

Collections (cont.)

- The New York Public Library
- The Anthology Film Archives, NY
- The Pompidou Art Center, Paris

Critical Statements Concerning Jordan's work:

"Very little has been written about the films of Larry Jordan even though he is one of the most important, prolific and experienced of American independent film-makers. Unlike Stan Brakhage, a friend of his since their high school days and film-maker over the same span of time, Larry Jordan has seldom written about his films, granted interviews, or published polemics. With the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to Anthology Film Archives, in cooperation with the Museum of Modern Art Film Department and the Pacific Film Archives work has begun on the preservation of Larry Jordan's films. The three programs of this retrospective are both an example of the initiation of this preservation and an acknowledgement of the importance of a much too little known master film-maker." --P. Adams Sitney, Introduction to the 1976 Jordan Retrospective in N.Y.

"One thing: If I'd have to name one dozen really creative artists in the independent (avant-garde) film area, I'd name Larry Jordan as one. His animated (collage) films are among the most beautiful short films made today. They are surrounded with love and poetry. His content is subtle, his technique is perfect, his personal style unmistakable." --Jonas Mekas, director Anthology Film Archives

"Extraordinarily rich in imagery and symbolic overtones, Jordan's films are dramatic without being narrative; rather, they abstract the essentials of drama--rising and falling waves of tension, suspense and release--while leaving the details entirely open to free association. Closely keyed to soundtracks that range from Sabicas to Hindemith, his films move with a distinctly personal rhythm: Flowing, graceful, gentle, unhurried, but with a nagging insistence which works as an undertow, to draw one's mind beneath the lyrical beauty and sensuous charm of their surfaces. While Jordan uses bizarre surrealist combinations of incongruous images, his juxtapositions do not startle or shock. The fluid continuity with which they unfold makes us accept these strange metamorphoses as the natural order of things at a different level

of reality. Like illustrations that you may remember from children's books, they lure you into a world of child-like fantasy, where virtually anything goes." --Thomas Albright, San Francisco Chronicle, March 14, 1976

"Jordan has created a cinema of extreme delicacy and elusiveness. The objects that appear within his frames are not presented as stable, fixed entities, but as objects of an imagination which may transform them at will. Similarly, his films do not assume the declarative forms of the "structural" cinema, but are rather organized more intuitively, in a way which interrelates complexly with his image material. The result is a cinema that requires a viewer with patient openness and an active eye." --Fred Camper, The Shoho Weekly News, April 1, 1976

"His imagery is exquisite and eloquent, concentrating on simple, repeated use of particularly poetic symbols and figures, a conglomerative effect of old Gustave Doré drawing, 19th century what-not memorabilia, all fused to a totally aware perception woven finally into a choreographed, animated, Dali-like dream. It is almost impossible not to hallucinate on your own while watching." --Lita Eliscu, The East Village Other, July 12, 1968

"Jordan's films provide a feeling of future-past relationships and a sense of transcendency from earth into space. The films are a sensory travelog. At the conclusion I felt I had been somewhere--where really didn't matter. It was a delightful trip." --Jerry Stein, Cincinnati Post and Times, April 9, 1970

"Animation. The word conjures up the world of film cartoon. But in the hands of Larry Jordan, an independent film-maker who last night showed and discussed his work at Carnegie Lecture Hall, the viewers saw the art that is possible with this complicated medium. Jordan summed up as succinctly as I have ever heard from an artist what his basic purpose was. 'I want to make impossible things happen before your eyes. I am interested in showing what could not happen in life but which can happen in film--say, a woman rising from the dead.' These films tell fantastic abstract stories, written by Jordan, but depend almost completely on the collaging of handsome old prints. The thing I like most about him is his sense of mystery and adventure. He is in his own distinct way a magician. He is most fantastic when least literal and clearly has a strong future." --Donald Miller, "Animator as Magician", Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 12, 1973

"His pictures are pure film. That is to say, he uses tools of this particular medium to create a kind of art that is exclusively a movie experience. Like music, they can only be described in terms of the experience, which in this case is exhilarating. Fish soar through the universe. Spacemen float past a lighthouse, or peer into an old-fashioned family portrait. A suitcase travels of its own volition. An egg rolls into a crater on the surface of a planet. On the soundtrack are chiming bells, organ grinders or merry-go-round music. Or even a dialogue. The effect of his films grows from their abstractness, and to try to define them in concrete terms is like trying to define the feeling of inebriation by detailing the taste of alcohol and the size and shape of the liquor bottle. A Jordan film produces an aesthetic high."

--Ed Blank, The Pittsburgh Press, January 12, 1973

"His films emphasize the tendency of different objects to take on new meanings when they are brought into close proximity, or when their usual context is changed."

--Hal Aigner, The Night Times, May, 1972

"Many films made in the Bay Area combine the qualities of ritual and abstraction. Larry Jordan has animated Victorian engravings to make abstract films bearing a ceremonial mark. Jordan's richly colored, whimsical films are among the most beautiful to be found in the Bay Area.

--Bob Sitton, The Folio, November, 1970

"Jordan is one of the collageists, and animators of film who can produce a significant vision. It's hard. Animation creates its own problems. The point is that Larry Jordan is finding a way to work seriously with animation, in a form which has very serious handicaps. Robert Breer is the only other artist I can think of who has attempted to work so complexly. Jordan is starting to significantly develop animation as a fine arts mode."

--Carl Linder, The San Francisco Observer, March, 1965

"The animated world of Larry Jordan exists at the border of wonder and terror. Using Victorian woodcuts and engravings, he creates a time and space that seem to move in the floating rhythms of an opium revery. The recurrence of certain objects (which may or may not be read as symbols) would have delighted philosopher Gaston Bachelard (author of such works as the "Psychoanalysis of Fire" and the "Poetics of Revery"). These objects, rich in the associations of an era distant in time yet vitally present in their curious on-screen life, draw us subtly into moods strong with fear or fragile with an evanescent nostalgia.

Jordan's imagery and mode of filmmaking are similar to what Max Ernst used in creating his surrealist series of Victoriana cutups, "La Dame 100 Tetes", and also to the complex, multi-layered boxes of Joseph Cornell, with their self-contained universes of memories and allusions. (Jordan, like his high-school friend Stan Brakhage, worked with Cornell on a number of films as well as attempting a number of boxes of his own.)

In Jordan's case, however, the literary references are kept to a minimum. Instead, the simultaneous use of a multitude of techniques creates films within films, multi-colored split screens, frames within frames and collage-films within flicker-films, all of which continually refer the viewer back to his actual presence at a movie. The effect dizzies. In this spinning world, strange and wondrous events occur--elephants fly, stiltmen walk the waters, and falling stars explode in a celebration of the imagination.

There is no logic, no plot. The title of one of the Duo Concertantes films, Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway, says it all--these works flow freely past the observing consciousness, framed in the film's frame by the doorway, through which we, with Patricia, gaze in wonder and awe.

The one narrative film in the program is based on another great opium revery, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Orson Welles's dramatic voiceover, rising and falling with the changing passions of the sea, creates an almost trance-like atmosphere for Jordan's manipulation of Gustave Dore's splendid illustrations. The opulence of these combined talents gives Jordan a rich lode for mining the most terrifying powers. A stunning experience, it resurrects Coleridge's poem from the albatross of its own high-school associations.

Larry Jordan's animation, though technically complex, creates a world vaster and more awesome than mere hand tricks would. A poet of the cinema in the tradition of George Melies, he takes us through the screen, as Cocteau's Orpheus took us through mirrors, into the enigmas of imagination. He inspires our impulses to revery and to search for the secret life and meaning of things and images. Alexander Jodorowsky, another alchemist of the screen ("ElTopo"), has expressed the desire to make films like trips. Larry Jordan has made them."

--David Harris, The Boston Phoenix (Center Screen Exhibition)

For the past nineteen years West Coast filmmaker Larry Jordan has worked with cut-out animation. Like the collage illustrator Allen Appel of the Washington Post, and the German designer Wilfried Satty (Annotated Dracula), Jordan employs nineteenth-century engravings as a prime source imagebank, allowing much free association to govern his juxtapositions. From Jordan's output of forty-four films, several magical musings have been selected -- Duo Concertantes (1964), Hanfai Asar (1965), Gymnopedics (1965) and Our Lady of the Sphere (1969) -- for this weekend's program in the winter animation series sponsored by the Carpenter Center's Center Screen, Harvard University. The Jordan selection includes a New England premiere: In the forty-two minute The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1978), Orson Welles' delivery gives an eldritch taint to the Coleridge classic while Jordan's effects provide a limited animation of Gustave Doré's magnificent and atmospheric illustrations (first published in 1875). For all three talents it's perfect casting. The Mariner's penance, you recall, was to fascinate spectators with periodic repeats of his tale, and, with this film, that's certain to be the case.

--Robert Stewart, The Real Paper, Boston