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# INDEPENDENT

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*Spirit*

Vol. XIV NO.1

Spring 1993

# Rosa Mystica



A still from Stephen Roszell's video *Rosa Mystica*.

Linda Dubler

**Rosa Mystica. Stephen Roszell. 1992. 3/4 video. Color. 87 min.**

Some documentarians make films as straight as the path of a bullet. They begin with an idea of truth and everything we see and hear, every image and every collision of images, supports and leads directly to their certain end. Stephen Roszell's documentaries are the video equivalent of a Mobius strip. Looping back upon themselves, enigmatic and contradictory, they dare us to find a single truth. They aren't indecisive works; rather they refuse a unified point of view, so much so that subjectivity becomes their subtext.

Roszell's embrace of ambiguity has always struck me as provocative, and in the past I've championed his work. But that was before the challenge of *Rosa Mystica*, a video tape that left the part of me that is Jewish, humanist, feminist and maternal feeling livid with anger. A meditation on Catholic faith and its fruits, *Rosa Mystica* struck me initially as infuriating both for the attitudes it contains and for its apparent formal neutrality. Repeated viewing have helped me understand Roszell's approach and my own resistance.

Ostensibly centering on the mystery of a weeping statue of the Virgin Mary housed in St. John of God, a Catholic church located on Chicago's depressed South Side, *Rosa Mystica* is shaped as much by Roszell's private history as it is by his public stance as artist and documentarian. In a voice-over that's heard near the video's opening, he identifies issues of faith, trust and authority as a lifelong battleground between himself and his deeply religious, conservative Christian mother. "While I was teaching at the Art Institute of Chicago at a time when conservatives were attacking the National Endowment for the Arts, she was at home writing letters of protest over *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a movie she'd never seen," he says. That Stephen Roszell dedicates *Rosa Mystica* to his mother is no small matter. The work carries the weight of a yearned for miraculous reconciliation through its 87 minutes; even at its most critical, it's a search for common ground.

*Rosa Mystica* begins with a brief montage that makes Roszell's liberal/humanist case for the spiritual poverty of contemporary America with his typical economy and wit. It's December in Chicago. A shot of a billboard for the phone company -- "Wise men phone ahead" -- give away to the dead faces of mechanical mannequins garbed in velvets and furs. Images of Chicago's poor, elderly and homeless are intercut with the merry-making of the department store's holiday display, where a plaster figure who bears an unsettling resemblance to Nancy Reagan ladles out a sticky, blood-like punch over and over again. Off-screen a man speaks

passionately, though sometimes in a fragmented, not very articulate way, about the need for mystery in our lives, about innocence and the folly of thinking we can understand what's miraculous -- his words a heartfelt counterpoint to the grotesque spectacle of materialism and its outcasts.

From this frantic urban site of consumption, Roszell takes us to the insular world of St. John of God. It's a splendid church that once served the huge Polish community that fled Chicago in the 50's. Now only 500 elderly white parishioners remain, and the neighborhood surrounding St. John, populated by African Americans who send their children to the church school but worship elsewhere, has felt the impact of unemployment and economic recession.

Up until May of 1985, Father Raymond Jasinski, a long faced, unremarkable looking man in his fifties, and a group of elderly nuns who lived in the convent attached to the church, were very much alone at St. John of God. Then, on Mother's Day, a priest from Brooklyn named Father John Starace, arrived with a pair of painted wooden statues of the Virgin Mary bearing a rose on her breast. A wealthy parishioner named Anthony DiCola has heard of Starace, whose devotion to the "miraculous" *Rosa Mystica* was well known, and had arranged to purchase the figures, one for himself and one for St. John of God. Two week later, both images of the *Rosa Mystica* began to cry.

The Virgin's tears brought thousands of Catholics to St. John of God, and even after the Archdiocese of Chicago refused to acknowledge the occasions of her crying as miracles, a dedicated core of believers continued to visit Father Ray's church. A strange incident that left the statue bullet-scarred but otherwise intact only added to the mystique surrounding the *Rosa Mystica*. Eventually, Father Raymond Jasinski's persistent and unseemly devotion alienated him from higher-ups in the Church. He was demoted, transferred to a suburban parish, and refused his request to bring the statue with him. At the same time, St. John of God's school and convent were closed and the space given over to a shelter for the homeless.

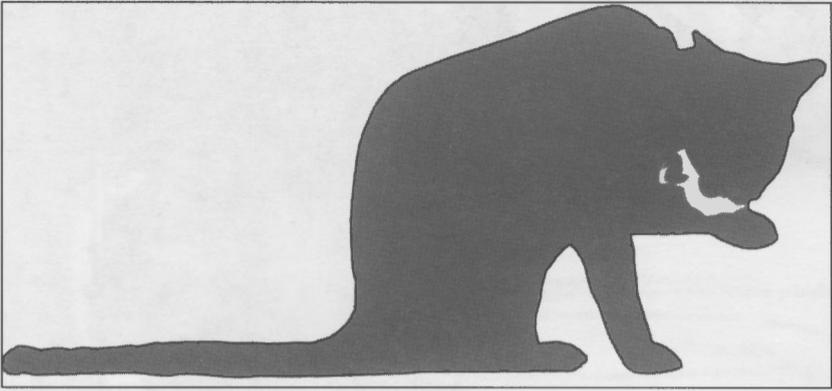
This story, full of odd, opportune coincidences and unexplained, perhaps miraculous occurrences, is just the sort of thing that the guys at *60 Minutes* would salivate over. Roszell doesn't. Instead of gung-ho investigation and go-for-the jugular interviews, which are utterly alien to his style, he chooses to hang out at length with three extraordinarily colorless individuals -- Father Ray, Sister Ambrosette and Sister Fulgenta. His reasons for doing so are readily apparent; what he's interested in isn't whether or not a certifiable miracle has taken place, or how a fraud has been perpetuated. He wants to get at this business of faith, to really understand what they believe and how it translates into action.

As a consequence, much of *Rosa Mystica* is given over to their ideas, and to the direct connection Roszell finds between their experience of having grown up without mothers and their devotion to the *Rosa Mystica*. We listen to Father Ray expound on disrespect for motherhood being at the base of all our society's ills (which seems like code talk for abortion being the root sin); remember his own mother fondly but in the abstract (he says "the mother," as if she were the Virgin, not "my mother"); and attribute suffering to the proliferation of "all the different theologies -- modernism, liberalism, humanism." We meet tiny, smug Sister Ambrosette, who informs us that she opens the door of the convent for no one, particularly not little black children, since they are liars and thieves, and watch as she pursues entrance to heaven by ironing a perfectly white sacramental cloth. We hear Sister Fulgenta's evaluation of President Reagan -- "a very pleasant man, but poor people feel cut off from him," and then her conclusion -- God punishes the unfaithful with bad leaders and bad priests. These interviews are supplemented by conversations with two ladies who work in the church gift shop, and two custodians (again, men with dead or absent mothers), all of whom share the opinion that women today are too sexual, too self-absorbed, neglectful of their children who turn criminal as a result, and basically oblivious to the fact that God made woman for man.

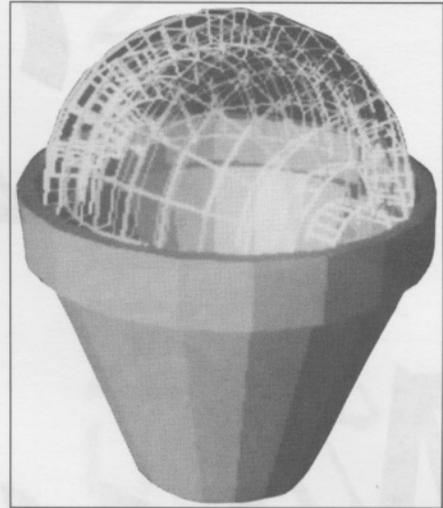
Rarely does Roszell force a response from his subjects, though he can't resist confronting Sister Ambrosette over an image of the baby Jesus crying bloody tears. The fact that Father John Starace refused to be interviewed, or that the Church hierarchy in Chicago declined to participate in his project, citing only a line from Matthew ("let them be judged by the fruits of their actions,") is reported without emphasis or even emotion. While even Sister Ambrosette observes that Father Starace had a way of showing up when he needed money, there's no probing into the mechanics of the *Rosa Mystica*'s miracle. There are instead the eyes of the *Rosa Mystica* filled with tears; the paranoid, quietly racist comments of Father Ray and his parishioners; the church's insularity and nostalgia for a simpler, more prosperous time; the endless recitation of the modern world's miseries; and the stunned faces of the believers, who find solace, relief and hope in the presence of a wooden figure of the Virgin and the prayers of a pale, frightened priest.

These faces and the enigma of their unquestioning faith fill me with terror and envy. I cannot reconcile them and the ideas of their leaders with my world, where science, logic, and a spirit of inquiry must be partners to mystery and emotion; where faith is sought after but elusive. What I find in *rt*, I am ashamed to say, is my persistent discomfort with its maker's attempt to feel commonality with people I reject as narrow, repressed and dangerous. Watching Roszell's video, I realize that, more than anything, I want him to confront his subjects and condemn them. I want him to abandon the method I have previously found so provocative and real, because now the price of openness too threatening. Perhaps that realization is what *Rosa Mystica* is about -- confronting the real meaning of compassion, which is the cornerstone of faith. It's a lesson that I, for one, find difficult, guilt inducing, and, thanks to this thoroughly unnerving work, inescapable.

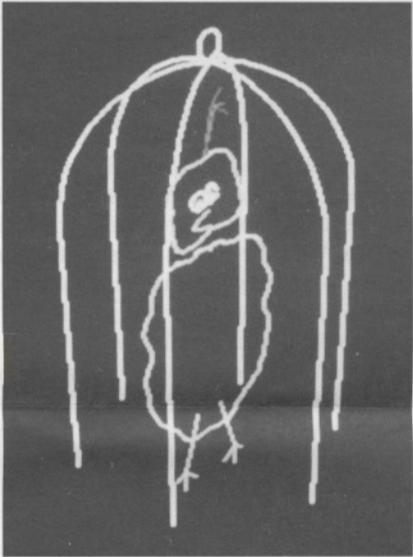
Linda Dubler is a film critic living in Atlanta, Georgia.



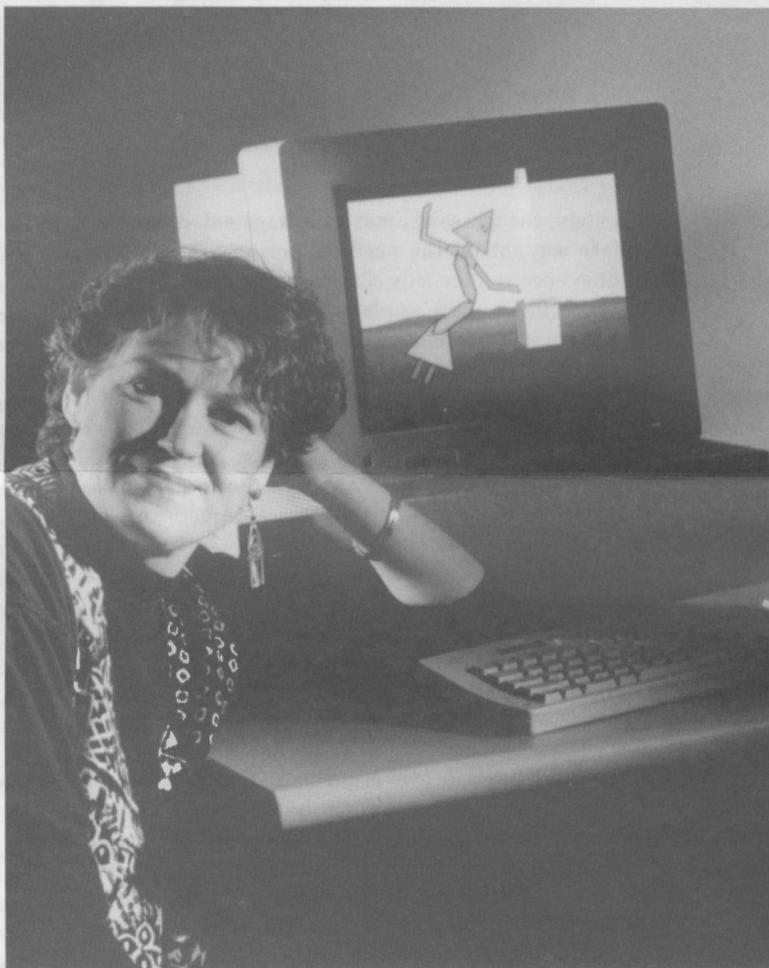
A still from Deanna Morse's film *Charleston Home Movie*.



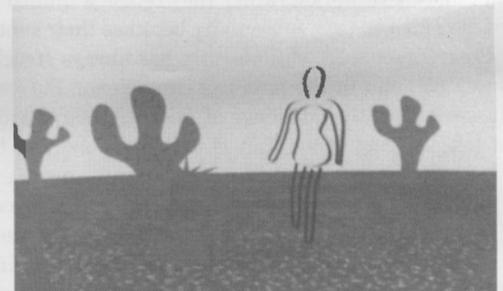
An image from *Plants*, a computer animation by Deanna Morse.



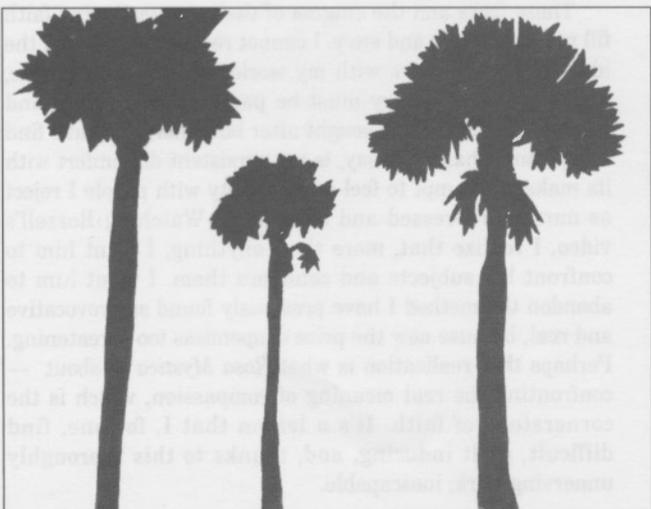
An image from Deanna Morse's computer animation *The A.M. Dream*.



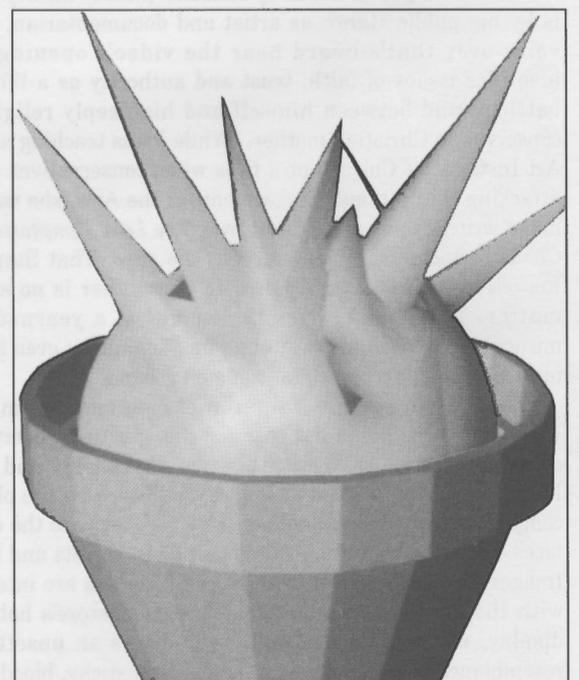
Deanna Morse at the computer with an image from *Sandpaintings*. (Photo by Chuck Heiney)



An image from Deanna Morse's computer animation *Lost Ground*.



A still from Deanna Morse's film *Charleston Home Movie*.



An image from *Plants*, a computer animation by Deanna Morse.

# DEANNA MORSE



A still from Deanna Morse's film *Camera People*.

F. Lynne Bachleda

**N**ineteen ninety-two was a very good year for Deanna Morse. While on sabbatical from Michigan's Grand Valley State University, the steadily ascending animator completed an M.F.A. in Art and Technology from the Art Institute of Chicago on a full scholarship. Equally impressive, and perhaps more satisfying to Morse, her computer animation, *Lost Ground* was selected for inclusion in the prestigious SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Computer Graphics) Video Review (issue #83). This juried compilation is produced by the world's foremost computer graphics organization and its touts the best, newest work each year through screenings at the annual international conference and a global distribution of the videotape.

Committed to completing at least one film per year, Morse is not one to rest on her laurels and accomplishments. In the midst of SIGGRAPH in Chicago and completing her new degree, she was at work on her next animation. *Freedom of Movement* is stylistically similar to *Lost Ground*. Both utilize a child-like graphic quality, "the look of the hand," as Morse describes it. Morse, who is more accurately described as an experimental filmmaker rather than simply an animator, wanted to use the computer in a different way. She rejected the stereotype of shiny, "morphing" three dimensional forms and opted for outline-shaped abstract characters that suggest ribbons. She also emphatically wanted to make "a cinematic piece with shots more than three seconds long."

Morse came to animation from documentaries, which she made first in her now twenty-year career. Although she has been teaching at Grand Valley State since 1984, she is a favorite in the South due in part to her teaching at Sinking Creek Film and Video Festival since 1975. She also was an Artist in the Schools in Columbia, South Carolina from 1974-78.

Morse chose to work in animation over the documentary because she was attracted to the control over a medium that could be produced at home. Her fascination with animation continued because of her fascination with movement. She speaks with animation herself about such things as "magical mistakes that begin to animate themselves," and about the mystical point at which a character starts to have its own life. Not surprisingly, Morse has abiding interests in dance and gesture. This is manifested practically and humanely in projects which explore American Sign Language and more recently in explorations of human communications symbols in *Sand Paintings*, her collaboration with Jane Dekoven.

Morse has a focused, down-to-earth quality in her personality that is mirrored in her comments about her work and the still-tedious process of animating on the computer.

"Computer animation is no easier, or faster than traditional animation. For starters, it took me six 40 hour weeks just to learn to use the Silicon Graphics Personal Iris computer with Alias software that was available on a shared basis here at school. Even though I have a lot of experience animating, I spent three days working on the lighting for my new piece and I am still not satisfied."



Rose Roselyn and Deanna Morse with animation characters from *Monkey's T-Shirt*, a short for *Sesame Street*. (Photo by Chuck Heiney)

# UPDATES



Deanna Morse animating *Monkey's T-Shirt*.



Deanna Morse at VPL Studio using the data glove to input sign language gestures for the film *Sandpaintings*.

The SIGGRAPH honor means a lot to Morse in part because she has attended six of the nineteen conferences.

"There are some self-referential pieces every year, like things that refer to *Luxo, Jr.*, for example. With the new technical advances the trend seems to be to replicate physical reality with computer graphics; for example, that piece that illustrated breeze on a piece of fabric. Physical texturing is better this year, as are real world environments. We also are seeing improved characters with better voices and finer "squash and squish." Characters still rely on a bright, hard palette for definition, but environments do have more subtlety with shade."

Morse looks to more interactive animation in the future. She was enamored with an impressive exhibit floor demonstration at SIGGRAPH by the Canadian firm, SoftImage. Stretching the concept of the virtual reality data glove in another direction, a dancer wearing a wired body suit moved in space. His "danced," movements were translated instantaneously to a wire frame model for the genesis of a 3-D animation. "The next step would be to add an environmental element such as wind. I think this may force more of a content focus in the industry . . . We are approaching a time when the computer will be seen only as one of a number of animation tools, transparent to the viewer."

Morse's previous work, much of which examines relationships, has a subtle political sense that stems from her "personal is political" milieu. Her current work in progress, *Freedom of Movement*, is more overtly political in its theme. Realizing that there was no imagery for the pro-choice movement, she addresses the fact that when a woman is pregnant her body belongs not to herself, but to someone else or the state. Based on preliminary work, it appears that *Freedom of Movement* will have Morse's common elusive, elliptical feeling, which Morse does not see as a liability. "I like structurally dense material that requires more than one viewing." Likely operating here, too, will be her affection for the "non-linear ways that children tell stories."

In her delightfully varied body of work a strong current of the human and the humane runs through Morse's art. It is heartening to know that she, with an evolving technique fueled by an experimental, maturing mind, is now working in the brave, new, too-often empty genre of computer graphics.

*F. Lynne Bachleda is a writer living in Nashville, Tennessee.*



Deanna Morse and Jane DeKoven animating the film *Sandpaintings*.

When I think of the month of June, I think of Sinking Creek. After a year of dealing with the complexities of higher education - teaching, administrating, generating memos, going to committee meetings, etc. - this festival comes at the perfect time. I always look forward to leaving the outside world and entering the Sarratt Center Theater at Vanderbilt University in Nashville to see a wonderful, eclectic, often unconventional, sometimes comfortable, sometimes incomprehensible, occasionally brilliant selection of independently-produced films and videos from all over the U.S. As an independent animator and avid film watcher and appreciator of all film genres, I have a special place in my heart for Sinking Creek for several reasons. First of all, the festival's origins are in the mountains of east Tennessee near where I grew up. Founded by Mary Jane Coleman of Greeneville 23 years ago and through her leadership and hard work, Sinking Creek has grown into one of the most, some may say *the* most, important showcases of independent film and video in America. Second, I received my first award at Sinking Creek. That was in 1985 and one of the judges that year was the late Willard Van Dyke. Third, even if I did not produce animated films or work with film and video, I would still attend Sinking Creek just to see the breadth and depth of the subjects and styles. At its best, the festival offers a unique look at our times created by some outstanding film and video artists. Mary Jane has placed an emphasis on showing what "Southern" hospitality is all about to independent filmmakers from all over America. David Ehrlich, a leading American artist and animator wrote in the Summer, 1992 *Newsletter of ASIFA/Central*, "Sinking Creek is still my favorite American Independent film festival. It is run impeccably and with perfect integrity by Mary Jane Coleman."

This year's Sinking Creek was especially noteworthy because it was in the capable and talented hands of first year Executive Director, Meryl Truitt. Her energy, enthusiasm, and creativity were evident throughout all components of this year's festival - from a very well written and designed program to two video installations in the theater's lobby to a record number of entries. Mary Jane continues as Founder and Artistic Director.

Judging the record number of 315 entries were Leighton Pierce, film and videomaker and teacher at the University of Iowa, and Peggy Parsons, media programmer at the National Gallery of Art. Of those entries, 78 were screened including cash award winners and honorable mentions. Judging this large number of films and videos and selecting award winners is an extraordinarily difficult and awesome task. In the 23 years of Sinking Creek, Mary Jane has seen about 70 judges work. She says that no two judging teams work alike. There is no one "right" way to evaluate the work submitted. Every judging session is unique. She adds that all of the judges take this task very seriously and agonize over every decision.

Special guests at this year's Sinking Creek included Ross Spears, *To Render a Life*; Zeinabu Davis, *A Powerful Thang*; Tony Slide, who presented a film bio of D.W. Griffith; Rob Moss, *The Tourist*; Eugene Martin, *Invisible Cities*; and, Steve Bachrach, *House of Pies*. This

year's workshops and seminars included animation production by Heidi Mau, computer animation by Deanna Morse, archival film research by Tony Slide, video production by Mark Pleasant, screenwriting by Barbara Roos, and a workshop on electronic sound production by Kirby Shelstad. A nice addition this year was the aforementioned video installation in the Sarratt art gallery giving festival attendees the opportunity to see the work of animation artists Deanna Morse and James Duesing. Although I did not see all of the works in this year's festival, two that made a strong impression on me were Ross Spears' feature documentary *To Render a Life*, and Joan Gratz's seven minute claymation *Mona Lisa Descending a Staircase*.

*To Render a Life* was not in competition, but was the featured program on the first night of screenings. Ross Spears from Johnson City, Tennessee and maker of *Agee*, *The Electric Valley*, and *Long Shadows*, introduced his latest work and answered questions after the screening. *To Render a Life* follows the day to day life of a "rural poor" family living in the richest county in Virginia. To respect the privacy of this family, Spears does not tell which county it is. Inspired by the classic work *Let us Now Praise Famous Men* by writer James Agee and photographer Walker Evans, Spears filmed this family over a three year period. The resulting work is a complex, and often moving statement about the dignity, pride, family loyalty, and self sufficiency of this family. Some of the most memorable moments in the film were voice-overs read from *Let us Now Praise Famous Men* complemented by Spears' sensitive camera work.

And completely different, but highly original and of equal quality was *Mona Descending a Staircase* by Joan Gratz. This little 7 minute masterpiece made up of masterpieces was completely delightful and educational - art history in seven minutes. Using clay, Gratz shows us many great paintings from the Renaissance to modern art-- evolving, changing, and overlapping. These innumerable creative transitions are a treat for the eyes!

There were animations by some of the best American independents - *After the Fall* by Joanna Priestley, *Dance of Nature* by David Ehrlich and Karen Sletten, *Lost Ground* by Deanna Morse, and *Perpetual Motion* by Karen Aqua. There were documentaries - *Fast Food Women* by Anne Johnson, *Cage/Cunningham* by Elliot Caplan, and *A Famine Within* by Katherine Gilday. There were narrative works such as *Mutzmag* by Tom Davenport and experimental works such as *Zero Hour* by Dana Plays. Of course, those are only a few of the 78 award winners but they do represent the artistic diversity of this year's entries.

Obviously, I am a real fan of the Sinking Creek Film/Video Festival. Thankfully, it occurs close to where I live thus it is relatively easy for me to attend but I would attend it no matter where it occurred. I recommend that any reader of the *Independent Spirit* do the same. You will not be disappointed.

*Edward Counts is an independent animator and professor of media services at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky.*



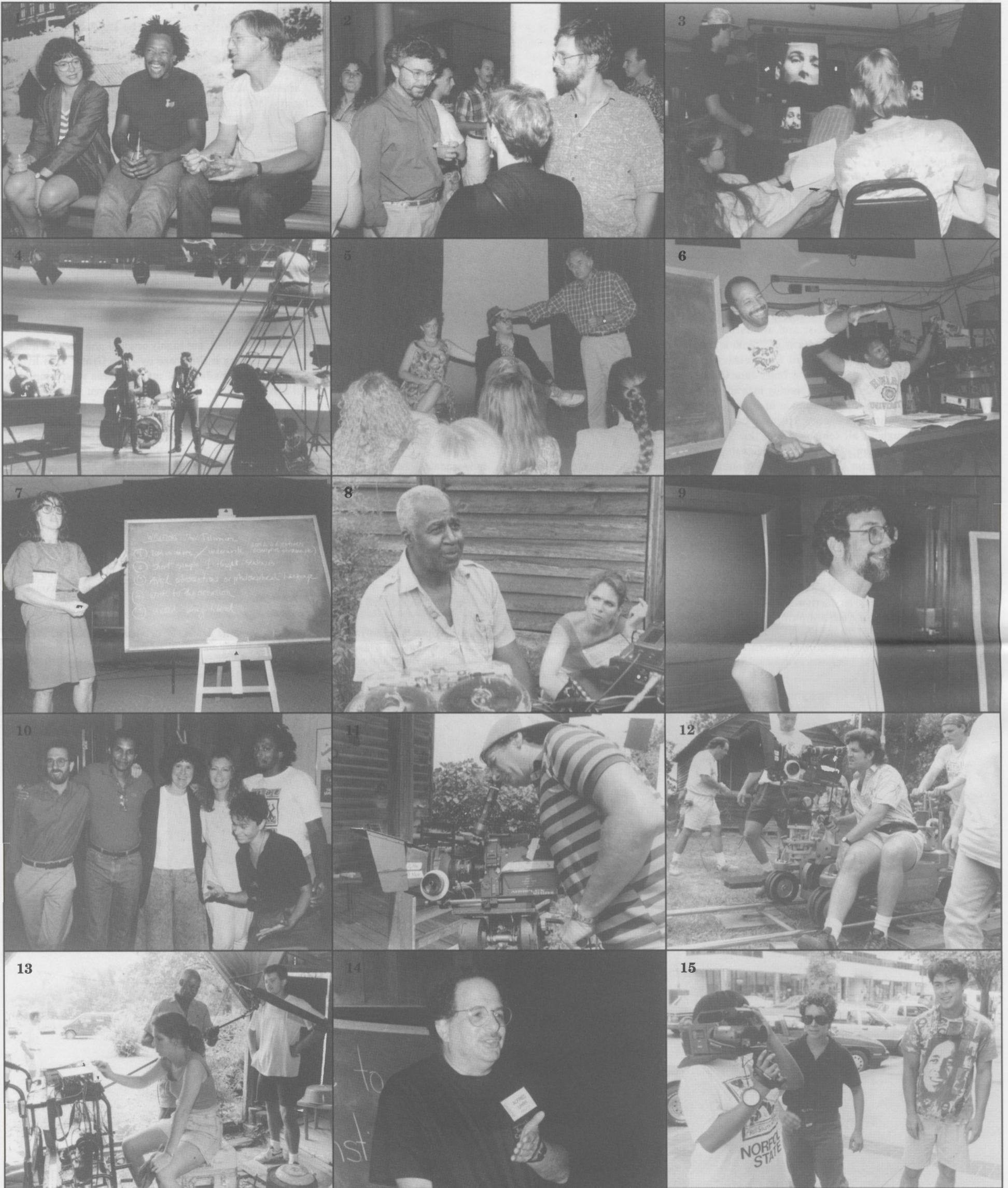
A still from Steve Bachrach's film *House of Pies*.



A still from Zeinabu Irene Davis' film *A Powerful Thang*.

**Sinking Creek Film/Video Festival, No. 23, June 7-13, 1992**

**Edward Counts**



1. Betsy Newman, Charles Webb and Stephen Roszell at the 1992 Southeastern Media Institute. 2. On the left, Morrie Warshawski at a reception at the Institute. 3. Director/Musician Peter Byck at the monitor with his 1992 Music Video Production class. 4. On location with Peter Byck's *Music Video Production* class. 5. Director Joe Manduke with students in his class *Acting and Directing for the Camera*. 6. Independent filmmakers, Butch Robinson and David Johnson, in their class *Streetwise Filmmaking: Independent Production in the Real World*. 7. Producer Mimi Edmunds teaching *Producing News and Social Documentaries*. 8. Sound recordist John Butler with students in *Advanced Cinematography*. 9. Independent film/video artist Steven J. Ross teaching *Producing and Directing Independent Film and Video*. 10. From left to right: Ross McElwee, Rodney Stevens, Susan Leonard, Terryanne Crawford, Charles Webb, and Ellen Spiro at the 1992 Southeastern Media Institute. 11 & 12. On location with John LeBlanc's *Advanced Cinematography* class. 13. John Butler with students on location with the *Advanced Cinematography* class. 14. Academy Award-winning Screenwriter Alfred Uhry teaching *Scriptwriting* at the 1992 Southeastern Media Institute. 15. Independent Video Artist Ellen Spiro, center, with students in her *Low Budget Video Production*.

# T H E F O U R T H A N N U A L

# SOUTHEASTERN MEDIA INSTITUTE



John LeBlanc's 1992 *Advanced Cinematography* class.

**I**n the summer of 1992 the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center hosted its 4th Annual Southeastern Media Institute in Columbia, South Carolina. The Institute featured eight week-long workshops and five weekend seminars that were taught by independent and industry artists.

The Institute is one of the few places in the country where hands-on media production experience is available at a reasonable cost in small, intimate workshops. The Institute is a place where independents, commercial producers, educators, broadcasters, writers, actors and students of film/video and audio meet with their peers and share information.

The Southeastern Media Institute is a program of the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center. Co-sponsors include South Carolina ETV, the University of South Carolina Media Arts Department, The South Carolina Film Office, The South Carolina State Museum, the Columbia Museum of Art, and the McKissick Museum. Additional support is provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Special thanks to Michael Satrazemis for arranging lighting and grip support. Corporate Sponsors include: MARKEE Magazine, Rental Tools/Motion Picture Event Division, Eastman Kodak Company, Clairmont Camera, Cine Partners, Creative Post and Transfer and CineFilm.

## THE FIFTH ANNUAL SOUTHEASTERN MEDIA INSTITUTE

### July 24 — August 6, 1993

Intensive week-long professional media workshops in Columbia, SC in cinematography, video production, video editing, radio production, historical filmmaking, directing and producing, video in the classroom and video production by students.

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South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center  
1800 Gervais Street  
Columbia, SC 29201  
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Detail from an *arpillera* made by Irma Muller in 1989 in Chile, featured in the documentary *Scraps of Life* by Gayla Jamison.

*Scraps of Life*. Gayla Jamison. 1991. 16mm. Color. 30 min.

Robert Walker

A friend of mine, a journalist who suffered much at the hands of Augusto Pinochet's secret police in Chile, once spoke to me of the anguish and despair that he and thousands of Chileans felt when they realized that the brutal repression of the military dictatorship in their country went unnoticed by people in the United States, whose government was, in large part, responsible for putting the generals in power in 1973. "We live at the bottom of the world," he said. "It is easy for you in North America to ignore us and forget about us!" The bloody coup that overthrew democratically-elected president Salvador Allende drew much attention in the U.S. press. The arrogant testimony of the odious and malefic Henry Kissinger before the U.S. Senate many months later (in which the good doctor freely admitted U.S. involvement in the *golpe*) received major play in the news media.

But as the years wore on and *los militares* remained in power and the repression continued, Americans took less notice of the plight of the Chilean people. Murder, torture, disappearances, intimidations, — the whole sad litany of atrocities that we have by now grown so used to (and numbed by) followed close on the heels of the end of the war in Vietnam. That conflict perhaps, left too many Americans emotionally hollowed out, unwilling to see the turmoil in yet another, distant land. Especially if we figured in a major way as provocateurs. Besides, by 1979 the turmoil in Central America was becoming a major distraction in gringoland. Our attention was focused on Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala. Chile and Pinochet were too far south, over the moral horizon. In defense of the bloody dictator Anastasio Somoza, a U.S. Senator once remarked — "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's *our* son of a bitch!" A revealing remark. It's the kind of sentiment that has long been a touchstone of U.S. foreign policy. Pinochet was a fascist—but he looked after our interests in Chile.

*Scraps Of Life*, directed by Gayla Jamison using a Chilean film crew, not only reminds us of what transpired inside Chile during almost two decades of fascist repression, but shows us that, with or without the rest of the world noticing, there was an active resistance to the military government. That this resistance was carried out against a regime propped up by the C.I.A., the Pentagon and major U.S. corporations with long standing interests in Chile, is all the more remarkable. Jamison's story is about a part of that resistance, a group of courageous women — wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, cousins— who are all relatives of persons arrested and disappeared by the security forces during the early period following the

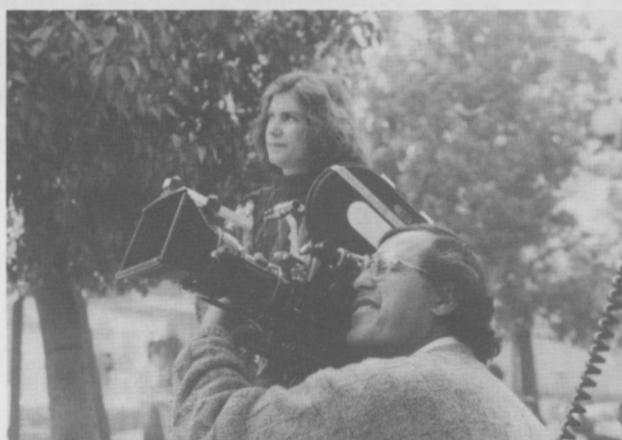
coup, when the regime was consolidating its power. The women join together to demand an accounting from the authorities regarding the whereabouts of their loved ones who were "detained" and made to vanish. As a matter of policy, the details of these disappearances were never revealed, even to or *especially* to the relatives of the victims. That was part of the terror. The women's purpose is to protest these and other human rights abuses and to make known to the Chilean public (and to the rest of the world) the bloody reality of Chile's police state. As the film illustrates, many Chileans denied or were indifferent to or even supported the regime's atrocities.

As a way of reaching out to the world to denounce the murders and disappearances, the women create *arpilleras* from scraps of their own clothing, using a technique that resembles quilting. No abstract designs adorn these tapestries. Instead, they are narratives of repression, showing the names and faces of the disappeared, images of soldiers and police brutalizing demonstrators, or scenes of the women confronting the police to demand information about their disappeared relatives. News stories about such public demonstrations and their inevitable repression were forbidden in Chile's mass media. So the *arpilleras* go beyond being the personal expressions of the women who create them, to become "archives of a history suppressed."

Under the aegis of the Vicariate of Solidarity of the Catholic church in Santiago, the *arpilleras* were sold to North Americans and Europeans, who smuggled them out of Chile. It is interesting to note that in the *arpilleras*, the faces of the disappeared and their advocates are given humanizing features like eyes and mouths, while the faces of the soldiers are always featureless. The soldiers' figures

are depicted with scraps of black and olive drab cloth that contrast sharply with the bright and lively colors of the figures of the people.

Jamison gives us a subjective account of this group of courageous women, whose struggle is both to know and to be known. They too are victims and they have learned to live with the loss of their loved ones. It was this aspect of the film that I found most wrenching. I was moved and amazed to watch the wife and now-teenaged sons of an electrician —who was taken away by the police more than fifteen years ago— at the supper table, the mother smiling with good white teeth, and the sons smiling and eating, when only moments before the wife calmly related the story of her husband's disappearance (visually recounted with old



Filmmaker Gayla Jamison with cinematographer Jaime Reyes on location in Santiago, Chile for *Scraps of Life*.

# SCRAPS of LIFE

family photos and scenes of the arrest on an *arpillera* ). For the viewer, this juxtaposition of events in time drives home the agony that relatives of the disappeared must endure. Forced to internalize the trauma, they suppress its natural consequences in themselves. Repression outside, repression inside. You carry on, but in your life, behind the tranquil demeanor and the smiles and the mere words that tell of violence done long ago, there is always that charge of grief and *dolor*. A sometimes clandestine camera evokes well the feeling of everyday life in a police state, the apprehension, the idea of being watched (and of being watchful), of violence barely restrained and swift to come. "The best jail is the one you don't see," goes the saying in neighboring Argentina, a nation that has also been dealt its share of misery by its own military.

Jamison travelled to Chile over a two-year period, getting to know the women in the *arpillera* workshops, becoming close with them, to understand their struggle. The women did not limit their actions to "telling stories with needle and thread." They also denounce in public demonstrations the numerous human rights abuses of the military regime. The film contains footage of the savage repression by the security forces of these and other demonstrations. For reporting the crimes of the dictatorship the women were condemned as subversives. Their efforts to know the truth and to tell it are met with rejection and ridicule, and the pain of these denials and refusals returns to them in thought. In what, for me was the most poignant comment in this very moving piece, the mother of a young man grabbed by "agents of the State" from a street corner in downtown Santiago, remembers her confrontation with a machine-gun wielding *carabinero* as she and others press the security apparatus for information about missing relatives. "These are memories so terrible and so painful," she says, "that when you recall them you *die all over again*." Nor will the women let us forget what it is to like to be the surviving relatives of the disappeared. To manifest the agonizing uncertainty surrounding the fate of their loved ones, the sadness and pain of their absence, and their own loneliness, the women devise the *cueca sola*. Adapting this traditional folk dance, normally performed by a man and a woman as a dance of flirtation and courtship, the women here dance alone, one by one, to a song whose words tell of damaged lives and the machine of state terror.

Editing was done in Chile, a venture not without risk, even under the more relaxed rules of censorship in the waning years of the dictatorship. Almost a third of the footage was mysteriously damaged in a U.S. lab and had to be reshot. The style is transparent -- that of the quotidian TV documentary; the shots tightly framed, using lenses mostly of medium and longer focal length. The women in *Scraps Of Life* are as eloquent as they are brave, not surprising in a country where poetry is greatly esteemed and poets are as numerous as lawyers are in the U.S. The "return to democracy" in 1990 is questionable. Pinochet still lurks in the wings, the military has a veto power over legislation, the constitution can be suspended at any time and the austerity program imposed on the advice of Milton Friedman and his "Chicago Boys" has left the country economically ravaged. But President Patricio Alwyn did appoint commissions to investigate the abuses of the military regime. One woman who was asked on camera what she expected from these investigations, replied simply "I want the truth to be told and justice to be done."

What I missed in *Scraps Of Life* was a discussion of the politics behind these barbarities, of fascism in its broader context. This means, inescapably, the role and scope of U.S. involvement in the Pinochet government. That is the truth that must be told, and told again and again to American audiences. One can plead constraints of time and budget; but I question the *ultimate* effectiveness of films like this, if the complicity of U.S. foreign policy in establishing and supporting such bloody regimes goes unexplained. A sympathetic film like *Scraps of Life* gives well-deserved attention to women who refused to be silenced, whose "determination to know the truth proved stronger than their fears." In this they are joined by the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and the Co-Madres of El Salvador and similar groups elsewhere, who had the courage to face down their oppressors. The coup and the repression that followed were as planned and deliberate as a space launch. ITT, Anaconda Copper, United Brands and various branches of the U.S. government played key roles in the overthrow of Allende and the subsequent destruction of his programs of social reform. No amount of ideological obfuscation or "free market" drivel can hide the real reason for U.S. actions: social reforms threatened the profit margins of North American companies. They still do.

Leonardo once wrote that there were three, and only three, kinds of people in the world: "Those who see. Those who see when they are shown. And those who do not see." Call me a cockeyed optimist, but I still believe that Americans will see when they are shown. And when they do, they will want to put an end to our murderous foreign policy.

Robert Walker is a writer, photographer and videomaker. His documentary on painter Howard Finster was recently shown in conjunction with the Virginia Festival of American Film.



Filmmaker Gayla Jamison with cinematographer Jaime Reyes and sound recordist Mario Diaz filming in the General Cemetery of Santiago, Chile for *Scraps of Life*.

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# WORKS IN PROGRESS

George Georgas

## ALFRED WIGGINS

Cullowhee, North Carolina

Actor/filmmaker Alfred Wiggins who works as an assistant professor of communications and theatre arts at Western Carolina University, is using his own money to fund *Chickasaw Park*. The park, an actual recreational tract in Wiggins' hometown Louisville, represents the centerpiece of his film. Chickasaw was a mecca for Louisville's black community -- young and old -- until it lost its appeal. Wiggins wrote the play the film is drawn from in 1984, in apparent response to the once-famed park's dwindling status.

*Chickasaw Park* is a metaphor for a generation gap as well as physical change. The story opens with Mr. Willis, a middle-aged publisher of a black weekly, charging the young and materialistic Tony Pose, staff reporter, to write a feature on the closing on Chickasaw Park. This opening serves to contrast the differences between those two black professionals: Willis believes heavily in tradition, as he remembers fondly the days he spent in the park; Pose believes in change and the future, and he ambitiously sets out to work for a larger newspaper. Pose sees little merit in doing a story on a park that was once mighty while Willis believes "God's Little Acre" has become an institution to the less mobile black population of the seemingly oppressive years.

Their disparate views betray deeper differences in terms of race: Willis believes in being true to your heritage, while Pose is bent on being true to himself. A telling line occurs early in the film when Pose, in responding to Willis' hesitance to say that blacks have "arrived," offers a deadening Salvo: "Race is no longer an issue."

Wiggins crafts the film so that Pose receives a kind of awakening. In doing so, Wiggins is allowed the personal therapy of waxing nostalgic. His production company -- the appropriately named Time Was, Ltd. -- puts cinematic emphasis on the park's many storied features: a high floodwell, a footbridge, a lagoon, the tree-surmounted Ohio River. Chickasaw, which Wiggins described as his "domain" when he was a youth, is best captured in the movie by the character Jake, played by Wiggins: "You know why I come here, son? 'Cause I remember. I remember all of 'em. All the colored folks who used Chickasaw Park. All the tired old women . . . all the snotty-nosed little kids and all the fun they had. All the men, pourin' iron and steel in deathtrap foundries, and how they'd feel just a little bit guilty on payday when they'd sneak and buy a pint of Old Crow before they took the money home."

Because he received no grants for the anticipated hour-long film, Wiggins funded the venture personally. His parents, who still live in Louisville, put the cast up in a local hotel during filming last fall. The WCU professor, who doubles as advisor to the school's Black Theatre Ensemble, might be a familiar face to television and theatre audiences alike. He has appeared on television's *Matlock*, *I'll Fly Away* and *In the Heat of the Night*, as well as on stage in *Tambourines to Glory* and *You Can't Take It With You*.

Wiggins expects the production to be finished by Spring of 1993.

For more information, contact Alfred Wiggins at Box 2379, Cullowhee, North Carolina 28723.

## DANNY MILLER

Asheville, North Carolina

Danny Miller, co-founder of environmentally conscious Ironwood Productions, is working on yet another "location" movie that promotes preserving the delicate balance between the human and ecological condition.

Miller is producer, writer and director of *The Other Side*, a film in which he examines the ongoing decimation of the rainforests of Costa Rica to make broader statements about the imperiled world at large. He is joined on this production by longtime Ironwood partner Kurt Mann, who is co-executive producer, and also by Mark Shields, who lived in Costa Rica before moving to Asheville to found the EarthDance Institute.

*The Other Side* addresses the deforestation of Costa Rica by focusing on seven students visiting the scene of a once teeming ecosystem. The premise of the film, which Miller expects to release by Earth Day (April) of 1993, is that the search for knowledge can uncover soul-shattering truths. The seven young explorers, aged 13 to 18, survey the damage done to the rainforest, posing many troubling questions. Miller offers this description of their mission: "Their voyage begins in the central mountain 'cloud forests' of Costa Rica. Led by 'Amos,' a biologist and founder of Rara Avis Rainforest Reserve, the students begin to understand what immense value and beauty the world's rainforests hold. Deep within the forest, a rain-soaked Amos reveals that the forests are not being destroyed by 'mean and evil people,' but those who are trying to survive economically, unaware of the positive alternatives that exist."

Amos leads the students as well as the camera to consider not only the vitality of the rainforest but also the politically fraught implications of the persisting devastation. Miller best captures the political-economic side of the coin in filming a meeting between the students and "Alfonso," a manager of a Costa Rica-owned banana plantation. "During this discussion we learn that the banana industry is controlled by multinational corporations, owned by U.S. and European based companies, who are not only killing the forests, but the people and social structure of Costa Rica as well," Miller said. "Listening to the banana farmer's concern for his country, we soar above the massive, endless destruction of some of the world's last remaining virgin forests."

The group next takes flight to San Jose, where they meet Costa Rican President Rafe Angel Calderon, just before meeting a high-ranking United Nations official at the University of Peace. From the urbane haunts of academia to the thatched huts of an altogether different educational experience, the students are regaled by the teachings of Juanita Sanchez, former President of the Kekoldi Bribri Indian Reserve. Sanchez equates the seemingly more civilized developers of industry with the leaf cutter ants that destroy vegetation in the forest. These "silkwa" turn the forest into a desert, according to Sanchez, and so "the white man had his origin in the belly of the King of the Leaf Cutter Ants, destroyer of the green world."

It is Sanchez' Bribri who represent "the other side" to Miller and the group, for they are emblematic of a simplicity and organic harmony that, however strange to us, could save the world.

Because of the location and scope of this film, Miller expects to complete it on a budget of more than \$100,000. Second and third phase production occurs in the winter months, simultaneous to post-production work.

A percentage of the proceeds from *The Other Side* will be given to EarthDance Institute.

For more information, contact Danny Miller, c/o Ironwood Productions, Route 2, Box 148A, Leicester, North Carolina 28748.

## JOHN BIGHAM

Columbia, South Carolina

Historian John Bigham is representing Southern families' war memories in the *Southern Army Album*. He is beginning filming on the third edition of "individually packaged" films that record people's memories and assertions about the many conflicts and wars affecting the South. Although he will focus on the Civil War -- Bigham has been the curator of education for the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Museum the past nine years -- he will weave in folklore and fancies surrounding other wars. Bigham said he comes by his passion for documentation honestly, for his father traveled the South as a writer interviewing people. "I have that same tendency," he said. "(The film) came from an interest in hearing people talk."

He differentiates his production from Ken Burns' much ballyhooed PBS *Civil War* documentary in terms of these "family memories." Burns' work was about "the total war itself," according to Bigham, whereas the *Southern Army Album* "is more to the individual; I don't get involved in the campaigns, or the major battles. My interest is personal."

An example of his personalizing touch can be witnessed in the *Album's* second edition film, whereby a woman is featured reading a letter from her grandfather that details Civil War memories. Equally personal was the first edition, which Bigham filmed at his Columbia home, having invited people to come and share their stories. The second edition found him traversing North Carolina, compiling war lore in the Tarheel State. Bigham covered 1,500 miles to complete the second edition.

The third edition, which the producer described as being in "the developmental stage," will take him to Georgia in the winter. "I'll try something different in Georgia; I'm going to drive down country roads and pull into driveways looking for stories."

Bigham believes this approach ensures spontaneity, "things that come off the top of people's heads and not just facts and details about the war."

His pursuit of handled-down-by-families folklore begins in Milledgeville, Georgia where statesmen first voted to secede from the Union, and then he plans to visit Macon. From there, whim and wind will be propelling forces. Bigham said he chose Georgia not only for its proximity to South Carolina, but also because of its rich history.

Bigham is funding the *Southern Army Album*, which is being filmed on Super 8 VHS, by himself. He said the lion's share of the expense will be for the publicity. He expects to complete the third edition by the Spring of 1993.

For more information, contact John Bigham at 4833 Arcadia Rd., Columbia, S.C. 29206

**MARK CHARNEY / JIM RANDELS**  
 Clemson, South Carolina / New Orleans, Louisiana

Filmmaker Mark Charney offers a new twist on the age-old chicken-or-the-egg problem: "What came first, the festival or the festival goers?"

The festival in question is the fifteen-year-old New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival; and Charney, along with co-director Jim Randels, uses the springtime extravaganza as a backdrop for *Red to the Rind*. This 50-minute film explores the rituals surrounding the event, focusing not on the live acts but the colorful people who flourish outside the sound stages.

Charney, who teaches English at Clemson University, said the predominantly Cajun and creole social circles that they address in the film imply a great deal about the community at large. "The ceremonies surrounding events such as Jazz Festival often reveal more about the local culture than the actual festivals themselves," he said. "Having lived in New Orleans for seven years, I have watched the Jazz Festival grow from a small musical celebration showcasing local acts to a nationally sponsored, *Rolling Stone*-covered event highlighting professional artists such as Linda Ronstadt, Joan Baez, Harry Connick, Jr. and Jimmy Buffet."

But Charney believes the people attending make the festival, and they "have for the last 15 years formed a group identity in response to the festival." He went on to say that changes within the group "have paralleled many changes within the festival itself, and (they) represent to us almost a microcosm of the good will and sense of community that the Jazz Festival has come to represent."

The aforementioned "group" includes doctors, lawyers, chefs, and millworkers. Charney and Randels hone in on their meetings before the festival, where under a morning sun they "divide the spiritual responsibilities of the festival's success among themselves," according to Charney. He said the division of panegyric labor works like this: "one will be responsible for originating fertility rites to protect the Caribbean spirit of the fest, while another may be charged with encouraging good will at the African exhibits."



A still from *Red to the Rind*, a video by Mark Charney and Jim Randels.

Other events include wedding ceremonies and watermelon rituals, from which the documentary's title is derived. Charney said filming the group's preparations for the day's rituals sheds light on the "complexity" of the process.

*Red to the Rind* is scheduled to be completed by April of 1993, the date of the next festival.

For more information, contact Mark Charney, c/o Clemson University, Department of English, Clemson, SC 29634-1503.

*George Georgas is a teacher and writer in Columbia, South Carolina.*



A still from *Red to the Rind*, a video by Mark Charney and Jim Randels.

### ON THE COVER

A still from Stephen Roszell's video *Rosa Mystica*.

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