

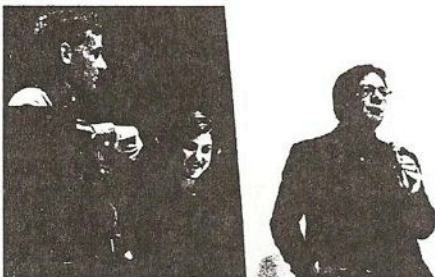
THE 32ND ANNUAL NEW YORK EXPOSITION OF SHORT FILM AND VIDEO

by Gordon Hitchens

Founded by filmmaker Nick Manning in 1966, the New York EXPO of Short Film and Video hasn't missed a single annual session in 32 years. Anne Borin is the current Director, succeeding Robert Withers (1994-97). Panels of New York professionals served as jurors, to consider 650 submitted titles; they culled 56 from 9 nations for the showcase. These were categorized into 4 groups: documentary, animation, experimental and fiction. EXPO's rules stipulate 60 min. maximum, and many titles were in the single digits, timewise. In addition, other committees of professionals acted as jurors to select the 4 winners in each category: Gold, Silver, Bronze and Best Debut.

Manning's original dictum remains intact: EXPO is committed to be *the* showcase for original talent in shorts, a neglected field. (The recent action by the Oscar® folks in eliminating documentary shorts from the Academy Awards® simply adds more neglect.) The short film or video can be complete and satisfying in itself, not just a training exercise for an emerging artist who aspires to move on to "real movies" in Hollywood. Rather, the short can be an exquisite miniature, making a single strong swift statement, like the 14 lines of a Shakespeare sonnet; we can't all make—nor want to make—a long opus like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Of course, some young producers of distinguished shorts indeed moved on to the feature format—Alain Resnais, George Lucas, Werner Herzog, Spike Lee, Martha Coolidge, Agnes Varda, many others.

Anne Borin last December debuted as Director of EXPO and scored with an increase in attendance of 34%. She is also the U.S. Coordinator for the International St. Petersburg Film Festival, "Message to Man," where she has curated programs of short fiction, documentary and animation since 1989. More than 200 films from the U.S., Canada and Australia have been screened in Russia per her efforts.



(left to right) Filmmaker Jay Rosenblatt, EXPO director Anne Borin and Canyon Cinema's Dominic Angerame

In addition to the EXPO screenings, two panels explored issues relating to shorts. "Directions in New Media" dealt with the variety of innovations within cinema and video, discussing (indeed, debating) CD-ROMS, websites, interactive movies, etc. Panelists were Diane Bertolo, Tennessee Rice Dixon, Kristin Lucas, Seth Thompson, Sue Johnson, Alison Cornyn, Kathy Brew. "Film Preservation for Independents" was a panel of top archivists, curators and preservationists working to save "Orphan Films," a precious legacy of ephemeral works of all genres made outside the Hollywood system: Patrick Loughney, Library of Congress; Anne Morra and William Sloan, Museum of Modern Art; Dominic Angerame, Canyon Cinema; M.M. Serra, Film-Maker's Cooperative; and a spokesperson for Cineric, Inc., one of the foremost labs dedicated to preservation.

The Best Debut short in the documentary category, *Rat Women* (9 min., 16mm, color, 1997, U.K.) is an incredible short about an apartment of young women who cohabit with — how many? — perhaps 30 rats, which crawl over everything and everybody. Luckily, cameras cannot record odors. Is this a cult? There are 600 Brits who welcome rats into their abodes, apparently the *rattus norvegicus* species. These human members of the National Fancy Rat Society share their digs and lives with these rodents. A Fulbright scholar, young director Minkie Spiro of the U.K. graduated school with honors in graphic design, later winning other honors documenting the airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel and child-victims of the Bosnian wars. She has a working tie with the BBC while continuing with graduate work.

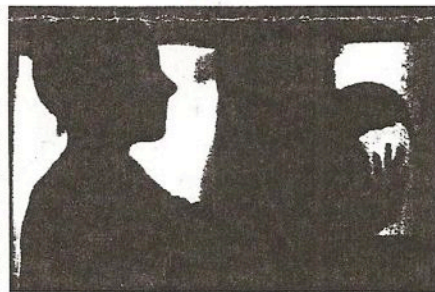
I Stare at You and Dream, by Susan Mogul, 57 min., 16mm, color, 1997, U.S.), co-winner of the Bronze, is like a fiction opus, as Mogul's real-life characters from Highland Park, Los Angeles, are captured so intimately. How could her adopted Hispanic community not be collaborating



(left to right) William Sloan (MoMA), Patrick Loughney (Library of Congress) and Anne Morra (MoMA)

specifically with the filmmaker? And yet it's their real lives, tears and heartbreak and all. Such as, the gal will soon be beyond the marrying age, but the guy just doesn't want to settle down. End of yarn. Mogul's film was co-produced with ITVS.

Look at Me, I Look at You: Koji Inoue, A Deaf Photographer, by Brigitte Lemaire (19 min., 16mm, B/W, 1996, France), is a charming profile of a Japanese photographer who, late in life, finally achieved some measure of renown. Curiously, his silent world benefitted his art, as is explained in the narration, in sign language. Inoue's life and work were made difficult by his deafness, but he learned its advantage in deeper understanding of human suffering, expressed pictorially. "I would like to prove that deafness is not a handicap but a special feeling which engenders its own philosophy," states director Lemaire. Almost all



Rat Women

of her work deals with the handicapped and multi-handicapped. A sociologist with a Ph.D. in Aesthetic Philosophy, Lemaire is also a journalist, widely recognized for her photography and films. Also, she works in theater as a sign-language teacher to hearing actors.

Ajit (28 min., video, color, 1998, India) is an eight-year-old boy in an upper-middle-class Calcutta household, an indentured servant, a domestic, who works for food and is glad to have the job. At home with his parents, he had been one of nine children, often going hungry. Because of his endless duties washing, sweeping, cleaning, laundry, even taking care of the master's children, he never attends school. He regards himself happily as special, because he has food and a corner for sleep. A charming boy, a sad film, a document of poverty in half the



Ajit