

Visual Communications: 24 years and counting

Curated by
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On previous occasions when I have been asked to offer a retrospective survey of Visual Communications' past and ongoing achievements, I could not resist the temptation to place our organization's history within a distinctly Third World context. After all, Visual Communications—a Los Angeles-based Asian Pacific American media arts center—is a product of UCLA's seminal Ethnocommunications Program, an affirmative action program established at the UCLA Film School in 1968 to provide minority representation in the film and television

community laboratory through which such works, in this case, those geared towards the Asian Pacific American communities of Southern California and the nation, found a hungry and eager audience and inspired newer generations of film and video artists.

This selection of works represents a truncated edition of a larger, more comprehensive exhibit curated for the 1990 Los Angeles Arts Festival. Nevertheless, audiences will

SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2:00

<i>Homecoming Game</i> , Danny Kwan	1970	16mm	21:00
<i>Manzanar</i> , Robert Nakamura	1971	16mm	16:00
<i>Wong Sinsang</i> , Eddie Wong	1971	16mm	12:00
<i>The Journey</i> , Pat Lau and Glen Akira Iwasaki	1972	16mm	7:00
<i>Cruisin' J-Town</i> , Duane Kubo	1975	16mm	24:00
<i>Mochi Monster</i> , Van Troi Pang	1985	16mm	2:00
<i>Pak Bueng on Fire</i> , Sapachai Surongsain	1987	16mm	25:00

AT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART



department. More importantly, the program would equip students of color to move into mainstream Hollywood and offer a less stereotypical, more human image of minority peoples and their histories in this country.

Of course, as I have learned, the struggles did not stop for that first class of 13 students on registration day in the fall of 1968—they only intensified. Not only did the UCLA administration show decidedly less than enthusiastic support for the program from the beginning, but faculty and students alike at the film school proved antagonistic towards these minority "interlopers." Caught in an environment where education was leavened with generous portions of hostility and racism, that first year class adopted a "do-it-yourself" approach to filmmaking, often-times depending on each other for support and technical personnel. The resulting works may have been technically crude—at times defiantly so—but they fulfilled the need to create media that offered a much needed reinterpretation of the lives of people of color. Subsequent classes of students refined this mode of film production and gradually developed a more polished and assured body of works which did not compromise their commitment to affording a more honest and accurate depiction of the collective minority experience in America. It was in this way that a collective minority filmmaking "aesthetic" developed on the West Coast during the 1970s. More specifically, Visual Communications became a



Pak Bueng on Fire

find the productions in this more ethnic-specific presentation reflective of concurrent developments within Chicano/Latino, Afro-American, and Native American media. Too, this selection represents a sampling of but a few of Visual Communications' many productions completed during its first 23 years. For reasons of time limitations, works such as Duane Kubo and Donna Dietch's hallucinatory *City City*, Robert Nakamura's *Wataridori: Birds of Passage*, Alan Kondo's *I Told You So*, Foe Alo, Jr. and Takashi Fujii's *Vaitafe: Running Water*, and John Esaki's *Yuki Shimoda: Asian American Actor* were regrettably excluded. Video, a medium first exploited by VC-ers in 1976 and which continues to afford an additional avenue of creative production and access for current staffers, is also regrettably excluded for time limitations. Hopefully, these curatorial decisions will not distract from what is an exciting and comprehensive program in its own right.

I always feel a rush of excitement whenever I program works from Visual Communications' library as well as those surviving works from Asian American Ethnocommunications students. It gives me a sense of pride to present what is essentially our ongoing efforts at "cultural recovery"; and this affirms my faith that the work produced at VC continues to challenge, enlighten, and inspire. I hope that you, the audience, will agree and be similarly enlightened and entertained.