

Scratching the Surface: Experiments in New Zealand animation after Len Lye

Curated by Mark Williams for the New Zealand Film Archive in association with Anthology Film Archives.



Birth of a Robot - Len Lye (1936)

Wednesday 17th October 2007, 7pm.
Windsor Foundation Lecture Theatre,
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia,
1723 Hollis Street,
Halifax, Nova Scotia.

THE FILM ARCHIVE
Ngā Kaitiaki Ō Ngā Taonga Whitiāhuru The New Zealand Film Archive

centre
for
art
tapes

5600 Sackville Street,
Suite 207
Halifax, NS, B3J 1L2
tel.902-420-4002
fax.902-420-4581
email: info@cfat.ca
www.centreforarttapes.ca

Scratching the Surface: Experiments in New Zealand animation after Len Lye

In 2007 Len Lye stands as the pioneer, inspiration and point of reference for animation in New Zealand. While the influence of Lye's film work remains undisputed, *Scratching the Surface* reveals a handful of New Zealand animators with their own independent vision. Beginning in the mid 1970s with John Henry's psychedelic feedback piece *Images*, the program also includes Glenn Standring's sci-fi noir *Lenny Minute One* (1993) which was animated on a Commodore Amiga 500 computer and selected for the Cannes Film Festival. Two films by The Pictorial Research Group combine raucous soundtracks of free noise music with direct animation, stop motion and narrative created on 16mm, while other works embrace narrative, politics and music video.

All films are presented on digital video but the original format is noted.

John Henry *STRATUS (from IMAGES)*

1976, 10:00, Umatic col sd.

Made over the course of a year in the mid-1970s and first exhibited at the Pan Pacific Biennial at the Auckland City Art Gallery, *Stratus* is one third of a three-part videotape of elaborate abstract patterns with a jazz fusion soundtrack by Billy Cobham. Henry made the work while working nightshift at a video production company where he patched a multitrack audio desk into a vision mixer to create intricate patterns of visual feedback.

Lissa Mitchell/ Pictorial Research Group *BOWL ME OVER*

1995 (6.00) 16mm col sd

A mini-epic South Island travelogue / road movie and homage to artists Colin McCahon, Mina Arndt and Rita Angus, by Wellington film maker Lissa Mitchell. Rendered in angular, woodcut-style scratches with rich washes of colour. Hand painted directly onto film.

Chris Knox *NOTHINGS GOING TO HAPPEN*

1981 (4.10) 16mm col sd.

Alternative music icon Chris Knox creates a piece of stop motion absurdism in this music video for his band Tall Dwarfs and their song *Nothings Going to Happen*.

Lisa Reihana *WOG FEATURES*

1990 (6:34) 16mm col sd

"*Wog Features* uses animation and live action to address racism in culture and gender. I chose animation because of its universal appeal to children as well as adults, and to increase the potential audience. Minstrels dance in blackface; golliwogs are incorporated into reconstructions of children's television. This politicised look at culture is almost on the edge of profanity. I feel the education of our people should begin when they are young." – Lisa Reihana

Douglas Bagnall/ Pictorial Research Group *THE FIRST FILM*

1992 (3.00) 8mm col sd

In Douglas Bagnall's *The First Film* a soundtrack of crashing noise, bells, and distortion provides the background for streams of mosaic patterns that form and decay in startling succession. Abstract shapes, suddenly detailed pictures of animals, unknown creatures and text all dissolve, appear and melt into each other.

Glenn Standring *LENNY MINUTE ONE*

1993 (11.46) 16mm col sd

"*Private Eye Lenny Minute* is drawn into a web of surreal intrigue after a series of murders, leading him to confront the woman of his dreams as the first swords are drawn in the war between the sexes." Standring describes his film as "a piece of artistic terrorism that got into the system." *Lenny Minute One* was selected for the 1993 Cannes Film Festival.

May Trubuhovich
FELINE

1997 (6.15) 16mm col sd

Set in a stealthy netherworld Feline investigates the possibilities of changing oneself in a world where physicality and identity are fluid.

Alex Monteith
THE DEFINITIVE QUANTIFIER

1999 (8.00) Digital Video col sd

8000 wingnuts and a dizzying array of measuring and monitoring equipment combines and recombines in stop motion. Winner of the silver award for experimental animation at the Worldfest Houston 2000, USA.

Curated by Mark Williams for the New Zealand Film Archive in association with Anthology Film Archives.

Interval followed by:

Films in Real Time 1970-79

In the early 1970s the New Zealand art world began to blossom. An emerging infrastructure based on the national arts council, public galleries, art schools and university art history departments supported expansion and experimentation.

During this time a post-object art movement was emerging, where artists turned their attention to performance activities.

Films in Real Time documents a range of activities from musical performance to the rigours of physical labour, sometimes completely raw and unedited, at other times crafted with an eye for cinema.

Leon Narbey
A FILM OF REAL TIME. A LIGHT SOUND ENVIRONMENT

1970, 9.20, 16mm

In 1970 Elam School of Fine Arts graduate Leon Narbey was invited to provide the opening exhibition for the Govett Brewster Art Gallery. Narbey's response was to transform the interior of the building into Real Time, a maze of lights, plastic and aluminium. The movement of audience members through the space triggered sensors which prompted light, colour and sound. This provided the point of departure for his film, A Film Of Real Time.

EARTHWORKS. TEMPORARY INSTANT IN THE CONTINUUM OF UNIVERSAL EBB AND FLOW

1971, 11.35, 16mm,

Philip Dadson is a sound and media artist, composer, performer, and musical instrument builder. Earthworks is Dadson's record of a compositional event at 1800 hours G.M.T on 23/24th September 1971.

Linking locations including Australia, Rarotonga, San Diego, Antarctica, England and New Zealand, Dadson asked participants to record data and impressions of their particular geographic location at a simultaneous instant in time. There were six instructions, designed to be carried out in 10 minutes, ranging from an official weather report to observations of the tide, moon, sun and immediate environment. These impressions were captured onto film and tape and along with a dozen or so photographs of the location in which they were performed, became the compositional elements of Earthworks. The entire event was coincident with the autumnal and spring equinoxes in northern and southern hemispheres. The New Zealand part of the composition was filmed south of Lake Taupo on the volcanic plateau at 6am sunrise.

Gray Nicol
DUCK CALLING

1978, 3.30, Video Umatic

"In the performance, as I unwound the bandage from my head and wound it around the hand holding the microphone, my voice became increasingly muffled and the duckpond sound track was slowly turned up until that was all you could hear - quite loud-then stopped, and the lights turned out. In the following silence I broke the glass of the display case with my bandaged fist, took the gun and left the stage making a duck call, with a lure, as shooters do. Then the lights came up slowly." - Gray Nicol

Darcy Lange
RUATORIA PART 2 [SHEARING PEKAMA]

1974, 9.00, Video Umatic loband

Darcy Lange was an early user of portable video cameras starting with the 1/2 inch open reel format and progressing to Umatic cassette. His early work in New Zealand concentrated on naturalistic studies of working life and included studies of the Waitara Freezing Works and Ruatoria Sheep Farming. In 1974 Lange departed for Europe where he continued his study of working life filming schools, industrial workplaces and allotment gardens. This excerpt from Ruatoria is trademark Darcy Lange; an uninterrupted take of a shearer dragging a sheep into the shearing enclosure, shearing the wool off the animals back, pushing the animal back into its pen. The shearer wipes his brow and prepares for the next animal.

WHATIPU BEACH PERFORMANCE (1973)

Bruce Barber

1973, 9.00, 8mm

On Whatipu Beach west coast of Auckland, four performers spread 200 metres apart relay information through walkie-talkies and megaphones. Amongst the cacophony of sound a 'blind-master' (literally blindfolded) records whatever sound attracts his attention while the camera operator moves amongst the performance area recording images. The resulting collage of sound and vision is Whatipu Beach Performance. "... I believe that I am working towards a position where paradoxically ... in the act of overloading or the deprivation of sensory (physical) and intellectual experience, I am thereby enlarging my own and others' capacity for sensory and intellectual stimulation." - Bruce Barber

Ted Nia
[NEW DIRECTIONS IN NZ MUSIC OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 1979. FROM SCRATCH - DRUMWHEEL]

1979, 13.00, Video Umatic loband

In the late 1960s Philip Dadson was a member of Cornelius Cardew's experimental music group the Scratch Orchestra. Returning to New Zealand he formed a local version of the London group and in 1974 he founded From Scratch, an experimental percussion group that would exist for the next 30 years. Dadson invented a range of musical instruments for From Scratch, using materials as diverse as PVC pipe and oil cans. Dadson's instruments were sophisticated harmonic and percussive devices. From Scratch's work has dealt with issues ranging from nuclear testing in the South Pacific to celebrating political and spiritual leaders. In this early recording of From Scratch we see the performers move between different "stations" of instruments, and swirl sound making devices in the air.