



BRUCE BAILLIE: TWO NIGHTS OF 16 MM TREASURES

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presented by

REDCAT

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California Institute of the Arts

CaLARTS

BRUCE BAILLIE: TWO NIGHTS OF 16 MM TREASURES

Sun Nov 3 17:00 pm

Co-presented with Los Angeles Filmforum and Canyon Cinema Foundation

Bruce Baillie is one of the great figures in American avant-garde filmmaking. Since 1960, he has produced a body of films unsurpassed for their lyrical sensuality, expressive honesty and formal inventiveness. An artist and film visionary, Baillie founded Canyon Cinema in collaboration with Chick Strand in 1961, and influenced generations of filmmakers and experimental artists, ranging from George Lucas to Jennifer Reeves and Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Two nights of rarely projected, beautiful 16mm films, celebrate Baillie's artistry, including vintage prints and the premiere of a previously unreleased work. **Sunday November 3's** screening features *Here I Am* (1962); *Tung* (1966); *All My Life* (1966); *Castro Street* (1966); *Valentin de las Sierras* (1968); *Little Girl* (1966, premiere, preserved by the Academy Film Archive); and others. **Monday November 4's** program screens *Quick Billy* (1970, 60 min.), an ode to both Eastern philosophy and horse operas, as well as rare unedited camera rolls.

"A metaphysical poet of film's postwar avant-garde, Bruce Baillie fuses inner and outer space through a sensuous manipulation of photographic surfaces. In *Castro Street* (1966), images of chuffing trains peel off from physical reality like shed skins, remarried in carefully fluid superimpositions, and set to a soundscape that combines machine noises with natural murmurs. Juxtaposing rich 16-mm color stock with high-contrast black-and-white lends a ghostly air to the massive engines, occasionally punctuated by makeshift iris mattes created by Baillie's hands cupping his camera's lens. He achieves a similarly oneiric quality in *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1963-64), again deploying deft multilayering, this time of eerily wordless city life alternated with observational moments that quiver on the edge of symbolism: A bearded biker charging across the Bay Bridge evokes fantasies of lost prairie warriors. A dreamlike synesthesia emerges more strongly in *Tung* (1966), a brief, ecstatic portrait of a female dancer set against a shifting pool of distorted organic colors.

Calling these lyric late-Beat films proto-psychedelic wouldn't be far off. Baillie contributed significantly to the emergence of a distinctly West Coast sensibility in American experimental cinema of the 1960s and '70s, one more unabashedly spiritual and lush than the scene's frenetic New York contemporaries. He helped establish the long-standing Bay Area distributor Canyon Cinema and inspired a younger generation of filmmakers like Will Hindle and Scott Bartlett. Today, Jennifer Reeves and others cite his influence, and George Lucas first became interested in filmmaking by attending Baillie's early Canyon Cinema screenings as a teenager..." — Ed Halter, *Artforum*

*Funded in part with generous support from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud*

<http://www.brucebaillie.com/>
<http://artforum.com/film/id=21925>



PROGRAM

Here I Am (10 min., 16mm, 1962)

Bruce Baillie's lyrical portrait of an Oakland school for emotionally disturbed children regards the world of the classroom with open curiosity. His camera thrives on the unpredictable movement of students and fog; every new composition is a new window unto the school space. This impressionistic style realizes many small epiphanies of play and private reverie. A soundtrack of

bird-song and cello only deepens the quietude. Though filmed in a style akin to cinéma-vérité, *Here I Am* flows as a poem.

"It's [Bruce] Baillie's way of allowing these marginalized, oft-forgotten kids to say, I am here, I'm a person too, I deserve some attention too." — Ed Howard, *Only the Cinema*

Still Life (2 min., 1966)

Color/Sound from Morning Star

Little Girl (10 min., 16mm, 1966)

Premiere, preserved by the Academy Film Archive

All My Life (3 min., 16mm, 1966)

Caspar, California. Old fence with red roses. These few things, a gradual pan and the voice of Ella Fitzgerald make *All My Life*, a major inspiration for Apichatpong Weerasethakul and numerous other filmmakers.

"Flaming red and a tenement roughness: Ella Fitzgerald has been remarkably seized and set to film."
— Richard Eder, *New York Times*

Valentin de las Sierras (9 min., 16mm, 1968)

Song of revolutionary hero Valentin sung by Jose Santollo Nasido en Santa Cruz de la Soledad; Chapala, Jalisco, Mexico.

Castro Street (9 min., 16mm, 1966)

Coming of consciousness. Photographed in Richmond, California, *Castro Street* is a masterpiece of poetic cinema. The film was selected in 1992 for inclusion in the United States National Film Registry.

Tung (5 min., 16mm, 1966)

A sensuous tone poem, *Tung* is a portrait of a friend; sandy skin and flaxen hair in the early-morning light.

Mass For the Dakota Sioux (20 min., 16mm, 1964)

A film Mass, dedicated to nobility and excellence. The film begins with a short introduction, "No chance for me to live, Mother, you might as well mourn." Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Sioux Chief. Applause for a lone figure dying on the street. *Introit*. A long, lightly exposed section composed in the camera. *Kyrie*. A motorcyclist crossing the San Francisco Bridge accompanied by the sound of Gregorian chant, recorded at the Trappist Monastery in Vina, California. The sounds of the "mass" rise and fall throughout. *Gloria*. The sound of a siren and a short sequence of a '33 Cadillac proceeding over the Bay Bridge and disappearing into a tunnel. The final section of the Communion begins with the *Offertory* in a procession of lights and figures to the second chant. The anonymous figure from the introduction is discovered again, dead on the pavement. The body is consecrated and taken away past an indifferent, isolated people, accompanied by the final chant. The Mass is traditionally a celebration of Life; thus the contradiction between the form of the Mass and the theme of Death. The dedication is to the religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Mass.

Born in South Dakota in 1931, **Bruce Baillie** served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War and studied filmmaking for a year at the London School of Film Technique. He moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1950s and within a few years became a guiding light of the New American Cinema. Simultaneous to his earliest personal experiments in 16mm, Baillie launched Canyon Cinema in the redwoods over Oakland in 1961. As he recounted to interviewer Scott MacDonald, "Immediately I

realized that making films and showing films must go hand in hand, so I got a job at Safeway, took out a loan and bought a projector.”

As Canyon fanned out across the Bay Area and developed into the cornerstone experimental film distribution cooperative it remains today, Baillie took to the road to collect material for a series of intensely lyrical works that helped to define the look “visionary film” in the 1960s. Early efforts like *On Sundays* and *The Gymnasts* gave an inkling of Baillie’s prevalent mix of documentary and fantasy, as well as his penchant for ripening superimpositions and exploration narratives. Canyon newsreels such as *Mr. Hayashi* (1963) proposed a concentrated form of cinema-as-haiku that Baillie would return to in later works like *All My Life* (1966) and *Pieta* (1998).

Baillie’s fully realized quest films – *Mass For The Dakota Sioux* (1964), *Quixote* (1965) and *Quick Billy* (1970) in particular – envelope laments for humankind’s destructive impulses in luminous formal surfaces. As much as his contemporary Stan Brakhage, Baillie developed a bold film language to convey visual phenomena outside the realm of dramatic realism. Baillie’s artisanal mastery of cinematographic layering, in particular, brings about immanent perceptions of the radiance and transience of all things. The lucidity of vision in his work is an end in itself, betraying an almost amorous desire for spiritual ballast.

In a simple ballad like *Valentin De Las Sierras* (1968), for instance, the intensity of proximate vision evokes a radical empathy with other beings. In *Castro Street* (1966), perhaps his most famous work, an industrial thoroughfare supplies Baillie’s Bolex camera with the raw materials for a matted tour de force of synesthetic effects. Film scholar P. Adams Sitney wrote that Baillie’s “problematic study of the heroic” and “equivocal relationship to technology” served to complicate his resplendent lyrical forms, though one could just as easily say that the films he made during this period give poetic expression to the inner struggles of the 1960s. His epic *Quick Billy* grew out of a brush with mortality while living at a commune in Fort Bragg, California, and its expansive passages through interior illuminations, autobiographical reflections and Western pageantry make it a fitting capstone to a turbulent decade.

Baillie continued to make films into the 1970s and 80s, eventually switching to video for works such as *The P-38 Pilot* (1990). Among other honors, *Castro Street* was selected for preservation in the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry in 1992. — Max Goldberg, *Fandor Cinema*

UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS AT REDCAT FALL 2013

Mon Nov 4

Bruce Baillie: Two Nights of 16mm Treasures

Mon Nov 11

Eline Jongmsa & Kel O’Neill “Live Screening” of *Empire: The Unintended Consequences of Dutch Colonialism*

Mon Nov 18

Rakhshan Banietemad: The Hidden Cost of Violence

Mon Nov 25

The Real and the Hyper-Real: Films and Videos by Scott Stark

Mon Dec 9

autrement, la Molussie by Nicolas Rey

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