic layouts in 1960, and then in 1961 I woke up from a nap with a vision that all these Max Ernst collages that [the artist] Jess had been showing me were like a kind of slow-motion movie. I thought, "I can make these things move." I started to collect books of engravings. A whole book of engravings was fifty cents if the binding of the book was no good; if it was good, it would be $10. Now engravings sell for $10 apiece. I started shooting my first collage film, *Duo Concertantes* [1964], in 1961, but I had experimented a bit the previous year, moving things around in front of the camera, including a monkey who shows up in later films.

In 1960 Bruce Baillie came on the scene and was showing over in Canyon. The other artist-organized screenings were well over by the time he started Canyon Cinema. Bruce had a one-person show for me, one of my first. I didn't go to it, but he said it went very well. I didn't get over to the town of Canyon until I was a judge on an early traveling Ann Arbor Film Festival.[5] It was a bash; it was lively. It was very, very loose and freewheeling. And marvelously, he had a speaker behind the audience as well as in front of it—that worked well outdoors. There were a lot of people there, a lot of people. Films came on with a rush and a bang. People were left to make of it what they could or would. In those days there was incredible electric excitement about these showings.

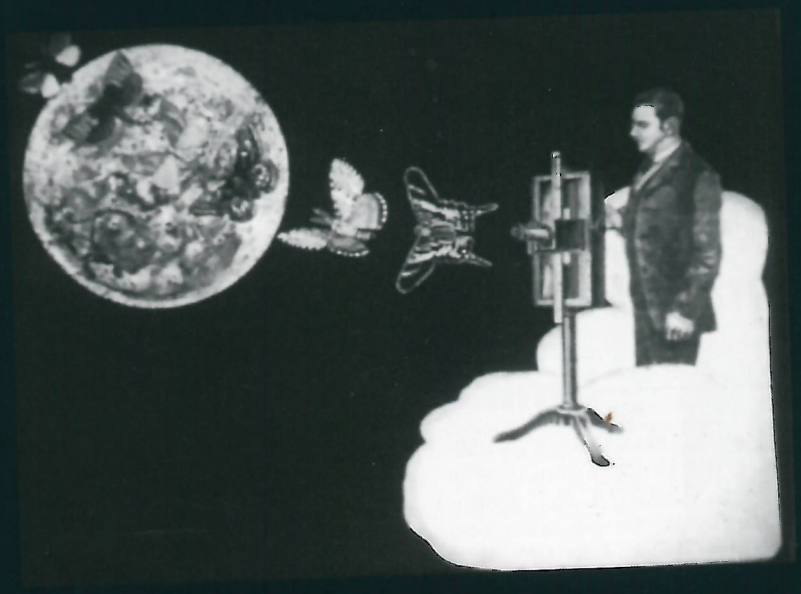
By 1960, and from then on, some showings started to get raucous. People would scream down a film if they didn't like it, or they would scream up a film. Today we'd be appalled if audiences were like that, but then the filmmakers didn't care. They were out to make such a reaction in many cases. I wasn't particularly, but many were. In the years 1961 to 1964 the scene was gearing up. The explosion came after 1965. Films were outstripping the imagination of the people who were coming to see them, and that's why people were coming to see them. Everyone understood in those years that social change was the greatest thing going on in this country. They weren't coming for art; they were coming to the films because they were part of a blow-your-mind social change. In the same way that the surrealists were interested in subverting the bourgeois mentality, it was understood that these underground films would upset the status quo. In fact they were not directly political or social, but the issues were flying around your head in the images. In a Robert Nelson film like *Oh Dem Watermelons* [1965] the issues were going on, but the filmmakers weren't reading you a lecture or giving you a subtext of some kind; the issues were just out there blowing.

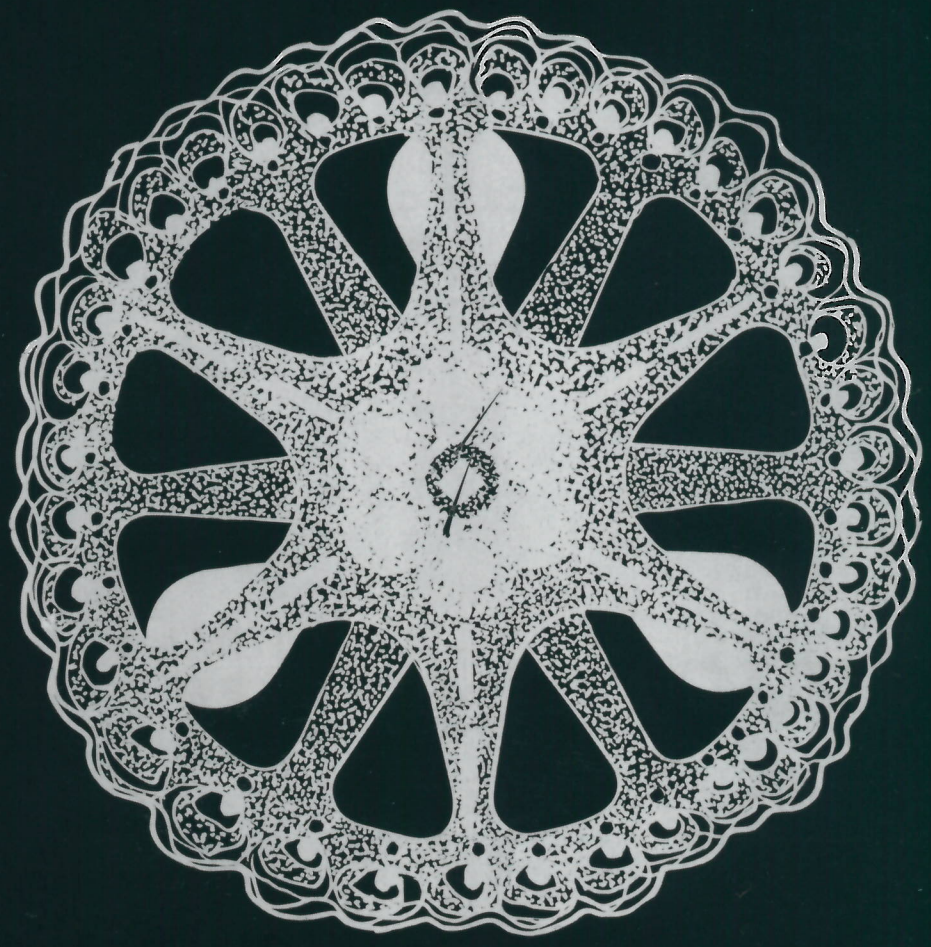
There was a very liberal guy who had the Cedar Alley Coffeehouse. Around this time, 1965, I convinced him to let me show movies on the weekends in the back room and charge admission. I could make a little money. Nobody knew we were in Vietnam, and we'd been there several years tearing the hell out of it. I would make speeches about this, and the guy who ran the café liked this. I showed *Hamfat Asar* and a number of films that didn't have sound tracks yet. One of them was *Duo Concertantes*, which had already won a prize at Ann Arbor as a silent film. I would show it and improvise with music on the radio. On came this Viotti sonata, and it played perfectly from the first note with the opening of the film right to the end. I called the station and found out what it was, and that was the sound track after that. Later I found out Kenneth Anger had done the same thing. You say, "Whatever comes on the radio will be my sound track." You force the universe into compliance.

By then Robert Nelson, Ben Van Meter, and I were full bore into making films. Having to send them out ourselves was a drag. Our films were being screened in showcases opening up all over the country, and we needed someone to do the work of sending the films out. We wanted a place where the films could be stored and shipped from. With the Film-Makers' Co-op in New York as a model, in August 1966 we founded a distribution company run by artists, the Canyon Cinema Co-op.

NOTES

1. Hy Hirsh had shown in the Art in Cinema screenings. He was a photographer and cameraman who worked for the DeYoung Museum from 1937 to 1954. He shot several films for Sidney Peterson and provided Jordan Belson, Harry Smith, and other filmmakers with technical knowledge and access to his equipment, including an optical printer he built. His own films include abstract animations and explorations of stereo vision and oscilloscope patterns.
2. The Six Gallery was originally founded by Jess [Collins], Robert Duncan, and Harry Jacobus as King Ubu Gallery in 1952. Two years later it reopened as the Six Gallery, founded by Jack Spicer, John Allen Ryan, Deborah Remington, David Simpson, Hayward King, and Wally Hedrick.
3. The first screening listed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for Camera Obscura Film Society is December 8, 1957, "Georges Méliès: Magician and Film Pioneer," at 1725 Washington Street. The listings continue through January 25, 1959.
4. The first screening listed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for The Movie is January 19, 1958, at 1034 Kearny Street.
5. In May 1964 selections from the first Ann Arbor Film Festival tour were screened in the town of Canyon. The filmmaker Gunvor Nelson remembers attending and Robert Nelson screening *Plastic Haircut* (1963) and Baillie showing *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1963–64).

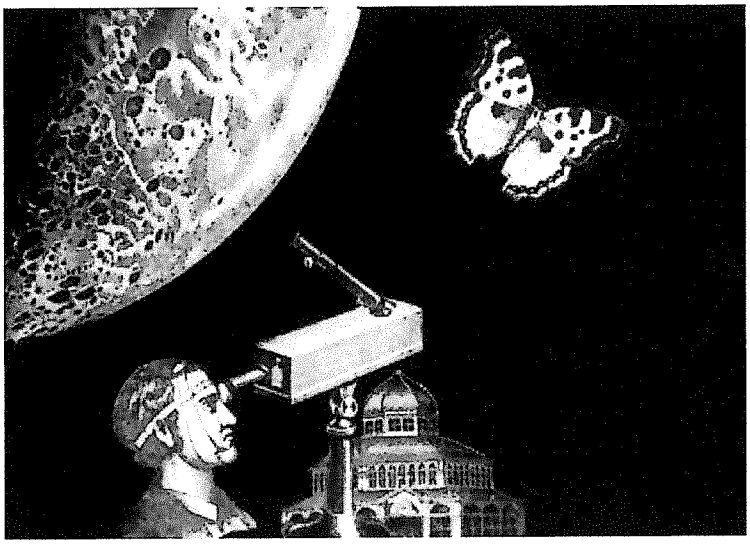




Larry Jordan, *Duo Concertantes*, 1964, film still

Canyon Cinemanews cover (detail), July 1967

OPPOSITE Jordan Belson, *Allures*, 1961, film still



FOCUS

Duo Concertantes
Larry Jordan, 1964

STACEY STEERS

Lawrence Jordan's animated collage work draws on romantically charged objects and illustrations taken from Victorian-era engravings, which he juxtaposes in myriad combinations to suggest a dreamscape rich with provocation. An heir to the surrealist impulse of Max Ernst and Harry Smith, Jordan began working with cutouts in the early sixties. The first of his many animated films, *Duo Concertantes* (1964) is a lyrical and poetic meditation on the artistic impulse. The film is a reverie of contrasting images exploring the interplay of creativity and chaos: grand architecture and nineteenth-century landscapes, scientific tools and galactic musings, classical sculpture and biology. The human desire to control and communicate is present from the opening image of the imposing and beautiful Glass Palace, home of the 1900 Centennial Exposition, wherein we see a bird captured in a cage, and is further symbolized by a man with his camera and various tools. The natural world's unmitigated life force challenges that effort when classical sculptures and a printing press fall into the sea and atoms spin randomly through space. The film employs telling combinations of images to signify the quest of a young ma to understand the changing world and of a young woman to dream art an cosmic forces into illuminating, uneasy connections.

Collage animation can be an inspiring vehicle for presenting multi-faceted concepts through apparently simple interactions. It allows for a compression of narrative and visual ideas not possible in all cinematic forms. *Duo Concertantes* inspires deep levels of connective interpretatio that expand with each viewing of the film, due in part to Jordan's use of found materials and his expansion of their content, using motion and proximity to suggest new meanings. A man stands knee-deep in water performing simple acts of magic. A sphere takes on transformative powe A pensive woman gazes out to see an egg with butterfly wings ascend. Jordan's palette, inspired by his early association with Joseph Cornell, pulls images from a source of mystery and lost innocence. The animation brought to life through skillful handwork and delicate manipulation.

Jordan's collage films are an early example of animation that steadfastl moves beyond the pigeonhole of entertainment to explore experimental animation as an art form. In this way his work has served as an inspiration to the fine-art animators who followed. A thread of his intentions can be seen in the work of Lewis Klahr, Janie Geiser, Martha Colburn, and Joshua Mosley, as well as my own work, to mention only a few. The truly whimsica yet serious nature of Jordan's work creates a legacy of real power.

Stills from *Duo Concertantes*

A Tour With Brakhage

Underground Movies Are Alive Along the Pacific

by P. Adams Sitney

After 15 months in Europe, I had lost contact with the most recent aspects of American avant-garde film-making. For our own education and as part of a project for a soon-to-be-announced center of non-narrative cinema, Stan Brakhage and I took a film-seeing tour of San Francisco. There we discovered at least half a dozen good and relatively new film-makers and two old masters, both of whom seldom, if ever, show their work in New York.

To begin with the best, the masters are Jordan Belson and Larry Jordan: each showed us at least one masterpiece, that is, a film to be numbered among the fluctuating score, at most, of works of high art ever made with film. Belson's latest film, "Samadhi," is truly the pinnacle of the abstract film. Harry Smith's "Early Abstractions," some of Jim Davis's work, the best of Breer, perhaps something of the Whitney Brothers, approach this class, but certainly more insight, more depth of spirit has never been captured in a non-objective film. Samadhi means Union, the Great Coming Together which is death. I am hesitant to describe the film because any effort would suggest images much cruder than the film-maker wrought under the severe discipline of filming only those configurations he had seen in what might loosely be called yogic meditation. The film truly is, as Belson described it, a picture of the soul.

His other work of these last years, "Allures," "Re-Entry," and "Phenomenon" would merit extensive praise if he had not so surpassed himself in "Samadhi." We saw the film twice while visiting Belson, but I must see it many more times before I would dare to do it justice in print. Unfortunately the film, and "Phenomenon" with it, is available only in a package called something like "The Kinetic Art," which I'm told holds the record for a high priced program of independent films. Still any talk of price is ludicrous before a film like "Samadhi."

Larry Jordan's great film can be discussed more easily, though it is enigmatic to the core. It seems that a few years ago he wanted to film a ghost story and shot a feature's worth of material. The film failed. Months later under new inspiration he returned to his footage, abandoned plot, and created "The Old House Passing." It is not at all a literary film, but its tradition is surely that of Strindberg in his dream plays, George MacDonald, and Hawthorne. Time seems folded in this film, so that two families might simultaneously and without sharing occupy the old house. Somewhere in the dark of the film is a crime, an infanticide, a curse, or a murder which is healed by love and by the extraordinary delicacy of a scene of blowing bubbles in a graveyard. Now that I have mentioned this last scene I am all the more amazed at how Jordan manages to get away with such potentially dangerous material.

Although his work is little known here, Jordan is one of the most prolific film artists around. We saw at least 20 of his films while in San Francisco without exhausting the oeuvre. He wasn't always the master of the delicate. His early films were often blatant failures and many of his more recent works are clearly experimental, provisional. Perhaps his apprenticeship to Jess Collins and Joseph Cornell helped him to master so the tact of cinema. (I should add here in passing that Jordan showed us a film of Cornell's not included in his great and only film show here six years ago—"The Midnight Party"—a collage of children at a birthday party, probably the "east side kids," and a circus film—which is Cornell's finest film and Cornell is surely the great unknown film-maker.) Jordan's other important films are dreamy cut-out animations—"Hamfat Asar," "Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by a Doorway," "Gymnopedies"—studies—specifically one on Rodia's mosaic work—and portraits—"Johnny," "Big Sur: The Ladies." In "The Old House Passing" he brings the subtlety of these tiny and perfected [illegible] into the shape of a b[illegible] to[illegible] makes the real, at least, phenomenal world of actual photography exude the spi[illegible] Max Ernst or August Strind[illegible]g.

While we were at his house Jordan also showed us a tiny film, perhaps even an excerpt, from the film "Crazy Horse," by Dean Stockwell. I had heard from Kubelka and Brakhage for a few years that Stockwell was a major unseen film-maker. If the fragment I saw is indicative of the whole of his work, then he is among the most talented new film-makers in the country. The screen jumps with oval colored forms as this fragment begins; then there is a landscape with colored flying saucers hovering about; the ovals return and the section ends. From what I have been able to uncover there are three Stockwell films completed, "Crazy Horse," a short film about Bruce Conner making "Breakaway," and a long film with George Herms in it. Unfortunately Stockwell was in England when I went to Los Angeles, where he lives, and so I couldn't even try to see his films. James Broughton plans to have three more films finished within a year, including a beautiful record of his wedding which he showed us in workprint.

Neither Bruce Conner nor Robert Nelson has new films to show. Conner is about to begin a new collage film and Nelson is in the middle of what he considers his best film, a long work about hunting deer. Likewise, Bruce Baillie seems to be between films. He showed us an amusing black and white western parody, but it cannot compare with his recent works "Still Life," "Valentin des las Sierras," and "Castro Street." He is still trying to recover from a bad case of hepatitis and to finish his film about death, "Feet Fear."

Will Hindle has been making films for several years, but he has just come into his stride with "Chinese Firedrill," "29: Merci, Merci," and "Billabong," which recently won some prizes at the Yale Film Festival. It is inevitable that Hindle will have a degree of success, especially at festivals. He has a sure technical polish, learned from years of tv commercial work. Yet he triumphs over it, unlike Scott Bartlett who has made perhaps the three most overpraised banalities since the avant-garde film became popular. "Billabong" shows Hindle's ability to control the textures, tones, and colors of his film. My favorite of his films, though, is the ambiguous "29: Merci, Merci." One-third of it is nothing but credits, then war, and parody of a sly and sneaky sort. In black and white Hindle lacks the technical spectrum to lullaby his images across, and therefore must rely on form and the interplay of ideas. Besides, a complex intellectual film like "29: Merci, Merci" is especially refreshing on the West Coast where, with the exception of Belson, intellectual implications are severely rooted out of films.

For both Brakhage and myself, Michael Stewart was the most interesting discovery of the trip. He works in 8mm, and his best films are stop motion, filmed off the screen. He showed us "Freeform," his latest, during a nightlong screenathon. The next morning we went to his house, basically a garage in Berkeley, and saw it again. When he admitted that he was screening original footage rather than a print, Brakhage laid out about $25 so he could make a copy and save the film. It is an open-air dance, seen again and again; its rhythm comes from an extreme slow-motion frenzy breaking suddenly into its natural time at various intervals in [illegible]. His other films, "The [illegible]y Unnamable," "Consequences," and "In the [illegible]nd's Eye," become progressively more and more exciting, but Freeform" is the film to see.

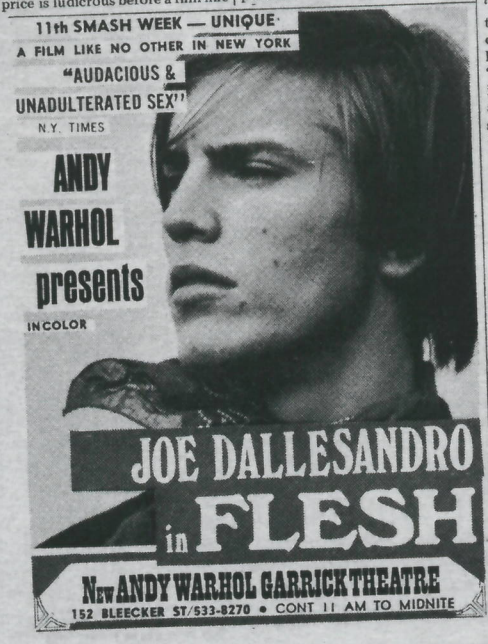
Brakhage found the roots of genius in the three distributed films of John Schofill: "Filmpiece for Sunshine," a kind of sub-"Scorpio Rising" of the college masturbation scene; "X-Film," a breathtaking flashframe film, and "Die," the purest of canonical LSD films, as far as I've seen. I find an undeniable virtuosity in Schofill's camera work and editing. Yet there remains very very much work for him to do upon or within himself before he can be counted among the important film artists of the avant-garde.

Even excluding these figures, an extraordinary program could be made of such films as Ben Van Meter's "Garden of Persephone" (I missed his three screen "Acid Mantra"), Lenny Lipton's "Show and Tell," Lauren Sears' "Tribal Home Movie," Shelby Kennedy's "The Bruce Nauman Story," and Steve Arnold's "Liberation of Monique Mechanique" (the only film I've ever seen to pick up on the black and white imagery of Jack Smith, a bleached Art Nouveau).

Michael Stewart is not the only film-maker of note in California working in 8mm. Myron Ort has made "Love Must Love," a highly sensual, well executed film in the tradition of Stan Brakhage's "Anticipation of the Night." His earlier film, "The Awakener," a kaleidoscopic paean to Meher Baba, is a little too overstuffed with superimpositions for my eyes. In Los Angeles the one revealing afternoon I spent was in watching two very short 8mm films, one in fact only an excerpt. Russel Tamblyn's little black and white film of Japanese calligraphy floating across the screen interrupted by glimpses of a nun, then two nuns, in what must be a mixture of a Kabuki dance, a strip, and a ravaging of one another, is unlike any film I've ever seen before. The poet Michael McClure had praised Tamblyn's films to us while we were in San Francisco. I was able to see only two of them, the other being a more conventional home movie of Rio de Janeiro, and look forward to a chance to see the rest. This is also the case with a tiny preview of Wallace Berman's 24-part Kaballistic film—what I did see, an incompleted version of one of the parts makes me very anxious to see the whole. Berman, who presently has a show at the Jewish Museum here (which he says will be his last show), is well-known in California for his photographic collages. His film, like the collages, is very dense, worked over, painted, scratched, printed upon, with recurring images out of his still work, primarily a hand holding a portable radio in which there is an image, and visions from his home, his son, a naked woman. Much more than Tamblyn's Japanese film, Berman's movie seems an enlightened home movie, as are Brakhage's "Songs." He has been working and reworking the film for seven years and seems in no rush to finish it.

Doors at Garden

The Doors will give a concert on January 24 at 8.30 p. m. at Madison Sqare Garden.



ANTHOLOGY

Dec. 21, 1968
5639 San Diego Street
El Cerrito, Calif. 94530

P. Adams Sitney
Film-makers' Cooperative
175 Lexington Ave.
New York, N.Y. 10016

Dear P.:

I have several things to tell you. When you and Stan confronted us at Canyon Cinema (us equals the board members present) you implied that you thought, I should say you said outright, that you thought that we of the West Coast felt ignored by the East Coast. I would like to point out that you flatter yourself. Although at one time this attitude existed, as I stated to Jonas in a letter some time ago, this is no longer true. As a matter of fact, it is the East Coast that is ignored by the West Coast. It is the East Bay-SF scene that is flourishing, not the New York scene as far as I am able to determine. It may well be that my fellow filmmakers and I are not aware of what is going on with the younger filmmakers in New York, but we were able to come up with a list of only half a dozen filmmakers of any stature residing in New York, and a third of them will be moving here by the spring.

Do you think you could list as may interesting filmmakers in a piece about New York as you did in your unfortunate piece in the Dec. 5 Village Voice dealing with the SF film scene?

Your attitude is preposterously provincial, to say the least. Yes, filmmaking of great achievement exists along the Pacific, but you have been the last to discover it.

Concerning you planned film archive. As it stands now, not only will you not obtain my cooperation, for what that is worth, but I will use whatever influence I have to dissuade local filmmakers from cooperating with you. If you think this is an idle threat, I full well plan to present my case to each and every one of them unless you change your organizational plans. As I understand it, you have five or six board members selected so far, four of whom are on the board of director of the Filmmakers Coop--if I am not mistaken. Even Kubelka, who is from Europe, and Brakhage from Colorado, are on the board. And you seek to give us representation with one West Coast member, of your choosing no less. I put it too you this way, if Canyon Cinema doesn't have an equal share in the board of your archive, if we don't have as many members on the board as FMC has, I will actively attempt to prevent cooperation with the archive with all CCC members.

Your article in the Voice. If you should have occassion in the future to be tempted to list me or any of my films, please think twice. I would prefer to be ignored. What especially irks me is the impression that the article gives that you are speaking not only for yourself, but more or less for Brakhage. I think you should let Brakhage speak for himself. While Brakhage found "roots of genius," in Schofills work, and I share you estimation of him (and Bartlett--but it isn't his fault that festivals are so shitty), I ask you to remember Stan's impression of my work. While Schofill may be a budding genius, I am a genius, and prefer not to be ignored.

You make an unfortunate equation between "intellectural" and "literary", if I am not mistaken. I don't think that "29: Merci, Merci," is any more a complex intellectual film, than for example, my own SHOW AND TELL. Is the film really "especially refreshing on the West Coast where, then exception of Belson, intellectual implications are severaly rooted out of film?" You seem to like the word roots more than it warrents, but despite this your most obvious shortcomming, are more stupid appraisal of the film scene here would be hard to find (unless you've written any other articles about the scene I haven't read). Were you just being glib, or do you really think we go along tearing out every intellectual shread we can grasp?

I have nothing else to say to you.

Sincerely,

Leonard Lipton

a copy for Brakhage

Letter from Lenny Lipton, 1968

OPPOSITE *Village Voice*, December 5, 1968