

20 Years of CUFF: An Incomplete Retrospective of The Chicago Underground Film Festival

curated by Bryan Wendorf and Warren Cockerham for Bennington College, Fall 2013

MONICA PANZARINO SINGS THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER Monica Panzarino, video, 3 min, 2011

Monica Panzarino sings the Star-Spangled Banner with the help of the “Freqshift/Reverb Audio Bra”, a performance tool built by the artist. The bra uses hardware potentiometers (or knobs), an Arduino microcontroller, and a Max/MSP software patch to process the audio signal in real-time. The right “nipple” of the bra manipulates the frequency of the signal, and the left “nipple” adds reverb (MP).

We opened CUFF 2011 at the Gene Siskel Film Center to a sold-out crowd standing at full attention with hands over their hearts to Monica’s video. It was shown before Jerzy Rose’s feature *Some Girls Never Learn*. Bryan was drunk, but well-dressed. (WC).

CLIT-O-MATIC: THE ADVENTURES OF WHITE TRASH GIRL Jennifer Reeder, video, 8 min, 1996

Chicagoan Jennifer Reeder made a name for herself in the 90s underground film scene with this Waters/Kuchar inspired feminist super-hero series she produced as a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She still lives in Chicago where she’s constantly inspiring new generations of image makers as Associate Professor Moving Image at the University of Illinois Chicago. She continues to screen her experimental narratives around the world including CUFF. (BW)

HARMONY Jim Trainor, 16mm, 13min, 2004

Jim Trainor was a Manhattan bartender when he made his first amazing animated film *The Fetishist* which had its world premiere at CUFF in 1997. He followed up with *The Bats* which firmly established him as one of the great contemporary underground filmmakers working in animation. *Harmony* supposes that an all-powerful deity bestows animals with the gift of self-awareness. Consequently, they begin to express guilt over their natural behavior. Jim lives in Chicago now and teaches at the School of the Art Institute and is currently completing his first live action film using human actors to portray the mating habits of wasps. For now, the black sharpies, thick card stock, and 16mm film are on the shelf. We hope he eventually adapts Felix Salten’s 1923 novel ‘Bambi: A Life in the Woods.’ (BW & WC)

POSTFACE Frédéric Moffet, video, 8 min, 2011

In a celebrity-obsessed culture, filmmakers often exploit the downfall of a star to amplify the emotional undertones of the fictional films in which they perform. POSTFACE takes a look back at the filmography of Montgomery Clift whose private life and career spiral downward after a 1956 car crash that left his face scarred and partially paralyzed. Like an actor without a face, the video is an exploration of obsolescence, produced by means of analog tape manipulations. (FM)

Frederic Moffet is Chicago-based media artist that teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was a judge at CUFF’s 20th festival this past spring. (WC)

NIGHT HUNTER Stacey Steers, 35mm to video, 15min, 2011

In this handmade film, composed of more than four thousand collages, the actress Lillian Gish is seamlessly appropriated from silent-era cinema and plunged into a new and haunting role. Night Hunter evokes a disquieting dreamscape, drawn from allegory, myth, and archetype. Music and sound by Larry Polansky. (SS)

Stacey lives and works in Boulder, CO and teaches in The Film Studies Dept at CU, Boulder alongside Alex Cox (*Repo Man*), Jeanne Liotta, Phil Solomon, and the spirit of Stan Brakhage. (WC)

ZWISCHEN Lori Felker, 16mm, 2min, 2006

Chicago based media artist Lori Felker has worn many hats with CUFF over the years. Co-programming and coordinating the festival, serving as projectionist and technical director as well as participating as a filmmaker herself. ZWISCHEN (“Between”) exists on the thin line between opposing forces. There is no grey between black and white, as ZWISCHEN jumps from earth to space, mixes matter with air, and materializes inspiration at the insistence of the hand. Dirt moves over light to a hand-drawn soundtrack of noise and space. Lori recently scaled back her CUFF duties to focus on her new position as Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois, Chicago. (LF & BW)

“Zwischen doesn’t really fit in with the rest of my body of work. I’m glad you’re showing that one for the CUFF program so I can bring the rest of my work to Bennington some time.” – Lori Felker at NYFF’s Views From the Avant Garde 10/4/13

ASK THE INSECTS Steve Reinke, video, 8min, 2005

Part home-made science (before it became doctrine), part animated video reverie, Reinke’s brief and episodic compression is an incendiary release which opens by announcing the death of the reader, of any audience capable of pulling its fragments together, or better, of dissolving into its tissues, of allowing the body to change shape, to identify, for instance, with an insect. Or a stone. (SR)

Reinke is a consistent CUFF alum. He lives in Chicago and teaches in the Art Theory and Practice department at Northwestern and is the author of ‘The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema.’ (WC)

REGARDING THE PAIN OF SUSAN SONTAG (NOTES ON CAMP) Steve Reinke, video, 4min, 2006

Continues the journey from the final sequence of *Ask the Insects*. We turn away from the graveyard, enter the schoolyard, approach the old crippled tree spinning, and sit under it to draw a little cartoon for the New Yorker, while--through some sort of temporal displacement--New Year's resolutions are being made. (SR)

ERRATA Alexander Stewart, 16mm, 6min, 2005

Errata is an experimental film in which I used a photocopier to generate frames of animation. Each frame of the film is a photocopy of the previous frame. Both black & white and color photocopies were used to make this film, approximately 4,600 copies total (AS). *Errata* became an instant experimental film classic. Alexander lives in Chicago and teaches animation at DePaul. He runs a regular moving-image screening series at the Roots & Culture Gallery as well as the Eyeworks: Festival of Experimental Animation with his partner and collaborator Lilli Carré. (WC)

THE FABULOUS STAINS: BEHIND THE MOVIE Sarah Jacobson & Sam Green, video, 11 min, 2000

The importance of San Francisco filmmaker Sarah Jacobson to CUFF in our early years can't be overstated. After attending the festival's inaugural year with her short *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*, Sarah became a one woman word of mouth PR machine for the festival. Spreading the word about us everywhere she went and encouraging filmmakers she met to send us their work. In our third year we opened with the world premiere of her feature *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* and in 1998 she presented the first public screening in 15 year's of Lou Adler's proto-riot girl comedy *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains*. Footage of that screening appears in this documentary co-directed by another SF based CUFF alumnus Sam Green (*The Rainbow Man/John 3:16* and *The Weather Underground*) and originally produced for Jon Pierson's IFC series Split Screen. Sadly, Sarah died of cancer in 2004 but her legacy lives on through a grant program for women filmmakers set up by Sam and Sarah's mother. (BW)

WUSTENSPRINGMAUS Jim Finn, video, 3min, 2002

Jim Finn also studied at Columbia College where he was part of the same graduating class as Usama Alshaibi. *Wustenspringmaus* combines his love of animals and his interest in marxist political theory. Themes he continued to explore in his "Communist Trilogy" of features; *Interkosmos*, *The Juche Idea* and *La Trincherera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo*. Today he lives in Boston and is an Assistant Professor at Pratt Institute in New York. (BW)

MONDAY 9:02 AM Tyler Hubby, 16mm, 11 min, 1995

Tyler Hubby was one of many graduates of George Kuchar's Electro-graphic Sinema classes at the San Francisco Art Institute who was a regular fixture during the early years of CUFF. This 16mm film, comprised of a single unedited 11-minute take shot from inside a second-floor apartment is inspired by the idea Michael Snow's avant-garde classic *Wavelength*. Although if my memory is correct Tyler didn't actually actually see *Wavelength* until AFTER making this. Today Tyler lives in Los Angeles and has edited a number of great independent documentaries like *The Devil and Daniel Johnson*. (BW)

PICARESQUES Mariah Garnett, S16mm & HDV to HD video, 20min, 2011

Picaresques experiments with documentary and fictional structures, weaving portraits of three seemingly disparate protagonists to ultimately create a film about the act of making something. The filmmaker (Mariah) sets out to make a movie about Catalina de Erauso, a nun-turned conquistador from the 16th century who wrote a memoir. She quickly becomes side-tracked, however, by a relationship she develops with a 10-year old through the process of casting, and the film turns in on itself.

Multiple strategies and media are employed to challenge binary notions – of gender, of narrative structure, of documentary convention, of age, time and history. Inspired by bombastic and relatively unbelievable accounts in Catalina de Erauso's 16th century memoir *La Monja Alferes*, *Picaresques* lives in the rupture between truth and fiction. It is humorous, wryly observed, yet tinged with melancholy (Art Slant).

Mariah is an L.A. based artist and hasn't screened work at CUFF in the past. *Picaresques* was easily one of my favorite shorts at this year's festival and I'm happy to include it in this CUFF retrospective (WC).

program total run time: 113mins

Bryan Wendorf is the co-founder, programmer, and artistic director of the Chicago Underground Film Festival. He loves Black Metal and has a cat named Boris.