

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUBJECT: Pat O'Neill

Biography:

Pat O'Neill studied fine arts, and has enjoyed successful gallery expositions of his sculptures and still photography (which often involves layered imagery, or ironic surreal juxtapositions in a simple snapshot). Throughout his career he continues to make installations in art galleries (e.g., *Screen*, 1969; *Two Sweeps*, 1977; *Let's Make a Sandwich*, 1982), which involve not only looped film projections but also sculptural elements. He began filmmaking as an extension of photography with a "documentary" *By the Sea* (1962), co-produced with Bob Abel (who later became famous for his advertising films), for the finale of which O'Neill printed images of beach activities on high-contrast film for a dazzling sun effect, and edited them in crisp dynamic rhythms. His 1966 *7362* (named after a high-contrast film stock) uses the potentials of a contact printer to layer images, and film emulsions to give special textures to them; its mixed imagery of oil pumps and a nude woman transform, in various episodes, into soft sensuous or vibrant hard-edged abstractions. In a series of five films (*Runs Good*, 1970; *Easyout*, 1971; *Down Wind*, 1973; *Saugus Series*, 1974; and *Sidewinder's Delta*, 1976) O'Neill created one of the most complex and engaging studies of contemporary consciousness: with optical printing, individual images are synthesized from

several different elements derived from various sources -- some older found-footage and others carefully shot scenes -- which modulate regularly and raise issues of perception and analysis. Individual scenes contain ambiguous spatial clues, and the collage of imagery both in space and time imbalances contradictory responses of accepting illusory depth-perception of "reality" and anecdotal representation versus experiencing purely abstract push-pull of colors and shapes. Intricate sound collages and occasional written texts reinforce these optical equivocations, and the regular reoccurrence of certain patterns of imagery -- serene time-lapses of landscape, animal behavior, cactus, exhibitions -- urge the viewer to reconsider at every turn. In the most complex of these films, *Saugus Series*, seven discrete numbered episodes add more tension to the mix, for a sound from one sequence may occur five minutes later accompanying an "unrelated" image, which the formalized divisions both seem to forbid and make more obvious. The juxtaposition of eclectic imagery in these films abounds with great wit, tough irony, and a deep humanity that, for example, can see human folly and nostalgia as parallel to the compulsions and dignity of animals. Frequent evocations of the fine arts tradition also range from paradoxical shots of museum artworks displayed in cases like encaged show animals to the incandescent scene of a pair of O'Neill's boots being painted in time lapse, recalling Van Gogh's canvas of his boots, and Rudy Burckhardt's photo of Jackson Pollock's spattered boots. O'Neill has continued to make short lyrical films, as well as an hour-long 35mm film, *Water and Power* (1989), which uses his same personal style of optically-printed montage and time lapse to focus on his native Los Angeles as an environment. - Dr. William Moritz
[Source: iotaCenter website]

Filmography:

Horizontal Boundaries (2008, 35mm, 23 minutes, color, stereo sound)
The Decay of Fiction (2002, 35mm, 74 minutes, color, sound)
Coreopsis (1998, 35mm, 6 minutes, color, silent)
Squirt Gun Step Print (1998, 35mm, 5 minutes, black-and-white, silent)
Horizontal Boundaries (1998-2008, 35mm, 25 minutes, color, silent)
Trouble in the Image (1996, 35mm, 38 minutes, color, sound)
Water and Power (1989, 35mm, 38 minutes, color, sound)
Foregrounds (1979, 16mm, 13 minutes, color, sound)
Two Sweeps (1979, 16mm, 20 minutes, color, silent)
Let's Make a Sandwich (1978, 16mm, 20 minutes, color, silent)
Sleeping Dogs (Never Lie) (1978, 16mm, 9 minutes, black-and-white/color, silent/sound)
Sidewinder's Delta (1976, 16mm, 20 minutes, color, sound)
Saugus Series (1974, 16mm, 18 minutes, color, sound)
Down Wind (1973, 16mm, 15 minutes, color, sound)
Last of the Persimmons (1972, 16mm, 6 minutes, color, sound)
Easyout, 1971 (16mm, 9 minutes, color, sound)
Runs Good (1970, 16mm, 15 minutes, color, sound)
Screen (1969, 16mm, 4 minutes, color, silent)
7362 (1967, 16mm, 10 minutes, color, sound)
Bump City (1964, 16mm, 6 minutes, color, sound)
By the Sea, Collaboration with Robert Abel (1963, 16mm, 10 minutes, black-and-white, silent)

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Cameraperson: Jeff Johnson

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Cameraperson: Jeff Johnson

Transcript Reviewer: Beverly and Pat O'Neill, Liz Hesik

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Cameraperson: Jeff Johnson

Transcript Reviewer: Beverly and Pat O'Neill, Liz Hesik

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Transcript Reviewer: Beverly and Pat O'Neill, David James

TAPE 1: PAT O'NEILL

00:00:41 ADAM HYMAN

All right, we're going to go, let's start with, will you please say and spell your name?

00:00:45 PAT O'NEILL

Pat O'Neill, P-A-T O'-N-E-I-L-L.

00:00:51 ADAM HYMAN

That's the hardest question of the day.

00:00:52 PAT O'NEILL

Oh good. Can I go now? [laugh]

00:00:54 ADAM HYMAN

All right, could you start by telling me where, when you were born, who were the other members of your family, what did your parents do?

00:01:03 PAT O'NEILL

I was born in 1939 in Los Angeles. My parents were both teachers. My father taught in the jail actually when I was really young. He taught in Juvenile Hall, taught high school and so he had one of the rougher teaching assignments. My mother was a grammar school teacher, first grade, second grade. I was the only child.

00:01:40 PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And spent a lot of time by myself naturally. Went to school, found a lot of things that I could do on my own. I was rather shy by the time I got to school. Got recognized for making art in kindergarten.

00:02:12 ADAM HYMAN

Were you already drawing then just different things? In what way? What were you recognized?

00:02:18 PAT O'NEILL

Well people liked my paintings, you know, it was gouache on newsprint in those days or kalsomine on newsprint. My mother saved so many of them for years. I'd be surprised, as an adult, to find them in stored in boxes

First grade things got a little rougher. There was more schoolyard competition and I'd never done any sports particularly, so I was behind. I was always behind everybody skill wise. But I went to a very nice school and I could walk to it. It was about a mile. Kids walked to school in those days.

00:03:02

ADAM HYMAN

What school was it?

00:03:03

PAT O'NEILL

It was the 74th Street School, 74th Street and Gramercy Place in South Los Angeles, right next to the City of Inglewood, a few blocks away. I did pretty well in school. I had learned to read quite fluidly, quite well before I went to school so that side of it was pretty easy. Everything went pretty well for a while. And, oh god, how to generalize all of that.

00:03:46

ADAM HYMAN

What were the names of your parents please?

00:03:49

PAT O'NEILL

My father was called "Red" and he was born in Canada in 1900. He had an interesting background in that he moved into the wilderness in Northern Canada and Alaska when he got out of high school and he became a teacher. He taught in a one-room school. He was a trapper. He was a fisherman. I think he made most of his living fishing, but he had these teaching jobs around the north.

00:04:25

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And he became a very self-sufficient guy. He'd learned to do just about any trade. He was a good carpenter and he liked to do everything around the house himself. He built part of the house that I grew up in. He was a pretty quiet man. He was not very communicative most of the time. I think he was somewhat haunted by, I think he really wanted to be where he used to be.

00:05:07

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

His mother, and there were three children, came to Los Angeles in the early '20s. They went through Teacher's College. Well he'd been in Teacher's College in Vancouver, B.C. and then received his credential in Los Angeles and went to work at, the depths of the Depression, 1931. He was always very proud of the fact that he was one of the last people hired before they started a freeze on hiring teachers.

00:05:44

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And my mother by that time had a teaching job in Orange and they were married in 1935. My mother had five siblings. She was born in Mexico.

00:07:16

ADAM HYMAN

Tell me about your mother

00:07:18

PAT O'NEILL

My mother was the second youngest of five, the twin sister of her brother Robert. She was born in 1908 and grew up in a little town called Matehuala, in Central Mexico, a mining town. She was there in 1913 when the Revolution started. And they saw some action in their town. In fact I have photographs that someone made of soldiers firing out of their windows and kids hovering in the corner.

00:08:22

PAT O'NEILL

The family left Mexico and moved to Cuba when she was eight. They lived in Oriente Province in the town of Banes, which is right across the bay from Guantanamo. It actually is Guantanamo Bay, the town of Banes. They lived in Cuba for six or seven years, and came to the United States, spent time in Oregon and stayed in Bakersfield for a long while.

00:10:26

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

My father's father had been a builder in Vancouver. He'd actually come from Manitoba. He was a wheat farmer in Manitoba, made a lot of money.

00:11:03

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

This is late 19th Century; came to Vancouver, I'm not sure where he learned to be a carpenter, but he built amazing craftsman houses from about 1890 to 1914. Anyway, I mean the main thing, my father really loved nature and he loved to be in the wilderness and so he exposed me to that, which is probably the greatest gift that I got from him was a love of the wild, fishing and being away from institutional life because he was totally immersed in that when he was here.

00:12:00

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

We didn't get along well, once I became a teenager. He was heavy handed. He was, he wanted to be king. He was king of the house. I didn't cross him up. And I was continually in trouble. To avoid all that I really began engaging more with art things, making these small environments, which I'd do in places where there was water.

00:12:31

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Ideally, there would be a river or beach environment, someplace with water and one could work with the soil and make canals and buildings and one thing or another. I think a lot of the time I was, I was reaching for something to be involved in that I could become totally focused on, or forget about the real world. I guess this is the thing that everybody gets into when they're really surviving by their imagination. One discovers a time when building an imaginary world becomes a necessary survival tool.

00:13:17

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I did a lot of that. I drew, painted and dabbled in things as a kid. Went to some films. I wasn't an avid filmgoer, but did take in some films. I remember going to GRAPES OF WRATH and being greatly moved by that. I think that was made in '41. I must have seen it in '46 or seven. Also there was another chapter earlier living with some family friends up in Oregon, a couple who had a subsistence farm.

00:14:03

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

My folks met these people because they were looking for a place to pitch a tent, before I was born, and there was an apple orchard. It was a farm that had essentially gone to seed, but the people living there were just amazing. They were completely self-sufficient, and off the grid. Katie and Frank Karskadden; he was probably 70 when I first met him and I suddenly recognized what it meant to see somebody who was a free spirit, living as he chose.

00:14:43

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Although he worked hard, he was poor, utterly disconnected from society, yet happy. He really enjoyed himself and he treated me less like a child. I was a child, but he made me feel that I was somehow at his same level. He was easy way to be with. And I really responded to that.

00:15:14

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

We vacationed at Gold Beach, Oregon all through the years when I was growing, up until I was eight. And on that site I found some ruined buildings. A farm area had been developed there and then abandoned. The forest grew around it forcing me to walk through its tangled under growth, I came across foundations and parts of buildings, car chassis, and the leftovers of a farm from 25, 30 years earlier.

00:16:00

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

That genuinely appealed to me. I was enjoying living in these abandoned cars and creating folklore. It was a little scary, too. Maybe some person or a bear might appear out of the woods. But that was a really happy period. I remember we were there on V.J. Day in 1945 when the war ended and it came through on the radio.

00:16:33

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And I remember hearing horns blowing all up and down the Rogue River when that happened. When I finished 7th grade we took a long trip. Being teachers, my parents had time off for their seventh year sabbatical. I could be home schooled. I missed the 8th grade entirely and we went to Cuba-- to Banes just before the revolution, then to New England, and Canada. It was a whole year of exploration while living in a trailer.

00:17:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And it was a whole year of one kid living with two parents and no one else. Missing the 8th grade was not a good idea socially, but no one considered that much. [laugh] When I returned, once again I was not quite in sync with my peers. So I became even more inclined to withdraw into art making. I was reading Steinbeck and began Faulkner at age 14. I took out art books from the downtown library, reading randomly. I rediscovered Dali's painting, THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY that must have been the first art I had noticed when I was age 5, in LIFE Magazine. The first time I heard New Orleans jazz was on my father's car radio. I became a life long fan of the blues and traditional jazz. And, you know, let's nibble on a different question, huh?

00:18:04

ADAM HYMAN

Let's do two quick follow ups with that and maybe it'll be clear. First, were you learning any of like the carpentry and jack of all trade skills from your father?

00:18:17

PAT O'NEILL

Uh-huh. I was often engaged in handing him tools and he built a fireplace on the house so I was the guy that kept the bricks wet. And he worked at chores all the time and I gradually picking up his skills. He was a pretty good mechanic and he would lift an engine out of a car to work on it. So that became something I was familiar with.

00:18:50

ADAM HYMAN

And then how was their general response or feedback or encouragement to any of your artistic practices?

00:18:59

PAT O'NEILL

Well my mother was on board with it. My father was tactful about it, but I don't think he really approved of what I was doing. He didn't understand it, but he was restrained. He never threatened me about it, but it was, okay what can you do with this? It's interesting, since he came of age in the Depression.

00:19:33

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Well. When he was 29 and the Depression experience primarily shaped his life. Oh and I believe that and probably what happened to my grandfather losing a lot of money in real estate investments affected him. That really pushed him over the edge I think. And my father really, really got into doing everything cash and carry, doing everything he could himself.

00:20:14 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Being just incredibly careful with money and encouraging me to go to work when I was 11, I think. I got to be a lawn boy and I had --nearly a dozen customers when I was in high school. I was pretty busy on the weekends cutting all these lawns and making money a dollar at a time.

00:21:01 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

But again it reinforced being alone all the time. Either I worked or went to school. And I fully embraced cars right from the beginning, fantasizing about cars, learning about cars.

00:21:32 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

At 14 I built a model for the Fisher Body Craftsmen's Guild, which was a thing that General Motors did between '48 and some time in the mid '60s when they stopped. It was a styling contest for kids and I learned about it somewhere or an auto show or something. I thought that would be fun to do. So I did one when I was 14. It wasn't very good. And I did another one when I was 16 and won a prize for that.

00:22:05 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And in the following year I did yet a third one which was actually pretty respectable for what it was. I wanted to go to Art Center, to learn automotive design. Several friends had done that. It was expensive and my grades were good enough to get into UCLA so I was strongly urged to go there and I'm glad I did. Both of my parents had gone to UCLA so they approved of it.

00:22:40 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I lived at home during my undergraduate years; drove across town from, from Inglewood to Westwood.

00:22:53 **ADAM HYMAN**

Just a couple of quick facts. What high school did you go to?

00:22:57 **PAT O'NEILL**

George Washington.

00:22:58 **ADAM HYMAN**

Where's that?

00:22:59 **PAT O'NEILL**

It's 108th and Western.

00:23:02 **ADAM HYMAN**

What year did you graduate high school?

00:23:04 **PAT O'NEILL**

1957.

00:23:06

ADAM HYMAN

And as part of college as well, well just for these, the car things that you were doing, were these like large-scale models of cars? Were they drawings and plans? What was involved?

00:23:19

PAT O'NEILL

No, they came up with the scale. The cars wound up being about that long so - you would start with certain parameters. They'd give you- you a schematic and say go to it.

00:23:36

ADAM HYMAN

What other artistic or design things were you delving in prior to college?

00:23:45

PAT O'NEILL

Well part of it was that I got my first car when I was 14 and spent a lot of loving care restoring, it was a 1938 Chevrolet, which was only 15 years old at the time. But it was already an antique in my mind. I poured a lot of resources into that. But again I was still doing it on the cheap because, I was earning my money mowing lawns and... oh, then there was also the bottle gatherings phase when, a lot of people used to throw their beer bottles out on the vacant lots in the neighborhood.

00:24:22

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I'd go around with my little coaster wagon at age 8 and gather them all up and take them to the market so I could get a buck or two. And that kept me busy for a while. I got the car and that absorbed me until I graduated from high school. Then I wanted to build something more ambitious and I really wanted to - build a car from scratch body wise, but I knew I couldn't pull that off.

00:24:50

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I was looking around and I found a car that someone had built. A company existed in the '50s, there were a number of companies building sports car like bodies that you could re-body a stock chassis or you could build a chassis and put the shell on top. And this one turned up for sale. I think I paid about \$600.00 for it. It was a raw fiberglass shell. It was a really nice design.

00:25:20

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Later it became a commercial project and several were made and raced. Also about that time I was going to road races at airports. There - were road races in Santa Barbara and in Palm Springs. - This would have been about the age of 13, 14, 15 and I wanted to be a driver. This was a time when it was a really amateur sport and there were people who built their own cars and raced and sometimes won.

00:25:57

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And I thought that would really be cool. So by 17 I think I started to build this car. I got the body and then I found somebody that had a chassis that was the right proportions for that body. I did some modification on it. It was a chassis that had been built for another commercial project that had been abandoned and so I got the chassis, I got the body, I bought a '50 Ford and I took the engine out.

00:26:25

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I think I got that whole car for fifty bucks and I was maybe about \$800.00, \$900.00 into the chassis and the body. Then everything else was made by hand. It was strictly a fair weather car. It didn't have a top. And I drove it for a while. It handled nicely. It could have been a pretty decent car if I had put a little more money into it.

00:26:58

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

But by then I was going to UCLA, investigating industrial design. There was absolutely no interest in cars there. The car (in the late '50s) was clearly a societal problem and the smartest thing we could contribute, would be to invent a new way to travel around. Let's think about that, the big picture rather than the romance of fast cars. That kind of shoved it into the background. I sold my car around '62 to a kid who destroyed it in an accident.

00:27:39

ADAM HYMAN

When you were building it, where were you, where you able to do the work? Where were you doing the work?

00:27:44

PAT O'NEILL

We had, my father had built a space to keep a boat in the back yard of our house, at 82nd Street and St. Andrews Place right off Western. He didn't have a boat for a while so I put the car in there. I worked in that space, enlisting a few friends to carry tools/parts around, figuring out how to build it, making mistakes, and doing it over. I wondered how far could I go with this: this weekly cash outlay, forty bucks or thirty bucks or something.

00:28:23

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

At the time, a custom car builder called George Barris made fantasy cars out of Fords, Mercurys and Oldsmobiles from the '50s. He invented chopping tops and dropping cars to customize these Detroit designs. As a kid I thought that was really cool. I used to ride my bicycle all the way to Downey to watch him work. And reading the press and thinking about this. I was just saturated by this culture. Then I had a few friends who were too.

00:29:12

ADAM HYMAN

And how would you get, when you went to races in your early teens in Santa Barbara or Palm Springs, how were you getting there?

00:29:19

PAT O'NEILL

I would go to Santa Barbara on the bus. Palm Springs, I remember once my mother drove us there. I had several friends who came along. Other times, someone would be old enough to drive and we'd go. We didn't want to pay the five bucks to get in so we climbed over the fence. We would be in some far part of the course watching.

00:29:50

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It was very small scale with very little hype connected to it. It was just basically these guys who were crazy about going fast.

00:29:59

ADAM HYMAN

Was there any other aspects of like artistic consciousness that you were developing in those years or in your college, early college years?

00:30:10

PAT O'NEILL

Early in college I didn't have a major. I was sort of flailing around. This was '58, the year of the Sputnik adventure with Russia. I was encouraged to study engineering. My folks thought I should either be an engineer if I could do it, but I was not mathematically inclined. It didn't really interest me.

00:30:43

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Then the fallback was to earn a teaching credential. I didn't relish that prospect. I gradually started going to the art school and investigating its programs especially industrial design. The industrial design program took five-years to complete. At the time it was fairly new program. It was sponsored by some famous names in that design culture like Henry Dreyfus and John Demare.

00:31:28

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It centered its mission on the initiative to bring social values into the process of making products. It was heavily research oriented, seeking to solve problems and presenting proposals in such a way that someone might want to build it. This appealed to me because I could incorporate so many of my early obsessions. And also they had a shop in the art school for design students: a wood shop, metal shop, and spray-painting shop.

00:32:15

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I became enthusiastic about pursuing this as an undergraduate. When I graduated I was starting to cool on it because I began realizing that I would have to work in a corporate situation.

00:32:53 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Early on, I also started taking sculpture and photography classes and enjoying art history.

00:33:25 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I had a photo teacher, Don Chipperfield who presented the deeper problems of the medium in his critiques. He allowed me to think more seriously about image making.

00:34:00 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And so in a few years I was doing that and I was doing a lot of dark room work. I got interested, in printing, in ways of taking photographic information and changing it in a dark room the manual way. And that sort of led me into, into the first film, which was we started in '61. BY THE SEA...

00:35:00 **ADAM HYMAN**

So before going to BY THE SEA, who else was teaching at that time who had an impact upon you?

00:35:12 **PAT O'NEILL**

I met Bob Heinecken who was still teaching graphic design at the time. Then he began transitioning from a career as a designer to a practicing artist in photography. That transformation was valuable for me to watch. He had served in the Korean War, as an Air Force pilot. He was a small guy, perhaps 5'2" I guess, and somewhat macho.

00:35:55 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He could be indifferent, but he always supported the students who he felt were exploring something inventive. John Neuhart, another key figure taught design. Neuhart worked for the Charles Eames office as a display designer and he had broad interests in form of all kinds. In his display practice, he had contact with a number of different cultures.

00:36:33 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He would bring in all manner of odd things, telling the stories connected with each one, revealing how reality was organized within different societies. He showed us the various techniques of printing processes. Neuhart was an amazing lecturer offering us access to his encyclopedic experience with visual cultural. It wasn't a practice class; it was entirely a history, a survey of the state of global form.

00:37:10 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He brought John Whitney Sr. to UCLA - to show some of his work and to set up a device called the Lissajous Pendulum.

00:37:24 **ADAM HYMAN**

Can you spell that?

00:37:25

PAT O'NEILL

L-I-S-S-A-J-O-U-S, named after its French inventor. It was a drawing instrument that consisted of a pendulum suspended from the ceiling with bars that came down. It had a secondary joint in it, so that one pendulum hung from another pendulum.. The motion, at the bottom, was influenced by these two pendulums, and their action was adjusted by moving weights up and down.

00:38:01

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

This caused the pen at the bottom to make a drawing on paper, a drawing that had amazing properties. As the pendulums' action decayed the drawing would make a figure that would get gradually smaller and smaller in very precise increments. It would make something that looked a bit like the oscilloscope pattern: an electronic signal that was endlessly beautiful.

00:38:41

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I don't know where the mechanism itself came from. It was quite elaborately fabricated. I think it had been made in Europe and he, or maybe the Eames office had acquired it. But John Whitney was an influence then. This would be around 1961.

00:39:03

ADAM HYMAN

Did you get to interact with Whitney much while he was setting that up or was he around a lot?

00:39:06

PAT O'NEILL

He wasn't around a lot, but he would come to present a workshop for a week or so. Later, during a summer school he actually taught the whole session. In grad school, I was the T.A. for Tom Jennings who was very fond of printing processes. He had bought offset presses and a letterpress for the students.

00:39:37

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

When the letterpress was set up, we learned to set type and how to make designs that could be printed on it. As the T.A. for that class I became the letter press guy for a year or two. He also he bought copy cameras so we could take our artwork and make a negative, which could be processed in the dark room and the result could be printed.

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2: PAT O'NEILL

0000:00:46

ADAM HYMAN

So yeah, tell me about the interactions with the Eames' office.

00:00:50

PAT O'NEILL

The Charles and Ray Eames office was very much a presence and they were - the most advanced design group on the west coast at the time. A number of people that I studied with had founded the studio. So we went there on tours - several times and they were doing exhibitions like "Mathematica", an early one that exhibited elaborate mathematical models.

00:01:31

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And they were doing film work. They were among the first designers who made quasi-experimental films like TOCCATA FOR TOY TRAINS. Later, of course they did POWERS OF TEN, and their all designs had great reception; one was aware of their inventiveness. It was a place you could aspire to work at.

00:02:03

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I had friends who got jobs there. It was very prestigious and quite a prize if you could get hired. My experience came mostly through John Neuhart who with his wife Marilyn, John Whitney Sr. and Parke Meek had helped Ray and Charles establish the studio. . Well, to finishing talking about John, who was so enthusiastic. He moved and talked fast displaying his passion that became contagious. He would get a round of applause at the end of classes.

00:02:53

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The comparison between the intense activity in design and the fine arts program was very, very stark because all the painting instructors were committed to the most traditional modes of figurative abstraction. I mean their aesthetic moment probably peaked back in the '20s and '30s.

00:03:30

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It really didn't attract my interest. I didn't fit into that. Oliver Andrews, a sculpture instructor, intrigued me even though he was somewhat traditional. But, he was a hands on guy and appreciative of... well, what to say. If a student were serious about the work, he would engage in a dialog and if someone weren't he would brush him/her off. He had begun building a sculpture department that involved bronze casting, and I found engaging work coming out of that.

00:04:16

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He died unfortunately sometime in the late '60s. He was killed in a diving accident. Andrews turned out to be an ally because he was more open to expanding possibilities in art than any of the painting faculty for whom pop art was anathema, this was '61, '62, '63, when Rauschenberg and Johns had shows at the Pasadena Art Museum. I had begun to visit contemporary galleries even before that.

00:04:51

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The Dwan Gallery in Westwood, and the Ferus were the two biggest ones early on. And I started seeing that, ah, there was this other potential in art: possibilities far wider than painting or sculpture. The new ideas delved into all manner of cultural debris and, theater. Alan Kaprow had begun his Happenings: making performance, human activity (in a non-theatrical realm) visible.

00:05:41

PAT O'NEILL

The art world blossomed. This was a hopeful time I felt to be an artist. Pop emerged and it seemed that new initiatives would expand forever. So many galleries opened. Artists experimented with radically different content and materials.

00:06:15

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

My good friend at the time, Carl Cheng, also had studied Industrial Design decided to become a sculptor. Initially, he fabricated little machines that demonstrated something absurd, but appeared to be scientific. Also met up with H.C. Westermann, Henry Clifford Westermann, a sculptor from Connecticut who was a Navy guy and a circus performer.

00:06:58

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He made terrific sculptures in the '60s and '70s. He didn't have a very long productive life. He died quite young, but he was like a rural craftsman who made philosophically strange objects.

00:07:33

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He constructed one out of plywood. This was probably an eight-foot tall sculpture. It had a knot in it that was entirely carved out of laminated plywood. What a beautiful piece. He had a retrospective at the County Art Museum in about '74 or five, I think. I met him at the Dilexi Gallery around that time.

00:07:59

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Early on Irving Blum showed Pop at his gallery near the Ferus on La Cienega. He presented Warhol for the first time in L.A., this would have been about '64, when he showed Warhol's SOUP CANS and BRILLO BOXES. All these objects shocked and challenged the mind. What constituted appropriate subject matter for art?

00:08:37

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Did any of this make sense? Claes Oldenburg built a total environment, rather like a bodega in a New York space where he produced sculptural replicas of everyday items, shoes, shirts, Coca Cola bottles, all made out of very rough plaster and oil paint. He displayed and sold all these goods/sculptures.

00:09:23

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Oldenburg did a happening in Los Angeles titled AUTO BODIES around '63 and he called for performers. I was in that. Bob Abel was in it. It happened at the parking lot for the Pan Pacific Auditorium. And as a performer you didn't really get much of an idea about the whole thing, but you were instructed to lie on the ground, lots of people lying on the ground while others drove around us. And that was my first happening I think.

00:10:10

ADAM HYMAN

What was sort of the effect of it or response to it that you've heard of, even if you didn't like feel it at the time that you were performing?

00:10:20

PAT O'NEILL

It was pretty low key. I don't know that I ever read anything about it.

00:10:27

ADAM HYMAN

And you made, you talked about like you and Bob Heinecken were like moving from design to art. So I'm curious about how for you those are different?

00:10:38

PAT O'NEILL

Design and art? Well the obvious difference is that if you're a designer you're working for a client. So you're in a situation where your relationship with a client is all-important, and naturally represents a certain level of compromise depending on the client. Today this concept has become quaint.

00:11:07

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In that era, it came to represent a way of living that I felt I was shedding, somehow. When you were working for yourself making art, the freedom that came with being able to initiate a project of your own and being able to follow its implications promised a valuable adventure. That notion is now equally quaint.

00:11:53

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I think it became apparent that the idealism of the design program at UCLA was not necessarily the actual work-a-day world that I would serve. I interned in a couple of design offices doing part time drafting. I came to realize this sort of nuts and bolts life of doing product design had lost its appeal somehow.

00:12:22

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I began seeing how some artists functioned, how they made a life. I thought that was important. I could be a little bit more portable and I might be able to live where I'd like, and besides the parties were better and I like the smell of turpentine although I never really was a painter, but I like to have painters around. And people playing the piano in the studio. So there was certain romanticism about that.

00:13:04

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In 1963, Bob Heinecken (I was a graduate by then) initiated an ambitious project for the International Design Conference at Aspen. We presented an audio-visual event in the Aspen Opera House. The Aspen Design Conference, I think it still goes on, it's held every summer in Aspen and they have a huge tent they put up and designers and architects give talks.

00:13:39

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And the UCLA graduate designers, through Heinecken were invited to produce a large-scale event, an hour in length. It involved making show with slide sequences using carousel projectors and reel to reel tape recorders, making sound tracks, (by today's standards all very primitive), and it delivered a powerful message. I think there were probably a dozen graduates working on it. The title was the AMERICAN IMAGE/IDEAL.

00:14:17

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It was about how Americans were viewed in other parts of the world and how we, in turn, dealt with non-U.S. centric cultures. It was geo-political and everybody took a topic.

00:14:50 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

The production happened during an intense semester, followed by the summer trip up there. So I knew Heinecken through our collaboration. Darryl Curan and I received the first two graduate degrees offered by his new photography program.

00:15:01 **ADAM HYMAN**

Why did you choose to stay at UCLA art graduate school?

00:15:07 **PAT O'NEILL**

It never dawned on me to seek out other university programs or find mentors elsewhere with whom to study.

00:16:22 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

There was a wealth of other disciplines one could pursue at UCLA. I did a year with Richard Dembo reading modern literature in which I learned about the objective correlative, and also took a year in the philosophy of literature with John Hospers. Most of my classes were part of the five-year curriculum that I needed to take, so I had to enroll in engineering and properties of materials courses.

00:16:55 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I took marketing classes. I was taking economics and I fulfilled all the design curriculum requirements

00:17:05 **ADAM HYMAN**

What year did you actually graduate undergrad?

00:17:10 **PAT O'NEILL**

'62 and then I completed my master's in '64 and graduated with Vija Celmins and Judy Chicago (at that time Gerowitz).

00:17:14 **ADAM HYMAN**

And when along the way did you meet Bev?

00:17:21 **PAT O'NEILL**

Bev and I met in a film class, Hugh Gray's class taught in the film school around, maybe '63. Gray, was one of a unique breed of people who were teaching at UCLA during that time. I don't know if he necessarily had a doctorate or if he were an historian. He was a cineaste. The option to major in film history didn't start until the '70s.

00:17:53 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He knew a lot about Russian cinema, world cinema (Ozu, Kurosawa, Sadyajit Ray) and the silent era. He had friends in the industry and he would present guests. Curiously he once invited Fatty Arbuckle's widow, god knows why. I remember seeing the first Slavko Vorkapich pieces there, that fully captured my attention.

00:18:27 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

We viewed all of Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov's MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA. And Bev attended, too. We were slaving on the Aspen project, and Bev's roommate, a design major was on the project team. Bev wasn't majoring in art studio. Well, she was in the art school, taking art history. And it turned out she had a Wollensak tape recorder that we desperately needed.

00:19:03 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And so I while I pursued borrowing the Wollensak I began to find her rather attractive, and then we had this film class together so we began going out.

00:19:24 **ADAM HYMAN**

Was that your first film class?

00:19:28 **PAT O'NEILL**

Well I'd completed the year-long animation workshop class with Bill Shull learned the fundamentals of animation and I spent, I think at least two semesters with Hugh Gray. I didn't have time to add many classes from the film department, but Gray's were particularly interesting as they drew students from all over the university.

00:19:58 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

So it was kind of an introduction to styles of editing and, the European avant-garde, the early cinema of Melies and the Lumieres. The films may have come from David Shepard's collection, and he always attended leaving with the reels right after the screenings.

00:20:18 **ADAM HYMAN**

What inspired you to take the animation class?

00:20:21 **PAT O'NEILL**

Well I wanted to learn to animate. Bob Abel and I had become friends by then. He had taken the workshop and was making an animated film. We talked a lot about that and I decided to take it. There were weekly exercises and projects.

00:20:53 **ADAM HYMAN**

Was that the first time you dealt with a film camera?

00:20:58

PAT O'NEILL

Actually, shooting with a film camera happened because Bob Abel's uncle had a Bolex that he could borrow. He wanted to make a film. I was working in the dark room processing static images and I wanted to make them move.

00:21:31

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And suddenly this Bolex appeared and we went down to the beach to make a few test shots. I was always fascinated with the pier, with the merry-go-round, the beach, the view off the pier on to the beach, and Muscle Beach with all its bars and gymnastic equipment.

00:21:59

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And it was just naturally a filmic environment. We proposed a film that was to be a part of my MFA and part of Bob Abel's MFA. I didn't really want to do a documentary, but I wanted to use these people more as dynamic motion. I wanted them to generate something unusual, visually. I'd been working with a particular kind of film stock in still work that rendered still images. It had a very steep curve. I thought these subjects might be rendered graphically using this film.

00:22:43

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It was a high contrast printing material used in the printing trade to reproduce type. It had a lot of properties that hadn't been explored yet. And I started doing stills of the beach, time exposures, just exploring every possibility for how I could make an image, just trying to make an image of human movement with human identity erased so it was like energy and not specific people.

00:23:26

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

That led into the film Bob and I worked on for a couple of years. Peter Mays who was a friend of mine in the art school, he was painting at the time, had gotten interested in filmmaking, and doing his own processing. He had a little studio in the basement of Royce Hall.

00:23:48

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And Bob and I went to visit him one night and knocked on his door. He said not now, be out in ten minutes. He was developing something and he came out, wearing this hard hat with a miner's lamp on the front with a red safe light in it. And he showed us how he was processing. He had made this big tank, a huge drum that had film wrapped around it in a tray with developer.

00:24:21

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And I don't remember the film he was actually working on then, but he also had a contact printer made out of cardboard boxes and very primitive. He was inventing all these ways of making film effects for free basically and he was processing black and white. And that was instructive, so I built a similar processing facility. Bob and I had set it up in one of the graphic design workshops.

00:24:58

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

We would, at the end of the day, bring out all this stuff and develop high contrast film with a safe light and then string the film up over these racks to dry and it was all very primitive. I tried various ways of making contact printing devices at first trying to bi-pack in a Bolex, which didn't work very well, tried to make contact prints of 16 millimeter film to print, print stock under the enlarger, which didn't work at all.

00:25:36

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And so I started looking around to see what would I need to actually do this. Bob made a contact at an optical house called Cinema Research, which was a big optical house at the time. And we got them to print some of our camera rolls on high contrast stock, which we would then take and process. Actually the stock we were using was a 35-millimeter stock because that was the only way Kodak made it.

00:26:16

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The stock was Eastman Kodalith and we had to transform it into 16mm, which of course wasn't manufactured, but Bob being a producer managed to find the guy out in Montebello who had a film slitter. He would take 35mm, slit it to 16mm. Then he ran it through a perforator to make new perfs in it.

00:26:48

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

So we bought all this stock. We had it cut down to 16mm and then we took it to the optical house and asked them to print the camera rolls using our material and they agreed. It started out because they were interested in our experiment. They would do this for us for free in their spare time. And like so many things by the time we got finished somebody said okay well you owe us for the time here.

00:27:18

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Okay, how much? And it's about twelve hundred bucks. Well we couldn't quite do that. I don't know, we came to some agreement, but I got to meet a real optical printer and watch an operator at work. Actually it's identical to one of the printers that we have now.

00:27:38

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember the name of that person?

00:27:43

PAT O'NEILL

Well the man who ran the company was Hal Sheib. I don't remember the operator's name. He was a Polish guy.

00:27:54

ADAM HYMAN

Sounds like your first experience seeing optical printing.

00:27:57

PAT O'NEILL

Yes seeing how it worked. I think, the process had been explained to me by either John Neuhart or Tom Jennings. So I kind of knew what the principle was, but I had never actually seen one.

00:28:19

ADAM HYMAN

Tell me about, a little bit more about Bob Abel.

00:28:22

PAT O'NEILL

Bob Abel, well Bob was maybe a year or two ahead of me in school. He was a design graduate. He was very smart. He was a very polished verbally. He was very good at explaining things and persuading people to do things and very ambitious. He wanted to do big projects. And he was a good producer. And he had the uncle with the Bolex that we borrowed. Bob was interested in what I was doing and we started going to European features --Bergman, Godard, Kurosawa

00:29:05

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

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00:29:41

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And whatever avant-garde was available. I'd been going to avant-garde screenings before that. At some point after we decided to do this project we rented a house to share in Beverly Glen. We had those living quarters for a couple years until Bev and I got married.

00:30:15

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

We parted ways after *BY THE SEA* because I wanted to do things on my own. I was making a little piece called *BUMP CITY*. That was the other film that was in my graduate show, which also included many photographs and a lot of design work.

00:30:59

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Bob made a documentary in 1966 called *SEVEN SECOND LOVE AFFAIR*. It's about drag racing, it's about a family that had a drag race car and I worked as a cameraman for him on that. In fact I was shooting at the moment where the featured drag car blew up and went off the course. And we thought the guy was dead, but fortunately he was all right because he had a lot of safety equipment in the dragster.

00:31:32 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

It was quite spectacular. I saw this happen and I thought I knew where he was going, but suddenly he vanished from the frame and by the time I was able to reframe I didn't get the actual event, nobody got it. We just saw him going off the course. And curiously, this was at the LADS Drag Strip in North Long Beach, which was not that far from Watts. At the very same time that the film was being made, the Watts Riots started in 1965.

00:32:10 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

So I remember being on this drag strip doing this thing and seeing this plume of smoke starting to come out, just a little north of there.

00:32:20 **ADAM HYMAN**

'65 the Watts Riots.

00:32:23 **PAT O'NEILL**

By then Bev and I were married and had our own place in West L.A. Bob and I were very influenced by John Neuhart and we shared a kind of panoramic view of culture and how it manifested itself in visual form. In fact, actually Bob wanted to make his masters film about that, but we chose to make *By The Sea*.

00:33:14 **ADAM HYMAN**

Which film is this?

00:33:16 **PAT O'NEILL**

BY THE SEA.

00:33:17 **ADAM HYMAN**

Oh BY THE SEA, not a design, not a morphology...

00:33:19 **PAT O'NEILL**

No, the design film never got made, but he went on to make this dragster film, which I thought was quite professional. I thought it would be a successful TV piece at least. But for some reason it was never distributed. I don't know whether he ran into legal problems with the people that were in the film, something happened, but anyway the film was buried. And then after that he wanted to form a design office and do commercials.

00:33:54 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He asked me if I wanted to be a part of it, if I wanted to be a partner. I thought about it quite seriously for a long time and then I said no, I didn't really want to do that. I said I was busy -making other films and objects and I didn't really want to put a lot of time into a commercial business. So his company started with maybe four people and several other designers, Con Pederson was one.

00:34:21

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He was involved with John Whitney Sr. Whitney was developing a technique called a slit scan, which would allow artwork to be moved under an animation stand as it was being exposed. It was the effect that that produced the spectacular sequence in 2001 A SPACE ODDESSY of Kubrick. So he played a part in that and engaged with the people who had invented this equipment. Then he built his own slit scan devise.

00:35:06

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

His office went from two people to about 300 people. (I think they closed in - '85.) He was always researching equipment that could be used to move artwork and animation to generate spectacular visual effects. He made a Seven Up commercial in the year that YELLOW SUBMARINE came out that could have been a sequence in that feature.

00:35:47

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And he became a huge success in the commercial world. He produced hundreds of commercials and feature titles. I think he always managed to lose money on everything because he was always buying more equipment and hiring more people. And it became quite frenetic. He began to have so much work that he couldn't finish everything in house. By then I had an optical printer and I could do some of the composite work. So I was taking jobs from them.

00:36:20

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

This would be early '80s, late '70s. So we had a very different idea of where we were going and we gradually drifted apart. It was odd, when I was shooting in the Ambassador in '94, he, Bob had formed a new company, - called Synapse. He'd gotten into the early stages of digital graphics. He had undertaken creating a digital encyclopedia for IBM.

00:37:03

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

They had rented an office in the Ambassador at time, the management at the Ambassador after it was closed wanted to derive some income so they rented space, but nobody else ever took one except Bob. So I showed up, and I hadn't seen Bob for ten years.

00:37:32

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I dropped by to visit him and it was just like the old days. He had the same collectables around. But I could see he was on hard times. He was trying to do something very ambitious on a pretty limited budget and I think the technology was moving so fast that by the time he was able to do this, he was using computers that soon became obsolete.

00:38:03 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And so that became sort of a failure. But anyway, I mean he was an influence and a lot of people worked for him, a lot of artists worked in his shop doing manual work of one kind or another, doing dark room work. Paul McCarthy was his dark room manager for a while in the '80s. Megan Williams and Jim Shaw worked there and John Hughes who later formed Rhythm and Hues.

00:38:46 **ADAM HYMAN**

What was the name of the company that went from the '60s to the '80s?

00:38:50 **PAT O'NEILL**

It was called Bob Abel Studio. I don't know exactly, he had his name in it.

00:38:58 **ADAM HYMAN**

And how did you, so we'll go back to Bob, and what sort of response did you get for it? What was it like to have films in the MFA program? Oh, one brief factual question. Did you switch from design to fine arts at some point or what was your masters in?

00:39:23 **PAT O'NEILL**

I finished my undergraduate degree in design. I received my masters in fine arts in '64.

00:39:33 **ADAM HYMAN**

And Bev raised a possibility, which was that BY THE SEA was the first film done as an MFA project.

00:39:39 **PAT O'NEILL**

It may well be, as far as I know, that's true. We were doing film in the arts school. We didn't have any connection to the film school. And I think it created some interest in the film school. People could see that we were bringing something a little different to it. We weren't doing traditional film. We were more interested in the physical apparatus of film, physical qualities of emotion.

00:40:13 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And I think it piqued some interest. Thom Andersen was talking this year and mentioned that Bob Heinecken had taught a design class in the film school, which I didn't realize. That happened after I left UCLA, but Thom Andersen was saying that it was an attempt by someone in the film school to get some fresh blood into their program.

end of tape 2

TAPE 3: PAT O'NEILL

00:00:46 **ADAM HYMAN**

So then what else was their reception of...

00:00:52 **PAT O'NEILL**

BY THE SEA?

00:00:54 **ADAM HYMAN**

BY THE SEA, yeah.

00:00:57 **PAT O'NEILL**

What can I remember about that? I don't think there was actually that much reception for that one. The Ann Arbor Film Festival, sent the film to that, I think maybe the first thing that was recognized was 7362, which was few years later.

00:01:17 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah, let's talk about that separately.

00:01:19 **PAT O'NEILL**

Yeah.

00:01:20 **ADAM HYMAN**

BUMP CITY, tell me more a little bit more about the making of BUMP CITY.

00:01:23 **PAT O'NEILL**

BUMP CITY documented my walking around L.A. with a Bolex, which I had bought by then. I was interested in commercial culture and how it constituted our environment. I was interested particularly in mechanized signs. So I filmed things like the sign on the Palladium. There used to be a huge billboard for the Lawrence Welk Show.

00:02:01 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

It was a big picture of Lawrence Welk and he was holding a baton and the baton had been mechanized and it would go up and down all day, all night. So I filmed that. And I shot these various large female figures in motion. They used to be at the corner of Sunset, near the Marmont Hotel just before the strip began. Later the Marlboro Man occupied that space for years.

00:02:33 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

In the early '60s, a big fiberglass cowgirl... oh, she was holding her hat up and wearing a bathing suit and she rotated around and around. There's another rotating skating figure from the Ice Capades Theater on Santa Monica.

00:03:04 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

It was Pop, the beginnings of Pop. It was in my graduate show so I might have shot the film in '63. Maybe the most interesting part was looking for representations in neon of objects other than written signs and so I drove all over town collecting these things. I remember finding a neon representation of a couch folding out as a bed and folding back into a couch. And I filmed that.

00:03:42 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

In San Francisco, I captured that famous, huge Sherwin Williams neon. Their logo represented the earth with a can of paint being poured over it and running down the sides, dripping off. The slogan said: "cover the earth." I also collected roses and bicycles and crosses and stars and all kind of commercial symbols.

00:04:20 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I would shoot a static burst of something and then I would begin editing. The first time I did a lot of very shortcut editing, three frames, five frames, in long sequences. I'd shoot quite a lot and cut it up and, it was basically a still, but it might be lighting up and going off. And so I made a sequence of those. I made another sequence by just shooting advertisements out of magazines.

00:04:52 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I became interested in the way women were represented smoking cigarettes and at the time they were a great many high-end print advertisements of those images. I collected a few hundred and filmed them. So that forms another sequence. I also shot superimpositions in the camera of crowds walking in downtown on Broadway and Main.

00:05:27 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

It's probably not more than half a minute, but shooting crowds reflected in windows full of mannequins and cranking the Bolex back, and doing four or five passes through to make a mixture of imagery. It was a test bed for trying cinematic ideas. It was parallel with BY THE SEA although it was shot in color. I made several different versions.

00:06:23 **ADAM HYMAN**

What do you recall, let me sidestep which is Peter Mays said he did screenings at UCLA?

00:06:29 **PAT O'NEILL**

Yes.

00:06:30 **ADAM HYMAN**

What do you recall of that?

00:06:33

PAT O'NEILL

It was a very brief period. I remember when he brought Brakhage's DOG STAR MAN. Well, Brakhage didn't come. He showed it in the old art school auditorium (now housed in the architecture school). The most memorable screening that I recall was an in-person appearance of Jack Smith and Gregory Markopoulos.

00:07:05

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

They were traveling together. Markopoulos was shooting TWICE A MAN, he had original camera rolls in a bag and he would thread up those camera rolls to show us. I don't remember what Jack Smith showed.

00:07:33

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Jack Smith was quiet and I guess he had made FLAMING CREATURES by then, which I didn't see until later. Peter had a little budget from student funds and he created a showcase. I only remember those two events, but I think there were others.

00:08:00

ADAM HYMAN

What do you remember of Gregory Markopoulos?

00:08:04

PAT O'NEILL

Not very much really other than the film he showed was shot from the Staten Island Ferry and it was very beautiful, Kodachrome. -

00:08:19

ADAM HYMAN

And what other environment, experimental film screenings in those years do you recall going to that had any impact on your development?

00:08:33

PAT O'NEILL

The early ones, when I was just barely out of high school were at the Coronet Theater on La Cienega. They would put out a bill. They made these posters, newsprint posters and they had a big black border around them that made them look like old time funeral announcements. And there would be many, many columns, a lot of description and pictures and so on.

00:09:04

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I saw a lot of early work for the first time there. I was going by myself. I don't remember groups. Saw the first Kenneth Anger piece, FIREWORKS...

00:09:29

ADAM HYMAN

Did you ever see Kenneth or Curtis there, Curtis Harrington?

00:09:32

PAT O'NEILL

No.

00:09:38

PAT O'NEILL

I saw Bruce Connors' A MOVIE and that moved me a lot. That was a real revelation and I think I was still living at home when I saw that. A MOVIE was made entirely from archival material.

00:10:11

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It's about things going wrong and much of it came from the Black Hawk compilations of accidents and mishaps of one kind or another, a bridge up in Washington that started to sway violently and ultimately broke up and fell into the Columbia River, which he accompanied with a symphonic score from, features Ottorino Respighi's THE PINES OF ROME.

ADAM HYMAN

What was it about the film that moved you?

00:10:53

PAT O'NEILL

Well it was so wonderfully apocalyptic and yet funny at the same time. And, it was all about editing, the way something started in one shot and continued in another in a completely different situation. It really chronicled civilization coming apart. It was structured quite differently from any film I'd ever seen.

00:11:32

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I think I saw it several times at the Coronet and when I was teaching I bought a print and showed it quite a lot. I've probably seen that film more than any other film. Every time I see it, it seems to be different. And I thought that's an interesting quality. I liked it better than, than the subsequent Conner film, REPORT.

00:12:47

ADAM HYMAN

You don't have to remember it all, but the ones that are most important to you that's still stuck in your memory.

00:12:50

PAT O'NEILL

I think films like René Clair's EN'TRACT and some of the Man Ray pieces I saw there first. The Cinema Theater started in '62 as a much bigger venue with a lot more publicity and it became a cult thing.

00:13:23

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The audiences were large and very demonstrative especially when they opened with BUCK ROGERS, BATMAN, and THE GREEN HORNET serials. And it was a very vocal audience: a lot of guffawing and cheering and farting and carrying on. I don't know what they were showing during the day. Later it became a porn house.

00:14:01

ADAM HYMAN

It's still there. I mean the building might still be there.

[00:14:02](#)

[PAT O'NEILL](#)

Cinema Theater started an underground film festival and they offered some prizes. I think a few hundred dollars was first prize and the first film that won was Stanton Kaye's GEORG and the second year it was Bruce Baillie's MASS FOR THE DAKOTA SIOUX and I don't know if there was a third year.

[00:14:32](#)

[ADAM HYMAN](#)

This is actually, Stanton remembers it being the first year, but on the poster it says it's the second Los Angeles Filmmaker's Festival, but...

[00:14:40](#)

[PAT O'NEILL](#)

Hmm, but maybe there was one that I missed.

[00:14:44](#)

[ADAM HYMAN](#)

But even Stanton doesn't remember like a previous one unless it was a festival that didn't have like awards or something like that. But Stanton Kaye won it in '64, but there seems to have been a first one in '63 that no one can validate or recall.

[00:14:59](#)

[PAT O'NEILL](#)

Kaye's won it in '64?

[00:15:00](#)

[ADAM HYMAN](#)

Yeah.

[00:15:03](#)

[PAT O'NEILL](#)

Well maybe Bruce Baillie's was first. I thought it was the other way around.

[00:15:06](#)

[ADAM HYMAN](#)

No, Bruce was, that would be '65. The question is was there something in '63. Movies Round Midnight was '63 to '65 really. I mean that's what started in '63.

[00:15:16](#)

[PAT O'NEILL](#)

I'm quite sure that the first one was the one that Stanton Kaye won. It seemed that way to me.

[00:15:21](#)

[ADAM HYMAN](#)

unintelligible one of the first ones. I don't even know if John remembers it so, yeah. [laugh] We ought to really do something. Can you describe, let's go back to the Coronet briefly. Can you describe physically like going to... technical

[00:15:44](#)

[ADAM HYMAN](#)

Just physically what was it like going to the Coronet?

00:15:47

PAT O'NEILL

The Coronet, well it was a modest little room and it was very dark and sort of musty. There wasn't much, there was no announcer or anything. You went there and the films came on.

00:16:04

ADAM HYMAN

How big a theater was it?

00:16:06

PAT O'NEILL

It was certainly no more than 100 seats.

00:16:11

ADAM HYMAN

Could you experience it as like, it served as a dance studio upstairs and the theater itself I think was the same room that they had live theater productions as well. Did you ever go to see anything at those?

00:16:23

PAT O'NEILL

No, I never saw anything else.

00:16:25

ADAM HYMAN

And how often would you go?

00:16:27

PAT O'NEILL

Oh, I don't think that many times really, maybe half a dozen times all together.

00:16:31

ADAM HYMAN

Did you ever go to the other location that Raymond Rohauer had?

00:16:35

PAT O'NEILL

Didn't know there was one.

00:16:36

ADAM HYMAN

Somebody cited it and I can't remember the name. It wasn't for an extended period, but he had a second venue for a while. It was something near MacArthur Park.

00:16:45

PAT O'NEILL

Hmm, no, I didn't know about that.

00:16:47

ADAM HYMAN

And, okay and how about the Movies Round Midnight, how often did you go there?

00:16:53

PAT O'NEILL

Well that was the Cinema. We went regularly for a year or two. It was a weekly thing. I can't even begin to remember everything we saw. I remember films like Ron Rice's CHUMLUM, Will Hindle's CHINESE FIRE DRILL, and BILLABONG, Ben Van Meter's POON TANG TRILOGY, Ed Emschwiler's RELATIVITY, Warhol's SLEEP, EMPIRE, and the Berkeley Newsreel which covered events with a political slant.

00:17:46

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Of course the trailers were a big feature and marked the beginning of a gay presence in the audience. One felt a certain freedom there that was unusual at the time. So there was a lot of response to films that had any sort of overtones of sexuality. I saw the first Kuchar pieces at Movies Round Midnight. Wally Berman was doing publicity for the venue.

00:18:17

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He made some very nice posters, some of which I saved fortunately. It was very much of its time. Suddenly there was an audience that woke up and discovered a new world of filmic content. I think the sensational nature of things created a new audience. The showcase lasted just a few years. And I was learning about Wally Berman.

00:18:49

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He was one of the first artists at the Ferus Gallery. He did a show that included something mildly sacrilegious and somebody complained and the police shut it down, confiscated the work. Wally lived in Beverly Glen, which is where Bob and I lived. So I got to know him at the grocery store. He seemed to hang out at the market a lot. I don't know quite why. I guess he liked to socialize this way.

00:19:22

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I hadn't quite known the extent of his work but later I began to see these posters for Movies at Round Midnight that were based on his multi-panel works showing transistor radios with various scenes in repetition. -

00:19:54

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I mean he did many variations of that printed on a yellow background. I remember they were very distinguished.

00:20:05

ADAM HYMAN

Did you ever, when you moved to Topanga, I guess you lived in Topanga for a while as well.

00:20:13

PAT O'NEILL

No, I didn't.

00:20:21

PAT O'NEILL

And only recently when Berman had that show at the Santa Monica Museum did I realized what a serious photographer he was. He was shooting important documentation of everybody he knew. That was invisible at the time. But I knew he had a hand press and made little booklets periodically called SEMINA and I remember Bob Heinecken bringing some to class where I first discover them.

00:20:57

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He left Beverly Glen because the foundation of his little studio got washed out in a heavy rainstorm and the studio collapsed down the hill so he had to gather his things and go. I don't know if that's when he went to Topanga. - But I didn't keep in touch.

00:21:20

ADAM HYMAN

And, you know, let's talk about the various exhibition action and some other stuff and then we'll come back to your work, but leap ahead a couple years and do you have reflections of Cinematheque 16?

00:21:34

PAT O'NEILL

Uh-huh. Cinematheque 16 was a little theater on Sunset Boulevard, near San Vicente (Booksoup is there now) in the basement of a building that once had been a mortuary, a rather large mortuary in the basement where I guess the equipment was kept and they cleared all that out. And Lewis Teague started this series. I think it was about '69, '68. I remember seeing some of the Warhol films there, CHELSEA GIRLS.

00:22:50

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I forget what the screening was, but when we came out afterward, Peter Mays was there with this shoebox full of little candy things. He was very enthusiastic and passing them around. He said this is "bananadine". He said your life is gonna change.

00:23:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

That is, you can get stoned on processed banana peels. An article had come out in the FREE PRESS about this and Peter had run with it and he said he'd been working for days making concentrated banana peels into these little candies. And so we all had one. I asked Peter what effect he had felt. And he had to admit, he said actually I've taken 30 of these and I haven't really felt anything. [laugh]

00:24:07 **ADAM HYMAN**

Any significant other screenings there for you?

00:24:09 **PAT O'NEILL**

Not that I can remember. I was probably there half a dozen times, but I don't really remember what I saw.

00:24:15 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah, Jeffrey was telling us yesterday it was Lewis Teague who basically managed it in '67 and then sort of handed it off to Jeffrey Perkins who sort of managed it in '68.

00:24:25 **PAT O'NEILL**

Oh, he managed it? I didn't know that.

00:24:25 **ADAM HYMAN**

And for him the biggest screenings were a Kenneth Anger retrospective, which ran for a few months he said and CHELSEA GIRLS and then some other person had done like guests and brought in, sort of having like Fritz Lang would come and do a screening and do a few nights.

00:24:40 **PAT O'NEILL**

Really.

00:24:43 **ADAM HYMAN**

And Von Sternberg came.

00:24:52 **ADAM HYMAN**

Anyway...

00:24:53 **PAT O'NEILL**

That was a curious place being in the basement and everything was painted black, and it was folding chairs and it was quite small. I mean you really had to get there early to get in.

00:25:06 **ADAM HYMAN**

What other alternative screening experiences were around that you recall from the '60s at least? Any other significant events or experiences?

00:25:16 **PAT O'NEILL**

I think there were occasional screenings done at UCLA. I remember going to Bruce Baillie's in-person presentation of QUIXOTE in '66 when he first made it. I met a musician who was doing performance art. His name was Joseph Byrd. He was a very erudite graduate composition student who came from New York where he had participated as a member of Fluxus [PO: which included George Maciunas, Jonas Mekas, Yoko Ono] in a number of events.

00:25:53

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In Schoenberg Hall he did stage pieces, accompanied by musicians, by sound sources doing something that was similar to what Robert Wilson did many years later. In the '70s he formed The United States of America rock band that lasted for a year or so. He was a very good East Indian chef and learned recipes from his teacher, John Cage. As a Fluxus artist, he was seriously engaged with the theoretical leftist politics of the 18th century philosopher Charles Fourier.

00:27:14

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In one performance at UCLA, Dorothy Moskowitz, the lead singer appeared nude. I think the stage was dark when we brought her out, she sang and I don't remember the extent of the piece, but I was the guy who moved the dolly she stood upon. And I helped him get various props. He did one piece where he needed a weather balloon because it would fill the entire stage. This was in Schoenberg Hall Music Auditorium. This piece lasted about an hour or so.

00:27:45

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It involved a rock trio or maybe there were five of them playing on the stage with the speakers turned up so loud they rattled the auditorium's seats. Behind them stood an air compressor that was filling this balloon. The balloon got bigger and bigger, becoming a sort of fig shaped thing, big brown thing. Gradually it grew to the point where it crowded the musicians off the stage and so the tension built around what would happen. -

00:28:18

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It loomed out over the audience and when it blew it dusted everyone with the fine white powder that had lined its interior. Byrd may have enhanced that effect by filling it with extra talc. It was a great piece. Byrd also built electronic synthesizers. He made most of the music for 7362.

00:28:57

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I don't know how many performance events he did, but each was quite magnificent. I don't think they were ever recorded or captured anywhere. He disappeared from the arts area for a long time. Apparently he became a commercial music producer.

00:29:37

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Other screenings. Peter Mays was shooting his own films by then, since he was an art major he was screening them in the art school. -

00:30:14

ADAM HYMAN

Okay, when did the Vanguard kick in?

00:30:19

PAT O'NEILL

In the early '70s.

00:30:21

ADAM HYMAN

Okay, we'll get to that.

00:30:22

PAT O'NEILL

Yeah.

00:30:23

ADAM HYMAN

Now through this period, like let's come back to you. So you graduated from '64, 7362 is '67. So right after you finished grad school, what did you start trying to do?

00:30:40

PAT O'NEILL

Well I started making sculpture. Why did I start doing that? I started finding objects and applying some of what I knew about materials from design and from building car models. I found commercially made castings and shapes. I began welding, laminating fiberglass and spraying paint. Carl Cheng and I rented a studio in Santa Monica in '66.

00:31:28

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The idea of having a dedicated space was appealing. I remember we took the top floor of an industrial facility on Pico. I think we got the whole floor for a hundred and fifty bucks. I remember my share was seventy-five so I think it was \$150.00. Carl lived there, he and Felice Matare, a designer, shared the other half.

00:32:00

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

What a nice period! In 1964, an art dealer, Bob Gino sought me out. I had gotten into some other gallery shows. And I was starting to make the film 7362 while I was making objects at the same time.

00:32:31

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I was doing a lot of projections in the studio at night, projecting different kinds of materials, multiscreen things. I remember doing one with a lot of sheets of tracing paper suspended in space and putting projections through it from both sides.

00:33:05

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

They started expanding and I had a few shows with several art dealers.

00:34:45

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In my sculptures I devised a way of shaping plaster using a thing called a sweep, which is basically just a template that is passed through a tub of plaster and as the plaster hardened I kept moving the sweep, you finally made a very clean representation of this template through space.

00:35:18 **ADAM HYMAN**

Sort of like making the duplicate of a key.

00:35:22 **PAT O'NEILL**

Yeah, you could use the key as the template.

00:35:26 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah, for the next keys, right? A key copier places...

00:35:30 **PAT O'NEILL**

Follows one and makes the other, yeah.

00:35:34 **ADAM HYMAN**

Complicated.

00:35:35 **PAT O'NEILL**

So I started out small. I became more ambitious and I made some pieces that evoked landscapes. Others sat on the floor, the big ones. And they were basically a ragged line that swept up out of the floor and rotated to meet the floor again. I had shaped it out so that no light passed underneath. They seemed to emerge from the floor.

00:36:08 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Those were shown in '68, '69 and some were sold. I believe I received a prize from the Barnsdall City Annual and was enthusiastically reviewed by the L.A. Times art critic Bill Wilson. I continued doing film while making sculpture. I began to realize that I couldn't afford to keep the new studio. I was editing the film work at home in our little bungalow on Tilden Avenue in West L.A.

00:36:55 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Even though the studio was such a bargain, it was in Santa Monica and I was now going to the labs quite frequently in Hollywood. We began thinking that we should relocate away from the Westside. We lost our rental house then. So we started looking for a place to buy near Hollywood and we found this place in Laurel Canyon.

00:37:29 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

We liked Laurel Canyon, liked Beverly Glen, tried to find some place where we're in the trees, a little bit off the grid. The realtor who showed us this property said you're probably not going to like this place because it's a mess, but it's really cheap and you could tear it down and build something. This was on Lookout Mountain Avenue and it was a little cabin that had been built in the '20s. Over time, it had been enlarged by amateur, handy craftsmen.

00:38:07 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

A sad disabled lady lived there and she couldn't care for herself anymore. She had to move. And so the place had this really funny vibe around it. But it was offered at \$26,000 and I think we actually got it for about \$24,000. The small house sat on 4 lots of land, an enormous piece of ground. It had a four-car garage that became my studio.

00:38:39 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And we did a lot of work on that house gradually repairing things. We put a new foundation under it at one point. And re-wired and plumbed it and made a real house. Lived there for 33 years. Well let's go back.

00:38:59 **ADAM HYMAN**

And what year did you move into that?

00:39:01 **PAT O'NEILL**

October of '69 we moved there.

00:39:08 **ADAM HYMAN**

Tell me briefly about the, we'll go back all the way to the house on Cresthill briefly.

00:39:13 **PAT O'NEILL**

Hmm.

00:39:15 **ADAM HYMAN**

What was that, who lived there and how did the contact from UCLA end up in it? We only have two minutes left on the tape so I might be stopping you in mid-story.

00:39:26 **PAT O'NEILL**

Well the Cresthill house was off of the Sunset Strip, up the hill from the Whiskey. I don't remember exactly whose place it was originally. I never lived there, but many of my friends from the Single Wing Turquoise Bird light show did. Jeff Perkins, Peter Mays, Bruce Lane, Burton Gershfield and first his wife Carole were residents. Larry the midget, a friend of Bruce's, curiously stayed there in a cardboard box.

00:39:59 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He would curl up in his cardboard box and you wouldn't know he was in the room, actually. He'd be present and talking and you'd see something move. Oh there's a foot coming out of the box. Never said much. He appears in Bruce Lane's film UNC. It was a big house, built in the '20s, Spanish style.

00:40:29 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Everyone dropped acid, a lot of acid and smoked lot of grass. It had a heavy rock and roll aura and smelled intensely of incense and vaguely of garbage.

00:40:41

All right, we'll stop there.

ADAM HYMAN

00:40:42

Yeah.

PAT O'NEILL

end of tape 3

TAPE 4: PAT O'NEILL

00:00:31 **ADAM HYMAN**

So a bit more on the house on Cresthill.

00:00:33 **PAT O'NEILL**

The house on Cresthill, well, I ate a few meals there. Burton Gershfield asked about my contact printer, and suggested that the place to put it was in the laundry room of Cresthill's basement. We made a darkroom down there and installed the contact printer and processing tanks.

00:01:00 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

We used it to generate footage for the light show projections. I had started to work on RUNS GOOD. Using 16mm documentaries I checked out from the L.A. Public Library I would find the scenes I wanted and make duplicate negatives with this printer.

00:01:41 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I wasn't really finishing anything. I was mostly accumulating shots at that time.

00:02:11 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I think that the people who lived there were taking so much acid that I wondered if it changed them neuro-chemically. I thought the place had a really strange atmosphere about it, something always felt vaguely unsettling, like a party that had gone on too long.

00:02:43 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I think visiting band members slept there. The music scene's residential geography included the Strip, Beverly Glen, and Laurel Canyon. I don't quite know how long the light show lived at Cresthill

00:03:08 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

At the time Bruce Lane had a really interesting feature project that he shot at AFI, called ALBION, The Albion Project. My friend Will Riegle, a sculptor appeared as an actor.

00:03:39 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

The picture had a western theme. Bruce shot it in 35mm black and white and I remember seeing some very beautiful rushes. The project was never completed and I believe the original disappeared.

00:04:07 **ADAM HYMAN**

How did the contact printer from UCLA end up there?

00:04:10

PAT O'NEILL

I backed up a pickup truck and carried it up there. I was a faculty member, I replaced Bob Heinecken at UCLA as an instructor for a year when he was on a sabbatical in Europe. That would be '66, '67. So I had one year of teaching there, and I was able to obtain the contact printer for the school because it was government surplus. Government surplus was available through an agency for nonprofit for educational institutions.

00:04:44

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

My friend Carl and I went out there frequently and we bought these amazing materials for 10 percent of their market worth. We found stacks of rope, of curious uniforms, and hardware. The most was the raw stock, then out of date, black and white print stock, 12 hundred-foot cans for four dollars. There were palettes and palettes of them.

00:05:17

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

You had to run the bookkeeping through the school and it was legitimate since I was teaching there. That provided quite a bit of material. The contact printers were surplus from the Navy, from shipboard film labs where they could process and print 16 millimeter coming from gun cameras during the Korean War.

00:05:48

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

These printers, built by Bell & Howell were beautifully made. They made a one to one contact print of a negative. I found that I could get it to bi-pack to run two negatives at once by building a couple of extra arms and some guide rollers.

00:06:15

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I was able to process it, because we had gotten, also from the Navy through the same agency, these stainless steel spiral developing reels that would -take 200 hundred feet of 16 millimeter. Stainless steel tanks were used for developing, washing, and fixing. It was a hands-on, low cost filmmaking technology.

00:06:46

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Later I bought the same processing equipment for Cal Arts when I began to teach there in '70.

00:07:12

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I used it as a teaching tool, I was giving some of the photo students these little cartridge cameras that came from military surplus and they used 16 cartridges, I think they shot 50 feet. We were talking about the difference between single frames and sequences, and giving students this camera to shoot with. Then we could take the cassette out and process and print it. A few people really took off with it. Some interesting projects got made using sequences. Chick Strand, who had moved from the bay area to attend the UCLA graduate film school (she was 33 at the time) became aware of our experiments with processing. She asked me to show her how to contact print and process black and white by hand. She made Waterfall during that period. Burt Gershfield worked for me during a semester and created NOW THAT THE BUFFALO IS GONE. He had a friend working in a commercial lab that processed Kodachrome. Burt got color coupler developers from him in yellow, cyan and magenta which allowed us to develop black and white as monochromatic color, a technique that we both used, for several years.

00:07:54

ADAM HYMAN

What do you mean by a sequence for this context?

00:07:57

PAT O'NEILL

One could print motion picture negative as though it were still negative. This allowed one to print motion on photo paper.

00:08:22

ADAM HYMAN

So that was still sort of, in some ways, also a continuing interest you had in the body as graphic element?

00:08:32

PAT O'NEILL

Yes, starting with 7362, -during a period when I was making biomorphic sculptures and the body's graphic qualities became my subject. -

00:11:25

ADAM HYMAN

Did you know Thom Andersen at that point?

00:11:28

PAT O'NEILL

I didn't know him then. I might have met him at a screening or two.

00:12:45

ADAM HYMAN

How did you relate your film exploration with that period, with the work you were making in other media?

00:12:53

PAT O'NEILL

Well I saw 7362 really as a sort of extension of a sculpture in motion, and they were the same vocabulary of forms I was working with in assemblage. Another project that quickly came after that in '69 was SCREEN, which isn't known much, but Oliver Andrews curated a show called "Electric Art," inviting many artists who used light in some way.

00:13:26

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I remember seeing a Doug Wheeler piece in that show made in neon. The show gave me an opportunity to present a film that could be looped. I was interested in making a film that avoided the conventions of motion pictures.

00:13:48

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The image appeared through an opening in the wall, 3 feet square. A rear projection screen was mounted in that opening. I hid the project in a booth. What the viewer saw was a random field of moving dots. I never saw this piece as an extension of painting. Instead I wanted to declare the zone of filmic space, distinctly different from static, pictorial space.

00:14:11

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The film was made by spray painting clear leader, using the result and its negative to print on color stock. By then I had access to an optical printer in '68, and I made the film in three weeks. We rented the loop projector.

00:14:38

ADAM HYMAN

Where was the optical printer?

00:14:39

PAT O'NEILL

The optical printer was in Bob Beck's garage. Bob Beck was an electrical engineer, interested in getting into the movies. He worked with Roger Corman on THE TRIP.

00:15:02

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Based on that he built optical printers using early Kodascope projectors, which he liked because of their registration accuracy. So these were projectors that were made in the '20s that he'd accumulated from collectors.

00:15:24

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

His optical printer camera was a Japanese camera called a Dioflex. Bob's electronics allowed for single frame operation only.

00:15:54

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I did everything manually. Shoot one frame, advance the projector, then shoot another.

00:16:23 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

For this installation film, the piece as it was shown comprised maybe 30 or so different composites using the same materials. It was shown only once. David Beinstock, the newly hired media curator at the Whitney purchased it for the museum at that time.

00:17:18 **ADAM HYMAN**

Is this before John Hanhardt?

00:17:21 **PAT O'NEILL**

Before John Hanhardt, yes.

00:17:23 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah, I don't know who that is.

00:17:25 **PAT O'NEILL**

And he died, unfortunately in about '72. Anyway, he had bought a print of SCREEN, put it in the Whitney's collection. And then it had languished there. I got a call about two years ago from Chrissie Iles, who is the chief media curator at the Whitney, and she said, I have this print here, what is it?

00:18:03 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I thought, uh oh, this is curious. I told her at great length about what it was, and that we had made a restored print of it. Once she thought she understood it, she wasn't interested.

00:18:32 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

So that came to life and once I had it digitized I realized that some of the material in it was not very good. I could make a better version by repeating some of the passages and extending them. So I made the new version.

00:18:50 **ADAM HYMAN**

Did you want to show it at a single screen thing, though, or is it, you really think for an installation?

00:18:57 **PAT O'NEILL**

It's really an installation. The format is square, not 1.33:1, which distinguishes it from motion picture. The viewer sees an illusion of motion in space. That was the first installation that I did.

00:19:29 **ADAM HYMAN**

Because how did you run it? You just ran it as a 16mm film loop in the original installation?

00:19:34 **PAT O'NEILL**

Mm hmm.

00:19:34 **ADAM HYMAN**

Now you could do it as a DVD loop?

00:19:36

PAT O'NEILL

Mm hmm.

00:19:36

ADAM HYMAN

Because we can talk about that for the, like, this symposium, we're doing this symposium in November, and we're going to have like a gallery of space with installed things related to the history of film in L.A. Ideally we'll have John Whitney Jr's three projectors.

00:19:52

PAT O'NEILL

Mm hmm.

00:19:51

ADAM HYMAN

And we'll have one of David Wilson's, we'll continue this after we're off camera.

00:19:55

PAT O'NEILL

Yeah.

00:19:56

ADAM HYMAN

Let's talk a bit more just about the making of 7362, though.

00:20:02

PAT O'NEILL

Mm hmm.

00:20:02

ADAM HYMAN

Like more on the genesis of it, and what your ideas were. And how you made it.

00:20:08

PAT O'NEILL

Well, 7362 was based on flat forms cut out of cardboard or paper, and put on a turntable so that they could rotate. Shot it all with a Bolex, everything had to be within one wind of the Bolex.

00:20:39

ADAM HYMAN

With a what?

00:20:40

PAT O'NEILL

One, camera wind gave you 15 feet.

00:20:44

ADAM HYMAN

23 seconds?

00:20:45

PAT O'NEILL

Yes. And it coincided with finding that contact printer, so it enabled me to make as many prints, or as many superimpositions of the same negative as I could. I spent a lot of time printing and developing for that. I wanted to get the human body into it, and Bev was willing, so she was the model.

00:21:21

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

We shot in a garage at Mount St. Mary's College (where I taught) in the summertime when school was closed. And they said I could have this space for the summer, but there were nuns coming and going all the time. They probably wouldn't have approved of having somebody naked in their studio. They never actually came in, but they were a presence that was somewhat oppressive.

00:21:41

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And I don't think I actually did more than about four days shooting. It's like so many things, I was just making the tests and thinking about it, wanted to have more bodies, but I had this body, and at some point it was going to be difficult to shoot anything more, so I started working with what I had.

00:22:02

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And that became sort of the core of the human figure part of it. There were oil wells; this was Venice at a time when Venice was full of oil wells. I was doing a lot of still photography there, of this area that had been developed as a luxury subdivision and resort in 1903. I think that is when Abbott Kinney began building there.

00:22:34

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

They dredged out canals and installed Venetian replica bridges over them, very elegant bridges made of concrete. It was to some extent developed, but and then failed as a residential neighborhood. In the 20's they discovered oil there. It became this landscape of oil wells and tanks and, oil refuse.

00:23:02

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

There were ponds of waste oil around. And equipment that had been soaked with asphalt over and over again until it became unrecognizable in its shapes. You had blowing sand, oil, and abandoned, deteriorated furniture lying around. It was a no man's land, although some people were living there.

00:23:36

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Most of the people had left. And then the oil wells, shortly thereafter, started to disappear. Then the whole thing was redeveloped. I started filming oil wells to get cyclic motion of derricks going up and down, wheels turning. That became part of the film, and I started making these shots that would become elements later in the film process.

00:24:14

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I didn't really know what I was going to do with them. They weren't very interesting on their own. But when I started combining them in multiples they started resonating. The overlay and interaction of body, machine, and the graphic elements became a complex whole. All these parts were being fused in the contact printer and hand processed. I'd learned about solarizing, about the Sabattier effect, the Man Ray effect, Rayograms, they've been around as long as photography. And that could be accomplished during the processing.

00:24:34

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I don't know that anybody had done it in film until that time... But I'd done it in a darkroom. I found stocks that I could use in 16. Sound recording stocks that have a very silver heavy emulsion. And so with the developing spirals I could start development and then wash it to stop development. And then give it a very short dose of light by turning on the light switch and turning it off, processing it again and fixing it.

00:25:09

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And I would get these unpredictable results which were somewhere between a negative and a positive. They were the result of waste products produced by the first processing, then affecting the film and with the second processing they would grow in the opposite direction as a negative.

00:25:34

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And it was temperamental, it really depended on a lot of factors: how much light and how strong was the developer, and how you positioned the reel in relation to the light. So I was learning all of that, I was able to solarize something and then run it through the contact printer and print that, make a new print, solarize the new print, generation after generation.

00:25:59

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I don't think I ever did more than about three generations. And editing it with a Moviescope viewer and some rewinds, in an extra room in the house we were renting. And it was a pretty interesting time, I mean, it was something that was growing constantly, so I was working on it every day.

00:26:27

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I also found some people at Deluxe General Labs, a timer, Tom Moore, there to whom I showed some of it, and he was intrigued, he hadn't seen anything like that. I was trying to find ways of bringing color into it, and I didn't really have a way to do that accurately. I mean, I was doing black and white in the processing. And so I was able to assemble A and B rolls, pick color filters and take it in.

00:27:00 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And I guess this was kind of a break for Tom to figure out how to do this. So he would do A-B rolls with a filter, and he could colorize things that way. And everything in the film that's bright red and bright blue was done through Deluxe General.

00:27:26 **ADAM HYMAN**

What was he doing? Just like adding gels and the...

00:27:29 **PAT O'NEILL**

Yes, he was creating unusual filter packs that normally a lab wouldn't do. He would test my filters for density and correct his printing lights to match.

00:28:02 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He got excellent results. I think he worked on it quite intensively and I finally only paid for a print. But Deluxe was, at that time, very helpful. I had an AFI grant for a while, and they gave me 40 percent discount on processing like the AFI students received. That lasted for a year or so.

00:28:27 **ADAM HYMAN**

In the '60s?

00:28:29 **PAT O'NEILL**

Yeah, this would be, the mid-70's.

00:28:32 **ADAM HYMAN**

AFI unintelligible the first class of 1970, but, like were doing stuff unintelligible

00:29:21 **ADAM HYMAN**

And so in L.A., as you said, no one else was doing this at that time, so were you interacting at all with other people making experimental films in Los Angeles at that time?

00:29:32 **PAT O'NEILL**

Well with John Whitney Sr., who I met through Neuhart. We were guests at his house. But of course we had different interests.

00:30:04 **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay.

00:30:06 **PAT O'NEILL**

I felt like I was inventing a way of working, and the only reason I knew how to do it was because of my background in still photo printing. I was constantly saying, there's no reason why I couldn't do this in motion. I was quite curious to see what would happen if I followed this image with that one or this color with that one.

00:30:29 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And you'd get images mixing. I mean, it was all experiments, seeing if you could get the screen to appear closer to the audience, or further back, by changing color. I was isolated in Los Angeles but kept aware of film coming from New York or San Francisco.

00:30:57 **ADAM HYMAN**

Did you ever find yourself or in thinking in terms of, like, you know, 7362 and RUNS GOOD, and so forth, did you think in terms of, like, having that conversation with some of that other work being created in New York and San Francisco?

00:31:11 **PAT O'NEILL**

Having a conversation with it?

00:31:14 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah, or...

00:31:13 **PAT O'NEILL**

You mean responding to?

00:31:15 **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah. To that, was that, like, part of your...

00:31:19 **PAT O'NEILL**

No, although I was very eager to get the work to New York. In '68 Bev and I went to MOMA, where I had an appointment with Larry Kardish. I had brought 7362, which had just come out of the lab. In the theater we started to project the film and I realized they'd only printed one of the three rolls. They had completely missed the other two.

00:31:49 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

But Larry was intrigued and we looked at what was there. I immediately called the lab and they made a new print and airmailed it- A few days later we saw the whole thing anew. It provoked quite a lot of enthusiasm and Kardish called people in from different departments to look at it. I remember reading Jonas Mekas' column in the Village Voice in which he announced the "good news" two new experimental filmmakers, Morgan Fisher and Pat O'Neill had appeared with significant films from Los Angeles. My sensibility however, varied from the east coast aesthetic of the '70s.

00:32:47 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I found receptive audiences in New York. I did many shows there, at the Modern, Millennium, and later at Anthology. I began to realize that my films were characterized as a part of a west coast regionalism.

00:33:18

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Bev and I initially went to New York in '66. We met Nam June Paik installing his first show at Bonino Gallery where he was setting up these old TV sets that he modified by using magnets. Curiously we later became colleagues at the founding of Calarts in 1970.

I also became friends with Stan Van Der Beek, Ed Emschwiller, Rudy Burckhardt, and Standish Lawder who taught at Yale. In the city we always stayed at the Chelsea and often rode the elevator with Harry Smith. Shirley Clarke had the penthouse where she oversaw the TV Teepee. We attend Richard Foreman's Ontological Hysterical Theater.

Peter Kubelka around that time had designed a unique screening venue in the Public Theater. His intent was to heighten the viewer's experience, isolating audience members from one another by placing each in a separate viewing box in an effort to minimize all distraction. In fact, the reverse happened. One became acutely aware of the annoying sounds everyone made which were amplified by the wooden structures. Anthology was building the Jonas Mekas canon in those days.

00:34:12

ADAM HYMAN

What else? I mean, what did you think of the other films that you were seeing out of New York at that time? I mean, now we classify this, like, period, as like the structuralist period. But was it even like...

-00:34:28

PAT O'NEILL

Yes, that would have reached our shores in '71.

00:34:49

ADAM HYMAN

Did you meet Jonas anywhere in that trip?

00:34:52

PAT O'NEILL

Not at that time. I had followed FILM CULTURE early on. On one trip he phoned to say he would attend my MOMA show and meet up later. We waited but he never appeared.

00:35:19

ADAM HYMAN

Alright, let's move onto, actually let's, talk about the making of RUNS GOOD, please.

00:35:24

PAT O'NEILL

RUNS GOOD was my fourth film. As I said, I was aware of Bruce Connor's use of archival footage. I began searching for diverse materials, the content of which could undergo radical alteration through context. Libraries provided one source, another, Gaines 16 Films in the Valley offered me great resources. It was a place that sold 16mm prints to collectors.

00:36:02 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I bought a print of **ANDALUSIAN DOG** for 30 bucks. It was quite a sacrifice. I loved that film, and loaned it to somebody who never brought it back. Mostly they had newsreels and science films. They had TV station camera rolls, 16mm black and white camera rolls without sound, that they sold by the pound.

00:36:37 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I think it was five bucks a pound. You'd buy this bag and they'd weigh it out. You couldn't choose what you were buying. They had a bin of stuff that they'd gotten. You'd come home and unroll this stuff to discover what you had.

00:36:57 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Sometimes it was interesting, usually it really wasn't. But I started finding scenes like the arrest of a man who I used in **RUNS GOOD**. It was quite beautifully shot, original footage, in good condition. It showed this man being booked at the police station who looked archetypically mob.

00:37:28 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

But I have never, figured out who he was. But he was being booked and he was covering his face, and then revealing it. I also found a newsreel item about five brothers marrying five sisters. And I used that. Used a lot of "You Asked For It," the TV show that had people performing feats of one kind of another.

00:38:03 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I was amassing cultural debris. It was film refuse.

00:38:34 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I collected quite a mass of footage and began editing sequences that yielded unexpected visions. This opened the door thematically so that I didn't rule out any content. I shot original material from my everyday environment. The film structured in sequences by the use of mattes allowed several images to appear simultaneously on the screen. The mattes concealed parts of images and revealed parts of other images. The film became chaotic but never lost its overall discipline. I saw it as a particular model of thought. It became a theme that I have never left behind.

00:39:12 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I remember Bill Moritz coming to the editing room when I was working on it, and being completely baffled. He was just beginning to learn about film. Bill was working at, Creative Film Society, Bob Pike's company.

00:39:40

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He was educating himself. He discovered Elfreide Fischinger through that because Pike distributed some of the Fischinger's films. I was unaware of his films of until Bill showed them to me.

00:39:58

ADAM HYMAN

How did you first meet Bill?

00:40:01

PAT O'NEILL

Bill was teaching at Occidental with Bev and we met.

00:40:37

ADAM HYMAN

technical

end tape 4

TAPE 5: PAT O'NEILL

00:00:48

ADAM HYMAN

Okay, so you were just, about Bob Beck and Fischinger and Bill Moritz's work with the Fischinger films.

00:01:53

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I had access to Bob Beck's 16mm printer and had begun to earn a modest living doing commercial jobs paying him an equipment rental fee. Commercial designers began demanding inventive visual techniques. Beck's 16mm rig became too limiting and I knew I had to work in 35mm.

00:04:26

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

You could not buy a 35mm optical printer. They all belonged to the Producers Service Company that held the critical design patents. To get one, a multi- year lease had to be signed.

00:04:49

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I made an arrangement with two other partners to secure the lease on a 35/16mm machine. I had clients, made my own films and offered printer time to other artists. David Lebrun made TANKA on that equipment.

00:05:41

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

With this set-up I had more control over the image. I could accurately align images with greater precision. I received an invitation to teach at Cal Arts in 1969. I met Sandy McKendrick and Kris Malkiewicz. I asked Sandy, if I came to work there would he buy an optical printer.

00:10:20

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Hal Scheib, from Cinema Research, had a printer that he had built and offered to sell to Calarts. They bought it, set it up in Burbank at their temporary campus (Villa Caprini, a defunct Catholic girl's high school). The first year of CalArts was held there.

Our campus was the first to have a professional optical printer. This enabled one to make precise alterations on existing footage. Every parameter of composition, time, color, and scale could be carefully controlled. Operating it was fairly easy. The purchase of it lured me to the film school.

00:10:54

ADAM HYMAN

Is that the one on Highland?

00:10:54

PAT O'NEILL

It was on Glen Oaks Boulevard, on the far side of Burbank. That first year of CalArts was really wonderful because it was in a small facility, and people were thrown together and forced to know one another. In the middle of the year, there was a major earthquake. -

00:11:22

ADAM HYMAN

February '71. The Sylmar earthquake.

00:11:24

PAT O'NEILL

Parts of the temporary campus collapsed or cracked open. Nobody was hurt, and it was funny in a way disasters sometimes can be. The classrooms occupied a two story red brick building.

00:11:50

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

An exterior wall simply fell outward, landed flat on the ground intact on the lawn with the bulletin boards, the posters and a blackboard with the word "Tomorrow" written on it.

Classes were held outside, and relocated into other facilities that had remained intact. Don Worthen, the sound engineer, was building a mixing studio. I don't think he finished because he had nowhere to move it. He took it all apart, and installed it at the new facility, which opened in Valencia in the fall of '71.

00:12:33

ADAM HYMAN

Why do you think they hired you?

00:12:34

PAT O'NEILL

My name had floated out of UCLA and my work added an element of diversity to the new faculty already hired by McKendrick. He built the school around the concept of narratives and documentaries. -

00:13:04

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I knew Sandy didn't have a clue about what I was doing, but he respected the fact that I was actually productive, had achieved some international recognition and my work wasn't as offensive to his tastes as some of the things that other filmmakers were showing him.

00:13:32

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He shared the faculty's universal concern about the Disneys' conservative management plans. We were assumed to be living out Walt's dream (in the midst of late '60s-early-'70s politics) and many of the faculty recognized the inherent conflict between the avant garde and entertainment culture. In '71 the school faced an uncertain future when the board fired the top tier founding, administrators who had conceive all the programs within the institute. It was the first campus anywhere to hire contemporary artists from all fields to serve as faculty. At the end of year one, a significant contingent of important artists resigned. Alan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, Max Kozloff, and Nam June Paik left the earliest. The campus remained unsettled until after I left in 1975.

00:14:30

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I didn't engage with the institute's political intrigues choosing instead to focus on showing and teaching experimental film. I had some really interesting students in that first class: Adam Beckett, Fred Worden, Robbie Blalock, Bruce Green, Robert Cohen, Chris Casady, Chris Langdon, Beth Block, Roberta Friedman and Daina Krumins studied with me.

00:15:09

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

We had an Oxberry animation stand, so I learned to shoot animation with it, which I had never done before. There were so many resources campus wide, composers, instrumentalists, who loved to collaborate on soundtracks and we had a great mixing facility.

00:17:25

PAT O'NEILL

At CalArts I was doing my own work on school's equipment and stood in line with the students waiting for access. Which meant that I was teaching in the daytime, going home, and then driving back at night and working all night, and then going home. And that was kind of a drag.

00:19:32

ADAM HYMAN

These are the, this is the CalArts years in the early '70s?

00:20:04

ADAM HYMAN

Were you having a class that they were in as well? Or was it really more like supervising as they did their own projects?

00:20:10

PAT O'NEILL

They were mostly special projects students. I was teaching an experimental film class renting everything from the New York Co-Op and Canyon. -

00:20:45

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

At that time I won some prizes from the Ann Arbor Film Festival. Served as a judge one year. I stayed at CalArts for five years. After four years I took out a loan and bought my own printer, because the printers that had been on lease were now for sale.

00:22:07

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The patents ran out. And all these printers came back to Producers Service Company, and were sold off at - 20 cents on the dollar, something like that. They were still expensive though. I got a single head printer, 35 and 16. I think the whole thing cost me about 26 thousand. It took me ten years to pay it off.

00:22:38

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I took a mortgage, I borrowed money from my father, and it was not hard to pay off. There were many clients and I felt like I had my own facility. I could control, it was next to my house. I could hire students from CalArts and other art schools, who were starting to show promise. I could, I pay people to work for me. Daina Krumins, Beth Block worked 5 years at Lookout Mountain. Tom Leeser, Sandy Matthews, Lisa Mann and Kate McCabe also assisted me. George Lockwood came during the early '80s and has been my collaborator ever since. I hope later we can discuss the invaluable contributions made by Beth and George to the 35mm projects.

00:26:24

ADAM HYMAN

Well let's return and stay with those first few years at CalArts, in the early '70s.

00:26:30

PAT O'NEILL

Mm hmm.

00:26:31

ADAM HYMAN

Um, tell me, can you tell me a bit more about Don, well first of all, which department were you, were you in film or animation? Or how did that work?

00:26:39

PAT O'NEILL

Well film included Live Action, Video, and Animation. Character Animation taught by the animators from the Disney studios had a separate program. So I was in the same area with Jules Engel, in his program called Experimental Animation. I was taught classes in the avant-garde and a studio course in the use of the optical printer. We had quite a few students who wanted to do that.

00:27:34

ADAM HYMAN

Tell me about Jules.

00:27:36

PAT O'NEILL

Jules. He came to CalArts after having a long career as a professional animator.

00:28:12

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Many of us guessed at his age to entertain ourselves. He never revealed his actual birth date anywhere. Jules was much beloved as an instructor, but our interests rarely over-lapped. We shared many students.

00:29:41

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Another founding faculty member in the school of Critical Studies, Gene Youngblood, held weekly screenings keeping us updated with the latest experimental films. I saw the first structural work there: SERENE VELOCITY, WAVELENGTH, and TOM TOM, THE PIPER'S SON of Ken Jacobs.

00:30:07

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And ultimately LA REGION CENTRALE, which provoked me to think about motion control systems. It is one of the most remarkable landscape pieces made in any medium. I then met Hollis Frampton in Philadelphia when he was showing ZORNS LEMMA and Brakhage's, THE ACT OF SEEING. My sense of filmic possibilities started widening tremendously.

00:31:08

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Through my friendship with Hollis I realized the limits of my education. I began to understand there's was more that I needed to know historically and philosophically, that I wanted to bring into my studio practice.

00:32:31

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In 1973 I was invited to show work at the first international film congress in London sponsored by the National Film Theater. The roster of U.S. attendees included Morgan Fisher, David James, Bill Brand, Stan Van Der Beek, Ken Jacobs, Amy Taubin, and Jonas Mekas, to name a few.

The exposure to so much new work provoked many questions. Every time I saw something that was intellectually challenging, I had to reflect upon my assumptions. I started thinking about new criteria, and I felt like not working for a while.

00:34:53

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I enjoyed talking with Hollis, he'd been a writer and a photographer before he made films. He started as a writer, which I didn't know, and his film NOSTALGIA was a coda to his photography. He was burning photographs and telling stories about them. Our discussions gave me an impetus to engage with different working strategies. Throughout my artistic practice I have always valued intuitive interplay with multiple ideas simultaneously. I feel that the films raise question about experience and its traces. They provoke more questions than they answer. This core dynamic has remained intact. I always felt that my films had more in common with other imaging making practices like painting or photography, except that my images evolve over time.

end of tape 5

TAPE 6: PAT O'NEILL

00:01:06

ADAM HYMAN

Actually, we were still in the midst of CalArts for a bit, and then we talked about RUNS GOOD. I'm going to start away from CalArts for a moment. We talked about your moving to Laurel Canyon in there. And I wondered if you can talk a bit and describe, sort of, the community around there.

00:03:40

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Many rock musicians lived there. Our neighbor managed Crosby, Stills, Nash And Young, and Joni Mitchell who lived in a bungalow like ours down the street. James Taylor lived next door. We didn't know these people except for an occasional greeting. We both taught full time. Bev was at UC Irvine and I sometimes made the two round trip excursions in a day to CalArts. Bev had joined with Judy Chicago and others to build Womanspace, the prototype for the Woman's Building. As time allowed I made films and some art works. Here we were on the famous musicians row. At the corner of Laurel Canyon Blvd and Lookout Frank Zappa had rented the house that was originally built by the silent film star Tom Mix. Tom Mix, the western star from the '20s, had constructed this large pseudo log house. Every night stretch limos arrived in various driveways along the block to pick up performers and take them to the Troubadour, The Whiskey and The Roxy. We enjoyed their LPs and went to concerts but our cultural and political work happened in another context.

00:04:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Zappa kept a communal house. The Girls Together Only (The GTOs) stayed there. An East Indian who wore a turban liked to sit in the window everyday. Perhaps he was a religious presence.

00:04:51

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

There was the notorious Miss Sheets. She was a nice looking girl, maybe in her 20s, and always wrapped herself in a white sheet that was her only wardrobe. She'd hang out in the neighborhood, sometimes panhandle and pick fruit from our persimmon trees. I asked her once where she lived and she replied, "in my body". The famous skater/guitarist who wore the amplifier on his back and who was as visually well known in as the Marlboro Man lived in that Tom Mix house. He appears in virtually all the stock shots of Venice from the period.

00:05:17 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

So that was some of the atmosphere. It was noisy at times. Bands, drummers practicing in the raw space of garages that amplified to the point of insane distraction. This was not a typical middle class neighborhood. Some of the older residents were emigres elderly Czechs, Swiss, and the Hungarian Count next door who claimed to have invented radar. In fact, the neighborhood had been called the Italian Swiss Colony in its earlier history.

00:05:55 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

The Look Out Mountain Air Force Base was about a mile up the hill. It had been a missile silo in the 1950s that was later decommissioned to become a military film production unit, underground.

00:06:24 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Built entirely into the rock of the mountain, it served as a film production unit that employed possibly 375 people, all of them working on government projects. The workers came and went by bus because the site had limited parking.

00:06:58 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

When I opened my studio the staff in the labs confused us with this military facility.

00:07:14 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

But it had been closed in 1968. They moved the production to Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino County. So that site became a large, empty shell.

00:09:16 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

We lived there for 33 years and saw several generations come and go. -

00:09:39 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

In our last decade there we had to remove a huge, decaying sycamore tree that had defined the lot. It made a wonderful umbrella and always kept us in the shade. Without it the nature of the place changed. The traffic density overwhelmed us and the entire canyon had undergone a spectacular gentrification. We left in 2002 and moved to Pasadena, without regret.

00:11:02 **ADAM HYMAN**

We talked already about Don Levy and Sandy McKendrick, and who you taught and how you got hired there and so forth. I wanted to see if you could talk a bit about...we talked a bit about Jules [Engel] already. Adam Beckett, I wanted to see if you could comment on, since he passed away did you know Adam, and how would you describe him and so forth?

00:11:23

PAT O'NEILL

Adam Beckett was one of the first students who enrolled during Calarts' founding year. He stood out immediately. He was very big and gregarious, fast moving and intense.

00:11:51

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He came prepared for what he wanted to do, that included sophisticated animation moves. He had collaborated with a mathematician and had written scores for camera movement.

00:12:15

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Adam's technique was to draw and shoot directly. He would draw on the cell with ink, shoot it, make all the camera moves and then add to that drawing. His animation moves were all predetermined.

00:12:45

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

THE EVOLUTION OF THE RED STAR and DEAR JANICE were made this way.

00:13:10

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Adam was so developed as a filmmaker I just cleared the way for him and would introduce techniques that could prove useful. And Adam would work in 24- hour cycles. We all shared the printer but everyone worked in different ways. To keep the printer in working order we relied upon one another's work habits. The movements, the parts that actually hold the film, were delicate, couldn't survive a fall and had to be kept clean. Some beginning students weren't always conscientious about its care. Adam became highly vigilant about other students' use of it.

00:13:33

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He'd have the equipment tied up. I contributed some optical printing knowledge to him, and he took what I gave him and improved on it. There was no one else doing anything remotely as ambitious. I had another student - from the same year, Daina Krumins, who came...

00:14:11

ADAM HYMAN

How do you spell that?

00:14:12

PAT O'NEILL

Krumins, K-R-U-M-I-N-S.

00:14:15

ADAM HYMAN

And the first name?

00:14:16

PAT O'NEILL

D-A-I-N-A. Daina.

00:14:22

ADAM HYMAN

Excellent.

00:14:22

PAT O'NEILL

She was a first generation American from a Latvian immigrant family who moved to New Jersey during the WWII. In the film school she wanted to re-create a Rococo religious scene in live-action. She set out to make it ambiguous enough to hover between the devotional and the ironic. It became her film DIVINE MIRACLE. Another I might mention was the team of Roberta Friedman and Grahame Weinbren. Roberta enrolled in the film school and Grahame taught philosophy in Critical Studies. They collaborated on printer work. They executed pieces that involved complex spit screens like the ones in their early film BERTHA'S CHILDREN.

00:14:57

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Daina enjoyed being cagey about her intentions. She worked as obsessively as Adam did and they were competitive, working hours and hours. For many of the other students the optical printer was a novelty.

00:16:35

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Adam graduated, with a fair amount of fanfare, and was hired by Lucas Films for the first STAR WARS project, along with a number of my other students: like Diana Wilson, Dave Berry, Chris Casady, Larry Cuba, Roberta Friedman, Robbie Blaylock, Bruce Green and at least 20 others. In his later career, Adam worked for Bob Able. I guess I should add here that Lookout Mountain Studio also took on some work from the STAR WARS epics.

00:18:45

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In Calarts' new building, a culture developed in the editing rooms of the sub-level basement, where students began writing, drawing and painting on the walls. It grew elaborately. For a while, and people kept adding to one another's drawings, filling the editing rooms, and eventually spilling into the hallways. Unfortunately, it turned violent when someone began using spray cans and breaking into the walls. Things turned scary.

00:20:05

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

As I said earlier I used the printer and I finished three films while I taught there.

00:21:05

ADAM HYMAN

So let's look at, let's talk about EASY OUT then, and the making of EASY OUT. Well actually, let me go back one question. So when you were going there to work on the printer, you were also like, then competing with students like Adam and Diana to get on the printer?-

00:22:44

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I believe we discussed my use of the Calarts' printer in an earlier session. Curiously in 1971 the film school was offered a very fine 35mm double head optical printer that had been used by the military. It was impractical as a teaching tool so we stored it. The school subsequently offered me the chance to buy for it a minimal fee. It was too long to house at my studio and so I passed. I mentioned it to Rob Blalock. Eventually, he and Bruce Green bought it, rented a space and set up an optical shop on Franklin Ave. in Hollywood. A year later Rob was hired by Lucas Films. He and Bruce Green moved that printer to the Star Wars production site in Van Nuys.

00:31:16

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Robbie and Bruce defined themselves as leftists. A lively debate ensued about bourgeois versus revolutionary filmmaking. This kind of revolutionary stance was in the air and with good reason. In our school, students talked about subverting the war and capitalism through the use of film. A lot of things seemed to be possible. Yet capitalism's capacity (perhaps less apparent then) to adapt any manifestation of radicalism was always in play.

End of tape 6

TAPE 7: PAT O'NEILL

00:01:18

ADAM HYMAN

Do you want to take a stab at self analysis, but in the sense... Just the question of: why do you think, say, explicit social engagement didn't interest you in your filmmaking?

00:03:12

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The first thing I wanted to avoid was topicality and references to major cultural and political events. It seemed to me that there was... so much propaganda from every side that, what could I add to it?

00:03:55

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I was making film from my own situation which was somewhat fraught with depression and self-questioning; it seemed to me that the thing I had to do was much more internal, more about stresses within the mind and within the experience of living.

00:04:51

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Centering my films on contemporary events wouldn't add anything much. I wanted to practice as a visual artist, not as a documentary filmmaker.

00:05:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I was trying to provoke questions, surprise and pleasure for an audience. I was engaging with the art I could never forget.

00:05:50

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Conner's A MOVIE had that effect on me. The experience. I always sought to create the conditions for something surprising to take place.

00:06:26

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

My background had to do with direct image making, thinking with the camera. For me the results had to be unpredictable. And the influence of Brakhage and Frampton as explorers established precedents

00:06:54

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Experiences that eluded definition and explanation compelled me to work in film, photography, sculpture and drawing. The curious thing is that as an artist I have always worked across media but the art world beginning in the mid '70s only considered me as a filmmaker. The Santa Monica Museum show in 2004 was the first chance I had to present a 40- year retrospective of all my static work along with the films.

00:08:59

ADAM HYMAN

Yes. Well that division is like the maddening one to me, as well. I mean, this ongoing, perpetual divide between the two.

00:09:08

PAT O'NEILL

Different economics. Different criteria. Different support structures.

00:10:18

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

When this medium initially emerged in the early '60s, filmmakers created the conditions that allowed artists to control of production, distribution, exhibition and profit sharing. That is the history of Canyon and the N.Y. Co-op. Both organizations accepted all films without regard for curatorial selection.

When the NEA began in '65 it supported these activities. My generation came into prominence by participating in these organizations that prevailed through the '80s. Filmmakers supported themselves by traveling to many artist-run venues across the states, including showcases at universities/colleges and museums. We made our work outside the support of the market system.

We accepted teaching jobs in the emerging media programs that offered MFAs and covered production costs by using a department's facilities, and our salaries to pay for things like the lab work. It was traveling and doing lectures, showing your work. This was a receptive period in the '70s and '80's. And we tried... there were 12 of us who did Oasis (Los Angeles Independent Film Oasis) which offered the same support we had received at other institutions.

00:10:52

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Oasis was successful for five years because we won grants. Everybody volunteered his/her time. It seemed like we were part of a growing phenomena. And maybe a wider public understood and valued what we were doing.

00:11:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The co-op, independent model of presentation provided an alternative to industrial entertainment, and that reality fed our utopian sense that this approach might have broad cultural impact. Yes, it did, by not in a way that any of us could have imagined as a final outcome: the capitalist co-optation of art making on a global scale. That's all I want to say about that.

00:13:07

ADAM HYMAN

There's a lot more to say on it as well. [technical]

00:13:24 **ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)**

Speak to this, is your films, to me, seem to be so invested with a trajectory of knowledge and experimentation that relates to the visual art practice and other media, as opposed to like... well, I don't want to say as opposed to, but more so than a dialogue with Hollywood industrial practice. Although, Hollywood industrial practice does also come into your films as well-- a conversation with that.

00:13:59 **ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)**

To me the question is, and this is sort of, you know, a larger, philosophical question- drawing from what you're saying, which is again, like how come the film audience, the audiences for films like yours don't draw in large numbers of people whose primary interest is other visual art?

00:15:08 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Museums largely ignored experimental filmmakers during the '60s. In the early '70s as conceptual art took hold, video supplanted film and the newer medium began appearing in galleries/museums especially in installation art.

00:15:43 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Only a few filmmakers like Anthony McCall's LINE DESCRIBING A CONE, Paul Sharit's projections and Michael Snow's FROM BOTH SIDES had the opportunities to present their ideas in that context.

00:16:08 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

My early adventure with installations, aside from SCREEN in '69, was in the late '70s and had a limited reception. LET'S MAKE A SANDWICH, and TWO SWEEPs were only installed once. I appreciated the potential this environmental mode of working offered.

00:17:32 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Looking at Paul Sharit's films, that are on multi projectors, often running the same film through a number of units, and making a modular, wide screen presentation were thoroughly non-theatrical. They were non-objective. They were musical, in a way. They had repetition, rhythm, and color change. LET'S MAKE A SANDWICH shared the same formal ambitions. In this film you see the traces of many images that tend to erase one another. Massive amounts of information cancel and re-cancel one another resulting in a highly detailed screen of fractured information.

There's pro-football players, a house on fire, a boat making turns and they are in this gelatin, all being at the same time and nothing dominates anything else. I worked at the threshold level of recognition. The experience encourages the viewer "to find" stories and faces which are not actually represented. The intention was for every viewer to see a different screen.

00:18:14 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

As I said this piece has a muted reception. By 1980, I needed to make a new start and set the 16mm gallery installations aside. At that time the galleries/museums had turned their attention toward a younger generation of artists working with different parameters in media. A new curatorial filter was in ascendance. I wanted to concentrate on a single, longer 35mm film for theatrical presentation that would take advantage of the fact that the world is full of 35mm theaters that could do a beautiful job of showing it.

00:18:48 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I would make something that plays in that arena. I started WATER AND POWER. I had a 35mm motion control rig built and returned to the landscape. WATER AND POWER, let's save that for later.

00:25:20 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I decided to by-pass that commercial gallery/museum filter. Many artists, who I respect like Bill Viola, Tony Oursler or Mike Kelly passed through it successfully.

00:30:45 **ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)**

What do you think a photo of a landscape can convey? An image of a landscape can convey?

00:30:43 **PAT O'NEILL**

What it can convey? We find a sense of orientation, the kind of ground that we all live in and recognize. Everything that isn't a figure, is a landscape. Even if it's an interior, it's the orientation that we stand in, where we know up from down. It's the ground of all physical activity.

00:31:27 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I guess you're asking why I'm using landscape so much. Some of it is a real love of space, of defining space. And in defining a space I must account for its vastness. Of course, as soon as we have space, we are also drawn into an enclosure. The two experiences oscillate. So, we have a sense of total freedom from enclosure, then fascination with that enclosure. We can enjoy them both.

00:32:23 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I find the complexity of space endlessly compelling. How do I make space malleable? How can I mobilize the world as I find it beyond using it merely as a background for human action. I am attending to that which is far, and that which is close at hand simultaneously, challenging the domination of the human over the inanimate.

00:33:02 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I'm not particularly a romantic about exotic landscapes. I enjoy shooting in the city as much as Monument Valley.

00:33:42

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In the city we're so accustomed to living in a man-made space that as soon as we leave it we become surprised and sensitized to what's around us. Using nature as a subject exclusively, for me is insufficient. While I have loved Ansel Adams and Edward Weston we can't go there anymore. Landscape, in my vision provides all the potential to construct a new fictional place in which there can be stories, human and otherwise.

00:34:54

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Then we realize that this is the endangered nature that we inherited. We photograph it to preserve what is about to be destroyed. In other words nature photography really isn't possible any more, because nature itself isn't really available in quite the same way past generations experienced it.

00:35:29

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In my beginning career at UCLA doing photography I was trying to capture a landscape that was already rapidly eroding. So that pushed me back into the manmade. The issue for some artists can be whether to criticize or celebrate the phenomenon of our world.

00:36:04

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Each of those propositions is freighted with problems. WATER AND POWER, for instance, tries to accept the inconsistencies of that freight. One is in awe about where we live, still hauntingly beautiful, and also in horror about what's happening to it. Sometimes it's like recording the little instances of our paradoxical tenure.

00:36:49

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Without that beauty, why do it? Landscape, some part of a landscape, that's what we all have in common, isn't it? In Werner Herzog's FATA MORGANA, he places us in an empty desert, heat waves and vastness. I saw it in about '68 or nine and found it moving.

00:37:33

ADAM HYMAN

Thoughts or anything you have to say about EASY OUT or LAST OF THE PERSIMMONS?

00:37:41

PAT O'NEILL

Maybe the most interesting thing about LAST OF THE PERSIMMONS, '72-73, are the sequences that I animated. I began this film several years after CalArts hired me. The school gave me my first access to an Oxberry animation stand. So I spent quite a bit of time learning how to use it, and drawing. I could create elements on paper that I filmed and later combined with live action elements using the optical printer. For instance, a cycle of animation was reduced and repeated many times to make a textural background like wall- paper.

00:38:24

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

This animation repeated cyclically. I had, maybe 12 of those on the screen, at the same exact time, and the synchronicity was just a few frames off. Something would happen in the upper left corner and then it would gradually repeat until it reached the lower right. This was behind a figure that pictured a plate of food, and someone eating from it.

00:38:51

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It's about the persimmon, an orb shaped fruit, slightly exotic that many people don't know how to eat. When it is hard like an apple the taste is bitter and terrible. It has to ripen, soften. Then it's very sweet.

00:39:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The eating of it is sticky. It has a sensual aspect to it. I thought, "Well I'm just going to show somebody." We set up a plate on a blue screen and just went through the whole process of cutting it open, putting lemon on it, and eating it. You don't ever see a face, but you see the hands and the spoon. I stole the needle drop of T-Rex's, IS IT LOVE.

End of tape 7

TAPE 8: PAT O'NEILL

00:00:40

ADAM HYMAN

All right, was there any last thought about **LAST OF THE PERSIMMONS?**
Or do you think you got it?

00:00:44

PAT O'NEILL

I think we covered that.

00:00:45

ADAM HYMAN

And **EASY OUT?**

00:00:46

PAT O'NEILL

The heart of **EASY OUT** is an animated sequence surrounded by a landscape setting. Within it there's a very active colorful animation. The animation was all made from a few pieces of the Fleischer Brothers, Betty Boop and Coco, the Clown.

00:01:55

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I probably bought them from Gaines Films. I began with this bold, iconic outline drawing, a very fluid, bouncy cartoon. The challenge was to take the motion of the cartoons and eliminate the characters and their story. What remained was a field of energy, so layered that it activated the entire screen with moving details.

00:02:32

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

So, the shots that I selected had a lot of action in them. I used an avalanche where a character slides down a hill. Rocks, train cars, and animals tumble down a hill landing in a huge splash of water. I super-imposed several cycles of that image over and over again.

00:02:56

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And made a series of loops that overlaid one another to serve as one piece of action. In turn I combined these sequences with one another. I built a field of continuous action. Using two frame cycles, the animation printed through vivid colors causing them to mix in complex patterns.

00:04:28

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

This film was finished in '72 or three and several artists had made flicker films by then. It may have been with contemporary with Tony Conrad's **FLICKER**. My use of animation made mine less pure. I kept introducing new characters. I introduced some things from the outside world, like neon and bits of light.

00:04:55 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I created a sequence from a neon sign in L.A.'s Chinatown. A seated Buddha would raise and lower his hands. I turned him into a kind of repeat texture.

00:05:20 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

He's flapping away. All this animation flows through and over him. Then he wipes away. Stan Levine and I worked on the sound. Stan was a music composition student at CalArts who had access to the Buchla synthesizer. And we worked together. He did the track. -

00:05:59 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

On a later film, I began to teach myself the synthesizer. I gradually learned to generate sounds. So for SAUGUS SERIES, the sound track was my own.

00:06:32 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

EASY OUT and DOWNWIND were both collaborations with Stan. -

00:07:43 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

With EASYOUT I wanted the action that I could pull from the animation that brought some residual content along with it. One might recognize some of the original material. I sought to atomize those ready-made images,

00:08:44 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

EASYOUT was one of my last 16mm pieces in which I used montage. Later I started segmenting films and kept the sections separate from one another.

00:12:28 **ADAM HYMAN**

So one thing you mentioned with EASY OUT, I'm curious about, I just want to understand better, was you talked about, like, removing characters from these animation pieces. Was that a literal thing, like, you know, the protagonist of the cartoon was there and you would remove him?

00:12:40 **PAT O'NEILL**

No, I fragmented the characters and backgrounds equally. Those remains, left me with actively moving lines devoid of narrative.

00:13:12 **ADAM HYMAN**

So you weren't being in dialogue with Jules Engel's where the dog gets erased as it runs?

00:13:59 **PAT O'NEILL 9(CONTINUED)**

The ACCIDENT of Jules Engel had more to do with Rauchenberg erasure of the DeKooning drawing, returning that piece to a blank page. It was an early postmodern gesture done with DeKooning's permission.

00:14:36 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I thought Jules had made something smart, erasing Muybridge's running dog that made one think about where the dog had come from in the first place. I wished he'd done more work in this vein.

00:15:04 **ADAM HYMAN**

So DOWNWIND I also just saw, and I wrote this note saying "cinematic equivalent to objective correlative" question mark. That's DOWNWIND.

00:15:24 **PAT O'NEILL**

Objective correlative in literature? An interesting idea, but perhaps not the best way to pursue a discussion of what's happening here.

00:15:39 **PAT O'NEILL**

DOWNWIND presents two separate ideas simultaneously. One is a diaristic recording of a year's travel though out Europe and the U.S. The other is an animated illusion of a geometric figure passing in front of the screen. This figure, a parallelogram, carries information from the main image, slightly offset and casting a shadow. It serves to divide one's attention between the primary image and the screen itself. As the film progresses these parallelograms begin to contain different information.

00:15:57 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I wanted this figure to interact with a variety of subjects. I shot quotidian scenes including a cat show, someone crossing a bridge in Amsterdam, a clock made of flowers in Switzerland, the cactus museum in Zurich, the Louvre, the Tuileries, the L.A. County Fair, Old Faithful and other geysers in Yellowstone. The display and the reception of this imagery fascinated me. As an artist I wanted to identify with the role of a passive tourist.

00:17:11 **ADAM HYMAN**

How hard was it to be shooting 16mm in all these places at that time?

00:17:15 **PAT O'NEILL**

Not difficult really...I had my Bolex and just so many rolls of film. That made me cautious, and I didn't re-shoot as much as I wanted to.

00:20:37 **ADAM HYMAN**

This was once thing that seemed very evident to me, like I was watching in the FOREGROUND as well, I think, is the editing doesn't seem like pre-derived. This was they heyday of Structuralist films and these don't feel Structuralist, the edits and rhythms of them feel very organic or intuitive. Like they came from you and something's bigger, then you go to something quieter, and it's just like the way a rhythm should go. I'm curious, how does it work then? For that, to me, it seems very much like editorial work, and I'm wondering how you would combine the editing with the optical printer work.

00:21:24

PAT O'NEILL

In SAUGUS SERIES, SIDEWINDER'S DELTA and FOREGROUNDS I employed these parameters. Individual sequences were made separately from one another. Each contained a fixed number of visible components. All of the components remained present throughout the entire shot. In most shots there were five. For example, one shot in Foregrounds depicts an urban neighborhood, two repeating, running dogs and the detail of a woman's shoulder. Spatially, the shoulder is positioned nearest the viewer. The dogs run in middle ground and we see the neighborhood in the farthest distance. The dogs provide the most action, crossing from left to right and then the reverse. Each time we see them, the dogs are a slightly different color.

00:24:09

ADAM HYMAN

There's another element in there, which reminded me of the Oskar Fischinger thing, which was like this pure middle thing on which you were painting and the painting colors would change and you would go through, and it was set within a window, which had a change of in the reflection as well. And I was curious whether, you know, Fischinger has those animations where it's like a different painted letters that would get revealed, as well.

00:24:32

ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)

I mean, obviously just it's changing cells as well in animation, in a general sense. But I was curious about whether there was any Fischinger interest in there for you, and in general, where did that element come from for you?

00:24:47

PAT O'NEILL

Fischinger's work didn't really apply to that scene in FOREGROUNDS.

00:25:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I made a set of different sized rectangles from plywood. I mounted each one of them on pins to place them individually. I used glass as a backing behind which I lit a blue screen.

00:25:55

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I shot this animation reordering the wooden rectangles frame by frame. I also painted marks on each of those pieces. We see abstractions appearing and fragmenting.

00:26:13

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The blue screen area was replaced by a detail of the sky and moving leaves.

00:26:44

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The last shot in FOREGROUNDS may hold the most interest. I wanted to do something impossible, to make an illusion of a loop of film in motion which portrayed on-going action. The loop hangs on a tree branch and appears to rotate convincingly.

00:27:21 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I made a tracking shot from a car window along the center stretch of the Palisade Park in Santa Monica facing the ocean. In this scene the vertical lines of the palm trees pass by smoothly against a pale void.

00:28:07 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

In front of a blue screen, I made a series of 20 loops in 35mm using this material, shooting them frame-by-frame on a small tree branch equipped with two register pins.

00:29:03 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I found this wonderful North African flute piece and felt its affinity for the motion of the loop.

00:29:46 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

It lent a snake charming tone to the conjuring. This very gentle flute music engages with the landscape's motion.

00:31:51 **ADAM HYMAN**

And then you added the text, the western edge of the continent.

00:32:23 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

When you look out there in Santa Monica, you're looking at that edge. The next thing is Japan or Hawaii. And it intrigued me that I could stand there really, at the Western edge. There wasn't anything more.

00:32:40 **ADAM HYMAN**

One other thing that struck me in that film was, I mean, I think there's an ongoing tension between the natural and the manmade in all your films. But, this one, to me it was very much along the lines of- the natural versus the mechanical, and mechanically reproduced. And the sound--just before the conversation started flowing, maybe it's the flute piece, but it starts like a, I don't know, it seems like a buzz. Something that's not a natural sound but then it becomes like this drone type of sound.

00:33:11 **PAT O'NEILL**

I made the predominate track from vocal tones, electronically modulated.

00:34:52 **ADAM HYMAN**

Was there... There's something about that film, though, as well. And we're ahead of, you know... We'll go back to these other pieces as well. But something about that film, in FOREGROUNDS, which is very much tied to being made in Los Angeles. Not just the reference to the western edge. But there's something about the scenery that you were filming and the landscape and the light and so forth. And I was wondering about your thoughts on that.

00:35:23 **PAT O'NEILL**

Everything in that film was shot close to home.

As a whole, this trilogy of pieces constituted a sketch book for me to refine ideas about representation. I used the practice of separating shots to avoid continuity, something I had appreciated in Peter Hutton's work. My approach here had more in common with still photographs than cinematic montage.

end of tape 8

TAPE 9: PAT O'NEILL

00:00:43

ADAM HYMAN

All right. Tell me about the genesis of SAUGUS SERIES.

00:00:51

PAT O'NEILL

Well, of course, I named it after the place where I was working.

00:01:21

ADAM HYMAN

Actually, let me ask one question. On your filmography, FOREGROUNDS is listed as 1979. But is that-- and SAUGUS SERIES is '74. Is that right? Was SAUGUS SERIES done after the FOREGROUNDS or after-- in your filmography, SAUGUS SERIES was after DOWNWIND.

00:01:44

PAT O'NEILL

SAUGUS SERIES was '74, and SIDEWINDER'S DELTA was made in '76. FOREGROUNDS is the third in that group. SAUGUS SERIES marks the first of the trilogy made with the intention to have each composite contain a fixed number of elements. As I explained earlier all the elements would be present throughout the shot. There would be no transitions. Each scene would be separate from all the others.

00:02:50

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

There was a fair amount of shooting in Monument Valley, where I employed some gestural camera work that produced fields of motion towards the end of the film.

00:03:10

ADAM HYMAN

What do you mean by gestural camera work?

00:03:13

PAT O'NEILL

It's vigorously handheld, taking the 16 mm Bolex moving it physically, moving the zoom rapidly. I was shooting Joshua trees. They're very spiky. I wanted to take something that was completely gestural, unpredictable and use it repetitively. I took the same material, offset it in time, laid it down again and offset it a third time. One set of movements would start and then the second one would move in behind it and the third, and all of these would contain a common element composed of drawn lines.

00:04:08

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

The last quarter of the film, made from simple animation elements that affect one another to produce a phenomena of floating dots and linear segments.

00:05:04 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

This animation yields tiny points of color, and toward the end, they seem to move like insects. It was rather like automatic animations. I didn't really know how this would turn out. I spent the whole summer combining these parts on the printer. The image was recorded on a stock used to print from color negative. This meant that the colors it produced were reversed, negative to positive. The background remained clear. The image was made by the intersection of animated line drawings.

00:06:51 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

For SAUGUS SERIES' opening sequence I set a pane of glass in front of a blue screen, took a finger dipped in tar and gradually smeared it across the glass very, very, very slowly. And then I inserted the result of that over a scale-less landscape of steaming, thermal water devoid of a horizon. Here's the paradoxical image of a hand painting directly on the land.

00:07:58 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Another shot of a circular plane of water was a tank of water I filmed from the studio roof, time-lapsing the reflection of the sun moving across the surface. It became this little lens that would project the sun back at me. The second element is a potted plant set into motion by the zoom that seems to move toward and past us. These "actors" engage one another. And that leads into the sequence of the flowing columns of color.

00:09:45 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Again I slanted glass in the front of a blue screen and poured onto it this viscous roof tar. I multiplied that image by three and assigned each a color, yellow, blue and red. I placed that in front of a wet rocky mound.

00:10:37 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

That had a wide range of color in it as these thermal sights do, produced by algae and minerals. In this case, I thought it resembled roasting meat. It looked like a juicy chunk of roast beef. I happened to find a 45rpm, in a record bargain bin in Chinatown that turned out be a small violin string orchestra playing Chinese exercise music. It suited the scene perfectly.

00:11:34 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

And this flowing thing happens. And the colors gradually go through a series of changes. They become very muted. And it's over.

00:11:56 **ADAM HYMAN**

Did you have any intended effects or responses desired in viewers for your juxtapositions?

00:15:23 **PAT O'NEILL**

I'm making assemblages in motion using modest components. The elusiveness of meaning is itself the content of the shots.

00:16:16 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

It's like leaping out a window. It's what happens when you refuse to take a position, deliberately avoid conclusions.

00:19:24 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Structuralism and minimalism, very much in the air then, refused the personal.

00:20:49 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Of course, storytelling was no longer viable, but with structuralism the notion that one might personally engage with content had become suspect. We had entered into this realm of the completely diagrammatic where one had a grid to determine what would be made and how it was to be received.

00:32:31 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Let's return to discussing *SIDEWINDER'S DELTA*, 1976, which is tied together by its western desert locations. It's executed as a series of black outs like the previous films and offers spoofs of scientific knowledge that we had learned from educational documentaries. I wanted to play with Joseph Alber's color theory, that explains how we see complementary color. We experience visual opposites. One looks at a saturated red and then in the dark one sees its opposite, blue green.

In *SIDEWINDERS*' I used colored paper and created the illusion that this paper changes colors, as a visual slight of hand. Later a saguaro cactus seems to change colors in complement to a transforming light bulb. The operation is the opposite of a chameleon who desires to disappear.

00:33:32 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I implied a scientific premise but I transfused it into stage magic. (At that time John Baldessari had made a video in which he taught a tomato plant the alphabet.) My saguaro sequence is also like a crackpot science experiment.

00:36:43 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

There's very little sound. The only sound that I did was striking a bamboo with a rock, dropping something in the water, and leaving many spaces silent.

00:36:57 **ADAM HYMAN**

Why did you not want much sound to that film?

00:37:00 **PAT O'NEILL**

I didn't want to dramatize it. I really wanted to put this material into a gallery. I could separate the 10 sequences, show them in any spatial configuration. In the meantime, I had to show it somewhere and I didn't want to show 10 separate films that would be a pain in the ass. So I combined them into one.

00:37:41 **ADAM HYMAN**

Is the order of that important?

00:37:44 **PAT O'NEILL**

Well, it became important as I edited.

00:38:49 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I'm always thinking about the audience and using myself as a test viewer. I think, well, how long does this experience need? If I can grasp in a minute why extend it for an hour.

00:39:16 **ADAM HYMAN**

So durational questions, per se, you know, like the most extreme example would be Warhol's EMPIRE, doesn't seem, so those weren't really a thing that interested you or is it...

00:39:31 **PAT O'NEILL**

No. I didn't really feel the necessity to do that. I mean, I was aware of it. I am a patient audience member and I sometimes find myself surrounded by impatient, restless audiences that ruined lovely films.

End Tape 9

TAPE 10: PAT O'NEILL

00:00:35 **ADAM HYMAN**
So any other final thoughts on **SIDEWINDER'S DELTA**?

00:00:41 **PAT O'NEILL**
I think we've covered it.

00:11:55 **PAT O'NEILL**
Did I ever say anything about **Linwood Dunn**?

00:11:59 **ADAM HYMAN**
About what?

00:11:59 **PAT O'NEILL**
Have we ever talked about **Linn Dunn**, the effects guy?

00:12:01 **ADAM HYMAN**
No.

00:12:03 **PAT O'NEILL**
Because he was an influence on my films during that period.

00:12:07 **ADAM HYMAN**
Spell his name for the transcriber.

00:12:09 **PAT O'NEILL**
Linwood Dunn, the Academy Theater in Hollywood is named for him. Dunn pioneered and refined important technology for making composite shots. His printing techniques became the industry standard. He put Faye Wray into King Kong's arms. He created spectacularly believable illusions in major features, working for directors like Orson Wells and Stanley Kramer. For awhile, when he had retired in the '70s, he would present a demonstration reel of his clips from features that showed how a shot was constructed using separate elements.

00:13:04 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**
When I saw it, I was fascinated with the technique, but I also began to realize that the presentation itself was engaging; that behind the scenes had as much to offer as the illusion. I attended his lectures three times becoming more fascinated with the elements than the features themselves.

00:13:45

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It's beautiful to watch the difference between being fooled and then informed about what's involved in the technical construction. All of which is off the table when we watch the film. We don't want to break that illusion, but once it is broken we discover all those remarkable separate parts: painted backgrounds, performers, stage apparatus, background sets and the ephemera of atmosphere, smoke, fog and dust. And breaking the spell was the thing I was trying to do all along. The revelation of these filmic illusions seem to be interesting as metaphors for us to undermine the overwhelming cultural fictions that dominate our everyday life..

00:17:16

ADAM HYMAN

And let's go back slightly. Why did you leave CalArts?

00:17:22

PAT O'NEILL

Well, I really enjoyed the first two years at CalArts but its early collegiality gradually evaporated leaving me feeling quite isolated. Then I began to critique my own teaching. I didn't find it satisfactory. I couldn't attend properly to my own films. This was an either/or proposition: concentrate on my art practice or devote more attention to teaching. I'd been there five years. I'd bought my printer and set up my studio at home. I agreed with Sandy to take a semester off beginning in December of '75.

00:18:17

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

And just as that happened, I had a cerebral hemorrhage. I wound up in the hospital and lost the ability to read. I realized that I'd been pushing too hard, trying to do too many things. I knew I was going to have to simplify my life.

I didn't realize until after many years that I had disappointed quite a few students when I didn't return. Only later did I appreciate how successful teachers establish a lineage of younger artists. Looking back on those early five years I realized how many wonderful artists had taken my classes

00:19:27

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

In early '76 I was ready for a break and always imagined I might come back for the odd year or so, but I never did. - After I recovered and reached a point where everything seemed to be all right, I returned to commercial work and concentrating on my films. I don't think my health crisis affected my art at all.

00:23:40

ADAM HYMAN

So in losing the ability to read, was that completely lost or what did you retain? And how do you think that has affected your work since then?

00:23:56

PAT O'NEILL

When I came out of the coma following brain surgery, I realized I didn't know what text was. I mean, I could see it, but I didn't comprehend it. I somehow had lost the knowledge of what letters were. Some of my confusion began to be resolved right away, maybe within two weeks. Then I worked with a therapist who was a reading expert at UCLA.

00:24:33

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I'd go every day for an hour and practice reading recognition and she gave me exercises to read to begin building back the connections to memory. It progressed enough so that I can do survival reading. But slowly—and my reading is slow—I can't follow subtitles quickly enough in foreign films. -

00:25:31

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

It's unbelievably more work to read than it was before this happened because it requires a very conscious sort of examination of each word. And I make a lot of mistakes. I read the beginning of a word, and I think I know what it means, and I go on to the next word, then I realize it doesn't make any sense so I have to go back, say, oh, that's "through", not "though".

00:26:02

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

So what does it mean? Well, it meant that I used to read a lot of fiction and I used to read generally quite a lot, and that was severely limited. Foreign films I just take in as a picture.

00:27:34

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I was just incredibly fortunate to survive the event.

00:28:19

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

There were medical procedures such as the newly invented MRI that saved my life.

00:29:48

PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

That was transformative. I realized that, this is all a gift, really. I mean, I was finished and came back.

end of tape 10

[PAT O'NEILL: As a coda, we have described all the 16mm work that falls into the Pacific Standard Time chronology. I began the longer 35mm films in the '80s, and those major projects fall outside the scope of this Getty/Los Angeles Filmforum oral history. I want to thank Adam Hyman and Liz Hesik for the time they devoted to producing my transcript. I recognize how much effort they have expended on my behalf and others to revitalize and showcase this medium—to spark younger audiences' curiosity about what happened so many years ago.]