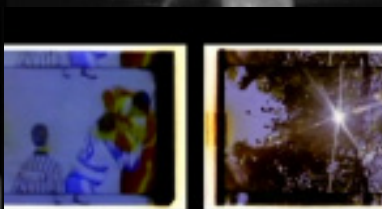


Strategies of the Medium VI:  
**Pieces of Eight**



**STILLS (L TO R FROM TOP LEFT):**  
*50 Feet That Shake the World*, John Cannizzaro; *Down on Me*, John Porter; *Amusement Park*, John Porter; *Night-light*, Dagie Brundert; *Milchwolken Liebe (Milky Clouds Love)*, Dagie Brundert; *October 25<sup>th</sup> + 26<sup>th</sup>, 1996*, Kika Thorne; *Christian Porn*, Roy Mitchell; *Rub*, Gail Mentlik & Anne Borden; *Hi I'm Steve*, Robert Kennedy; *Melty Kitty*, Allyson Mitchell; *4x8x3*, Chris Kennedy; *Artifices 1*, Alexandre Larose; *The View Never Changes*, John Price; *Mean*, Clive Holden; and *Nanaimo Station*, Clive Holden.

**COVER STILL:** *Artifices 1*, Alexandre Larose.

**Strategies of the Medium**

Presented by the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT), this six-part screening series reflects on current and historical practices in the use of specific material and technical strategies in artist-based film production. The screenings and accompanying panel discussions complement LIFT's series of advanced workshops and production courses on the topics of animation, optical printing, the Bolex camera, photochemical processes, and 35MM artist film.

Part I: **Animating Analogue**

Part II: **Printed Light**

Part III: **In the Dark**

Part IV: **In 27 Seconds**

Part V: **Go Big or Go Home**

Part VI: **Pieces of Eight**

Part VI: **Pieces of Eight**

*8PM, Friday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*CineCycle, 129 Spadina Avenue (down the lane)*

*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada

**EYE WEEKLY**

*Strategies of the Medium is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts.*

**Strategies of the Medium VI:  
Pieces of Eight**

Super 8 film and its predecessor, Regular 8, were first introduced as amateur formats for home movie-making. While they were superseded by camcorders (and now digital video) for home use, 8MM formats were embraced by artists and independent filmmakers for their ease of use, affordability and nostalgic quality. LIFT has an arsenal of Super 8 cameras, including Nizo, Canon, Nikon, Rollei, and Bolex models, and a variety of post-production equipment to assist filmmakers in producing work using Super 8.

This programme looks at ways in which independent filmmakers have used these classic formats to create startling stories and sublime images. It features works shot on both Regular 8 and Super 8 film and finished in a variety of formats, from Super 8 prints to transfers to video, 16MM and even 35MM film. The screening complements LIFT's creative and technical workshops in 8MM filmmaking, including "Guerilla Filmmaking in Super 8MM"

and "Regular 8MM Film Festival."

The screening will be followed by a panel discussion with filmmakers Alexandre Larose, Gail Mentlik, Roy Mitchell, John Porter and Kika Thorne.

**Panelist Bios:**

**Alexandre Larose** is a French-Canadian filmmaker based in Montreal. While completing a Bachelor in Mechanical Engineering, Larose began experimenting with film using Super 8. He completed a BFA in Cinema at Concordia University in 2006. By incorporating elements of the scientific approach, Larose's work expresses and reveals the fragility of the cinematic apparatus through formal treatment of the medium.

**Gail Mentlik** is a Toronto-based independent filmmaker who enjoys working in both 16MM and Super 8. Her work ranges from experimental to personal documentary and has been screened nationally and internationally. Her films include *Rub* (with Anne Borden, 2002) and *My Mother at the Consulate* (2003).

Toronto-based media artist **Roy Mitchell** has been making films/videos since the mid-nineties. His work is low-tech and DIY (do-it-yourself). Based in autobiography, his short films look at his demons and obsessions. He curates,

writes on film and art, and is the Executive Director of Trinity Square Video, an artist-run centre dedicated to the creation and exhibition of video. His films include *Delta Don* (1997), *I Know a Place* (1999) and *My Life in Dance* (2001).

**John Porter** has been a filmmaker, performer, photographer and writer in Toronto for over 40 years. Often called the "King of Super 8," he has made 300 films, mostly Super 8, and has performed 100 solo shows since 1971. John studied photography and 16MM film production at Ryerson University (1969–74), worked as a letter carrier (1976–81) and bicycle courier (1987–98), and has received five Film and Multi-Disciplinary "B" or "Creation" Grants from the Canada Council for the Arts since 1984. He has been actively involved with several artist-run centres in Toronto since 1978, most consistently with The Funnel and Pleasure Dome.

**Kika Thorne** is a performance and video artist, curator, researcher, writer, editor and cultural activist. She studied Media Production and Cultural Theory

at the Ontario College of Art & Design and holds an MFA from the University of Victoria. Kika's video work has screened nationally and internationally in various galleries, museums and festivals, such as: The International Cinema Museum, Chicago; Mix Festival, New York; Mostros des Video—International Experimental T.V., Barcelona; Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina; and The Power Plant, Toronto. She has curated for Pleasure Dome, YYZ, Images Festival and Anti-Loft, and was most recently programmer/curator at VIVO Media Arts Centre in Vancouver.

### **The 8MM Alternate Universe**

Designed by Kodak for the home-movie market, Regular 8<sup>1</sup> (introduced in 1932) and then Super 8<sup>2</sup> (introduced in 1965) became the most widely used of all film stocks by the general public until the emergence of the portable video camcorder in the eighties.<sup>3</sup> While 8MM film has been replaced by video and digital video for home use, it has been widely embraced by artists and independent filmmakers for its ease of use, flexibility, affordability and nostalgic quality—achieving a devoted (some might even say cult) following worldwide.

Because 8MM film is so affordable when compared to larger gauges such as 16MM and 35MM, small-gauge filmmaking can be largely free from commercial demands. It is also simple to use, as cameras and film were designed for amateur use and so have many automatic features not found on professional cameras. Combined, these two qualities mean that small-gauge filmmaking has become associated with movements and artists that exist on the outside or in opposition to the mai-

stream, such as feminist, punk, and queer. It also enables a personal, diaristic form of filmmaking which is the antithesis of the commercial, industrial model which drives most filmmaking.

To capitalize on Super 8's affordability and accessibility, many Super 8 filmmakers edit in-camera, eliminating the need for post-production editing. With this model of filmmaking, all that is required to make a film is one cartridge of Super 8 and a camera. A number of screening events and festivals have sprung up around this concept, such as Canada's One Take Super 8 Event. Participating filmmakers are given one cartridge of Super 8, which they surrender to the organizers for processing once they have completed filming, and create the soundtrack, if there is one, without seeing the finished film first. Made for LA Flicker's "Attack of the 50-Foot Reels," John Cannizzaro's *50 Feet that Shook the World* is an excellent example of what is possible within these constraints, with careful planning and a bit of serendipity. In a playful homage to Russian silent film and partic-

ularly *Battleship Potemkin*, it stages a battle between film and video in which the film cameras rise up against their evil oppressors, the video cameras, and strike a blow for freedom. It is a fun and spirited argument for Super 8.

If one person embodies the spirit of Super 8 filmmaking in Canada it is John Porter. Heralded as the "King of Super 8," he has made 300 films since 1968 and has had 100 solo exhibitions. Unlike many Super 8 filmmakers, who often finish on video due to the limitations of Super 8 exhibition, Porter is a purist whose love of the medium means that he will only screen on Super 8 (either the original film or a print) and often projects his own films. The films screening tonight represent two major strands of Porter's filmmaking, which he categorizes as "Camera Dances" and "Porter's Condensed Rituals."

*Down on Me* is one of his best-known films and an excellent example of the "Camera Dances," which take advantage of the lightness and portability of Super 8 cameras. In *Down on Me*, Porter enlisted the aid of his friend Stephen

Niblock to hoist the camera on a fishing pole from rooftops and bridges. Shot on two rolls of film and edited in-camera, the first half features outdoor locations, the camera being lowered and raised from different structures while Porter looks up at it from the ground below. The second half of the film was shot indoors in various stairwells, with timed exposures creating occasional and beautiful abstract vortexes. With *Down on Me* and other “Camera Dances,” the camera takes on a role almost as a character in the film, a partner in the filmmaking experience.

“Porter’s Condensed Rituals” utilize the single-frame capacity of Super 8 cameras and in particular the timed exposures possible with the Nizo make of cameras. Films in this category include *Santa Claus Parade*, an aerial view of Toronto’s Santa Claus Parade shot in 1976, and *Exams*, a time-lapse portrait of hundreds of University of Toronto students writing exams in Varsity Arena, shot in 1982. Screening in this programme, *Amusement Park* documents the Midway rides

at Toronto’s Canadian National Exhibition (CNE). It begins with shots of the individual rides, and ends with a wide-angle shot of the entire Midway taken from above, a glorious vision with lights streaming and people constantly in motion. These films are Super 8 time capsules in two ways—both condensing or encapsulating hours of real-time into a few minutes of screen time, and also capturing and documenting particular events for historical posterity.

If Porter is the King of Super 8, German filmmaker Dagie Brundert may very well be the Queen. Since making her first film in 1988 (*23 Barbiepuppen kippen um / 23 Barbie Dolls Collapse*) she has gone on to make 85 Super 8 films. Dagie’s films are marked by joie de vivre, embracing fun, improvisation, beauty and experimentation. Her most recent film, *Nightlight*, a portrait of people and places at night, has all of these. Shot on old expired B&W Double Super 8 film<sup>4</sup>, hand-processed and dyed a deep red, it achieves an almost-painterly effect.

For Porter and Brundert, the economics of Super 8 filmmaking

mean that art can be a part of every day life, that one needn’t be dependent on grants and wait years between making films. *Milchwolken Liebe* (*Milky Clouds Love*) is a lovely example of the affinity the medium has for capturing the quotidian. Sweet but not cloying, it captures the rhythms of lazy summer days spent reading and drinking coffee. It is also an intensely personal film, connecting moments and memories in the filmmaker’s life.

Beyond their shared use of Super 8, filmmakers like Porter and Brundert may not seem to have a connection to the activist films by Kika Thorne and Roy Mitchell that follow in the programme—but their low-budget, DIY practice can be seen as political in its active resistance to the dominance of the commercial film industry specifically, and to the capitalist imperative more generally. Moreover, as Olaf Möller wrote about Brundert’s films for the Oberhausen Festival in 2000: “In a society in which entertainment has been degraded to a process of stimulation and reflex, joy can have an endless potential for resistance, precisely because it

is not functional and has no purpose.”

Kika Thorne's *October 25<sup>th</sup> + 26<sup>th</sup>*, 1996 embraces both political activism and joy. Made with the October Group during Toronto's "Metro Days of Action" in 1996, a two-day general strike organized against the Tory government's cuts to social spending, it documents the group's construction of an inflatable structure over the air vent in front of City Hall. The 150' long transparent tunnel bore a single sentence down each side which read: "Have mercy I cry for the city, to entrust the streets to the greed of developers and to give them alone the right to build is to reduce life to no more than solitary confinement." While the purpose and message are serious, there is an energy in the music and editing that suggests hope, not futility. A playful, carnival atmosphere is created as people interact with this spontaneous, pop-up structure, which is mirrored by the camera's freedom of movement.

There is playfulness as well in Roy Mitchell's *Christian Porn*. Invited to participate in a panel discussion on gay pornography as part of Regina's gay and

lesbian film festival, Queer City Cinema, Mitchell is confronted with angry protestors who object to tax dollars being spent to support the festival. Mitchell disarms them with his humour and friendliness, all the while surrounded by tow-headed children smiling and waving at the camera while holding signs reading "Gay activists expect taxpayers to fund their porn addiction" and "Christ reorients the sexually disoriented." Mitchell's film resists not only the fundamentalism of the protestors, but also the deadly seriousness which can overcome political debate.

Gail Mentlik and Anne Borden's *Rub* addresses sexuality in a much different way, with a sensuous and intimate portrayal of female masturbation. *Rub* is not overtly political in the manner of Thorne's and Mitchell's films, but it is subversive in its rejection of pornographic modes of representation and its assertion of the female subject. The compact size and lightness of the camera provides an intimacy with the body not easy to obtain with larger formats. The film is a celebration of female sexu-

ality which dares you not to look away.

Mentlik's film provides a segue into Robert Kennedy's *Hi I'm Steve* and the world of gay telephone dating. *Hi I'm Steve* is a classic example of Kennedy's humour—droll, deadpan, and slightly twisted. Like many of his films, this one has the filmmaker in the starring role and as the object of his own barbed wit; Kennedy may well be the gay Buster Keaton of Super 8 film. It is also an example of a vein of humour that runs through Super 8 filmmaking, which seems to give people license to have fun. Maybe it is the toy-like quality of the cameras or because it is inexpensive that filmmakers don't feel they have to treat it as seriously, as reverently as other forms of film. But in the right hands, humour can be seriously subversive.

Irony and animation seem to go hand-in-hand with Super 8, and both are featured in Allyson Mitchell's *Melty Kitty*. As Lady & Bird sing a lovely rendition of "Suicide Is Painless," made famous as the theme song to *M\*A\*S\*H*, a kitten-shaped candle melts down to nothing before our eyes, the



wax running like tears down its smiling face. It is hard to imagine it being made in anything but Super 8, combining as it does several favourite elements of the format: a toy (in this case, candle) animal, time-lapse, irony and pathos.

Like many works shot on Regular or Super 8 film, *Melty Kitty* was finished on video. Most Super 8 film is reversal (positive) rather than negative, which means you can project the camera original but there is a risk of damaging it in the projector and prints are difficult to make. Super 8 projectors and expertise are also difficult to come by so unless, like John Porter, you are willing to travel with and project your own films, transferring to video is a sensible option. Most Super 8 and all Regular 8 film is silent (Kodak stopped making sound-stripped Super 8 in 1997), so finishing on video also enables the addition of sound to the picture.

Another option to video is to enlarge from 8MM to 16MM or 35MM film. While more costly and time-consuming, the results can be stunning and can not only retain but emphasize the quality and grain of the film which

is beloved by many filmmakers. *Artifices 1* by Alexandre Larose was originally made for the 2007 Montreal One Take Super 8 Event. While Larose has screened the original (with separate sound on cassette), the transfer to 16MM solves some of the distribution dilemmas that can arise with Super 8. *Artifices 1* takes advantage of the lightness and portability of the Super 8 camera by constructing a mechanical device that induces concentric rotations to the camera. Through this mechanism, static and dynamic light sources such as streetlights and moving cars are transformed into a spiraling flux of colours.

Chris Kennedy explores the unique qualities of Regular 8 film in 4x8x3. Regular 8 is 16MM film with double the number of sprocket holes. It is run through a Regular 8 camera twice: the first pass exposes one side/half of the film, the film is then flipped and the opposite side is exposed (much like the A and B sides of a cassette tape). In processing, the film is split lengthwise down the middle, resulting in two lengths of 8MM film which are

spliced together for projection. If it is left “unsplit” and projected as or transferred to 16MM, the result is a four-quadrant split-screen. 4x8x3 is carefully choreographed to take advantage of this, collapsing time and space so that a ferry’s return trip is recorded on one screen and a streetcar makes a full circle.

Clive Holden’s *Mean* also employs a split-screen technique, but in this case by transferring Super 8 to 35MM. One side of the screen features footage of hockey fights, taken from underground video ordered off the Internet and filmed off a T.V. screen, juxtaposed with imagery of a maple tree on the other. Stemming from its origins as a home-movie format, small-gauge film carries with it a strong association with the past and nostalgia. Holden uses this association to heighten the contrast between the violence of the fight footage and the gentle flickering of the maple tree leaves, challenging the romance we attach to both sports and the idea of nation. We are “proud” of hockey as our national sport, we are proud of sports teams that we root for, we are

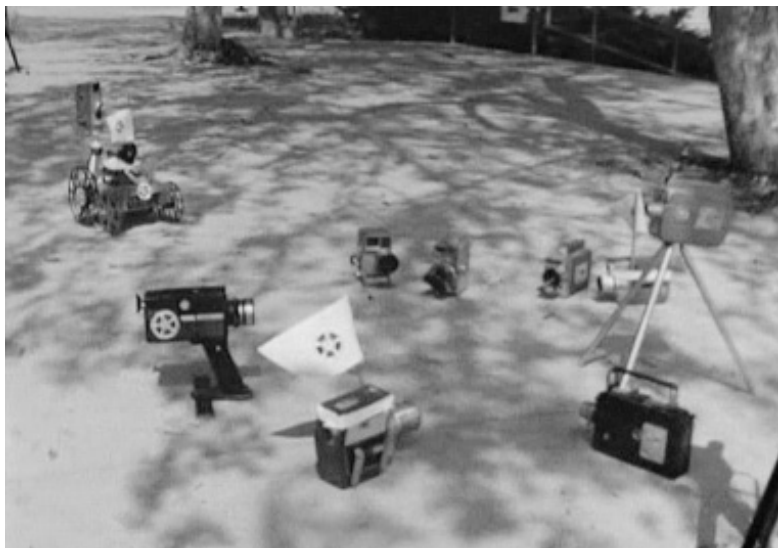
supposed to be proud of our country, but what exactly is there to be proud of?

Holden's *Nanaimo Station* and John Price's *The View Never Changes* both tap into the format's connections to nostalgia, family and memory. *The View Never Changes* is a thoughtful examination of Price's relationship with his father, ironically achieved mostly through interviews with his mother. Shot in black-and-white with a fish-eye lens, the grain of the Super 8 is emphasized in its blow-up to 16MM—it feels as if we are looking back in time through a fortune teller's crystal ball, or have unearthed archival footage that has been buried under the house for decades. Clive Holden's *Nanaimo Station* is also a look back, to a time in his family's history both real and mythical, one that is imbued with nostalgia: "My family was perfect then, no one was sick... The food was like magazines and the cars were all big." Holden uses 8MM home movies shot by his uncle, and his are the home movies we would all like to have—a child's first steps, a happy family get-together. Enlarged to 35MM, repeated and slowed

down, they represent a time that we long for, a time of seeming innocence, "before complexity and sadness" (Holden).

Perhaps this is part of the enduring appeal of small-gauge film: that in a world driven by commerce, it still retains some innocence. Its popularity is a mark of resistance to an increasingly technological world and planned obsolescence. In an age of constant and accelerated change, when a computer bought three months ago is already old, it is hard to imagine that a format released 45 years ago can still be useful and relevant. Affordable, fun, accessible and elegant in its simplicity, 8MM film has managed to survive and even thrive against the odds.  
—Larissa Fan

- <sup>1</sup> Regular 8 is alternately known as Standard 8 and Double 8.
- <sup>2</sup> Fujifilm in Japan produced an alternative format called Single 8, which had the same dimensions but a different cassette design. Internationally Kodak's version was the most popular.
- <sup>3</sup> PortaPaks and other portable video systems were introduced in the late sixties, but were large and heavy. Video didn't become popular for home use until the early eighties with the development of smaller and truly portable "camcorders."
- <sup>4</sup> Double Super 8 is a 16MM-wide film but with Super 8 sprockets. Similar to Regular 8 film, it is run through the camera twice, exposing one side on each pass. After processing, the film is split down the middle and the two pieces spliced together to produce a single strip for projection in a Super 8 projector.

**50 Feet that Shook the World**

(John Cannizzaro, USA, 2003, 2:30,  
Super 8, B&W, sound on CD)

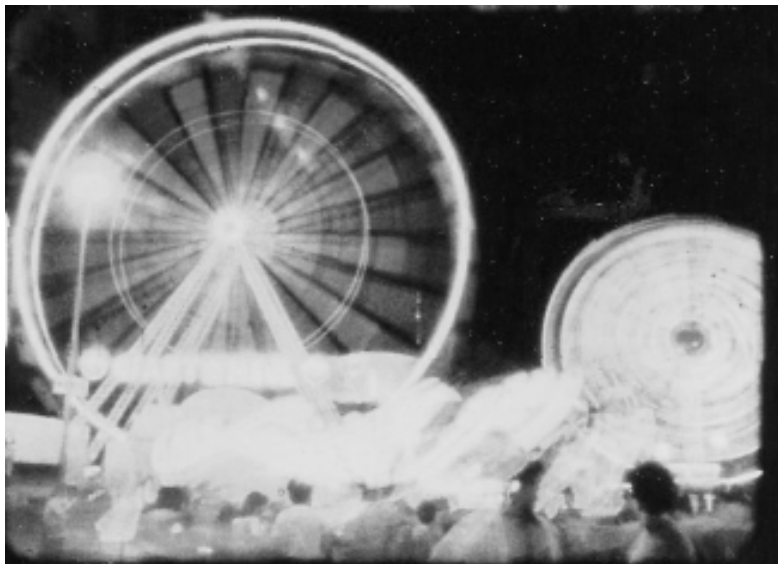
This stop-motion homage to the silent Russian classics takes a twisted look at the on-going war between film and video (imagine Jan Svankmajer remaking *Potemkin!*). Originally made for LA Flicker's "Attack of the 50-Foot Reels" (one roll of Super 8 film, edited in-camera, sound created without seeing the footage).

**Down on Me**

(John Porter, Canada, 1980/81,  
4:00, Super 8, colour, silent)

In *Down on Me*, John Porter dances with, and is led by, the camera, which is running at one-frame-per-second and turning its own way on the end of a fishing pole line while being raised and lowered from rooftops and bridges. Throughout, the camera is looking down at John on the ground, who is looking back up at the camera and turning with it. “Camera hoisting” done by John’s friend, Stephen Niblock.



**Amusement Park**

(John Porter, Canada, 1978/79,  
6:00, Super 8, colour, silent)

One of “Porter’s Condensed Rituals,” *Amusement Park* is a time-lapse document of rides at night at Toronto’s annual Canadian National Exhibition. Shot over two consecutive years on two rolls of film, the first roll consists of close-ups of each ride, edited in-camera. The second roll is a single, wide-angle long shot of the entire “Midway” of rides, seen from the top of the historic observation tower which has since been demolished. This scene was shot continuously over an eight-hour period beginning before dusk, increasing the time exposures as the daylight lessened and even after dark, ending in an almost white-out of the night scene created by two-minute exposures on each frame.

**Nightlight**

(Dagie Brundert, Germany, 2009, 2:22,  
Double Super 8 on video, colour, sound)

A lovely time-lapse portrait of landscapes and people at night, featuring both loneliness and connection and ending with a fireworks display. *Nightlight* was shot on expired black-and-white Double Super 8 film and processed as negative, the gelatin layer of the film stained red.





**Milchwolken Liebe  
(Milky Clouds Love)**

(Dagie Brundert, Germany, 2002/2007,  
4:13, Super 8 on video, colour, sound)

“My balcony is my boat. Today is the 1<sup>st</sup> of May and it’s pretty loud in Kreuzberg. And hot. Shit helicopters. Get off! Now the summer can begin.” So starts Dagie Brundert’s evocation of languorous summer days. Puffy white clouds pass by in a blue sky, and milky clouds of cream in her coffee trigger memories of childhood. Past and present converge.

**October 25<sup>th</sup> + 26<sup>th</sup>, 1996**

(Kika Thorne, Canada, 1996, 8:17,  
Super 8 on video, B&W, sound)

During the Metro Days of Action in 1996, a 150' long building was inflated using the air vents in front of Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square. *October 25<sup>th</sup> + 26<sup>th</sup>, 1996* documents this action by the October Group, which references both public institution and temporary home to protest the erosion of our city. Music by Dirty Three.





**Christian Porn**

(Roy Mitchell, Canada, 2000, 6:00,  
Super 8 on video, colour, sound)

When the Saskatchewan Opposition Party whipped Regina into a frenzy over the spending of tax dollars on a panel on gay porn, all hell broke loose. To overcome the uproar and win the hearts of the Christians, in steps BROTHER LOVE.

**Rub**

(Gail Mentlik & Anne Borden,  
Canada, 2002, 1:25, Super 8  
on video, B&W, sound)

Masturbation is one of life's sweetest distractions. This experimental film is an homage to the pleasures a girl can experience, all on her own.





**Hi I'm Steve**

(Robert Kennedy, Canada, 1999,  
6:00, Super 8 on video, B&W, sound)

Dissatisfied with his sex life, Steve decides he'll give gay telephone dating a try. Although he never seems to find the right person, he does discover a new fetish at the core of his sexual being.

**Melty Kitty**

(Allyson Mitchell, Canada, 2006,  
2:20, Super 8 on video, B&W, sound)

Suicide is painless. It brings  
on many changes. And I can  
take or leave it if I please...





**4x8x3**

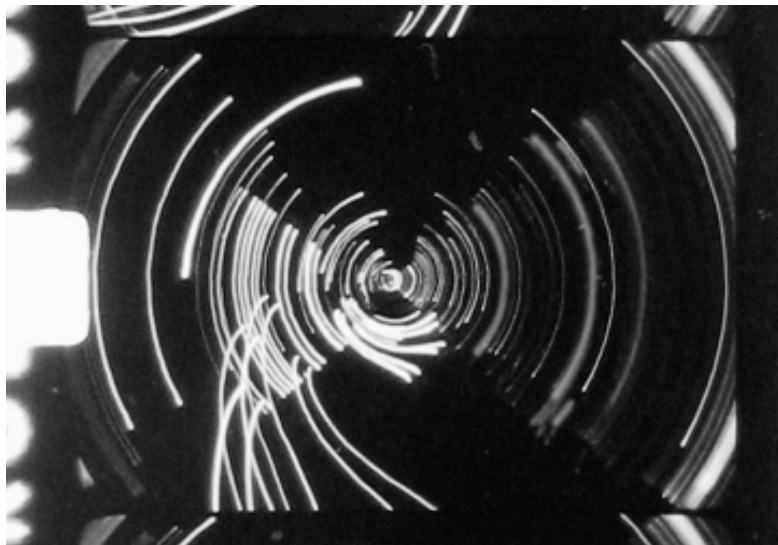
(Chris Kennedy, Canada,  
2004, 3:00, Regular 8 unsplit  
on 16MM, colour, sound)

Regular 8 unsplit. Streetcars circle.  
The ferry leaves and returns in one  
gesture. Camera and character dance.

**Artifices 1**

(Alexandre Larose, Canada, 2007, 3:40,  
Super 8 on 16MM, colour, sound)

*Artifices 1* presents the raw elements of a visual language under construction. The projected material appears as it was captured inside the camera, unedited. Each sequence was generated using a mechanical device allowing concentric rotations. Static and dynamic light sources progressively disintegrate into flux.



**The View Never Changes**

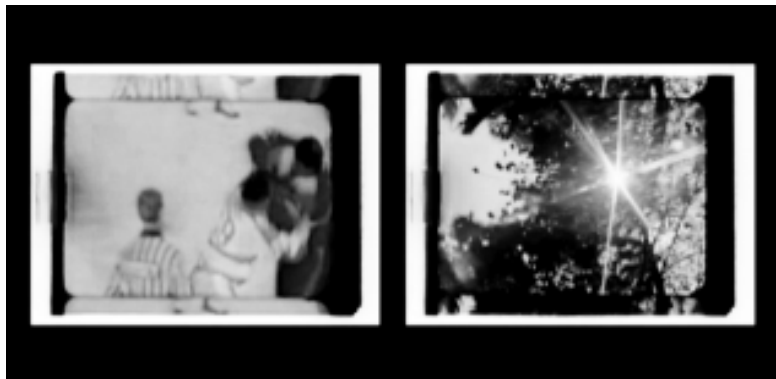
(John Price, Canada, 1996, 5:40,  
Super 8 on 16MM, B&W, sound)

*The View Never Changes* revels in the seething grain and swirling textures of Super 8 film processed in a pail. A gentle and yet critical portrait of the filmmaker's relationship with his father, "this beautifully hand-processed film manages to offer a balanced study heavy with the weight of family history and family ties" (Alex MacKenzie).

**Mean**

(Clive Holden, Canada, 2006, 3:00, Super 8 & video on 35MM, colour, sound)

A diptych which contrasts video images of hockey violence with Super 8 footage of a maple tree. Filmed off a television set from videos found on the Internet, the footage of hockey fights is relentless. Slowed down, looped, repeated—the hockey players hit each other again and again, locked in ferocious and eternal combat. Next to it, the sun flickers gently through the rustling leaves of a maple tree. The irony is clear: Canada is supposedly a peaceful nation, a moderate nation, but its national sport is marked by aggression and brutality.





**Nanaimo Station**

(Clive Holden, Canada, 2004, 3:25,  
8MM on 35MM, colour, sound)

A collage of family archive narrow gauge footage embracing/refuting the ideas of nostalgia and lost innocence, the contemporary commingling in our minds of the romantic past and easy irony. We can't go back. The home we search for is gone...

This footage, including my first steps, was filmed by my namesake, Clive Brown, a friend of the family, our adopted "Uncle Clive." Nanaimo, British Columbia, is where my family first attempted to set up a home in Canada after arriving from Dublin. They moved, for work reasons, to Victoria two years later. As a result, Nanaimo took on a useful mythical status for my family, becoming the place before complexity and sadness.  
—Clive Holden

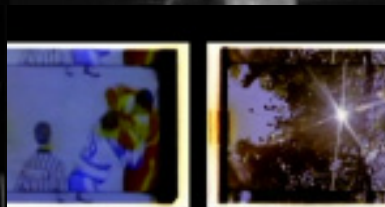
Since 1981, LIFT has been Canada's foremost artist-run centre for independent filmmakers, providing affordable access to film equipment, pre- and post-production services and education, in a creative and supportive environment.

**Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT)**

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*LIFT is supported by its membership, the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.*

*Design by Martina Hwang*



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**COVER STILL:** *Artifices 1*, Alexandre Larose.

