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The Liason of Independent  
Filmmakers of Toronto  
April > May 1996  
Volume 16 > Issue 2

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The LIASON OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS OF TORONTO is a non-profit co-operative which supports and encourages independent filmmaking through the exchange of information and access to equipment and facilities. LIFT hosts a program of workshops and monthly screenings and provides access to information regarding funding sources, festival and grant deadlines and other related matters.

LIFT is supported by its membership, the Canada Council (Medial Arts Section), the Ontario Arts Council, Metro Council Cultural Affairs Division, the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, the National Film Board of Canada, Telefilm, the Ontario Film Development Corporation, the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation.

Articles published in the LIFT newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the Co-op or members of the Board of Directors. Letters to the editor can be sent c/o LIFT, 37 Hanna Ave. Suite 301, Toronto, Ontario M6K 1W5, Phone: 588-6444; Fax: 588-7071; Email LIFT@Inforamp.net website: http://www.Inforamp/nLIFT

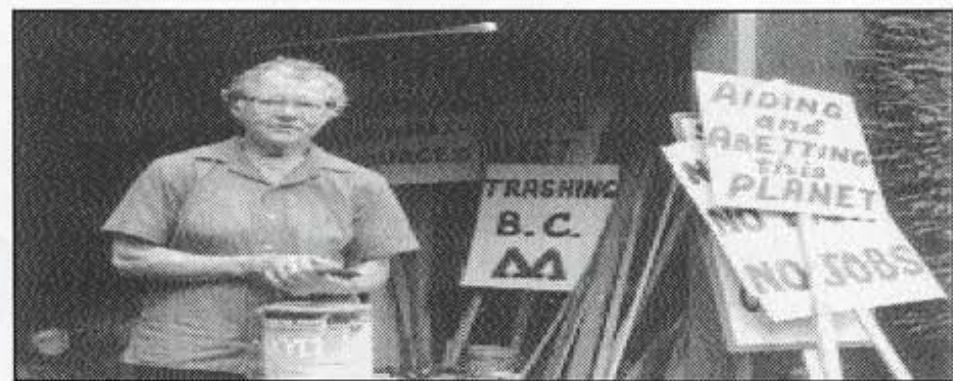
Things being what they are in this industry/art form, I decided to go directly to the source to peer into the future of independent film in Toronto: Jo Jo. I called the 1-900 Psychic Alliance number as a last resort to find something to cling to in the uncertainty facing the community. First, a male voice, authoritarian, comes on, and tells me that Jo Jo works for Ormon Incorporated. The cost is \$4.99 per minute, a small price to pay for certainty on questions no one else can answer. Then Jo Jo's comforting introductory message: The Power of Love is keeping the psychic alliance alive, and will work for me. "I am here for you", Jo Jo says, and I feel immediately calmed.

The univoice comes back and tells me to press 1 if I know the extension of the psychic I would like to talk to (why don't they already know?), and to press 2 if I would like to be connected randomly to a psychic. In the spirit of extreme fatalism, press 2.

Tina, Extension 5050, introduced herself and asked my first name and date of birth. I told her I'm calling for the independent film community, to

ask what the future holds. I told her that we have been through strife and turmoil recently and the future is uncertain. "Yes" she said, "I can see lots of people around. It appears the people have been going through extra difficult times." I concurred, and ask if there is respite indicated. "I see lots of people around," she repeats, and they will continue to be so. That's a good sign. There will be a financial struggle, but goals should not be put aside. Regain confidence - there will be funding. I see investment indicated - not just of money, but time and of interest. Investment by you and the people around you." Tina also saw ill health, possibly depression. I asked if that could be the general malaise permeating the industry. She said it could be. "There will be lots of delays, but success in the overall endeavour is indicated. There is lots of talent, high energy, artistic talent - in stage or screen. Make plans for the future. These things will come to fruition within three months."

You heard it here first.



from *Bones of the Forest*, see interview on page 13>>>>

photo: Kelly O'Brien

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## features

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## on the cover

**The man with the movie camera**  
Dir. Chelovek s Kinoapparatom, 1929

# LIFT news

## CFMDC Silent Auction

Filmmakers with money and a budget! Why not do two things for less cash? Support the CFMDC and buy stuff for your film!

### Over \$8000 worth of stuff for sale

- \$1000 credit with Spot Film & Video
  - \$1000 credit with Production Services
  - 2 free weeks in an edit suite (value \$1000)
  - \$500 credit with Wallace Studios
  - 10 minutes of music composed for your films by Jason Agouris or Andres Castillo-Smith
  - Discounts on services with Lynx Video, Sonic Bloom, Fearless Films, Cutting Edge, Exclusive, Sound Techniques...to name a few!
- \*non film-related goods include a \$100 gift certificate from Rapp Optical, haircuts at Coupe Bizarre, Shiatsu sessions, a ghetto-blasters, bike tune-ups, artwork and a 35mm still camera.

The silent auction will take place **Sun. April 27**, complete with bands, films, food and beer at the CFMDC, one floor below LIFT. So come and bring all your friends!

## LIFT Goes On-Line

LIFT member Garth Dyke has designed our World Wide Web site, which should be launched in early April. Check it out at <http://www.inforamp/N/Lift>. Anyone with questions, suggestions or ideas, please call Lisa or Greg at the LIFT office, or e-mail us at [LIFT@inforamp.net](mailto:LIFT@inforamp.net)

## Do You Have e-mail???

Since LIFT is finally getting the technology, we need to know who has an e-mail address, what the address is, and if you would be interested in receiving your bi-monthly mailing by e-mail in the future. You can e-mail the info to us at [LIFT@inforamp.net](mailto:LIFT@inforamp.net)

## Special Screening

LIFT Members' Films In Hamilton

Hamilton Artists Inc., an artist-run centre located in downtown Hamilton will be hosting an evening of films made by LIFT members on May 10, 1996. The address is 103 Vine St. in Hamilton. For more details call Sally at LIFT 596-8233.

## Funding News:

You probably received your notification in the mail that the PAFPS fund operating through the **National Film Board** has been frozen effective immediately.

Word on the street is that the Film Board aims to replace PAFPS with another filmmaker-friendly assistance programme, as soon as they can. Watch this space for details.

The rumours about the **OFDC** tumble like the rolling dice that will decide their future... Now that the OPSEU strike is over, and they can clear up the paperwork backlog, there should be news. Rumours are that they will exist only as a tax-break agency, with a program similar to the tax-break program at SODEC in Quebec. Should this be true, a full explanation of the tax-break mechanics will appear in the next newsletter. Briefly, it is recoupable money geared not at the creative talent but at the producer (unless they are the same person). This represents a philosophical shift to the right in the nature of provincial funding! There is only a faint hope that the OFDC will survive as a funding body directed at research and development. Latest good news/bad news, though, is that culture will lose 202 jobs, where other sectors are losing as many as 700. Is that a good sign?

## LIFT Orientation

**Wednesday, May 15, 1996**  
11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.  
37 Hanna Ave., Suite 301

LIFT will be hosting an orientation session for individuals interested in joining the co-op, as well as for any members who haven't yet familiarized themselves with LIFT's facilities and resources. The Membership Co-ordinator will introduce attendees to the LIFT staff and will show everyone how to access the various hands-on information resources (funding files, festival and crew lists, etc.) and will answer specific questions regarding resources, membership structure and policy, etc., or more general ones regarding how to get more involved in the co-op and its activities. The Equipment Co-ordinators will take everyone on a short tour of the editing rooms, go over the equipment resources, explain equipment booking policies and procedures, and answer questions regarding LIFT production equipment and post-production facilities.

**NEW:** An orientation of the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre will also be conducted for interested individuals. **Space is limited, so call to reserve a spot.**  
LIFT: 588-6444

## Wo(man) and machine 50mm Lens for SR

LIFT recently purchased a 50mm Zeiss high speed prime lens for the SR camera package. We now have a total of 5 lenses in the SR prime kit. To complete this package we have also purchased a bridge plate and follow focus. We have changed the rates to reflect the added value to the SR prime lens package. The new rates will be \$50 for Full members and a \$100 for Associate members

### A warm Welcome to Jeff Hocken

You may have noticed a new face in the equipment area at LIFT. That's Jeff. He is a co-op student from Brampton who is doing a placement here. He is interested in developing a career in film production. Jeff has come to us at a very busy and pivotal time at LIFT. The responsibilities he has undertaken have made a real difference to the LIFT staff and membership.

### DONATIONS NEEDED

LIFT needs comfortable couches (not for casting, thank you very much), armchairs, end tables and lamps so we can turn the mezzanine into a members' lounge. We are also looking for a fridge. Only stuff in good condition, please. Call LIFT @ 588-6444. We can make arrangements for pick up.

### COMING SOON! 1996 LIFT MEMBERS DIRECTORY

This summer over 600 of your fellow members and about 200 organizations will receive the 1996 LIFT Members Directory. This year's Directory will include a handy index organized according to crew position. The Directory promises to be a valuable resource for the independent film community. **IMPORTANT:** Please note that only those members who have given LIFT permission to publish their names and phone numbers will be included in the 1996 directory.

- If you joined in the last year, you should have filled out the appropriate section on your application form.
- If you renewed in the last year, you should have returned your renewal form with the appropriate section filled out.

In doubt, call Sally at the LIFT office 588-6444. Remember, whatever we have on our database as of May 1, 1996 will be included in the 1996 Directory, so make sure that your membership dues are paid up!

### New Discount For LIFT Members

Spot Film & Video is pleased to offer LIFTers a 20% discount on all lab prices and a 45% discount on video transfers. They will give the first ten clients who take advantage of their new pricing an additional \$50 credit in lab or video services. For more info. call Al Lindsay or Jim Hardie at 535-3522. They are located just around the corner from LIFT at 23 Fraser Ave. See page 20 for the full range of discounts available to LIFTers.



February 1-April 17, 1996

Sarah Abbot	Ben Marrello
Colin Adams	Deiren Masterson
Patrick Arias	Phillip McGregor
Mike Bailey	Tracy McMenemy
Dmitry Belopolsky	Michael Meagher
Keith Berry	Colleen Murphy
David Bishop	Jeffrey Nesker
Andrej Blazeka	Bill Oncea
Frank Bosnjak	Beth Ootes
Dennis Brown	Jeffrey Orr
John Bryja	Bimal Parmar
Caryl Katheleen Caryl	Glen Pineau
Catherine Clement	Demetri Portelli
Derek Dorey	J. Rupert Ritchie
Garth Andrew Dyke	Marc Roumy
Jeffrey Estrela	Patricia Sagl
Shelly Fairfield	Joshua Shapero
Darya Farha	Michael Sinyor
Janine Fung	Dee Dee Siye
Sterling Fury	Ellen Smallman
Luis Garcia	Woitek Smialek
Todd Gaver	Gavin Smith
Nathon Gunn	Randy Steinberg
David Harnden	Abigail Steinberg
Wanda Harnum	Stan Suda
Jeff Hocken	Desirée Sy
Nancy Hughes	Patrick Tarr
Todd Hughes	Jerry Vandebeld
Saeed Kardar	Tim Ware
Owin Lambeck	Steven Watson
Linda Leitch	E. Bosede Williams
Sean Lowe	Angelo Zacharakis

# Deadlines

## **The 6th Annual Gravity Free Film & Video Competition**

Sponsored by the Lucy-Desi Museum and Paragon Cable, the competition is looking for comedy shorts, 30 min. or less, completed since January 1, 1990. Live Action or Animated, B & W or Colour, all film or video formats, sound sync or silent, suitable for cable broadcast.

Cash prizes: \$250 each for four finalists. \$250 for Juror's Award and Popular Pick Award. Prizes awarded at Festival (travel allowance provided). Jurors include a rep from Comedy Central, Jay Craven, filmmaker (Where the Rivers Flow North), and Dr. Scott G. Isaksen, Dir. of Studies in Creativity, Buffalo State College.

All submissions must be in 1/2" VHS format for evaluation. Submission deadline is June 1, 1996. There is a \$20 (U.S.) entry fee for each title submitted (send a SASE if you would like your tape returned). To enter, send videos and entry fees to: The Gravity Free Film Festival, 116 East Third Street, Jamestown, NY, 14701. Ph: (716) 664-2465, Fx: (716) 661-3829.

## **Cinema in Citta**

Call for films and videos by directors of Italian heritage. Features, short films and video productions are being sought for the second annual festival of Italian-North American film, Cinema in Citta. To be eligible, films must be directed by a Canadian or American filmmaker of Italian heritage, or be concerned with an Italian-North American theme. We are interested in all genres and styles of film and video, including fiction, documentary and experimental.

If you would like to submit your film for consideration, please send a VHS copy, along with a SASE by April 19\* to: Cinema in Citta c/o Eyetalian Magazine, 901 Lawrence Ave. W., Ste. A201, Toronto, ON M6A 1C3.

Entries which are selected will be screened at the Cinema in Citta film festival in Toronto this June. For more information, please contact Pino Esposito at any of the following numbers: (416) 787-9598 or 1-800-689-5145 or e-mail: eyetalian@magic.ca

\*Contact festival programmer Pino Esposito at any of the above numbers if you have a film you'd like to submit after the deadline.

# call for submissions

## **Discovery Channel Asia**

Discovery Channel Asia acquires approximately 40% of the documentaries and education programs it broadcasts. They are interested in acquiring quality programs that fall in the categories of History, Science & Technology, World Cultures and Adventures. No News, no sports, but programs that are educational. Several multilingual professionals on staff at Discovery Channel Asia are Canadian. They welcome your queries on program acquisition or co-productions at the following address:

Discovery Channel Asia, Inc.  
3/F Baskerville House, 13 Duddell Street  
Central, Hong Kong  
Fax: (852) 2810.8456  
Attn: Kevin-John McIntyre, Senior VP & General Manager

## **Animated Films Wanted for International Television**

Jolt Television Productions Inc. is putting together a new compilation of animated films for the international home video, broadcast, and related markets. If you are an independent animator who would like to have your work considered for such a package, Jolt TV wants to hear from you!

If your work is selected, they offer: potential national and international exposure; payment for your efforts; inclusion in their international database of filmmakers that they make available to networks, producers, etc.

Send your work right away on videocassette (1/2" VHS, 3/4, or Beta SP). For further information, please contact Jolt TV Productions at the following address: Canadian Film Institute, 2 Daly, Suite 140, Ottawa, ON K1N 6E2. Fax: (613) 232-6315, Tel: (613) 232-8769.

e-mail: aj899@freenet.carleton.ca

Web:

[HTTP://www.DocuWeb.ca/CFI-OttAniFest/](http://www.DocuWeb.ca/CFI-OttAniFest/)

## **WTN's Shameless Shorts**

The Women's Television Network is looking for short films and videos by Canadian and international directors and producers. This program showcases work created by women or work which portrays women's perspectives, stories and interests. All shorts 15 minutes or less, including drama, animation, documentary, and experimental, will be accepted for preview. Just send a VHS copy of the work along with any appropriate publicity material. Laura Michalchyshun, Programming Director, WTN, P.O. Box 158, Station L, Winnipeg, MB, R3H 0Z5.

## **Hallwalls Media Program**

Video/performance, film, multimedia, digital media and internet projects wanted for ongoing exhibitions/screenings/installations.

They also accept proposals from video & digital artists for residencies which includes access to Hallwalls' video and digital editing facilities and internet services. Work produced through these residencies will be exhibited at Hallwalls.

Submit preview tapes, proposals, resume, support material & SASE.

For more info., contact Gail Mentlik: Media Program

Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center  
2495 Main St., suite 425  
Buffalo, NY 14214

Tel: (716) 835-7362, Fax: (716) 835-7364

email: [Hallwall@Localnet.com](mailto:Hallwall@Localnet.com),

Internet: <http://freenet.buffalo.edu/~hallwall>

## **The Independent Eye**

The Independent Eye, a prime time slot on Knowledge Network (BC's educational broadcaster), is looking for examples of Canada's best independently-produced short drama and animation. If you have a unique, creative and entertaining short drama or animated work, send a VHS copy, along with the appropriate publicity material. Programming preference is for work 30 minutes or less, and all entries will be screened by the programmers. License fees negotiated upon acceptance (please ensure all rights have been cleared for television prior to submission). Judy Robertson, The Independent Eye, Knowledge Network, 4355 Mathissi Place, Burnaby, BC, V5G 5S8. Ph: (604) 431-3224, Fx: (604) 431-3387.

# fest ival<sub>s</sub>

Guidelines and application forms for the following festivals are on file and available for photocopying (10c a page) at the LIFT office. **Local festivals are in bold.** As much as they would like to, LIFT staff cannot take the time out to fax information to members. Please do not ask. If you are unable to make it into the LIFT office, you will have to call the festival directly to request an application form.

	Deadline	Telephone
Grenoble Outdoor Short Film Fest. (France, July 2-6).....	Apr. 26	76 54 43 51
Linz Prix Arts Electronica (Austria, May 31-June 2).....	Apr. 30	++43(732) 6900-218
Munich Media Net Award (Germany, July 4).....	Apr. 30	+49+89-381904-12/17
Paris Fest. of Films on Art (France, October 16-21).....	Apr. 30	33 (1) 44 78 47 22
Lausanne Int'l Film Fest. of Films on Energy (Nov. 13-16).....	Apr. 30	+41 21/312 90 69
Valencia Cinema Jove Int'l Film & Video Fest. (Spain, June 24-30).....	Apr. 30	34 (9) 6 398 59 26
Ebensee Film Fest. of Nations (Austria, June 16-27).....	May 1	+43 0732/673 693
<b>Toronto Int'l Film Fest., Perspective Canada Shorts (Sept. 5-14).....</b>	<b>May 1</b>	<b>(416) 967-7371</b>
<b>Toronto Int'l Film Fest., Perspective Can. Features (Sept. 5-14).....</b>	<b>May 1</b>	<b>(416) 967-7371</b>
Margaret Mead Film & Video Fest. (New York, Oct. 18-23).....	May 3	(212) 769-5305
Quebec Int'l Scientific Film Fest. (Montreal, Oct. 17-27).....	May 15	(514) 849-1612
Jerusalem Film Fest. (Israel, July 4-13).....	May 15	02 724131
Cracow Int'l Short Film Fest. (Poland, May 31-June 4).....	May 15	(012) 67-23-40
Ambiente-Incontri Int'l Film Fest. (Italy, June 26-30).....	May 25	0434/520404
Bettina Russell Film Fest. (Waterloo, Oct. 3-5).....	May 31	(519) 884-0710 x410
Chicago Int'l Children's Film Fest. (Illinois, Oct. 4-13).....	May 31	(312) 281-9075
Canadian Int'l Annual Film Fest. (Barrie, Autumn).....	June 1	(705) 737-2729
L'Alfas del Pi Film Fest. (Alicante, 1996).....	June 1	96/5889423
Canadian Int'l Film Fest. (Barrie, Autumn, 1996).....	June 1	(705) 737-2729
Tokyo Int'l Fil Fest. (Japan, Sept. 27-Oct. 6).....	June 17	81-3-3268-5204/7
Breckenridge Fest. of Film (Colorado, September 19-22).....	June 30	(970) 453-6200
Valladolid Int'l Film Fest. (Spain, Oct. 18-26).....	June 30	+34-83-305 700
Ottawa Int'l Animation Fest. (October 2-6).....	July 1	(613) 232-6727
International Emmy Awards (New York, Nov. 21).....	July 12	n/a
San Sebastian Int'l Film Fest. (Spain, Sept. 19-28).....	July 31	34.43.48.12.12
<b>Cabbagetown Film &amp; Video Fest. (Toronto, Sept. 4-5).....</b>	<b>Aug. 27</b>	<b>921-0857</b>
Abitibi-Temiscamingue Int'l Film Fest. (Quebec, Oct. 26-31).....	Sept. 2	(819) 762-6212

## ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL

Contact the Film, Photography, Video Office, Ontario Arts Council: 151 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON, M5S 1T6. Phone: 969-7428 or 1-800-387-0058

## CANADA COUNCIL

The following deadlines have been confirmed with the Canada Council:  
 Film Production and Creative Development Grants : **July 15**, November 15 (contact Leuten Rojas, ext. 5541)  
 First Productions In Media Arts: **Sept. 1** (contact David Poole ext. 4253)  
 For more information, contact: The Canada Council, P.O. Box 1047, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5V8. Phone: 1-800-263-5588.

**FUND** (Foundation to Underwrite New Drama for Television)  
 Script Development Programme & Senior Projects Programme: **May 3**  
 For further information and guidelines/application forms, call: 956-5431.

## BRAVO! Starts Bravo! FACT

BRAVO! has launched a new foundation, Bravo!FACT, to assist Canadian talent by

# funding

the promotion, development, production, and exhibition of Canadian-made shorts form arts video, in all manner of disciplines and modes of expression, and to stimulate public interest in and appreciation of the arts on television. Awards can cover up to 50% of the budget, up to \$25,000. Upcoming deadlines: June 28, contact Marie Lalonde for more info: 591-5757, ext. 2734.

## Canadian Heritage, Multiculturalism Program

Heritage Cultures and Languages Program. Broadcasting, Film and Audio-Visual National Competition. Deadline: **June 17**, 1996. Projects may fall into one of four categories: 1) development of film, video, television and radio scripts; 2) post-production of film, video, television, radio and other audio-visual projects; 3) promotional opportunities; and 4) professional development projects in media.

There are two levels of support: A) \$5,000 - \$7,000 for development only;  
 \$10,000 for post-production only (one copy of each submission is required).  
 For more information, please consult the Guide for Applicants for the Broadcasting.  
 For more information, please consult the Guide for Applicants for the Broadcasting, Film & Audio-Visual Program. At press time, LIFT had contacted the Dept. of Heritage for an office copy. Donna James, Program Officer, Broadcasting, Film and Audio-visual, Heritage Cultures and Languages, Dept. of Canadian Heritage, 15 Eddy St., 11th Floor, Hull, Quebec, K1A 0M5. Tel: (819) 994-6035, Fax: (819) 953-8052, email: Donna\_James@pch.gc.ca

## Ontario Film Development Corporation

All programs have been frozen until further notice. For further info contact: 314-6858

## Canadian Independent Film & Video Fund

No upcoming deadlines confirmed. For more information, contact: Robin Jackson, 666 Kirkwood Ave., Suite 203, Ottawa, ON K1Z 5X9. Tel: (613) 729-1900, Fax: (613) 729-4610

# deadlines



# recent awards

congratulations to:

**Heather Frise and Velcrow Ripper** for their double prize winning for *Bones of the Forest*: Best Feature Documentary and Best Film at the Hot Docs! International Film festival in March. Jeff Winch interviews Heather and Velcrow in this issue of the LIFT newsletter. **Lynne Fernie** (*Fiction and Other Truths: A Film About Jane Rule*) and **Heather Frise and Velcrow Ripper** (again!), all finalists in the M. Joan Chalmers Documentarian Award for Film and Video. The \$15,000 annual prize will awarded at the Royal Alexandra Theatre, 4pm, Mon. May 13, 1996

**John Hopkins** whose film *Johnston...* *Johnston* won a finalist award in recognition of outstanding achievement in the International Competition for Television, Film and Video Communications, New York.

**Michael Werth**, Gemini Award for Best Overall Sound on *Due South*.

**Stephanie Morgenstern**, Palm d'or (16mm) Le Prix de la direction de l'audiovisuel du Ministère de la Culture at the 35th Huy World Short Film Festival in Belgium for *Curtains* (French version). *Curtains* has also screened before festival audiences in Sudbury, Winnipeg, Montreal, Vancouver, and Chicago. Look out for it at Images '96.

**The Racial Equity Fund's** 1995/96 Awards have been announced: The jury of Jennifer Holness, Keith Lock, Steven Loft and Beatriz Pizano awarded: **\$2,000 Development awards to:**

**Mark Beachey & Gord Bishop**  
*Stoney Pointers: Untold Stories*  
A story of the Stoney Point Nishnaabeg and their struggle to regain recognition. These untold stories are about humanity, the people affected by the land and their history.

**Marilyn Gray** *Vicious Cycles*  
Maxine Gordon is a strong, determined college student and young mother of a three month old son. She faces the challenge of her life as she discovers that both her and her child are HIV positive.

**Armen Kazazian** *Mercury*  
A film of the life and desires of Aaron, a young gay man who has been hurt one too many times by the rejection of possible lovers. Mistrusting the physical world around him, he retreats into the mystical realm of Cyberspace, where he meets and falls in love with an anonymous caller.

**Jane Eun-Hee Kim** *Crickets*  
The story of a young alienated Korean-Canadian girl in a lily-white town whose eyes are opened to her loss of innocence. She plays with her sexuality, but realizes that it is not always a game.

**Sandy MacIntyre** *Roots/Routes in Motion*  
A New World African woman called Nana who in her second year of pregnancy is searching for a way to give birth.

**Monique Mojica** *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*  
A First Nation's woman explores and explodes the mythology of the "Indian Princess" in order to discover who the real Pocahontas might be.

**Betty Quan** *Mother Tongue*  
A family struggles to communicate their hopes and desires, while divided by three languages: English, Cantonese and the language of the Deaf, American Sign Language.

**Ras Leon Saul** *For Better... For Worse*  
A tale of spirit possession, drug dealing and political intrigue set in South America and spilling over into a major Canadian metropolis.

**Abdallah Scheck** *Amphibious Landing*  
After Immigration Canada failed to reunite him with his family, a lonely and depressed refugee travels to Rome, Italy and smuggles his wife and children into Canada.

**Jason Seudath**  
*The Weekend*  
Irene, a young woman questioning her sexuality, is shocked to find that her nosy friend has set her up on a blind date with a woman.

**Dawn Wilkinson**  
*The Nappy Hair Solution*  
A story about a young black female scientist who works part-time at a West Indian hair salon in Toronto and invents a hair cream that turns straightened hair back to its nappy (Afro, Dreadlocks) roots.

**Production Grants to:**  
**David Findlay** *Queer. Love. Words.*  
An experimental dramatic narrative about Syte, Sawoond and Moeve as they negotiate their long-distance relationships in the weeks immediately following their friend Memri's death.

**Luis Garcia**  
*These Onions Don't Make me Cry*  
A bitter-sweet film about the experiences of an illegal Latin American immigrant in Canada and his relationship with the daughter of Chilean exiles.

**Rose Gutierrez & Nora Angeles**  
*4227 Celia Street*  
The struggles three Pinay Lesbians face in choosing how to live their lives.

**Carolynne Hew** *Bangs*  
A young Chinese-Canadian woman who cannot leave her bathroom. She spends her day there reflecting on the truths begins Chinese face-reading, the nature of self effacement and the efficiency of light sabers — and bangs.

**Jorge Manzano**  
*Red Skin and Grey Bar Hotel*  
The film encompasses a tightly woven narrative of memory, dreams, desires and experiences of Native inmates in the Canadian prison system.

**Victor Mokgakala**  
*The Ghost of Queen Street*  
A film about a young woman named Vera, who is raped and murdered by two men on their way home. The brutal act prompts her mother to ask a spiritual healer, Inyaka, to free her spirit so she can confront her killer.

**Post-Production Grants to:**  
**Anita Lee** *Kiseanq's Challenge*  
The relationship between two Korean-Canadian women, one who was raised in Canada and another who is a recent immigrant. Grace is a feminist translator and is representing Hyang-sook who she met in a women's shelter.

**Mario Tenorio**  
*The Dark Chamber*  
A Salvadorean writer who is writing a novel about Maria, a 25 year-old political activist who was tortured, raped and killed in order to obtain military information about the political group to which she belonged.

REF is a not-for-profit organization that encourages diversity in Canadian filmmaking by offering grants to first-time and emergent filmmakers from the Aboriginal, African, Asian, Black, Caribbean, Mexican, Central and South American communities. REF receives co-sponsorship from the Ontario Film Development Corporation, and support from the National Film Board.

If your film has received any awards or nominations, or has been accepted into any festivals, please phone the LIFT office at 588-6444 or fax us at 588-7017.



# montage in the modern age

## The Field of Digital Editing

a new battleground  
between film & video

by Alexander Shuper

For over 100 years, from the advent of cinema itself, the primary charm and strength of the film medium lay in its unique claim over a special dimension which set it apart from the other visual arts: movement. The novelty and power of this dimension is reflected in the very terms we use to identify the medium: *motion pictures*, *movies*.

Film art quickly evolved. Dramatic and narrative elements became central to the medium; dynamic framing and shot compositions were taken to extremes; sound as an important artistic device was not long in following. And side by side with all these strides, continually being developed, endlessly being taken to new heights and depths was editing, *montage*.

Traditional editing has been primarily a mechanical process. Lev Kuleshov, high pioneer of film theory, isolated cinema's most elemental component as the physical celluloid upon which the photographed image is chemically imprinted. Manipulation of that physical form was a physical process. Imagery captured on strips of celluloid could be strung together in endless combinations, each possessing potentially disparate psychological effects. The actual strips of film had to be physically bonded together by hand; the mind of the viewer was necessarily affected by the very corporeal process of traditional film editing.

Eventually, the technology of traditional film making was challenged by video, a new, significantly different medium. Whereas conventional film stores visual images as photographic emulsions on celluloid, video stores both imagery and sound as electronic signals on tape. Film is chemical and physical; a film strip is actually made up of a series of tiny translucent pictures. Video is electronic and almost imaginary in its existence; video images cannot be viewed in their stored state without the proper equipment. In this sense, when compared to film, video can be seen as once more removed from the reality it depicts.

Due to these fundamental differences, editing methodology and practice in the two media are distinct processes. The field of editing has been one of the main battlegrounds between film and video -- the two predominant modes of moving image representation. Video introduced a new technology -- and therefore a new methodology -- for the stringing together of moving imagery. Video is not edited manually (tape cannot be stitched together), but electronically. Video imagery lacks a material presence and existence. As it has no physical, celluloid base, it is interesting to wonder what Kuleshov might have considered the most elemental unit of video ...

Other areas of contention are present, as each medium has its own strong points. Video is cheaper, it can be played back immediately, its raw stock is reusable, it can be more easily manipulated and colour corrected, and when converted to certain formats (such as video disc) it has a substantially longer life span. Film on the other hand offers more aesthetically pleasing images with a broader range of hues and contrasts, it presents a wider picture, it uses reliable technology that has survived the test of time, it has a stronger and more sentimental artistic tradition and cultural association, and in its final form (*i.e.*, the answer print) it can be easily projected for group audiences.

Today, this evolution of *montage* methodology has gone one step farther. In effect, a new weapon has been introduced, one that threatens to conquer traditional film editing methodology once and for all. Although it is more closely related to video than film, this new technology is, at the same time, also quite unlike traditional video editing. The new weapon is computer aided non-linear digital editing.

The technology behind digital editing is quite advanced and complex, but the basic concept is fairly straightforward: Source images are translated into computerized information which can be stored on a computer system's hard disk drive. This process is referred to as "video capture." The source imagery can be directed from a variety of video formats, including Beta, Hi-8, S-VHS, and even standard VHS. (Images originally shot on film can be converted into computer information, but as a preliminary step they must first be transferred to a video format.) Sound is also captured in this way -- as analogue (or digital) source impulses translated into binary computer information.

Once the visual images and audio tracks are captured, a myriad of options are open to the digital editor. Typically, each shot or sound bit is captured in its own window and assigned a name for easy identification when it needs be used. The series of captured shots and tracks are collectively stored in a *project window* or *edit bin*. In most systems, the opening image of each shot can usually be displayed in the project folder/ bin for even easier access and identification.

With a click of the mouse, any shot can be called up and pasted into the *construction window* -- a clearly laid out time line of the film where both video and audio can be easily laid down, synchronized, and even manipulated.

Special effect filters (warping, bending, ghosting, etc.) can be applied to any shot at any time; still frames are a snap; shot speeds can be accelerated or decelerated; colour corrections and shot croppings can be imposed with ease; and professional quality titles can be customized quickly and easily. However, the features which seem to garner the most accolades are the endless possibilities with shot transitions and linkages — inter-shot *montage* itself.

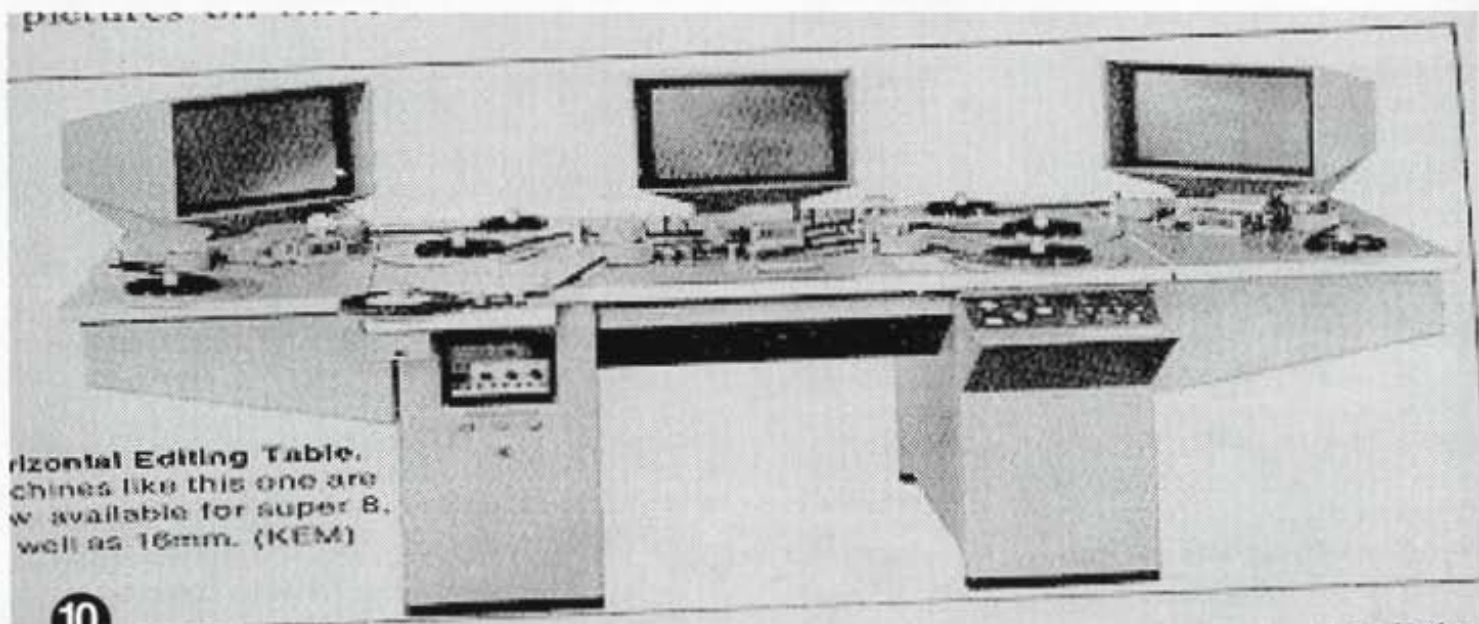
The only thing more astounding than the variety of dissolves, wipes, and other specialized transitions available to the digital editor is the ease with which these transitions can be applied. Customized shot links are also an option. These same effects are not only more time consuming and difficult to execute in conventional film editing, but also more costly. Moreover, once an editing decision has been made in conventional film editing, the final outcome cannot be immediately viewed. Only upon processing can the editor or director gauge the merit of his/her decision. In digital editing, however, all the effects mentioned above can be easily previewed. If it looks good, then great; if not, then it can be just as easily rectified. This ease arises from the fact that no physical strips of celluloid need be handled or manually bonded together; regardless of how one may defend traditional film editing, digital editing is an easier and more efficient process. Furthermore, although these particular advantages are also true of conventional video editing, digital editing simplifies the process even more and exponentially expands the range of options and possibilities for the manipulation of moving imagery.

Once an entire project has been assembled in the construction window and has been appropriately previewed, the next step is to "render" the work.

Rendering can be defined as the operation by which the computer imposes a series of direct-ed manipulations upon the captured images. It creates a completely processed final version of the project as a new information file, which is fully viewable on a system monitor. Once rendered, then, the project is ready for output. It can be transferred to virtually any video format, being reconverted from binary digital information back to its original state - conventionally readable electronic impulses (i.e., video tape). Depending on the image quality demarcations set by the editor, generation loss isn't even a concern. True broadcast quality can be maintained through all phases of the digital editing process.

Traditional film editing necessitates the physical bonding of existent celluloid strips. Standard video editing involves the linking together of abstract electronic impulses. But digital editing — *montage* in the modern age — goes beyond either of these definitions. Imagery, the essence of artistic representation, is translated into cold, calculated, computerized data, data which is somehow less existent and less real than the electronic impulses on a video cassette, yet somehow more tangible and more accessible than the photographic emulsions on celluloid. What exactly is it that is linked together in digital editing? Never mind what Kuleshov might have considered the most elemental component of video; what would he have had to say about digitized imagery? This latest step in the evolution of *montage* is nothing less than a revolution in the film industry, the seeds of which were actually sown back in the 80's. The digital editing uprising can actually be considered just a small part of the larger global socio-economic shakeup now referred to as the Information Revolution. Regardless, Apple's Avid System, which continues to be one of today's most popular

# montage in the mo



Horizontal Editing Table. Machines like this one are available for super 8, well as 16mm. (KEM)

# ern age

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digital editing packages, was one of the first setups to solve the problem of keeping digitized video synchronized with audio. Apple's early dominance of the market was completely in keeping with the Mac's early edge over the PC in terms of graphic-based applications. Still, recent advances on the PC front have brought the two formats — Macintosh and PC — head to head in the digital editing market. The field of digital editing, then, has become an important battleground, indeed, involving a series of combatants in a series of wars.

Today, Apple offers a series of fully integrated systems at various levels, which revolve for the most part around the Avid / MediaSuite setup. Some of the other well known digital editing systems, including those engineered for PC technology, go by the names of D-Vision, Radius Telecast, Immix Cube, Fast Electronics, and DPS Perception. And the list is constantly expanding. Regardless of the particular video engine a digital workstation might utilize, a solid base computer system is nothing less than crucial.

As far as PC workstations go, depending on the quality and complexity of the images being captured for editing, storage requirements are generally between 2 and 5 megabytes per second (at 24 to 30 frames per second). Customized quality versus storage parameters can also be manually adjusted.

Nevertheless, this creates the demand for high storage capacity hard drives. Because accessing the information quickly is an asset, the drives should be of a high speed variety (SCSI's are the standard). Also in the interest of speed, efficient CPU's and high performance, high MHz motherboards are similarly required. More RAM in a system naturally means quicker image rendering, and at least 32 MB is required for any level of decent efficiency.

The need for good video and audio cards are obvious, as is the absolute necessity of at least one, possibly more, quality display monitors.

Depending on a system's hardware configuration, a particular digital editing software package might be recommended over another. Mac's typically use the MediaSuite package, whereas today's most popular PC editing packages are Adobe Premiere and Razor Pro. Running these programs on the PC makes the use of Windows NT the platform of choice, although both Windows 3.1 and '95 can be utilized. Regardless, the most important factor in any digital editing workstation is the hardware.

The hardware, after all, is what enables an editor to take full advantage of any software package and all the possibilities that digital technology offers to the world of moving imagery.

Because of the technology involved in setting up a digital editing workstation, the costs associated with doing so are still fairly high. That is not to say, however, that access to this new technology is somehow closed to the average independent film maker. On the contrary, numerous digital editing suites — most of them charging reasonable and flexible rates — have popped up all over the city.

All the sophisticated software and hardware necessary for digital editing stands in sharp contrast with the splicers, flatbeds, tape and glue that are used in traditional film editing. Still, to characterize the advent of digital technology as a weapon set to destroy conventional film making may not be completely accurate. After all, what computers and flatbeds do have in common is that they are just tools, tools used to capture and convey ideas and visions expressed as visual imagery. It may not be true that digital editing technology violates the sanctity of traditional film editing after all. In fact, it

might even enhance it.

For one thing, as pointed out, images originally shot on film can be edited digitally as long as the film is first *telecined* (transferred to video). *CCD scanners*, *flying spot equipment*, even conventional *film chains* can do that easily enough. Although the final product of the digital editing process is a video copy of the work, there are ways around that as well. Most digital editing software packages offer the option of automatically keeping track of edge codes from the film's work print and negative print. Upon completion of a film's digital edit, the computer can generate an accurate *edit decision file* - a series of coded instructions for manually editing a negative print, so precise and clear that any negative cutter getting the assignment would do backflips.

Another alternative is video-to-film transfer, a process which, depending on the quality levels being sought, might involve the processes of images onto *kinescoping*, *laser projection* of video film stock, even *electron beam printing*, or some other far-out technology.

"We are in the midst of a revolution"

# montage in the modern age

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The fact of the matter is that digital editing can be used as a tool, one that can compliment, rather than undercut, traditional film editing.

Perhaps, then, film makers need not choose one methodology over the other. It may be more accurate to assert that digital editing has created an entirely new methodology: a strange hybrid form of moving image representation which links the traditional and the modern, the corporeal and the digital, the old and the new. What can't be denied is that this new wave of editing equipment represents a veritable revolution in film making. This revolution, marking the inevitable merging of traditional and modern film making methodology, has many implications. First of all, traditional film editing has undergone few refinements and even fewer major changes for decades. (Is it really that unheard of for today's independent film maker to use a decades-old flat bed and a comparably aged camera in the production of his/her film?) Conversely, the history of computer technology is marred with almost daily advancement and change, which is especially true of digital editing applications. The variety of related products is constantly increasing. This invariably dictates increases in availability and quality, along with decreases in the costs and expenses associated with setting up or making use of digital editing facilities.

Any good film/video editor knows the advantages of a well defined, properly logged paper edit - a plan. But where plans fail, only options can save the day. Editing — *montage* — is essentially an exercise in options and possibilities. Digital editing is the embodiment of options: first, it represents an alternate methodology and system of visual image editing; second, within that new methodology lies a series of features previously inaccessible to most film-makers. In this sense, digital editing may not be an enemy to film at all. It may in fact be an ally. Perhaps editing will no longer be a battlefield, but rather a frontier waiting to be pioneered and

explored - a wild new West of visual representation. The cold electronic desert can become a garden of moving imagery.

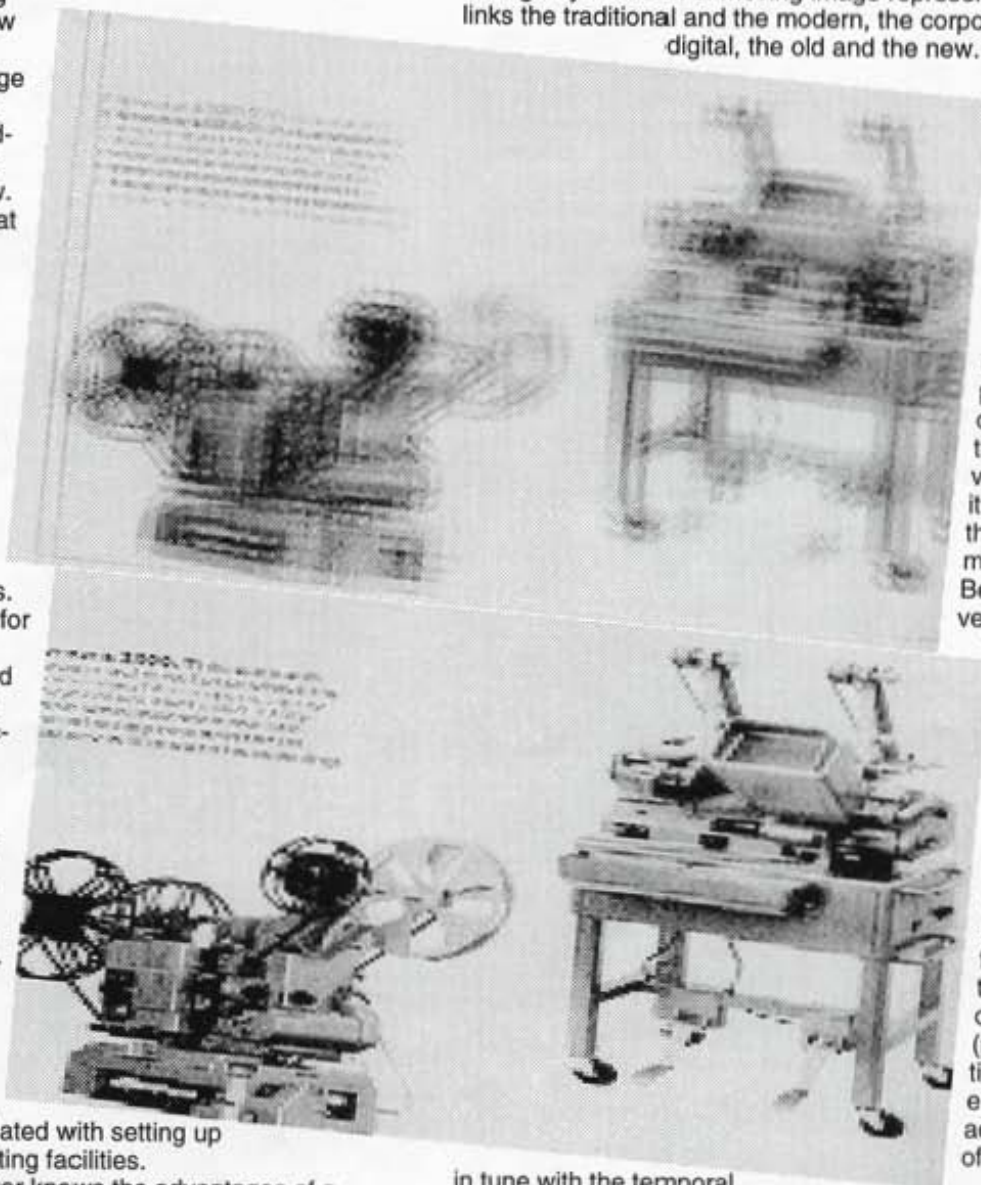
Another alternative is video-to-film transfer, a process which, depending on the quality levels being sought, might involve the processes of *kinescoping*, *laser projection* of video images onto film stock, even *electron beam printing*, or some other far-out technology. The fact of the matter is that digital editing can be used as a tool, one that can compliment, rather than undercut, traditional film editing. Perhaps, then, film makers need not choose one methodology over the other. It may be more accurate to assert that digital editing has created an entirely new methodology: a strange hybrid form of moving image representation which links the traditional and the modern, the corporeal and the

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As pointed out earlier, the prime lure and charm of film is the fact that as visual imagery, it does capture the realm of movement. Because it conveys movement,

film depicts not only the physical dimensions of height, width, and depth, but also the non-physical fourth dimension: time. It follows, then, that by virtue of their (pre)occupations, film makers should be acutely aware of and naturally



in tune with the temporal dimension. The film community itself must *move*, as does the imagery to which it is so devoted. Like the moving images they create, film makers must move from one frame to the next, from one age to another, linking — editing together, as it were — the past and the future.

We are in the midst of a Revolution.

Digital editing has arrived. It has forever changed the face of *montage* in this, the Modern Age. ...

# listening to a TREE FALL

an  
interview  
with  
Heather  
Frise  
& Velcrow  
Ripper  
by  
Jeff  
Winch

**Bones of the Forest** is an incredible achievement. A four year labour of love made with a combination of public and private financing totalling about \$200,000.00, **Bones** is a gutsy and endearing challenge to the conventions of documentary filmmaking. Politically it takes a subjective stance (pro-environment/anti-clearcut) and is quite open about it. There is no pretension of balanced viewpoints here, it is a very personal film that reflects the passions of it's makers. Visually and aurally the work is absolutely stunning. Several techniques and formats are used in **Bones**: time lapse, slow motion, optical printing, super 8mm, video, 16mm, colour, black and white, animation etc... the list is a long one and everything is used sparingly and effectively. This can be attributed to talents of the filmmakers and many long months at the editing bench.

**Bones of the Forest** recently screened at **HOT DOCS! '96** (Canada's National Documentary Film Awards) where it emerged with the two prestigious prizes; **Best Feature Length Documentary** and **Best of the Festival**. I managed to pin down **Velcrow Ripper** and **Heather Frise** about a week after the awards gala at **HOT DOCS!** and we spoke about their work.

**Jeff Winch:** How did **Bones** begin?

**Heather Frise:** It really started when we went to the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii) in 1989. It was a place I'd always wanted to go and I was expecting this rich archipelago, very lush and beautiful. We took the ferry over from Prince Rupert and the first thing we saw was this huge clearcut mountain in the pink dawn light... you know, super natural B.C.

**Velcrow Ripper:** We were really shocked when we saw that. We ended up kayaking down South Morseby Island for about six weeks, and we shot about 30 rolls of film. Mostly time lapse stuff and these huge scale animations of the whole landscape. We'd have rocks or driftwood or kelp moving through the frame with the light shifting, we spend whole days on one shot, it was very intricate work.

**Heather:** It was a very dream-like experience that ended tragically. When we returned from the trip we left our packs overnight in the ferry terminal, when we came back in the morning they'd been ripped off. So we lost everything; our beloved camera and all the film. To this day I still wonder how some of that stuff turned out... but it was the genesis of **Bones**.

**Velcrow:** Two years later we were both in Toronto, our minds reeling back to the Charlottes. We decided to give it another go. We wrote a script...

# listening to a TREE FALL

continued

**Jeff:** So at that stage it was an experimental drama.

**Velcrow:** It was a hybrid really. There were dramatic and documentary elements and we knew we wanted to spend a long time filming very intuitively in the forest, the way we had on the Charlottes.

**Heather:** It was very important to have that time. It wasn't like we went out to do "a shoot". I think that comes through in *Bones*, the intimacy we felt with our surroundings; allowing the forest, the whole landscape, to reveal itself. We were not following a script or shooting to illustrate stories or points, it was really an experience unto itself and we trusted that things would fuse together in the edit room.

**Jeff:** You were really experiencing the forest through the camera...

**Velcrow:** Yeah, and the (Native) elders who have seen the film really love it and they don't feel shut out by the experimental techniques we used. They (experimental techniques) were necessary to convey more than a traditional documentary style might convey, to bring you closer into some of those realities... and who's to say the conventional documentary form is really normal. That's just what the dominant paradigm is. There's no reason that it is a more accessible language, it's just what we've been force fed.

**Jeff:** How did you come choose the people you interviewed for the film?

**Heather:** Well, when we first arrived on Vancouver Island we read this newspaper article about an old logger, Jim Gillespie, who allegedly had his cabin burned down by a bunch of angry loggers. Jim has a reputation as a real hell-raiser in B.C. because he's been protesting corporate forestry since the fifties. We interviewed him and he talked for about four hours straight... he was a captivating storyteller with this great sense of humour. He had a real insight as an old time logger and as a first hand witness to vast devastation over the past few decades. He wasn't spouting empty rhetoric, he hadn't just jumped on the environmental bandwagon.

**Velcrow:** He was the one that really inspired us.

**Jeff:** To establish the position you would take?

**Velcrow:** Not so much the political position but the idea of sticking to interviewing older people in the film and the decision to make a feature length documentary. We realized with these older people we would have a binding force to link a longer project together. Native elders especially have been through enormous changes from almost a century of living in B.C. where the first contact with white settlers didn't happen until about hundred years ago. Many of them hadn't met a white person until they were 9 or 10. So they had incredible insights and a great sense of loss.

**Heather:** I think for all the people in the film, a sense of loss is, in part, the thing that fuels them. No one in the film has resigned themselves to hopelessness, they all had a fighting spirit that was completely inspiring.

Heather Frise and Velcrow Ripper



**Jeff:** Can you talk about how you work as a pair, what roles do each of you adopt?

**Velcrow:** The first film we did we together, the one that got stolen, we just said we're going on this trip and we're gonna shoot. We did it all equally between us.

**Heather:** I hadn't done a lot of film work at that point so it was a real learning process for me.

**Velcrow:** And I'm a terrible teacher... so Heather's self taught. For *Bones* there was something to shoot every day. We sometimes went into the forest separately and shot all day.

**Heather:** One of us would go off with the Bolex and the other would do some shooting in Super 8 or set up a time lapse.

**Velcrow:** On the blockades we had the Hi-8 cameras going. It was really the two of us doing everything... and we both respect each others opinions, even though we often had different opinions. That made it a product of two minds and helped it to become so complex because, perhaps one person might feel that they couldn't take on all these issues. With two of us there was always someone to say 'lets keep going' or 'we have to address this issue, we can't let this slide'.

**Heather:** When we were shooting we would encourage each other as much as possible, but, I think that we really started arguing when it came down to editing. But it was an effective collaboration because we were building on each others ideas. There were parts that we each edited separately, then we would look at each others decisions and challenge them or support them.

**Velcrow:** It was basically a two person production. Other people came in for a few things... we did the interviews ourselves, there was no other crew except for one day.

**Heather:** We kept it really low tech.

**Jeff:** Did you continue to shoot interviews during the editing process?

**Velcrow:** Always. They were constantly building, and new questions would arise that needed to be answered.

**Jeff:** Now shooting has begun on your next project, what's it about?

**Heather:** Trophy hunting of bears in B.C.

**Velcrow:** We've got a 10 minute pilot.

**Heather:** There's still more shooting to do, we are about three quarters of the way into it.

**Velcrow:** Right now it's in need of money. It's at the point where it can't go on any more without an influx of money.

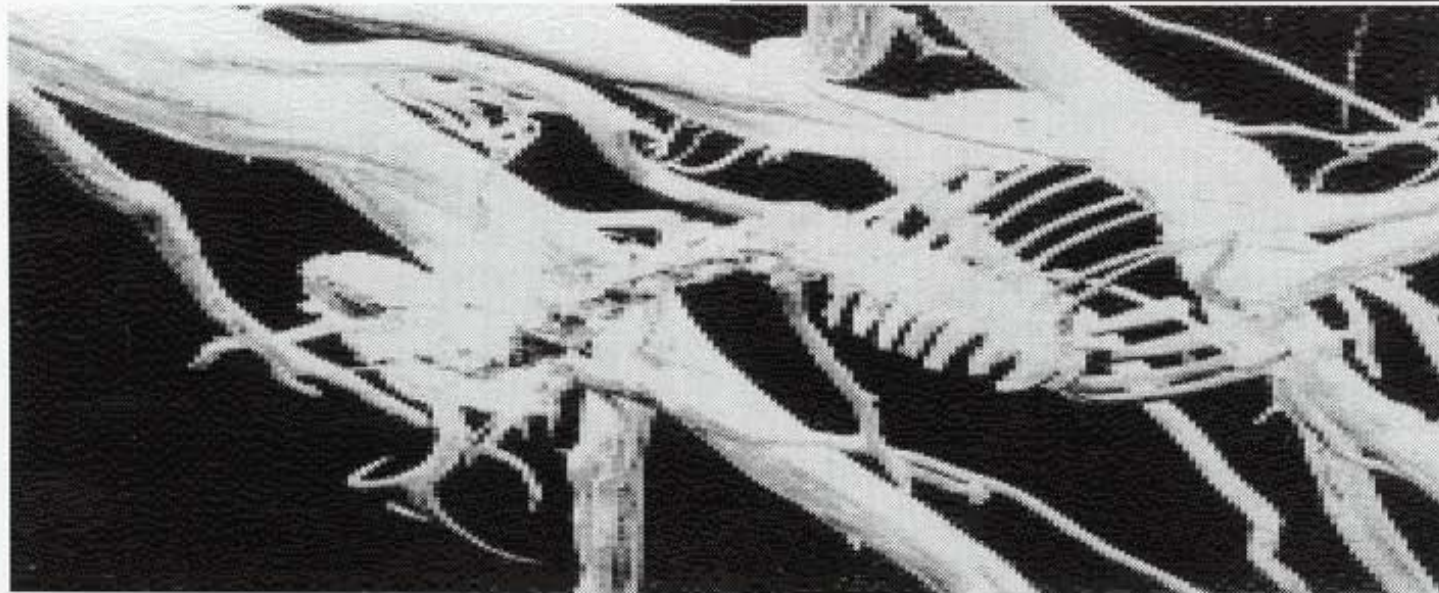
**Heather:** And it's needs a better title.

**Jeff:** What's it called?

**Velcrow:** The working title is '*Fun Kill*', it looks good graphically but no one likes it. If anyone has any ideas let us know.

*Bones of the Forest* will screen at the Images Festival on Saturday May 11.  
Only a pinhead would miss this film!

photos: Kelly O'Brien



# review

Hot Docs! neverused to seem like the most likely place for alternative filmmaking to shine. The first few years of the Festival seemed devoted to the CBC, who made off with the awards like a thoroughbred in a country fair furlong. Only the occasional exception, a gem in a dented can, with thank you credits as long as the film and a who's who of educational broadcasters as the funders, struggled past the glossy corp(se) productions to the winners podium. It's still largely the battle of the institutions, the NFB, CBC, Discovery and TVO being the most prolific backers, but this year's win by Heather Frise and Velcrow Ripper for their moody, compelling feature-length work *Bones of the Forest* makes one think that the days when every 5 minute bit on the journal, narrated by someone in an Eddy Bauer safari suit, was considered a documentary, are over.

#### The Business:

The Hot Docs! conference began with a pitch session modelled by the one that has become a popular tradition at Banff. Started by Pat Ferns, a long-standing producer in Canadian film, it offers the contestants the opportunity, in front of a crowded room full of their peers, to pitch their projects as best they can to a phalanx of the top funding gatekeepers from government and the industry. It achieved its reputation when a presentation by Breakthrough Film and Video in 1992 resulted in a bidding war for their project *The Riot of Christie Pits*.

This year's clear winner was for *History of Lounge Music*. The filmmaker presented the panel with a glossy red box, the top of which was her comprehensive proposal, and which when opened revealed a martini glass and a jar of olives. Dim the lights, start the Sinatra tunes... She sold it to Turner broadcasting on the spot.

The next session was a detailed explanation of various distribution possibilities

in the new world of documentary filmmaking, and featured lengthy explanations of the tax credit system operated by the Federal Government. Also useful was the information that there are 40 applications from specialty channel's competing for the new licenses in May. More about this in our special distribution issue of the LIFT newsletter, coming up in August.

Third was the most contentious session: New Wave Documentary. It's an old wave for anyone familiar with alternative filmmaking or Canadian documentary history. Documentary, a European, NFB-style film unit, designed to capture images of the new Europe, was suggesting the term as a means of making highlypersonal/experimental/strongly authored/opinionated/etc. documentaries palatable to broadcasters who are afraid that anything that deviates formally from the "Just the facts, ma'am" school of documentary filmmaking. The tone is personal, with highly interventionist filmmaking. It doesn't try to keep the author anonymous, and is said to be striving for 'greater truth,' a level of poetry, rather than strictly informative detail. In extreme cases, there is a certain element of fiction, including loosely staged narrative: "Why don't you guys go over there and smoke a joint and we'll get it on film?" Their model is a film called *Tale of a Hard City* by Alex Osborne from Sheffield, England, which explores the seedy underbelly of Sheffield, and follows a young man and a young woman as they negotiate the world of pop singing and petty thievery, trying to make their fortune. It was interesting,

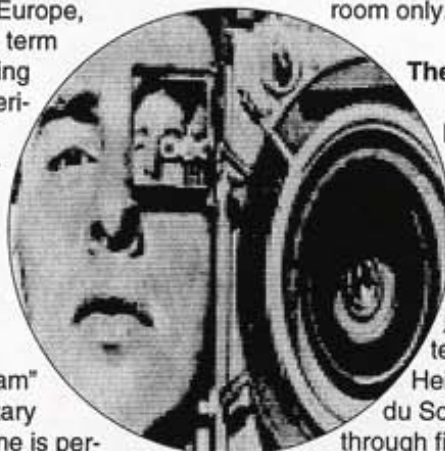
but reminiscent of the films of Pierre Perrault, Colin Low, Derek May, Mike Rubbo of the Film Board in the '60's, and in Canada today: *22 Short Films About Glenn Gould* (François Girard), *Manufacturing Consent* (Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick) *A Rustling of Leaves* (Nettie Wild), *Pictures of Light* (Peter Mettler) and of course *Bones of the Forest* (Heather Frise and Velcrow Ripper)... The audience didn't seem too impressed by the panel, though if it helps broadcasters see how to market these kinds of films for television audiences....

All the sessions were packed, standing room only.

#### The Screenings:

I wandered around trying to find something that I couldn't see later on CBC or TVOntario, with only partial success. On the way, I learned about justice in the North, contentious photographer Heidi Hollinger, Haiti, Cirque du Soleil and the fishing crisis through films which are interesting and whose worth comes from the information they contain than rather than any formal adventuring or attempt at greater truth. Lucie Lambert's *Landscape in the Mind's Eye* was an exception, an eerie tale of four women from a village on the North Shore of the St. Lawrence and so was Anne Bromley's *Summer in the Cherry Orchard*, about taking her two children home to Russia where they explored their roots and acted like, well, a family - the kids fought, were bored, tormented each other. It is highly entertaining, and a view of Russia impossible to see without personal access. In the end, though, I measured everything against the meditative allure of *Bones of the Forest*: which is in a class by itself.

>BJM





# MUSE & mystery revealed as structure

**Nika  
Rylski  
cleans  
up  
your  
acts**  
by Ian R. Coutts

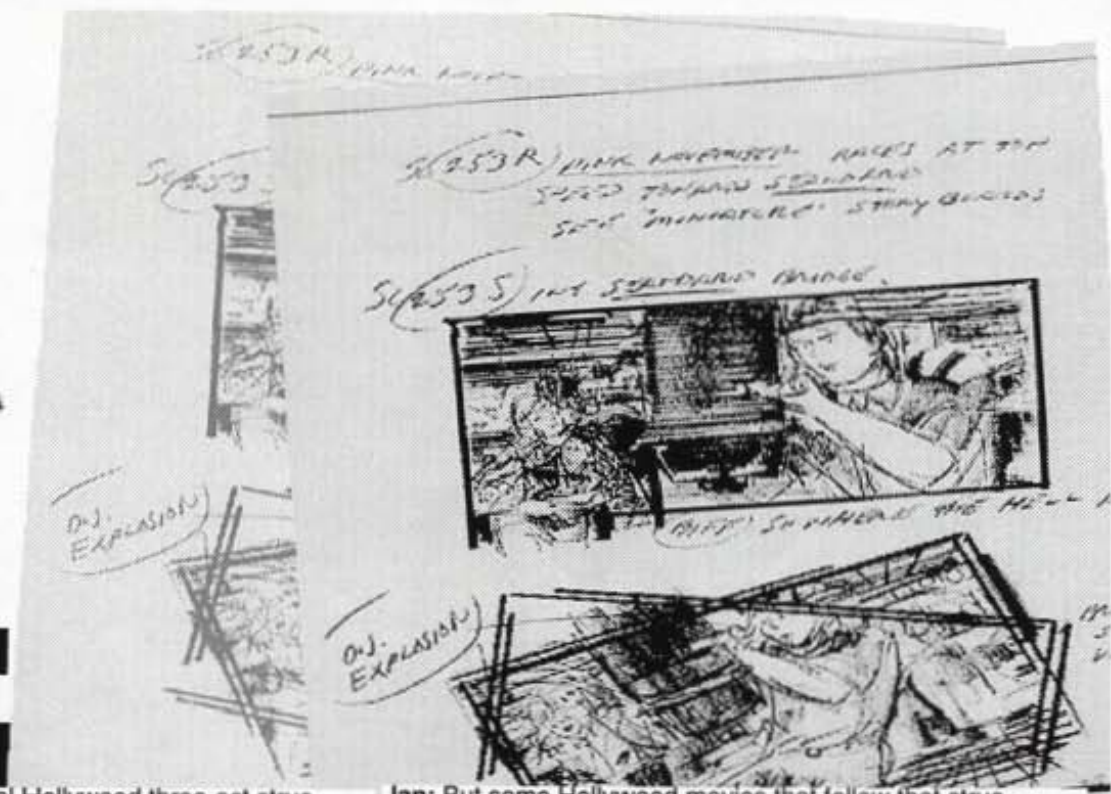
.....

Everyone knows, or thinks they know, how a conventional movie works: Act one: Set up a character and throw them a curve. Act Two: Keep piling on the complications. Act Three: Overcome those complications and build to a climax. It's often dismissed as trite or obvious; it's also murderously hard to get right.

Nika Rylski has taught screen and TV writing at George Brown College for eight years. During that time, hundreds of would-be TV and screenwriters have taken her classes and a number of them have gone on to successful careers. A story editor and a produced writer herself, she has turned out work for the stage (*Just a Kommedia*), television (her TV drama *Last of the Four Letter Words* was nominated for an ACTRA award) and radio. Perhaps not everyone can write, but Nika believes anyone with some talent can be taught the craft of writing — and part of the secret of craft is to learning structure. That is what her classes typically focus on, learning the traditional three-act structure of dramatic writing (beginning-middle-end) found in most Hollywood movies.

# muse & mystery revealed as structure

continued>>>>



**Ian Coutts:** You follow the real Hollywood three-act structure.

**Nika Rylski:** It's not just the Hollywood model so much. You read Shakespeare, it's structured that way. It's just dramatic structure, that's all.

**Ian:** When I took your class, I remember you saying that when you first started writing sometimes things would go right or wrong and you never knew why.

**Nika:** I just would write about things that would interest me, and I would never try to get a commission, I would just write on spec. At the time when I started writing I had a regular job, so I would just write something because I felt some passion. The first thing I ever wrote for television, I sold. But the way I wrote, I would just write instinctively and some of the stuff I had no problem selling and other stuff nobody wanted to look at, and I wondered why. Then Sid Field [the Hollywood script doctor whose books teach a lot of the conventions used in commercial films] came to town. I didn't know who he was. It was at the Danforth Music Hall, and they filled the place. Eight hundred people. I had no idea there were these many writers in Toronto. He had a blackboard on the stage and he said, OK guys, you know what a house looks like, and he drew four lines and a roof. A table? This is what a table looks like. And then he says, OK, this is what a screenplay looks like and he drew a straight line, and then he said, here's act one, here's act two, here's act three. These are the beams. And I'm looking at it, and I'm going, Holy Shit, that's why half of the stuff I write doesn't go anywhere, doesn't sell, because there's no dramatic structure. It was like the classic moment, the scales fell from my eyes and I went, Oh, my God, manna from heaven.

**Ian:** But some Hollywood movies that follow that structure seem incredibly mechanistic...

**Nika:** And they're wrong! They're like, Oh, Gee, we have to have this by this point or we need that. No. It's just a guide. No two houses are the same, but they still have to have the same things holding them up. It's not rigid.

Once you've learned the format, play with it. The other thing I do, though, I had to refine the course, because the first few years I taught it, I'd say, Here is the structure you follow, go way and find it. And nobody could find it. And I thought, well, I've gotta come up with a way of finding it. And then I thought well, how the hell do I find it? I went to character. The character will always tell you. Now I've developed a method for finding those beams using character.

**Ian:** Character is something that Field—

**Nika:** Doesn't touch on.

**Ian:** How does character help you find the structural beams?

**Nika:** There are a couple of ways. You can ask yourself at the beginning of your screenplay, What does this character want? If you know that, then you can ask, What triggers that want? That gives the narrative its forward momentum. Then ask who or what opposes them. If they want to go to the moon — silly example — there has to be someone who prevents that. Then at the start of act two, something happens that changes their goal. Another way to do it: I ask my class, Who is your character, what is he like? For example, if the character is rational, then come up with something that challenges that rationality. That starts the story. I have other ways, but I don't want to give too much away — I want people to take my course!

2953R) DINA NOVEMBER  
SPEED THROUGH I  
SEE 'MINUTE' STAY OUTSIDE

2953S) INT SEVERAL BRIDGE



2953R) DINA NOVEMBER RACES AT TOP  
SPEED THROUGH SEVERAL  
SEE 'MINUTE' STAY OUTSIDE

2953S) INT SEVERAL BRIDGE



24

O.J. EXPLOSION



O.J. EXPLOSION



BRIDGE  
SHANE'S  
VIOLENCE

**Ian:** The thing about character is that you have to start thinking about people again.

**Nika:** That's what's exciting about it! If you go to character, character will always surprise you. I was working on this script, I had to get certain information about a certain character. So what I did was I had a guy talking to a girl and he's telling her information about their common friend. And basically the information he's giving here is that this other guy's life has turned out shitty. He's dumping on him, right? And I am writing this and I am about three quarters of the way through the script and I'm thinking, Wait a minute, why is the character doing this? Why is the character giving this information? Suddenly the character spoke to me and said, Because I'm in love with her. That's why I'm feeding her this information — because I want her. And suddenly I had to go back and fix everything at the beginning because I now know something about this character I didn't know before. He's got an agenda. When that happens, it's fabulous. But you have to pay your dues, you have to write a couple of drafts before the characters start talking to you. I love rewriting, it's getting the first draft out that's murder.

**Ian:** A lot of the films that LIFT people do probably seem—

**Nika:** Non-structured?

**Ian:** Maybe because they're shorter they can do that?

**Nika:** It's like a short burst. Whereas in a longer film, you have to get that dramatic tension. They get saggy or they don't build to a climax or they have a climax that happens off-screen and they have somebody telling us about it. You have to keep the narrative strung tight for an hour and a half. I have had people taking my course who were doing short films. Maybe they found the structure helpful. If you work on character, it will tell you what happens in this scene, what happens in that scene.

**Ian:** A lot of people at LIFT are visual artists rather than writers. Do you think they could benefit from this?

**Nika:** But isn't visual what screenplays are supposed to be? That's the problem with most first drafts — they rely too much on dialogue. I did do a seminar for LIFT a few years ago, and there were a couple of people in it who were doing non-structured films. So basically what you do there is you ask them, What's your intention, what's your idea that you're trying to get across? Then you can say, Well, you're not getting it across here. If you're making a film, aren't you trying to communicate something. [If] you're trying to communicate and the other person isn't getting it, well, why isn't the other person getting it? What am I doing that isn't getting across to them? Maybe you haven't thought it through and you're trying to discover yourself what it is you're trying to say. Most writers I know just write the first draft because they're trying to figure out what it is they're trying to say. They loosely sort of put it in this container. Then I go, Great, then you can start playing with it.

storyboards: Fred Lucky

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## Build a Better Screenplay

Written analysis and tutorial session with a professional script reader - \$100.00. For constructive advice on editing, revision and character-building, call UPSHOT CREATIVE SERVICES. 416-424-4226.

## Production Office For Rent

The freshly painted, 400 sq. foot space is available to LIFT members for \$275/month for full members and \$375/month for associate members. This facility can only be used for film-related activities. For more info, call the LIFT office or stop by to see it.

The CFMDC screening room is available to LIFT members @ \$50/hr. up to 3 hrs. + \$15/hr. for a projectionist.

## Attention Optical Printers!!

LIFT is selling the popular, yet difficult to acquire, Kodak 7272 Printer Stock. It is now \$165/400 foot roll, with a \$5 roll down fee. Smaller amounts are possible. Call ahead to be sure we have some in stock.

## For Sale

5 single packs of polaroid 600 (exp. Sept. 96)  
call 787-3062- best offer

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## PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE

In order to make submission of completed films to the Programming Committee simpler, we have set up a drop box, located at the LIFT office.

Please leave us your prints, video dubs, or just descriptive materials on your finished (or nearly finished) films, so that we can show them at future LIFT screenings. (Be sure to include contact information with all submissions).

**WE WANT TO SEE EVERYBODY'S  
WORK WHILE IT'S STILL WET FROM  
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charge for previewing effects.)



## from the chair

Dear LIFT Members:

Congratulations to LIFT members Lynne Fernie (*Fictions and Other Truths a: A Film About Jane Rule*) and Velcrow Ripper (*Bones of the Forest*), who are both finalists for the M. Joan Chalmers Documentarian award for their films. As well, congratulations go out to LIFT staff member Lisa Hayes for her film *Dike*, which was screened at the prestigious Ann Arbor Film Festival this past month. Other LIFT members whose films travelled to Ann Arbor, Michigan for the screening were Roberto Ariganello and Chris Gehman, Tracy German, Larissa Fan, Josephine Massarella, Phillip Hoffman, Su Rynard, Mike Holbloom, Wrik Mead, April Hickox and Cara Morton.

The LIFT Garage Sale is happening again this year: May 25th all day at the parking lot next to the Bamboo. This is a great fundraising opportunity for LIFT, so any and all donations are appreciated. If you have 'stuff' to donate, please call Denise at the LIFT office. See you there!

Sincerely,

Hope Thompson, LIFT Chair.

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## Late Breaking News from the OAC:

\*Budget cut: 28.6%. This means 10 million less for grants and services than '95-'96. Staff has been reduced by one third, leaving 60 full time positions, down from 89. The equivalent of 17 full-time positions has been eliminated, and the remaining staff took a 7% cut. This year's budget will be finalized this month. Look for news in the June newsletter.

\* Anew body, the Arts Programs Group now has responsibility for granting decisions. It includes a group of programme officers who will have cross discipline responsibilities. Peer assessment will be still the criterion for grant decisions. Some administrative changes:

- effective immediately, all clients weill be required to submit multiple copies of applications.
- late applications will not be accepted.

\*There is no room at the OAC office to fill in applications - they are now sharing office space with the Southern Ontario Library Service, so fill ou those forms at home! For More Information: Arts Programs: 416-969-7450  
Policy Questions: 416-961-1660/1-800-387-0058 or on the web: <http://www.ffa.ucalgary.ca/oac/index.html>

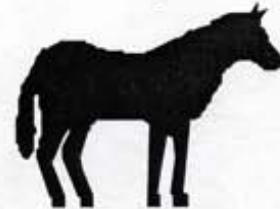
**An educational arts kit is available to help you make a case for arts in your community. Call the policy numbers for details.**

**Surely an ugly rumour:** Can it possibly be true that Media Officer David Craig has quit because OAC Chair Paul Hoffert gave Moses Znaimer, long-time public funding antagonist and arts skeptic, \$70,000 dollars, which might have gone a lot further in the hands of those for whom the COuncil is intended? Say it isn't so

**SCREAMERS**  
Paul Fairfield  
30 min, 16 mm



**A COWGIRLS REVENGE**  
D. Gillian Truster  
11 min, 16mm



**THE SEDUCTION OF  
MARY DAY**  
Kathleen Cummins  
31 min, 16 mm



## **LIFT MONTHLY SCREENING**

**Monday, April 29th, 8:00pm**  
**CFMDC, 37 Hanna Avenue, #220**  
**Free to LIFT members, all others by donation**