

# Through the Sands of Time:

A Tribute to the L.A. Independent Film Oasis, 1976-81

Curated by  
Terry Cannon

**T**he Los Angeles Independent Film Oasis was founded in 1976 by a small group of film enthusiasts with the primary purpose of presenting an on-going series of screenings devoted to experimental cinema. The inaugural program was Jonas Mekas' *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, which was shown on March 7, 1976 at the Haymarket, a now-defunct Socialist bookstore/coffeehouse/gathering place located on South Parkview Street near MacArthur Park. For roughly the next five years, almost exclusively on Sunday evenings and in a variety of venues

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 7:00

<i>Projection Instructions</i> , Morgan Fisher	1976	16mm	4:00
<i>Dead Reckoning</i> , David Wilson	1980	16mm	9:00
<i>Our Lady of the Angels</i> , Chris Regan	1977	16mm	13:00
<i>Abacus</i> , Lyn Gerry	1980	16mm	5:00
<i>Renee Walking/TV Talking</i> , Tom Leeson	1980	16mm	10:00
<i>Foregrounds</i> , Pat O'Neill	1978	16mm	14:00
<i>Rose for Red</i> , Diana Wilson	1980	16mm	2:30

### Three Tenses of Cinema:

<i>Bertha's Children</i> ,	1976	16mm	8:00
<i>Future Perfect</i> ,	1980	16mm	12:00
<i>Murray and Max Talk about Money</i> ,	1979	16mm	16:00

Roberta Friedman and Grahame Weinbren

<i>Gratuitous Facts</i> , Tom Leeson	1981	16mm	12:00
<i>Sleeping Dogs (Never Lie)</i> , Pat O'Neill	1978	16mm	9:00

## AT UCLA MELNITZ THEATER



around Los Angeles, the Oasis presented an eclectic mixture of work which reflected the group's passion for and deep commitment to independent/experimental cinema. In addition to the Haymarket, screenings were also held at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA) on Robertson Boulevard, the LAICA Downtown gallery on Traction Avenue; and Founders' Hall on the campus of the University of Southern California. The final Oasis presentation was in 1981.

The rather brief existence of the Oasis belies the organization's unique and significant role in the history of experimental film in Los Angeles. It can be argued that the period from 1976 through 1981 was a "golden age" in terms of experimental film activity in the City of the Angels. First of all, there were three organizations exhibiting experimental work on a weekly basis: the Oasis, Pasadena Filmforum, and Theatre Vanguard (later to be reconstituted as Encounter Cinema at UCLA). From a production standpoint, this brief period saw the completion of a relatively large number of major works by L.A.-based filmmakers, including Pat O'Neill's *Sidewinder's Delta* (1976); James Whitney's *Wu Ming* (1977); William Scaff's *Searching for Planes* (1977) and *In this Trembling Shadow* (1979), two films from his remarkable Super 8 "Dream Trilogy," to be completed in 1982 with the release of *Rite of Passage*; Chick Strand's *Soft Fiction* (1979); Daina Krumin's *Baboblicons* (1981); and Betzy Bromberg and Laura Ewig's *Marasmus* (1981). This period also saw a blossoming of film installations and mixed-media works, many of which were the products of the fertile imaginations of Oasis members. Although Morgan Fisher would not finish another film for nearly a decade after the release of *Projection Instructions* (1976), he did produce four film installations between 1976 and 1981. David Wilson's landmark Super 8, 3-D film installation *Tying Dogs' Feet* was presented at Pasadena Filmforum in August of 1980, and it proved to be a precursor to the Museum of Jurassic Technology. Roberta Friedman and Grahame Weinbren's work during this period concentrated on exploring the notion of temporality in film and was influenced by the structures of contemporary avant-garde music. Their programs often incorporated film, tape, slides, and the live music/sonic works of Z'ev, Marty Krystall, Jim Fulkerson, and others.

Oasis certainly was at the nucleus of this very creative explosion. Organizationally, in terms of its inner workings and decision-making structure, the Oasis favored a very utopian approach. Whereas Pasadena Filmforum and Theatre Vanguard/Encounter Cinema took the despotic approach to film exhibition (these organizations were basically run by one person), the administrative and programming decisions of the



Oasis were jointly shared by most of the members of the group acting as a collective. The filmmakers, critics, and teachers who comprised the membership of the Oasis participated in all of the facets of running a film organization—from the creative challenges of programming to the mundane tasks of taking tickets and serving refreshments at screenings. This concept of artists in the role of administrators was a unique notion in experimental film in Los Angeles; and though there may have been within the Oasis an ongoing battle between idealistic principles and practical considerations, there is no doubt that this organization had a profound impact in its time, quite unlike that of any other short-lived film group that comes to mind. Individual members often “curated” group shows, thereby assuring that many different filmic tastes were represented. Many of the filmmaking members of the Oasis toured nationally and internationally with their work, thereby interacting with other artists and returning to Los Angeles to spread the word on the latest trends and developments in other major centers of experimental film activity. Such exposure allowed Oasis members to bring to Los Angeles new works by countless American and foreign filmmakers. Roberta Friedman and Grahame Weinbren, for example, were instrumental in introducing Los Angeles audiences to the work of Jenny Okun, William Raban, Marilyn Halford, Malcolm LeGrice, Rosa von Praunheim, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi.

Another major function of the Oasis was to package its members’ works into

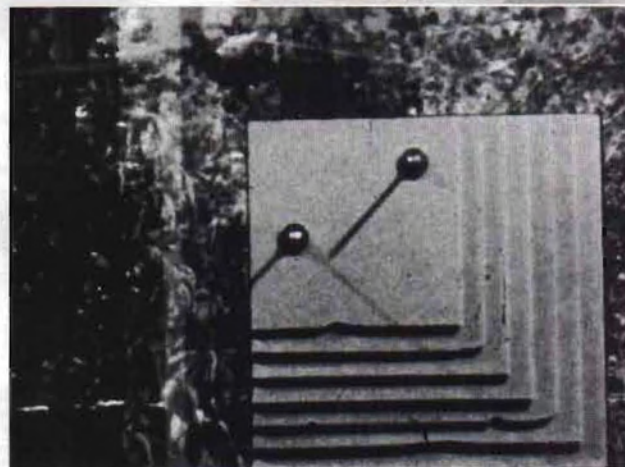
programs which toured other experimental film showcases around the country. One such touring program was assembled by giving each member of Oasis, filmmaker or not, the chance to select a film made by another member. Selecting a film then obliged the person who chose it to write a brief critical response to that work. Shortly after the demise of Oasis, Pasadena Filmforum continued this unique concept of packaging and touring the work of Southland artists; several such programs, under the title “L.A. Filmworks,” were presented throughout the United States in late 1981 and 1982.

In terms of this tribute program to the Los Angeles Independent Film Oasis, it should be stated that the full range of films made by Oasis members could not be adequately represented in one evening. All films selected were completed during the 1976-1981 life span of Oasis; many received their world premieres at Oasis programs. Although not all of the filmmaking members of Oasis are represented here, hopefully this program will, at the very least, reflect the multiplicity of filmic interests and the high quality of work to be found in the Oasis during this period.

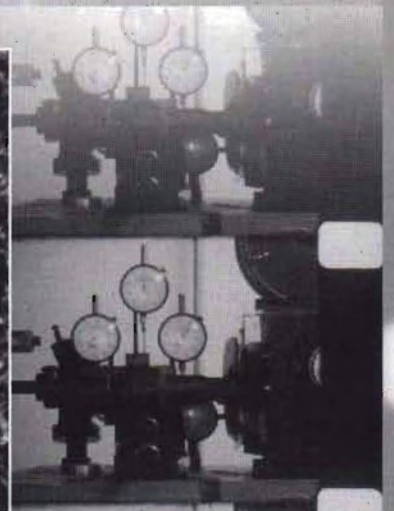
The above caveat aside, I would like to acknowledge all of the members of the Oasis not represented in this tribute program, many of whom played significant roles in the history of this very important Los Angeles film organization: Paul Arthur, Amy Halpern, David James, David Lebrun, Sandra Matthews, Bill Moritz, Beverly O'Neill, Robin Palanker, Dennis Phillips, Magdalena Rangel, Susan Rosenfeld, Tim Shepard, and Arlene Zeichner.



Four stills from *Murray and Max Talk about Money*



*Foregrounds*



*Dead Reckoning*