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What better way to mark a big birthday than by throwing a party and ensuring some great gifts? To mark their 40th anniversary last year, the CFMDC commissioned seven artists to make works inspired by films that hold notable significance to them as image-makers. Premieres meet paradigms from the avant-garde in this unique program that pairs up these new films with their influential companion pieces. **Andréa Picard (Cinematheque Ontario)**

FUNDED BY Canada Council for the Arts Conseil des Arts du Canada ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL torontarts council

LISA KISS DESIGN, TORONTO

CFMDC40
REGENERATION TOUR 2008



BREAKFAST (TABLE TOP DOLLY)
Both a comedy and a structural film, *Breakfast (Table Top Dolly)* vividly illustrates a camera dolly's effect on a table full of breakfast items.
Michael Snow
Canada 1976
15 min, 16mm

ROSTRUM PRESS: MATERIALS TESTING
In this humorous response to Snow, a variety of objects and materials are subjected to the downward pressure of an animation camera.
Chris Gehman
Canada 2008
3:30 min, 16mm SILENT

For information regarding TOUR dates and locations, please contact us at:
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CANADIAN FILMMAKERS DISTRIBUTION CENTRE
401 Richmond St. W., Suite 119
Toronto, ON CANADA M5V 3A8
(416) 588-0725
www.cfmdc.org

FRANK'S COCK
A powerful and bittersweet meditation on love and loss in the age of AIDs.
Mike Hoolboom
Canada 1993
8 min, 16mm

SECRET WEAPONS
Adam Garnet Jones reflects on loss and grief in the Native community, with *Hoolboom's* four-channel split-screen reinterpreted as a medicine wheel.
Adam Garnet Jones
Canada 2008
7 min, 16mm

FISSURES
A film about forgetting and remembering, about past presences and the traces they leave.
Louise Bourque
Canada 1999
2:30 min, 16mm

LA VIE EN PELLICULE
A joyful meditation on photography and its ability to capture memories, made for the filmmaker's son.
Lise Beaudry
Canada 2008
4:30 min, 16mm

TREE
Mother Nature mourns the damage done to the earth and the soullessness of the urban landscape.
Shelley Niro
Canada 2006
5:40 min, Video

SHELLEY
Shelley draws on the work of Shelley Niro to meditate on the relationships between nature, Western ideals, cultural production, and Native life in Canada.
Jerry Thevenet
Canada 2008
3:42 min, 16mm

CHRIST MASS SEX DANCE
A celebration of the balletic restraints of adolescent sexuality—shaped by "The Nutcracker Suite" by Tchaikovsky, as well as the gristly roots of Elvis Presley.
Stan Brakhage
U.S.A. 1991
5:30 min, 16mm
Image courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and www.fredcamper.com

THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS
A lush and beautifully layered film, inspired by both Stan Brakhage and Hieronymus Bosch's triptych "The Garden of Earthly Delights" (1504).
Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof
Canada 2008
8 min, 16mm SILENT

THE BASEMENT GIRL
Abandoned by her lover, a young woman retreats to her basement apartment, taking solace in junk food and television.
Midi Onodera
Canada 2000
11:40 min, 16mm

CRUSHED
Crushed is a meditation on media through the eyes of grief—can Dr. Phil mend a broken heart? Made as homage to Onodera's *Basement Girl*.
Susan Justin
Canada 2008
2:10 min, 16mm

RAT LIFE AND DIET IN NORTH AMERICA
Wieland's smart and humorous parable, enacted by rats as American political prisoners who break out of jail and escape to Canada.
Joyce Wieland
Canada 1968
16 min, 16mm

AFGHANIMATION
In this tribute to Wieland, Allyson Mitchell weaves a critique of military/media relations and Canadian complacency in obscuring the facts about Afghanistan.
Allyson Mitchell
Canada 2008
6 min, 35mm

Animating Inspiration: Notes on ReGeneration

Brett Kashmere



RIDEAU HALL
OTTAWA

I am so pleased to congratulate the members of the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre (CFMDC) on the occasion of its 40th anniversary, and I am thrilled to send my best wishes to everyone attending *ReGeneration*.

Could you imagine a world devoid of the inquisitive and expressive nature of artists? Life would lose much of its meaning without their creative minds, which question and challenge the status quo. They are masters at reinventing the world before our very eyes, as they stir our blood and awaken our spirits with their abilities.

Since 1968, the CFMDC has presented innovative techniques and new talent in independent and experimental film. It values enthusiasm and fresh ideas, and gives filmmakers the opportunity to showcase their new—and sometimes daring—points of view. *ReGeneration* promises to be an extraordinary event, befitting this milestone anniversary. It will be a travelling wonder that will reach out to Canadians at every stop along the way, moving us, taunting us and leaving us spellbound.

I applaud all of the filmmakers taking part in this project and I wish everyone a memorable experience.

Michaëlle Jean



Photo: Sgt. Eric Jolin (2006)

In the '60s they said it was underground and it wasn't. Now nobody says anything and it really is.

— STAN BRAKHAGE

THEN AND NOW

The past decade has witnessed an amazing resurgence in experimental film activity. The emergence of increasingly affordable, easy-to-use new technologies has had an enormous impact on contemporary screen practice, allowing marginal practices to develop and prosper. The amplified volume and perpetual traffic of time-based media in the digital age has created a rising demand for new presentation platforms and screening initiatives. Out of necessity, the practice of independent filmmaking is becoming progressively hybrid and multidisciplinary, bridging the divides of analogue and digital, research and creation, theory and practice. Ideas about the relationship between media, exhibition space, and audience are likewise changing, and the way that art and film institutions are structured and administered is becoming more complex. The traditional selecting and staging role of the curator, the roles of the practitioner and the distributor, and the model of a classical exhibition form are being superseded by a diversity of new ideas and approaches.

The CFMDC's commissioning project and tour, *ReGeneration*—*New Animations on Seminal Films*, is one such initiative. The project exemplifies Jean-Luc Godard's notion that the best response to a film is a new film. The project also highlights the importance of historical consciousness and respect for avant-garde traditions, while concurrently opening questions about those very traditions, in particular myths of individual genius and uniqueness. After all, no artist creates entirely within a vacuum. Posing their collection as a studio for creative inquiry and a catalyst for production rather than a cul-de-sac of masterworks, the CFMDC resituates the avant-garde canon as infinitely extending signposts.

REVISING EXPERIMENTAL

Triggered by a certain pernicious tendency in Michael Snow's film-making, Chris Gehman's *Rostrum Press: Materials Testing* (2008) encloses its structure in an act of destruction. This amusing film, shot in luscious colour, ironically redeploys the industrial strength Oxberry animation stand as a demolition press. Namely, it squishes things: an egg, a tomato, an ice cream cone, a plastic frog, a three-dimensional cardboard house, and so on. While the mechanically controlled camera movements are smooth, systematic, and precise, the end violence is sudden and startling on each occasion. Slowly, the camera gains a malignant character, like a robot turning evil. As a catalogue of destruction the film seems to have no limits, at least until the final section, when the apparatus self-annihilates by smashing its own lens (in actuality, it shatters a mirror). By approximating the gesture of a zoom, *Rostrum Press* also recalls the cone-shape of Snow's *Wavelength* (1967), adding to the multivalent referencing of previous films and formal techniques, a recurrent motif throughout this program.

Adam Garnet Jones draws upon the work of Mike Hoolboom for his contribution, *Secret Weapons* (2008). Most notably, this concise first-person essay borrows from the four-frame composition and raw storytelling of *Frank's Cock* (1993).¹ Whereas *Frank's Cock* addresses life under AIDS, *Secret Weapons* explores the endemic's lingering impact on Aboriginal queer identity fifteen years later, in the context of a wider cultural loss. Knitting artist and community (and echoing past collaborative activist projects such as the AIDS quilt), the film loops, in its lower left quadrant, black-and-white found footage of a bare-chested man being hit and knocked down—a ten-second clip which is animated over by the filmmaker and more than a dozen friends and allies (his "secret weapons"). The other three frames, beginning in the upper right quadrant and moving clockwise, feature Garnet Jones emoting an urgent personal monologue; close-up streams of smoke

from a smudge of sweetgrass and sage; and the rendering of a medicine wheel tattoo. The medicine wheel can be viewed as both synecdoche and framework for the entire piece, symbolizing the cyclicity of nature, life, and interdependence.

Also adopting the tropes of diary filmmaking, Lise Beaudry takes Louise Bourque's *Fissures* (1999) as wellspring for her piece, *La vie en pellicule* (2008). A spectral 16mm photogram, *Fissures* utilizes the chemical materiality of film to invoke the instability and volatility of family and memory. The film reads like an X-ray: intensely private, at once transparent and opaque, requiring context for diagnosis, and illumination. Less ambiguous and elusive, Beaudry's *La vie en pellicule* is a mesh of bleached home movies, bilingual narration, family photos, Francophone pop, and hand-painted and collaged filmstrips, animated by the artist's will to document her son's early life. The result is a positive inverse of *Fissures*' latent mystery: it shows rather than suggests. Collapsing past and present, *La vie en pellicule* is equally a posthumous paean to Beaudry's father, who passed away when she was fifteen, and the inaugural episode of a "home movie."

Susan Justin's *Crushed* (2008) updates Midi Onodera's bitter-sweet heartbreak film, *The Basement Girl* (2000). Justin's terse adaptation opens with filmic imagery of shimmering, beachfront scenery. Over clipped voicemail messages that narrate an unresolved break-up, we see sun-bleached footage of feet and hands caressing. As a computer-generated fly settles on the scene/screen, *Crushed* cuts from the cinematic idyll to the televisual quotidian, flipping around the cable dial and landing on *Dr. Phil*. Not surprisingly, revenge is on *Dr. Phil*'s mind, too, reminding us of TV's potential for vicarious payback. Another fly enters the frame and a brief, insect-ial romance ensues. As the background channel-changes from *Dr. Phil* to a spring break party scenario, a forest fire report, a Vagisil commercial (to cure "that itch you can't scratch"), nondescript sci-fi, and an episode of *CSI*, the love-struck fly is squashed and decapitated by a swift,

slipped human foot. *Crushed* ends with the monitor being wiped clean while the *CSI* team inspects severed limbs, a fitting nod to the clever cultural recycling and uncomfortable humour that permeates Onodera's *Basement Girl*.

Jerry Thevenet's *Shelley* (2008) is a tribute to the Mohawk artist Shelley Niro, whose video *Tree* (2006) infers parallels between Native identity and the Canadian landscape. Like Justin's *Crushed*, *Shelley* modulates film and video textures to construct a nature-technology dichotomy. Beginning with hand-drawn animation of a seed that shape-shifts from plant to human, the piece progresses from a timeless parable of transformation to a condemnation of the contemporary mediascape. Organic, childlike shapes wash in a radiant orange hue cleave to the sharp raster lines of a television screen, which impose an electric grid over appropriated Cowboy-and-Indian pictures, while harsh static and dissonant music subsume the audio track. As the racist representations recede, a more complex flow of images—including documentary war coverage, flowers closing in fast motion, and ominous skies—stretches the cultural critique. After returning to the solitary seed, Thevenet introduces a sped-up passage from Niro's "Reservation X" melodrama, *Honey Moccasin* (1998) into the visual stream, further extending the pastiche character of Niro's work into his own.

Allyson Mitchell's *Afghanimation* (2008) renders homage to the Canadian artist-filmmaker, Joyce Wieland. Mitchell describes *Afghanimation* as a tribute "to Wieland's evocation of domestic textiles in her political critiques of nationalism and foreign policy." This evocation is most clearly found in Wieland's brilliant film, *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968), an allegorical response to the growing corporate military-industrial complex, its realization in the Vietnam War, and Canada's complicit acceptance of American imperialism. *Afghanimation* responds to the present-day situation (i.e. Canada's involvement in Afghanistan) by focusing on an

obscure form of idiosyncratic propaganda: the Persian war rug, which features "martial images, such as helicopters, tanks, guns, etc."² Shot in 35mm time-lapse and moderated by inter-titled double entendres ("political fibre," "embedded reporters"), *Afghanimation* unfolds slowly, as Mitchell reveals and conceals a traditional war rug depicting a woman kneeling with a stringed instrument, framed by grenades and tanks. By essentially knitting a new rug over the other,³ then blanketing it with a top layer of newspapers that reference recent unrest in the Middle East (legible headlines include "Death of Bhutto" and "Pakistani Plunged into Chaos"), Mitchell insinuates a process of camouflage and obfuscation. Mitchell concludes with the statement that "Canadians don't know what the Canadian military is doing in Afghanistan," which, like the war rugs themselves, lends itself to myriad interpretations.

Mitchell's *Afghanimation* demonstrates how admiration can be absorbed as energy and empathy, rather than manifested as quotation. Likewise, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof conjures the essence of Stan Brakhage while still maintaining mastery over her own voice and technique in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (2008). Finding inspiration in Brakhage's *Christ Mass Sex Dance* (1991), and a title (via Hieronymus Bosch) from Brakhage's camera-less *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981), Pruska-Oldenhof's eponymous eight-minute film is a breath-taking invocation of Brakhagean aesthetics. Indirect allusions to the legendary American filmmaker abound, but are reshaped through Pruska-Oldenhof's individual eccentricity and impressive formal vocabulary. Throughout her film one senses the textured flutterings of *Mothlight* (1963), the sensual kinetics of *Loving* (1957), and the layered poly-rhythms of *Sirius Remembered* (1959) and *Christ Mass Sex Dance*, which superimposes six image rolls in concert with James Tenney's *Blue Suede*. Conceived as a "duet," *The Garden of Earthly Delights* lays down a pixelated self-portrait as base rhythm, while rapid cascades of foliage, animal eyes, petals, fish scales, butterfly

wings, etc. sing forth a multiplicity of melodies, a continuous in-folding song of the natural world and all it contains.

REVISITING UNDERGROUND

The new animations created for *ReGeneration* testify to the energy that's spilling onto screens throughout Canada, both under- and over-ground. Together these films stand as a monument to creative inspiration. Various, their moving images mark an emphatic return to materialist strategies, anti-illusionism, and hand-tailored forms, but don't shy away from personal and political content. It's only a matter of time before the work of this generation begins to be acknowledged and interpreted by an equally efflorescent critical front line. With projects such as *ReGeneration*, the CFMDC continues to ensure that a daring, diverse, and unconventional critical cinema is supported, encouraged, and seen in this country. A lively dialogue awaits.

Brett Kashmere is a filmmaker, curator, and Visiting Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at Oberlin College in Ohio, USA. His writing on experimental film, video and improvised music has appeared in *The Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, *Take One*, *The Films of Jack Chambers*, *esse arts + opinions*, *Senses of Cinema*, *Synoptique*, and the forthcoming volumes *Live Cinema: A Contemporary Reader* and *A Microcinema Primer: A Brief History of Small Cinemas*.

Endnotes:

¹ *Secret Weapons* reminds us that influence works both ways. Just as *Secret Weapons* wouldn't exist without *Frank's Cock*, it's difficult to conceive of Hoolboom's film without R. Bruce Elder's autobiographical treatise, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* (1979), which employed multiple discrete images and a piercing, self-reflexive voice-over to trace a path of disease and its consequences many years earlier.

² This description comes from the website Warrug.com, which is cited in the end credits for *Afghanimation*. These rugs come primarily from Afghanistan, dating back to the 1979 Soviet occupation, and continuing through the 2001 U.S. invasion.

³ I write "essentially" because the film is actually presented in reverse. In other words, what appears to be the knitting of a new blanket is actually the unknitting of an old one.