

Haunted Landscapes

Poetic and Experimental Cinema Screenings

BY JOEL SCHLEMOWITZ



Connectivity Through Cinema presents Stephanie Gray, and Another Experiment by Women Film Festival

The work of super-8 filmmaker and poet, Stephanie Gray inaugurates the new film series "Connectivity Through Cinema," joining the flock of alternative film venues in New York. "What You Thought You Knew / What You Knew You Thought" will take place at 7:00 p.m. on Feb. 17, at Center for Performance Research, (361 Manhattan Ave., in Greenpoint, Brooklyn).

Organized by the creators of the Mono No Aware film events, the series is described as presenting "the work of artists, filmmakers and curators who are traveling or presenting special interactive programs in-person. ... to engage the community by showing work with a focus on post-screening discussion."

The films will be projected super-8 film and paired with live reading of poetry by the filmmaker; making it, indeed, a screening that is very much intended to be experienced in person; the films physically unreeling in the projector, and the words of a live reading harmonizing and contrasting with the image on the screen. We witness, in the first film of the program *Seeing Thru Buffalo(s)*, the camera at street level looking up at the facades of decaying buildings, the patina of the weathered surfaces, the old signs, "Meats and Poultry," "Optometrist," "Furrier," in vintage typeface and flaking paint.

On the top of a building, a goddess-like statue of a woman and a glint of sunlight from some reflective surface, its intense brightness splaying across the surface of the film's emulsion. What is it, reflecting the sunlight with such intensity? A window? A metal rain gutter?

The light reflected from a cluster of deflated, mylar balloons tangled in the bare, thin, branches of a tree, carries this visual theme into another of Gray's films. The camera, in its upward tilt, moves, sometimes with great tentativeness, a movement of searching and seeking. The film *Balloons Tied (up) Your Sky*, coming in the center of the program of short works, is hand-processed black-and-white super-8 film, the texture of the hand-processed images, its splotches, watermarks, drips, and solarization merging with the texture of the world before the lens—the dark, haunted glow of solarized emulsion within the brightest parts of the image.

We hear precepts and suggestions, "Syllables emerge from disaster. The mirrors turned inside out. Some jobs are always in demand. Visually sonic thought. Secret collusion between what you meant and what you ended up saying."

"Suspension of disbelief to the sound of breaking waves. When you go to Manhattan, there is an air of selling out. I called that one in." A fleeting quotation from E.B. White's *Here is New York* is paired with detailed advice on how to get a dryer in a busy laundromat. Observations, reminiscences, guidance, all intermix, as does the form of address, sometimes directed to you, in the second person, but frequently pivoting between "I, you, he, she, they, us." "We knew what you were all about. Keep it alive by not messing it up too much. I don't believe you didn't see it coming. I don't see what you're saying. He was last seen wearing a smirk."

The old adage of the parts being greater

at an unexpected connectedness between disparate combinations. In fact, it's quite gratifying to not have the associations between word and image not be too literal, making it a thick stew of sights and sounds, the divided concentration bringing emphasis to the poetry of the films, and the filmic quality of the strings of unreeling words.

At 6:00 p.m. on March 5, at Anthology Film Archives (2nd Avenue and East 2nd Street, in the East Village), the ongoing Another Experiment by Women Film Festival, under the aegis of New Filmmakers, presents a group screening of short experimental films by women artists. The program includes a diversity of work—animation, filmic image-poetry, recounted dreams, a portrait of the Gowanus environs, a bricolage of forensic ephemera. But the coalescing of these divergent works has made for an unexpectedly coherent and satisfying program. It's part of the mystery of film programming. The works in

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'Melt in the Shade' by Kyoungjiu Kim.

than the sum of the whole, doesn't quite explain what is most compelling about the juxtaposition of film and poetry, for the text itself stands on its own, spilling out in fragmentary observations, like the experience of bits and pieces of overheard conversation. And many of the images, the hand-processed, solarized, black-and-white images of sunlight hitting the lens and silhouetted figures in a doorway, for instance, also require nothing more. But the simultaneity of spoken text and filmic image do something to the viewing and listening, a heightening of attentiveness, the process of adding the two experiences together and arriving

a group should support one another, not be too much of a random hodgepodge, and not be so similar as to be redundant. Is there is an ideal place on the continuum of divergency and thematic consistency? Perhaps this is the Goldlocks theory of film programming? Striking the right balance between the works in a program, neither too similar nor too disparate.

Too haphazard a program isn't hard to imagine, but what makes a short film program too thematically consistent? I recall a group screening a little while ago where all the films were linked by the use of images of water reflections, of the texture of waves and ripples on the surface of water, and even the films that didn't have such images directly contained some water-like "flow" to the unfurling of light on the screen.

The next film began, and water imagery reappeared, and, as this happened, there was the feeling of being a bit damp and soggy from all the wetness washing up on screen. The programmer was clearly well-intentioned, and all of the films were exceptionally good in themselves. But the thematic consistency of the curatorial approach took away from each individual film's impact. They all began to seem redundant of one another, whereas if each had been shown on its own, the effect would have been more satisfying.

And yet, there seems to be just enough linkage between the works in Another Experiment by Women to have them speak to one another without seeming to parrot from each other. In *Missing Green* by Joey Huertas aka Jane Public, we witness grainy footage of a young woman walking along the horizon of a hill, and hear messages left on an answering machine. The work is less a mystery story than it is an envelopment in the atmosphere

of exquisite dread encountered in the forensic miscellany of documents, recordings, and other fragments relating to a woman's disappearance.

Melt in the Shade by Kyoungjiu Kim also engages the viewer through an invocation of black-and-white images, in positive and negative film, of the bare branches of a tree in winter. The film is described as "a visual metaphor of the filmmaker's journey to understand her roots after experience of cultural dislocation." Its use of external topology to evoke a psychological state feels akin to the landscapes of German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. The bleak sounds of the cold, forest air, bring a sense of tension, with the signs of life in the form of a few cries of distant birds. The film's spare soundscape contributes greatly to its sense of beguiling unease.

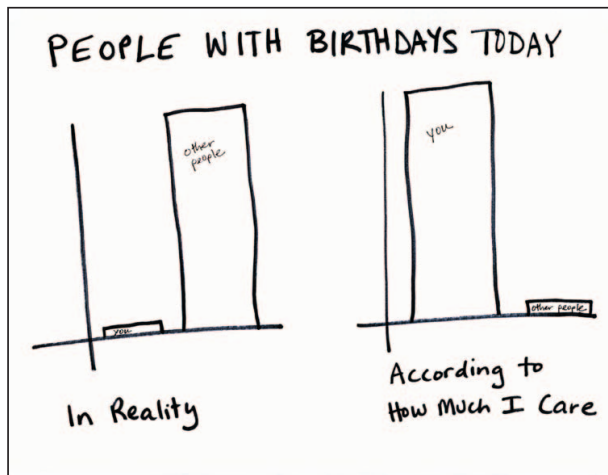
Laura Heit's animated piece, *The Deep Dark*, also makes use of the sounds of the forest as a traveler treks through the nocturnal woods. And yet the primary curatorial link between the works is the haunted and ghostly aspects of the films, the relation to the wooded landscape is secondary.

Lori Felker's *The Broken News Series - Part 1: Disaster* gives us a monologue, delivered in the guise of a newscaster addressing the camera. And yet the verbal picture painted within the spoken words is almost a film within a film, a private landscape viewed inside our mind as we watch the other film on screen, constructed from the verbal narrative. Margaret Rorison portrays the Gowanus Haze in the cinematic grayness of black-and-white emulsion, the images seemingly desaturated of color by the very atmosphere of cement dust and airy effusions from the polluted waters of the canal itself.

The festival director and programmer, Lili White, explains that the connective link between the works is a sense of "otherness," but the term is used in a completely different way from the academic usage of "the other," as the opposite end of a polarity of "us" and "them," the other tribe in a tribal view of the world. Otherness, in this case, is used to describe the intangible quality of possessing something extra, something more, something else occurring below the surface of the images, in the work she had selected.

White likens the aggregate effect of the screening of works by women artists to the difference in how a conversation within a group of women is different from a group of women and men. But this might also be said of the experience of attending a screening; to see work with others is to experience it differently, the energy of the audience is present, and both of these events are worth the experience of this energy.

Joel Schlemowitz is a Brooklyn-based filmmaker who makes short cine-poems and experimental documentaries. His most recent project, "78rpm," is scheduled to be completed in early 2014. He has taught filmmaking at The New School for the past 15 years. (<http://www.joelschlemowitz.com/>)



Jessy Randall