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LITTLE PAINTINGS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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May 2006

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Abstract

LITTLE PAINTINGS

By Robert W. Land, M.F.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Major Director: David Williams
Assistant Professor, Photography and Film

Little Paintings is a document that describes the creation, influences and process of two films, “Betty Creek” and “New Berlin”. The films are personal responses to my experiences growing-up and living in the Southern United States. The Thesis illustrates the influences of painters such as Jimmie Lee Sudduth and Willie Jinks and how their raw painting methods inspire the development of my films using a tactile approach to filmmaking.

Little Paintings

A dark room with a focused projected image has intrigued and captivated audiences from the shadow plays of the 1420s to current digital cinema. The subject matter and methods of obtaining the thoughts, moods and issues have developed in the motion picture medium beyond what any sophisticated camera can accomplish and continues to be pushed by film artists such as seen in the work of David Gatten's "What the Water Said" and Jeanne Liotta's "Loretta". This idea of process in filmmaking and its possibilities captivate and motivate me to continue to find the means to communicate as an artist through the celluloid medium.

The possibilities inherent in light sensitive materials and projection can create beautiful atmospheres and transport a viewer from a dark room to infinite possibilities. A filmmaker has the power to dictate or guide the audience into whatever mood, memory or feeling they wish to share with the viewers. Jeanne Liotta description of "Loretta":

"A photogram, also known as a rayogram (after Man Ray) is a cameraless process whereby a photograph is made by placing objects directly on the sensitized paper/film and directing a light source on it to expose it. Loretta was made this way, placing a 35mm negative on top of raw 16mm stock and exposing it with a flashlight, section by section, even frame by frame sometimes." (Jeanne Liotta)

The vast range of techniques available in filmmaking in order to express a thought or tell a story is an alluring aspect of the medium. *"For three days in January and three days in October of 1997, and again, for a day, in August of 1998, lengths of unexposed,*

undeveloped film were soaked in a crab trap on a South Carolina beach. Both the sound and image in WHAT THE WATER SAID are the result of the ensuing oceanic inscriptions written directly into the emulsion of the film as it was buffeted by the salt water, sand and rocks; as it was chewed and eaten by the crabs, fish and underwater creatures.” (David Gatten)

Techniques used in other mediums can be applied to film to communicate various subject matter, emotions and images. For example, printmaking or painting techniques are common in filmmaking, especially experimental film and animation. The use of alternative techniques applied to film can enhance a subject and encourage exploration in additional methods to achieve an effect that will evoke the desired emotion or idea.

In recent years I have employed methods I acquired knowledge of while working as a photographer in scientific and engineering firms, medical research facilities and photo labs. Working with available material has allowed me to explore many scientific image-capturing devices using film. In turn I apply these resources to the personal experimental films I produce.

In developing the film “New Berlin” (2006) there are two elements I wanted to juxtapose. I wanted to describe the beauty of the area by using traditional cinema techniques such as time-lapse photography, underwater cinematography and optical printing to illustrate the New Berlin, Florida environment. The other element in the film I wanted to communicate was my family’s history in this Florida location using old photographs from the early 1900s. I used a cameraless animation procedure of cutting and pasting each individual still image onto the 16mm celluloid frame by frame. The resulting

imagery expresses the historical past of a seaside shipbuilding town and the way I recollect this history.

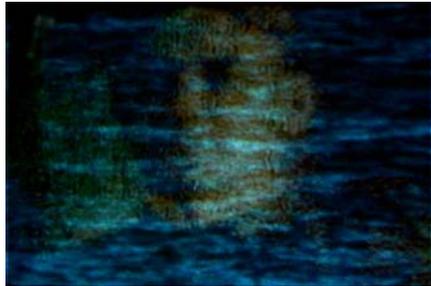


figure 1



figure 2

The film “Betty Creek” (2005) was produced in a similar manner to “New Berlin”. A fascination I have with a location identified as Betty Creek in the North Georgia Mountains motivated a film that attempts to recapture the atmosphere of the area. In “Betty Creek” I taped and attached plant life, leaves and dirt from the region onto 16mm celluloid and rephotographed each frame with various lenses including a microscope objective lens in order to amplify the beauty of this environment. The paste, tape, dirt and frames of plant veins are placed against timed-lapsed images of trailing stars and the moon illuminating the mountain landscape. This juxtaposition suggests the mental imaging one experiences standing amongst the Appalachian Mountains and hearing the sound of the nearby rolling creek. The rhythm expressed as the leaves and specs of dirt flit past the projector’s light creates the experience of being alone and feeling the silence of this space. It is my intention to provide a cadence for the viewer to contemplate the stream-of-consciousness when exposed to the Betty Creek atmosphere expressed in the film.



figure 3



figure 4

The methods of visual development and expression used in the two films are derived from my admiration of an art genre that is prevalent in rural areas near towns where I grew-up. Visionary or outsider artist have been a key influence in the concepts and aesthetics of my creations. The use of materials such as crude wood planks as a painting surface augment the unrefined texture of Willie Jinks and Jimmie Lee Sudduth. This serves as part of my inspiration in the search for the process of expression. The process is apparent in the decayed quality generated by the tape and paste over the still photos in “New Berlin”.

The beauty that is transmitted in the work of Jinks and Sudduth possess a virtue that I hope to achieve with my motion images. The “outsider” artist works with what appears as an exterior comment, but the image is more internal and the uses of select materials enhance the issues constructed in the painting. “If a film fills in too much, it violates our experience.” (Nathaniel Dorsky, Devotional Cinema , p.31)

The simple techniques and material used in “outsider” work enforce the message that the artist is communicating. Sudduth paints onto the raw surfaces with mud, molasses and soot. He has claimed to use over thirty different colors of mud and further supplements his palette with plants and berries. The texture of the organic material significantly

enhances his image and “down-to-earth” subject matter. *"You see that black mud? All you got to do is take that black mud and put you a little sugar in it. Stir it up and sweeten it, add a little water and you can paint all day."* (Jimmie Sudduth) The aspect of using simple materials to create a painting is effective and is a key vehicle in its artistic success. When creating “New Berlin” and “Betty Creek” I enhanced the image using common household and natural materials with the hope of triggering a familiarity with the viewer through the subconscious.

My most recent film, “New Berlin” is one of the more complicated and time consuming films I have developed. Before deciding on cutting and pasting the still images I experimented with several methods I've used in earlier films. Two of the methods were hand processing high contrast 16mm black and white lab stock and contacting the transparent images on top of 16mm raw material. These did not provide the look I hoped to achieve. The final method experimented with involved converting stills to negative using computer software and printing the images onto transparency film. To maintain the color design of the film I rephotographed each frame with 16mm interpositive color print stock.

I have yet to complete a film without approaching it in a painterly or tactile manner. The process to me is as vital as the product. It is vital to enjoy the creation of the piece. Whether it's scratching, pasting or painting on it, I want to take advantage of each 16mm frame. As Carmen D'Avino notes, *"You begin to think of the single frame as a single brush stroke on a canvas."* (D'Avino, *Science & Technology In The Arts*, p.174) This is my methodology as we watch 24 paintings pass per second in the projected light.

My exploration with the celluloid medium continues as I am constantly discovering new ways to illustrate an idea or describe an atmosphere. With the development of video and digital imaging I am finding means to incorporate pixels the same way I integrate dirt or leaves. The working process and results of a scratch, burn, photograph, re-photography and tape is the attraction I have with this medium. To place the bits and pieces in projected motion for an audience is currently, for me, the greatest form of communication.

Bibliography

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Dorsky, Nathaniel. Devotional Cinema, p.31, Tuumba Press. Second edition 2005

Gatten, David. What the Water Said, Canyon Cinema Catalog description

Liotta, Jeanne. Loretta, An Evening of Cameraless Film Program, Eyedrum, Atlanta, Georgia 2003

Sudduth, Jimmie Lee. <http://www.antonart.com/bio-sudd.htm>

VITA

Robbie Land

Education

B.A. College of Fine Arts, Film Production **University of South Florida. June 1995**

M.F.A. Department of Photography and Film **Virginia Commonwealth University May 2006**

Recent Select Presentations

39th Humboldt International Film Festival, Humboldt, CA 2006

Cinetrain, a four month video program in several French train stations continuously looping the film "Oil Derric" **November 2005-February 2006**

The Images Festival, festival of independent film and video, Toronto, ON **2006**

Art Basel Miami Beach 2005, Film Screening for Art Papers Magazine exhibit, **2005**

Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin, Film Screenings, Installations, Performance, **2005**

16mm Experiments, Solo Exhibition of Films and CinePerformance at ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA 2005

The International Experimental Cinema Exposition, Denver, Colorado, **2005**

Newspace Gallery, Film Loop Installation, Portland, Oregon **2005**

12TH James River Film Festival, Prizewinner, Richmond, Virginia **2005**

Screening of 16mm Personal Experiments, Solo Exhibition at The Eyedrum, Atlanta, GA **2004**

Atlanta Underground Film Festival, Atlanta, Georgia **2004**

Laboratory Exhibition of Experimental Film & Video, Salt Lake City, Utah **2004**

Anthology Film Archives, "NewFilmmakers" Screening, New York, NY. **2004**

11th San Francisco Art Institute Film and Video Festival, San Francisco, CA **2004**

The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, "Georgia7" Emerging Artist Exhibition, Atlanta, GA **2004**

Miami Beach Cinematique, Art Miami, Featured Film Artist, Miami, FL **2004**

Ocularis, "Open Zone" Quarterly Film Screening, Brooklyn, NY **2003**

Brrr! Super-8 Festival, in conjunction with Loop'00, Barcelona Culture Studio, Barcelona **2003**

Kunst Biennale, Cologne, Germany **2003**

Brooklyn Underground Film Festival, New York, NY **2003**

10th Annual Chicago Underground Film Festival, Chicago, IL **2003**

7th Colossal Film Crawl, Columbia, South Carolina **2003**

Chicago Filmmaker's screening of "Fall Creek Road Study #3", Chicago, Illinois **2003**
The Experimental Show, International Experimental Film, Featured Artist, Miami Florida
2003

Intermittent, N. American Experimental Cinema at Museu Do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal **2003**

Thaw International Film Festival, Iowa City, IA **2003**

36th Humboldt International Film Festival, Arcata, CA **2003**

Frankfurt Flicker Film Screening, Featured Filmmaker, Frankfurt, Germany **2003**

Professional Experience

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Instructed three semesters Advance Film production, one semester Digital Filmmaking, Professional Practices and Experimental Film, Virginia Commonwealth University, Photo/Film Dept., **2004-2006**

Editor/Technician with Cinepost Atlanta Posthouse performing post production for film/video, DVD authoring, video editing, film transfers, subtitling, and creating video masters from film or video for broadcast /duplication. **2003**

Multi-Media Producer producing promos, T.V. spots, Instructional, etc. videos for the University of South Florida and outside clients using various film and video formats. **1998-2002**

Adjunct Professor of 4000 level undergraduate honors class "Major Works/Major Issues" with a concentration in video production at the University of South Florida. Spring and Fall **2002**

Photographer and Darkroom Technician at the University of South Florida College of Engineering utilizing various traditional and digital formats for public relations, promotional and scientific applications. **1993-1997**

Cinematographer/Videographer for T.V. program "Science Adventures" Channel 16 Tampa PBS affiliate, Tampa, Florida **1996-1997**

Photographer documenting North American Artist Allan McCollum and his process creating fulgurites for an international touring installation titled "Petrified Lightning" **1997**

Photographer for the magazine "Science Adventures" produced in conjunction with the PBS television program "Science Adventures". **1997**

Director of Photography of two television commercials produced on 16mm motion picture film for the University of South Florida. **1997**

Cinematographer collecting cloud to ground lightning images at Camp Blanding Lightning Research Facility using high-speed motion picture cameras for the Tampa Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI). **1997**

Technical Production Assistant at the Kitchen Performance Space, New York, NY. **1993**

Production Assistant at Good Machine Productions, New York, NY. **1993**

Awards, Residencies and Publications

Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs Arts Services Funding for Film Production & Presentation **2004**

Florida Dept. of State Division of Cultural Affairs Honorable Mention Individual Artist Grant **2001**

Hambidge Artist Residency, Raybun Gap, GA Fall 2001 and Winter 2004

New Forms Florida Grant, South Florida Art Center, 1996

Art Council Hillsborough County Emerging Artist Grant 1996

Intermittent published in conjunction with an exhibition of recent work by experimental filmmakers working in the US. Curated by the Museum of Contemporary Cinema 2003