



**SILENT MOUNTAINS, SINGING OCEANS, AND
SLIVERS OF TIME: SIX FILMS BY DAVID GATTEN**

OCTOBER 29, 2012 8:30 PM

presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

CaLARTS

SILENT MOUNTAINS, SINGING OCEANS, AND SLIVERS OF TIME: SIX FILMS BY DAVID GATTEN

Mon Oct 29 | 8:30 pm

Jack H. Skirball Series

Over the last 15 years, David Gatten has explored the intersection of the printed word and moving image with a depth and imagination unique to cinema. Making connections across fields of knowledge and meaning, Gatten's films generate tactile compositions and draw novel conclusions from 19th-century scientific treatises, "outdated" 20th-century instructional texts, and rare books from 17th- and 18th-century personal libraries. Gatten, a leading figure dedicated to mining 16mm film's continuing expressive possibilities in the digital era, was recently included in *Cinema Scope's* "Best Fifty Filmmakers Under Fifty." This program, Part 3 of a touring retrospective, consists of six films made between 1998 and 2010. Part 1 screens at the Velaslavasay Panorama on October 27 and Part 2 at Los Angeles Filmforum on October 28.

In person: David Gatten

"Gatten continues to find new creative possibilities in the continuing premonitions of film's demise."
— Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine*

"The films of David Gatten brand the brain and the retina with equal force. They consist partly of cerebral puzzles and partly of lyrical reveries, and their central drama lies in the space between, where facts transform into poetry and transient experiences are assimilated into systems of knowledge."
— Tom McCormack, *Moving Image Source*

"One of the most singular and focused bodies of film being produced today."
— Chris Stults, Wexner Center for the Arts

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

Funded in part with generous support from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



PROGRAM

Film for Invisible Ink, Case No. 71: Base-Plus-Fog

10 min., b&w, sound, 16mm, 2006

"Gatten's placid, comically lyrical film calls to mind the self-referential hijinks and bone-dry textual wit of Owen Land. But Gatten's approach is in some ways more classically minimalist than Land's. Invisible Ink is largely composed of a series of sprocket-hole outlines that seem to materialize from the white screen, the "image" consisting of clear leader and its dust granules until one of the rounded rectangles dips down and floats forward into the frame of reference. They each occupy pretty much the same position, and although they are mostly identical, the ongoing procession gives us time to notice their differences – a smudged lower boundary, say, or an unstable corner. In between, Gatten silently presents texts from a Kodak manual, detailing what I can only assume to be film-developer hazard that we're observing – problems in base-plus-fog density." — Michael Sicinski, *GreenCine Daily*

What the Water Said, Nos. 1-3

16 min., color, sound, 16mm, 1998

"*What the Water Said, Nos. 1-3* derives both sound and image from the action of the ocean on lengths of unexposed film submerged in a crab trap at different times of year. The chemical action of the seawater, and the nicks and scratches made in the emulsion by the action of the waves, determine what is seen and heard in the finished film, making this one of the few truly aleatoric films."

— Chris Gehman, *Cinema Scope*

Journal and Remarks

15 min., color, silent, 16mm, 2009

"*Gatten's silent Bolero* is "the second reel of the ongoing *Continuous Quantities* series [and] contains 700 shots, 29 frames each, shuttling between the 1839 version of what later became Charles Darwin's *A Voyage of the Beagle* (1845) and images gathered on a recent trip to the Galapagos Islands. Ostensibly *Gatten's film* is a film about evolution in which nothing changes: shots of Darwin's words are matched with present-day illustrations of them, and shots of Darwin-era drawings of animals are matched with current footage of them looking exactly the same. The tempo never quickens at the pace of 29 frames per shot. But what evolves is the style; *Gatten* has achieved something like a mini-history of the avant-garde. At first image-shots alternate with black frames in a slow-motion simulation of a projector starting up. Soon images alternate with images, mostly from Darwin's book. More and more these alternate with contemporary images from *Gatten* himself, and more and more the shots begin to move from stillness. By the end, in these single units, shots begin to dissolve together in a move from Eisensteinian dialectics to Brakhage-like synthesis." — Johnny Lavant, *The Auteurs*

Shrimp Boat Log

6 min., color, silent, 16mm, 2006/recut and printed 2010

"A mathematical concept by Leonardo da Vinci, translated into a beautiful conceptual film consisting of 300 shots, each 29 frames long. Footage of a logbook of shrimp boat names and the image of those same boats at the mouth of the Edisto River." — Erwin Van't Hart, International Film Festival Rotterdam

What the Water Said, Nos. 4-6

17 min., color, sound, 16mm, 2007

"*What the water said* is literally inscribed on the strips of unexposed celluloid that *Gatten* cast into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of South Carolina. Encased in crab traps, the fragmented filmstrips harbor mystical messages from the underwater world, a source of seemingly never-ending fascination. The sea, its salt, sand and rocks, and its gnawing creatures have created the film's inimitable textured patterns and sounds, while passages from Western literature's greatest sea odysseys - from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Moby Dick* - remind us of the sea's singular place in our imagination."

— Andréa Picard, Toronto International Film Festival

Film for Invisible Ink, Case No. 142: Abbreviation for Dead Winter [Diminished by 1,794]

13 min., b&w, sound, 16mm, 2008

"The film is a physical abstraction of text from Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, a cinematic rumination of the absence of words... It is impossible to know the specific import of this film without context but no background information is necessary, however, to appreciate its glittering, flickering kaleidoscopic aesthetic. It's like seeing tree branches through dying eyes." — Livia Bloom, *Filmmaker Magazine*

Over the last 15 years, **David Gatten** (b. 1971 in Ann Arbor, Michigan) has explored the intersection of the printed word and moving image. The resulting body of work illuminates a wide array of historical, conceptual and material concerns, while cataloging the variety of ways in which texts function in cinema as both language and image, writing and drawing, often times blurring the boundary between these categories. Using traditional research methods (reading old books) and non-traditional film processes (boiling old books) the films trace the contours of private lives and public histories, combining philosophy, biography and poetry with experiments in cinematic forms and narrative structures. Exploring the archive in unexpected ways and making connections across categories of knowledge and fields of meaning, Gatten's films construct new compositions and generate novel conclusions from 19th century scientific treatises, "out-dated" 20th century instructional texts, and rare books from 17th and 18th century personal libraries.

Among the leading figures in a diverse movement dedicated to mining the fullness of 16mm film's expressive possibilities in the digital era, David Gatten "*continues to find new creative possibilities in the continued premonitions of film's demise*" (Scott MacDonald). A recent *Film Comment* critics' poll of avant-garde filmmaking in the 2000s placed Gatten within the top ten filmmakers and included two of his films in a list of the fifty best individual works of the decade. He was recently included in a list of *Cinema Scope* magazine's "Best Fifty Filmmakers Under Fifty." Gatten is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and his films have been included in two Whitney Biennials and have appeared at countless film festivals, museums, and cinemathèques around the globe.

This screening is part of the series ***Texts of Light: A Mid-Career Retrospective of Fourteen Films by David Gatten, in Three Programs*** organized in three different venues in Los Angeles.

At the mid-point in the completion of his magnum opus *Secret History of the Dividing Line, A True Account in Nine Parts* (1996-), this retrospective will provide the most complete survey to date of this project, which *Artforum* called "*one of the most erudite and ambitious undertakings in recent cinema.*" The two programs devoted to the *Secret History* series will be rounded out by a third program consisting of other smaller – but no less vital – series, providing an extensive overview of Gatten's substantial and accomplished body of work at a remarkable moment in his career. The retrospective is accompanied by a beautifully designed brochure which includes two newly commissioned essays by Tom Gunning and Genevieve Yue as well as numerous images from Gatten's work and other visual resources.

UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS AT REDCAT FALL 2012

Mon Nov 5: Poetics of Place: Films By Rose Lowder

Wed Nov 7: Revival Screening: Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam*

Mon Nov 19: Thom Andersen Meets Souto de Moura: *Reconversão*

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... or send an old-fashioned email to info.redcat@calarts.edu

... or, if you want to contact the curators of the Film/Video series and/or get on "Film at REDCAT" mailing list please send an e-mail at redcatfilm@earthlink.net