

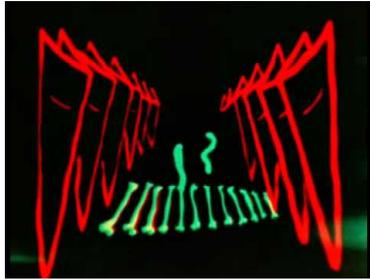
# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED ON FILM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

FRIDAY  
SEPTEMBER 20, 2019  
7 PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

## Directed by Yale Women: A Celebration of Women Filmmakers at Yale

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM  
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



**SPOOK SPORT** (Dir. Mary Ellen Bute, Norman McLaren, Ted Nemeth, 1939, 35mm, 8 min.)

**POLKA GRAPH** (Dir. Mary Ellen Bute, Ted Nemeth 1947, 16mm, 5 min.)

*Notes by Kit Basquin, author of Mary Ellen Bute: Pioneer Animator (2020, John Libbey Publishing)*

Pioneer animator Mary Ellen Bute (1906-1983) enrolled in the Department of Drama at Yale in the department's first year, 1925-1926, before it was separate from the School of Fine Arts. A Houston, Texas, native, Bute studied lighting, the history of stage design, and producing. Acting was not taught at Yale at that time, because instruction was readily available nearby in New York City. The three-year program led to a professional certificate, rather than a degree. Classmate Isabel Wilder, Thornton Wilder's sister, said of the 68 people in the course, ten were women. Only five finished, and all of these were playwrights. The program was directed by George Pierce Baker, a renowned teacher of playwriting recruited from Harvard. Bute was admitted on the basis of her professional drawing of a stage set sold to the Shuberts, who owned many theaters in New York City.

Bute had left Houston at the age of sixteen to study painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. 1923-1924. The next year she attended the Inter-Theatre Arts School in New York City, where she designed stage sets and assisted with student productions, including the lighting. After a year at Yale, Bute taught dance and drama on the Floating University, an around-the-world cruise for students, affiliated with NYU. In 1927-1928, Bute was a debutante in Houston in the evenings and assistant director of the Little Theatre in Houston during the day, where she painted scenery and supervised lighting.

Bute met Ted Nemeth, a commercial cinematographer, in 1934. They made their first five minute, 35mm black and white animated film directed by Bute in that year, RHYTHM IN LIGHT, in which abstract forms danced to music. MoMA's film library did not open until 1935, and Bute had not seen experimental films before she started making them. In 1939, Bute hired Norman McLaren, a Scottish filmmaker passing through New York on his way to Canada, where he would head the animation department of the National Film Board of Canada, to draw animation images on film stock for SPOOK SPORT, following Bute's storyboard. The images of a spook, a ghost, a bat, a rooster, and others danced to the music of Saint-Saëns' "Dance Macabre." The 8 minute, 35mm color film premiered at Radio City Music Hall.

POLKA GRAPH, a 4½ minute, 35mm color film directed by Bute, premiered in 1947. Ted Nemeth was the cinematographer. The abstract images polka to the music from the ballet suite "The Age of Gold," by Dmitri Shostakovich. It premiered at the Sutton Theatre in New York. Cecile Starr, film historian and critic, suggested that Bute send POLKA GRAPH to the 1952 Venice Film Festival, where it won a prize.

**THE LEGEND OF ROCKMONOTONE** (Dir. Phyllis Chillingworth, Charles Goetz, 1969, 16mm, 14 min.)

**AT THE ZOO** (Dir. Phyllis Chillingworth, Charles Goetz, 1969, 16mm, 3 min.)

*Notes by Phyllis Chillingworth '69 ART*

Having had a strong graphic background from The Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, and studying with Aaron Siskind, I was excited to combine my graphic eye with filmmaking in the MFA Program at Yale, with the Drama School next door, which enabled the use of actors, and John Hubley teaching a course on animation. I worked with Charlie Goetz on both films; he also graduated from The Institute of



**NEXT UP:** UPCOMING TREASURES SCREENINGS INCLUDE A 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF **BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID** ON **SEPTEMBER 27 AT 7PM**, AND THE CELEBRATION OF 50/150 YEARS OF COEDUCATION AT YALE CONTINUES WITH MORE FILMS DIRECTED BY WOMEN, INCLUDING **DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST**, DIRECTED BY JULIE DASH, SCREENING **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13 AT 2PM**. A SPECIAL SERIES, **THREE BY KUBRICK**, BEGINS WITH A BRAND-NEW 35MM PRINT OF **A CLOCKWORK ORANGE** ON **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10 AT 7PM**.

Design so he was also eager to experiment in film. We created a melodrama with a hero, a villain, and a heroine they both wanted. It was a kind of take-off on the silents, where rolling titles would carry the plot and piano track would provide the necessary emotion and suspense. With this basic structure and story line we were then able to invent so many fantasy scenes; our imaginations had no limits. No one taught us how to do any of this; we experimented on our own. I was particularly drawn to creating films somewhere positioned between reality and fantasy. Much of the film was shot 16mm, live action. Frames were then blown up onto large Kodalith sheets with colored gels added and re-animated on an Oxberry animation stand. ROCKMONOTONE is a playful visual romp! The soundtrack was created after the film was completed. We screened it at MoMA, where Charles Hoffman, noted piano player for silent films, gave the piano track, adding the suspense and drama. I toured campuses with the films, and Universal bought both films.

The Simon & Garfunkel song "At the Zoo" gave us the visual storyline and structure that enabled our imaginations and graphic abilities to run free. Some footage was shot live-action, 16mm, and then reanimated on an animation stand. We would blow up frames onto large Kodalith sheets, adding gels and make many overlapping passes on the stand. We edited the visuals to the beat of the soundtrack. It was all experimentation, new ground for us.

**DEMIAN [TRAILER]** (Dir. Carolyn Lamont, 1970, 16mm, 3 min.)

**CAT'S CRADLE [TRAILER]** (Dir. Carolyn Lamont, 1970, 16mm, 4 min.)

*Notes by Phyllis Chillingworth*

These two "titling experiments" were made by Carolyn Lamont '70 ART as part of her Yale MFA thesis. Carolyn saw the titling part of films important as it lays the mood, providing clues to the film, much like an empty stage sets the tone before a performance. Most title sections are created after the actual film is complete. However, Carolyn chose two contrasting books that hadn't yet been made into films so she wouldn't be influenced by them. *Demian* by Herman Hesse is a probing account of a young man's search for personal values and his quest for identity. The novel is a gradual internalization of the outer world. Carolyn wanted to maintain the ambiguity between inner and outer reality.

Carolyn wrote in her senior thesis: "I wanted to create an elusive quality about the characters which I achieved by fading their faces in and out and over each other while they were in constant flux and out of sync. I dared to use the simple image of the face through the entirety of the film because I believed it was symbolic of the telepathic quality of the book.

Lamont based the second trailer on the novel *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., a satirical commentary on the insanity of modern man. She wrote in her thesis, "One concept explored in the book is the close relationship between the process of creation (playing) and that of destruction, the amorality of science and the naivety of the brilliant mind... Like Vonnegut, I have chosen the game of cat's cradle as a means of structuring the film both conceptually and visually."

Carolyn created traveling mattes to block out sections of the cat's cradle pattern to allow live action images to be inserted. Carolyn stated, "The content of the inserts mainly dealt with concepts of the naivety of the brilliant mind and the closeness of the creative (play) process with the destructive one." You will see, for instance the juxtaposition of a child's hand shooting, a sling shot and a rocket launching, and turtles juxtaposed with tanks.

**END OF THE ART WORLD** (Dir. Alexis Krasilovsky, 1971, 16mm, 33 min.)

*Notes by Alexis Krasilovsky '71*

END OF THE ART WORLD started as a film in Murray Lerner's filmmaking class. I was the only—or one of the only—women studying filmmaking. The guys were mostly graduate students, as I recall. They would pick apart each others' dailies ruthlessly; if you could survive these critique sessions, liberally peppered with words like "bullshit," which at the time was new vocabulary for me, the quality of your film would toughen up. But no one gave me feedback in the class. I was invisible. That actually helped my film improve... If my film stands up to time, I have my fellow students' cold shoulders and the books that Sontag and Arnheim wrote to thank, as well as Murray Lerner, who was kind enough to let me, a mere undergraduate, into his filmmaking class.

Looking back, the way I handled PTSD from being one of the first coeds at Yale was to apply to the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. That allowed me to get college credit while spending a considerable amount of the Spring 1971 semester in New York instead of on campus. Michael Snow was assigned as my mentor. Meanwhile, however, I was lucky enough to be able to borrow a sync sound camera from D.A. Pennebaker, whose faith in me as a budding filmmaker went a long way towards validating my first efforts, no strings attached. I also took the money that my grandmother had given me to buy clothes to wear at Yale, and instead bought a 16mm Bolex, which I used to film Robert Rauschenberg in his studio as well as the Midwestern cows that I filmed to bi-pack in the camera as a special effect of cows walking through Warhol's 1971 opening at the Whitney. My camera was stolen back at Yale, when I was editing.

I had run away from home as a teenager, hoping to join Warhol's Factory. But I ran away in a green John Meyer of Norwich linen suit: all they would allow me to do was to transcribe audiotapes. Later, of course, I found out that women were not allowed to stay overnight—not even Viva or the other superstars. Maybe having something more meaningful to do with the Factory is what led me to wanting to make a documentary about the New York art world. Warhol allowed me to be one of the only camerapersons, male or female, filming his opening at the Whitney Museum in 16mm. I almost didn't finish making END OF THE ART WORLD, but fortunately, Prof. Jay Leyda admonished me that if I didn't complete it, I would never become a filmmaker.

**UPTOWN EXPRESS** (Dir. Sandra Luckow, 1987, 16mm, 15 min.)

*Notes by Sandra Luckow '87*

UPTOWN EXPRESS was my graduate film project in my second year at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. It was my first attempt at 16mm color with sync sound. The story is based very closely on an experience I had the previous summer with my Yale College roommate Denise Vinson BR '87. It won Excellence in Producing at the 1989 NYU First Run Festival. My Yale senior thesis film SHARP EDGES won the Louis Sudler Prize in the Performing and Creative Arts at the Class of 1987 graduation, at a time that we were still considered remnants of an experiment—not even the marble urinals had been removed from the girls' locker room at the gym.