

## FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

**Fri Dec 13 | 8:30 pm |**

Jack H. Skirball Series

# Reanimating Ancient Worlds: The Short Films of DAVID LEBRUN

David Lebrun combines techniques of animation, documentary, and experimental and anthropological film to explore the art, architecture, cosmology and history of cultures ancient and modern. His features, including *Proteus* and *Breaking the Maya Code*, have been exhibited from Sundance to Tehran and received major international awards. The evening's program of short films explores the boundary between still and moving images in formats ranging from variable-speed 8mm to 4K multiscreen arrays. Included are several premieres from *Four Worlds*, an epic cycle of films that synthesizes images of objects made between the Paleolithic and late Middle Ages into contemplative and revelatory aesthetic experiences.

### World Premiere

### In person: David Lebrun

"[Lebrun's work lies] at the intersection of ritual, anthropology and expanded vision." — David James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*

### PROGRAM

***Tanka*** (1976, 9 min., 16mm on HD digital)

"Tanka" means, literally, "a thing rolled up". Photographed from Tibetan scroll paintings of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, *Tanka* is a cyclical vision of ancient gods and demons, an animated journey through the image world of the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*.

"*Tanka* is brilliantly powered by the insight that Tibetan religious paintings are intended to be perceived not as in repose but as in constant movement. Lebrun has created the illusion of motion in this painted world. The water and flowers seem to dip and sway, the birds to fly, and the god to move his arms sinuously."

— Edgar Daniel, *American Film*

***Sidereal Time*** (1979/2018, 14 min., HD digital)

*Sidereal Time* was filmed in 1979 in at Sayil, Labna, Xlapak and Kabah, small ancient Maya sites in the Puuc region of Yucatan. The film was completed in 1981 as a two-screen piece for live variable speed Super-8 performance.

*Sidereal Time* was photographed at reduced speeds ranging from 6 frames per second to time lapse, and then projected at variable reduced speeds, both to fragment motion and to introduce a mechanical and sometimes hallucinatory shutter strobe. The film was recreated digitally in 2018, using various editing techniques to reproduce the effects of analog projection in the shutter-less digital medium.

**6 FILMS FROM *THE FORMS: FOUR WORLDS***

*The Forms: Four Worlds*, a work in progress, is an immersive installation comprising an orchestrated set of 100 animations that trace universal human images and forms across time and space... from the Lower Paleolithic period through the late Middle Ages, and from Mesoamerica to Europe, the Middle East and Indian Asia.

Viewers explore iconographic subjects that have been portrayed by artists since humans first created images on bone, stone and the walls of caves – representations of our bodies, of the visible world around us and of the invisible worlds of belief and cosmology.

The exhibition will include over 5 hours of animations on displays ranging from small flat screens to wall-high environments. It will be a garden of forking paths, a labyrinth of glowing and ever-changing forms. The sound, like the visuals, will be designed as a coherent tapestry, designed to evolve harmoniously as the visitor makes his or her own path through the animation-filled spaces.

The animations at the heart of *The Forms: Four Worlds* are created from thousands of high-resolution images of artifacts, art objects and architectural details, photographed in museums, churches, temples and archaeological sites. These photographs are precisely aligned and animated through techniques ranging from slow, meditative morphing to rapid, almost hallucinatory cascades of coherent images.

Tonight's program includes six films from *Four Worlds*:

*45 Lower Paleolithic Stone Tools, 1.7M-300,000 BCE*  
(2015, 6 min.)

*53 Figurines, Cycladic Islands, 3300-2000 BCE*  
(2014, 4 min.)

*93 Bird Women, Mycenae, Greece, 1600-1100 BCE*  
(2018, 4 min.)

*99 Bronze Finials, Luristan, Iran, 1200-500 BCE*  
(2018, 8 min.)

*Vishnu and Consorts, Temples of Karnataka, India, Circa 1250 CE* (2018, 7 min.)

*65 Churches and Cathedrals, Early Romanesque to Late Gothic France, 1050-1500 CE* (2019, 18 min.)

"The *Four Worlds*... [return] to the ancient objects a sense of life and power that defies objectification. Most notably, the animations accomplish this without adding any narrative overlay at all. Standing before their slowly morphing images in a darkened space, it is impossible for the viewer to subject the object to the usual hierarchical museum gaze. In great part this is because the viewer doesn't control what he/she sees, but is instead him/herself subjected to the slow revelations of the objects. The effect of this revelation is to create a sense of wonder in its most potent form. To wonder about every aspect of the object encountered – its maker and the manner by which it was made, its use, its time and place – opens the mind in a way that a presentation of facts or narrative cannot. In our culture of fast takes, we are not often encouraged or even permitted to have such a mind-opening experience of wonder, to even briefly structure an inquiry ourselves."

— Linda Duke, Director, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art at Kansas State University

## **ARTIST BIO**

**David Lebrun** was born in Los Angeles in 1944. He came to film from a background in philosophy and anthropology, and many of his films

have been attempts to get inside the ways of seeing and thinking of specific cultures. He has served as producer, director, writer, cinematographer, animator and/or editor of more than sixty films, among them films on the Mazatec Indians of Oaxaca, Mexican folk artists, a 1960s traveling commune, Tibetan mythology and a year in the life of a Maya village in the Yucatán. He edited Victoria Mudd's Academy-award winning feature documentary *Broken Rainbow* (1985) on the forced government relocation of 10,000 Navajo Indians in Arizona. Lebrun combines the structures and techniques of the documentary, experimental and animated genres to create a style appropriate to the culture and era of each film.

Lebrun's experimental and animated works include the radical editing styles of *Sanctus* (1966) and *The Hog Farm Movie* (1970), the animated films *Tanka* (1976) and *Metamorphosis* (2010) and films for multiple and variable-speed projectors such as *Luminous Bodies* (1979), *Sidereal Time* (1981) and *Wind Over Water* (1983).

Lebrun's animated feature documentary *Proteus* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004 and won numerous international awards. Animated from period paintings and graphics, *Proteus* tells the story of 19<sup>th</sup> century biologist Ernst Haeckel, who found in the depths of the sea an ecstatic and visionary fusion of science and art.

Lebrun's 2008 documentary, *Breaking the Maya Code*, a film on the history of the decipherment of the ancient Maya hieroglyphic writing system, received top awards at six European film festivals; shorter adaptations were produced for the PBS program NOVA and Europe's ARTE France. Versions of the film have been seen on television in over 70 countries, have sold over 100,000 copies on DVD and digital download, and have been viewed by millions on Netflix.

In addition to his work as a filmmaker, Lebrun has been the curator of numerous art exhibitions, and is co-editor of *In the Meridian of the Heart*, a 2001 book on his father, painter Rico Lebrun. He was President (1987-1996) of First Light Video Publishing, a production company and distributor of over 250 video titles in the field of media arts education. Since 1996 he has been President of Night Fire Films, a documentary film production company. Lebrun was a founding Board Member of the Center for Visual Music (CVM) and was on the Advisory Board of the Berkeley, California Chabot Space & Science Center's *Maya Skies* project.

Lebrun is also a founding member of the multimedia collective "Single Wing Turquoise Bird." Originally formed in the 1960s, the group was

reunited in 2010 and has since created a commissioned installation piece, *Invisible Writing*, participated in a university of Southern California conference on the history of alternative projection in Los Angeles, and presented commissioned performances as part of the major 2012 retrospective of Los Angeles art, *Pacific Standard Time*.

Lebrun is currently at work on *The Forms: Four Worlds* as a museum installation project using innovative animation techniques on dozens of screens to explore the evolution of fundamental artistic forms and symbols from the Paleolithic through the late Middle Ages.

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