

'Lawrence Jordan: A Mosaic of Personal Selections'

Sun/19–Sun/26, various locations

An influential force in the Bay Area avant-garde film scene since the mid-1950s (and 30-year faculty member at S.F. Art Institute until his retirement last May), Lawrence Jordan has accrued a diverse and impressive body of work. This retrospective is a collaboration between the filmmaker himself, George Kuchar, the Cinematheque's Steve Anker, the Art Institute, and Film Arts Foundation; it presents a healthy chunk of some 40 titles Jordan has produced to date. Among the oldest and shortest is 1957's *Vision of a City*, which uses distorted perspectives — from an anamorphic lens to reflections off a wino's castaway bottle — to suggest everyday, collective S.F. bustle as a maze of solitary prison cells. Among the most recent is the early-1990s *Star of David*, which de-



poetically mourned on its soundtrack. Two dramatic albeit elliptical narratives are the most ambitious live-action efforts here: the 50-minute color featurette *The Apparition* (1976) and 45-minute *The Old House, Passing* (1967) are both "ghost stories," with the latter using classic B&W "old dark house" imagery to ambiguous, near-abstract ends — interestingly, the decision to go that route came postshoot, when Jordan decided his planned linear script wouldn't work, so a "free-associative" reshaping of footage occurred. Jordan is best known as an animator, and the seven-years-in-the-making *Sophie's Place* (1986) may be his magnum opus in that medium. A plotless "alchemical autobiography," its symbolic meanings are like tarot cards — seemingly random yet highly suggestive. Utilizing 19th-century illustrations, woodcuts, and classical statuary as his primary (and brilliantly hand-colored) cut-paste materials, the film is a series of phantasmagorical transformations and rebirths: toga-clad women dance on spider webs, sorcerers' hands emerge from teacups. The look may recall Terry Gilliam or the Brothers Quay, but it substitutes a gentle, mystic surrealism for their respective burlesque humor and obsessive morbidity. *Sophie's Place* scarcely varies pace, develops "explanatory" motifs, or "goes" anywhere in particular over 90 minutes' course. Yet its exquisite visual beauty and serene, supernormal air cast the same enchantment as a lone stroll in a secret garden. All shows 7:30 p.m. Sun/19, S.F. Art Institute, 800 Chestnut, S.F.; Tues/21, New PFA Theater, 2725 Bancroft, Berk.; Thurs/23, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission, S.F.; Sun/26, S.F. Art Institute. See Rep Clock for venue information. (415) 558-8129. (Dennis Harvey)