ARTFORUM

REVIEWS KINDERHOOK

Michael Snow

The School - Jack Shainman Gallery

By Jennifer Krasinski

Michael Snow, *Flash 20:49 15/6/2001*, laminated color photo on aluminum, 48 × 72".

"I was thinking of planning for a time monument in which the beauty and sadness of equivalence would be celebrated," wrote Michael Snow on the origins of his once-underground, now-canonized film, *Wavelength* (1967), "thinking of trying to make a definitive statement of pure Film space and time, a balancing of 'illusion' and 'fact,' all about seeing." Funny to note how throughout his work, the temporal—often monumental, made pure—was also Snow's sidekick, the Harpo to his Groucho, a silent coconspirator that demanded, even stole, the audience's attention, clarifying "the cinematic" by deranging it. The beauty and the sadness of "Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955–2020)" is that it, too, is a time monument, honoring this rarest of artists, who died in January 2023 at the age of ninety-four, having spent his years being "all about seeing" in film, video, painting, drawing, installation, and more. An elegant celebration of all things Snow, the exhibition traces the makings of this beloved goofball intellectual—or intellectual goofball, if you prefer—who had a penchant for puns and seemingly endless tricks up his sleeve, and whose productions are as conceptually exacting as they are a joy to behold.

In the earliest works on view, we see Snow, at the time of their making an aspiring musician and painter, digesting his influences. His ink-on-paper drawing *Natureza Muerta Optica (study for Ocul)*, 1953, looks like a daffy homage to the Surrealists; the exuberant watercolor *Meeting in Milan*, 1954, channels something of the spirit of Paul Klee. In 1961, the Walking Woman made her debut. A female figure in silhouette, she is the leading lady, so to speak, of a mischievous series of two hundred and some discrete pieces that Snow created through 1967. (As scholar Scott MacDonald rightly noted in the pages of this magazine, the Walking Woman, despite her disparate realizations, can in fact be understood as a single, time-based work—auguring Snow's future in cinema.) She made many media appearances over the years: sometimes as a cardboard cutout, other times as a drawing. She even appeared in an issue of the *Village Voice*. For the photograph *Walking Woman in the Subway*, 1963, Snow made her out of plywood, painted her white, then posed her—at once avatar and absence—next to a flesh-and-blood female. In the installation *Little Walk*, 1964–2005, he casts her as *id ideal*, the perfect screen, projecting footage of nudes and other visual offerings onto her otherwise blank surface.

For the most part, Walking Woman retired the same year *Wavelength* premiered, its forty-five-minute gradual zoom expanding Snow's rightful reputation as a serious structuralist. (*Wavelength* is sadly the only *film* film in the exhibition, shown in 16 mm on Saturdays at 1 PM.) Not to be made obsolete by the short-attention-span era, Snow created *WVLNT: WAVELENGTH for those who don't have the time: Originally 45 minutes, Now 15!* 2003, a fifteen-minute digital video for which he spliced *Wavelength* into three sections, then layered them in post so that they play simultaneously. (It's available on YouTube.) The piece is largely inscrutable, utterly irritating if you're a fan of the original, but its message is clear: To quip it like Snow, film time is really *reel*. He nonetheless triumphed in the digital era, continuing his experiments via brilliant and weirdo images both still and moving. The large-scale *Powers of Two*, 2003, may be the single least titillating work in the exhibition, despite the fact that it's an image of a man and a woman having sex. Their coupling is awkward, artificial—the woman smiles directly at the camera, perhaps more interested in the male gaze than in the male on top of her. There's far more heat generated by *Flash! 20:49, 15/6/2001*, a hyper-vivid color photo of an otherwise banal dinner scene that looks like it's been hit by lightning—the subjects' food, drink, and hair fly in the air. For all the motion and commotion documented (and caused by) Snow over the years, the piece I found myself most deeply moved by was *Venetian Blind Revisited*, 1999, a pair of selfies he took in Venice with his eyes closed. The "tourist snap" gag was obvious, but the full joke took me a moment longer to get. In the parlance of classic Hollywood, I was looking at two of Snow's *holiday pictures*.

The New York Times

CRITIC'S PICK

In Moving Images, Michael Snow Teases the Eye and the Mind

A retrospective for the artist at The School in Kinderhook, N.Y., showed how he worked across mediums and genres — painting, sculpture, film and music.

"Wavelength 1967 Still 1" in the exhibition "Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955-2020)" at The School in Kinderhook, N.Y via Michael Snow and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

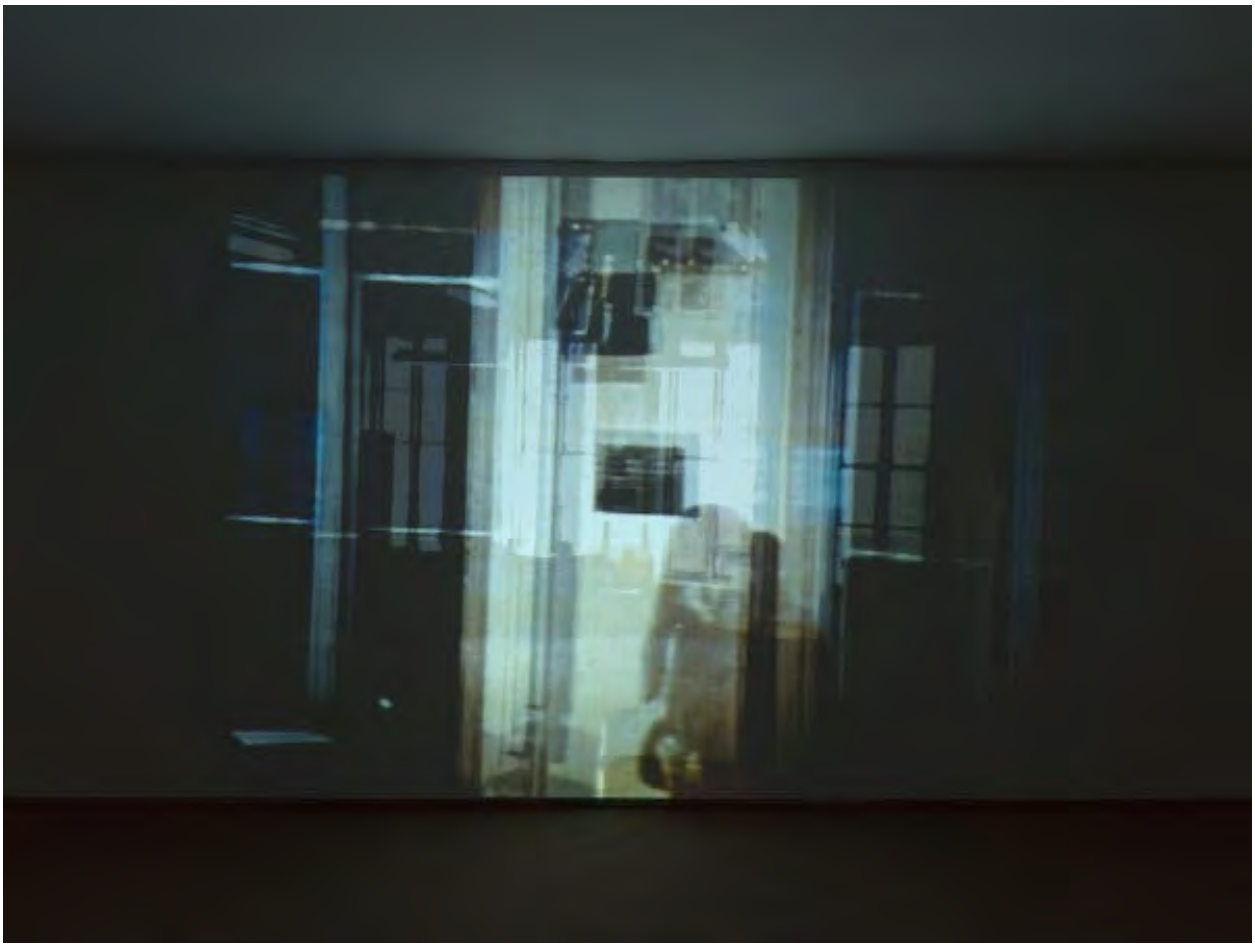
By Martha Schwendener

July 3, 2023

The New York Times

Our attention spans have shrunk over the last half century. Consider Michael Snow's "Wavelength" (1967), a rigorous 45-minute film made by the Canadian artist that stands as a monument of experimental cinema. Snow understood what he was up against: In 2003 he made a video called "WVLNT: WAVELENGTH for Those Who Don't Have the Time: Originally 45 Minutes, Now 15!" It wasn't merely a joke or a concession. Knowing that people were choosing to watch his film digitally sped-up, Snow used the occasion to create a brand-new work, superimposing 15-minute segments of the original onto one another like gauzy layers of celluloid film.

Both "Wavelength" and "WVLNT" are on view in "Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955-2020)," an illuminating exhibition of approximately 80 works at The School, the gallerist Jack Shainman's outpost in Kinderhook, N.Y. Rather than just focus on cinema, the exhibition also reveals how Snow, who died in January, worked across mediums and genres — painting, sculpture, installations and music. What really fascinated him was the question of how we see, hear and perceive reality and how art, language and technology continue to shape this experience.



Michael Snow's "WVLNT: WAVELENGTH for Those Who Don't Have the Time: Originally 45 minutes, Now 15!," 2003.Credit...via Michael Snow and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Snow's early, abstract paintings from the 1950s and '60s are mostly unremarkable, mirroring artists like Paul Klee, Jasper Johns and Franz Kline — although there are glimmers of an obsession with how images are constructed, particularly in drawings and canvases divided into grids and boxes, a bit like filmstrips or storyboards.

His first really successful experiment, in 1963, was creating a cutout silhouette he called the Walking Woman, which became a signature motif. A similar project — using a woman's body as an object or formal device — would be frowned upon in many quarters today. Snow's Walking Woman, however, clearly reflects how representations of women were changing in the mass media, captured by artists like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Willem de Kooning and Ray Johnson — and particularly in mainstream animation. (Television shows like "The Jetsons" and "The Flintstones," with their curvy-cutout-looking women — and whom the Walking Woman resembles — appeared in the early 1960s, and Snow's first cinematic work in the '50s was animated.)

The New York Times

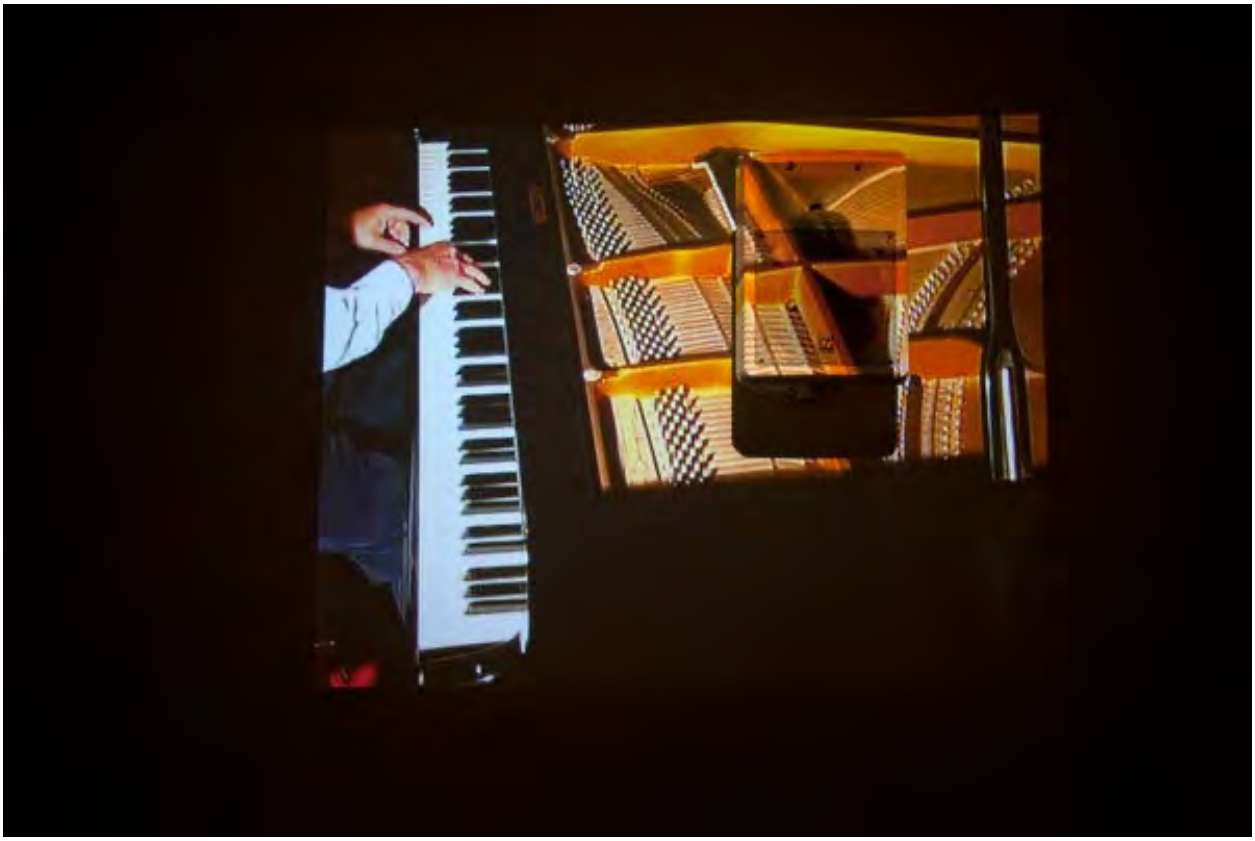
"Walking Woman in the Subway," 1963, captures a startled lady reacting to a life-size plywood version of the Walking Woman propped in a subway entrance. Credit...via Michael Snow and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

A photograph titled “Walking Woman in the Subway” (1963) captures a startled lady reacting to a life-size plywood version of the Walking Woman propped in a subway entrance. It’s “funny” (i.e., you can see how it’s supposed to be funny), but also a little alarming. The 12-minute film “Little Walk” (1964-2005) is where Snow really matures artistically. Here, he uses the Walking Woman silhouette to create a magic show of contrasts: Positive/negative, figure/ground, surface/frame — the staples of what would be called “structuralist” film, the category in which Snow was enshrined.

Later, the Walking Woman largely receded, and Snow focused on the technical properties of various media. “One Two Three” (2002) features cutup black-and-white photographs of a single tree to create a stuttering vision — like a filmstrip, but in still photography. “Handed to Eyes” (1983) has oil paint applied to a chromogenic photograph, turning it into an updated Cézannesque still life. The wonderfully wacky “Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001” (2001) portrays a chaotic moment at a dining table, but all the toppling “effects” were acted out by the two performers, rather than digitally manufactured.

“Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001” portrays a chaotic moment at a dining table.Credit...via Michael Snow and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Time becomes a more potent medium in the film and video works. (Snow called “Wavelength,” a “time monument.”) The beautiful, stilling “Solar Breath” (Northern Caryatids)” (2002) shows a curtain with folds, like the Caryatid sculptures that hold up temples in Ancient Greece, flapping in the breeze. “The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets” (2009) is a real-time video projection of a corner in Chelsea that plays with the ideas of images and a viewer’s perspective — just like the Cubists, but with the contemporary addition of video surveillance. The videos projected on four walls of a room in “Piano Sculpture” (2009) all focus on Snow’s hands playing the instrument — he was a professional jazz pianist — synchronized into an impossible performance: Through video, he creates a simultaneous piano solo and quartet.



In “Piano Sculpture” (2009), videos projected on four walls of a room focus on Snow’s hands playing the instrument. Credit...via Michael Snow and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Then there is “Wavelength” (1967). Shown in its original, 16-millimeter celluloid form every Saturday at 1 p.m., the film was made with a fixed camera slowly zooming into — eventually engulfing — a photograph of the sea attached to the opposite wall in a downtown Manhattan loft. The room in the film is lined with windows that resemble filmstrips and the moving images are accompanied by a rising tone produced by a sine wave generator. Bona fide “action” occurs, despite experimental film’s avoidance of narrative and story: The Beatles play on the radio and a character performed by the filmmaker Hollis Frampton drops dead. But in true avant-garde fashion, the real subject of “Wavelength” is film itself and how sound, light and time are structured by this technical medium.

“I wanted to make a summation of my nervous system,” Snow once wrote of the film — a work in which everything was “cosmically equivalent.” Given our current, upended nervous systems, “Wavelength” feels more like a meditation than an endurance test. Measured precision can’t be achieved in everyday life, but Snow’s film still feels structurally, cosmically sound.

“Wavelength, 1967, Still 2.” The camera gradually zooms into — and eventually engulfs — a photograph of the sea attached to the opposite wall.Credit...via Michael Snow and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955-2020)

Through Dec. 16 at The School (Jack Shainman Gallery), 25 Broad Street, Kinderhook, N.Y., (518) 758-1628; jackshainman.com.

Chronogram

"Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955-2020)"

Up at The School Through December 16

By Sparrow

Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001, Michael Snow, laminated color photograph, 48 x 72 inches, 2001

You walk into a room of somber paintings from the 1950s, and think you're at a "serious" art show, but soon that impression fades. Just to the right is *Over and Under* (1960), a crushed paper bag, partially painted blue. It resembles something you'd step over on a sidewalk, but the composition is as perfect as a Michelangelo sculpture. In the next room is *Site* (1969-2016) which looks like a stainless-steel rack for stacking chairs.

Could "Michael Snow" be a collective of 12 artists all working under the same name? In fact, Snow was a prolific artist whose multiple art forms nourished each other: painting, sculpture, photography, video, printmaking, collage, drawing. Plus, he was a professional jazz pianist! I wouldn't be surprised to hear that he also baked bread and rode a unicycle. "Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955-2020)" will fill **the School,** a 30,000-square-foot gallery in Kinderhook, until December 16.

Michael James Aleck Snow was born in Toronto in 1928, the son of a civil engineer. He graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1952. Snow was one of the first artists to recognize the aesthetic possibilities of video. His film *Wavelength* (1967) was voted one of the hundred most important cinematic works of the 20th century by *Village Voice* critics. (This film, plus eight other videos, appears in the show.)

Powers of Two, 2003, 4 Transparent photos, 48 x 102 inches

Serve, Deserve (2009) is a 13-minute video piece showing the setting for a meal: three plates on a tablecloth. After a while, salad falls onto one of the plates, followed by salad dressing. A clump of spaghetti lands on another plate; then orange sauce descends. Time passes, and suddenly the tape is played backwards. The salad dressing rises into the air, and the green leaves leap upwards. The orange sauce flies away, then the spaghetti. The plates are clean once more. *Serve, Deserve* is simple but mesmerizing.

Though he lived in New York City from 1963 until the `70s, Snow was not associated with a particular movement. He wasn't pop or Fluxist or a minimalist. Being in no school gave him a certain freedom. In 1961, Snow introduced his "walking woman" image, a silhouette of a

female with a bouffant hairdo, leaning forward as she walked. This nameless person became the source of multiple drawings, sculptures, prints. In one painting entitled *Banner* (circa 1994), a silkscreened image of her, black on red, suggests a political movement: the Walking Woman Party.

"There's a lot of jokes in the work," observes Jack Shainman, director of The School. For example, two photographs titled *Venetian Blind Revisited* (1999) show the artist in Venice, closing his eyes in the bright Italian sunlight. (In other words, he's "Venetian" and "blind.") Warning: If you are "triggered" by puns, enter this show cautiously.Do you know the classic story of the fisherman who catches a fish, and each time he describes it, the fish gets larger? *Fish Story* (1979) alludes to this phenomenon. A tiny fish at the bottom is reproduced seven times, growing larger with each repetition.

Chronogram

A still from Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids), 2002, a color video installation, 62 minutes, sound and continuous projection

The earliest work is *Airplane Ace*, a double-sided comic strip Snow drew when he was eight, in 1937. The most recent piece is from 2020. Not many art shows span 83 years. "I went to him with this idea for the exhibition, and he said yes right away," Shainman observes. "I was thrilled that we were going to work together on it."

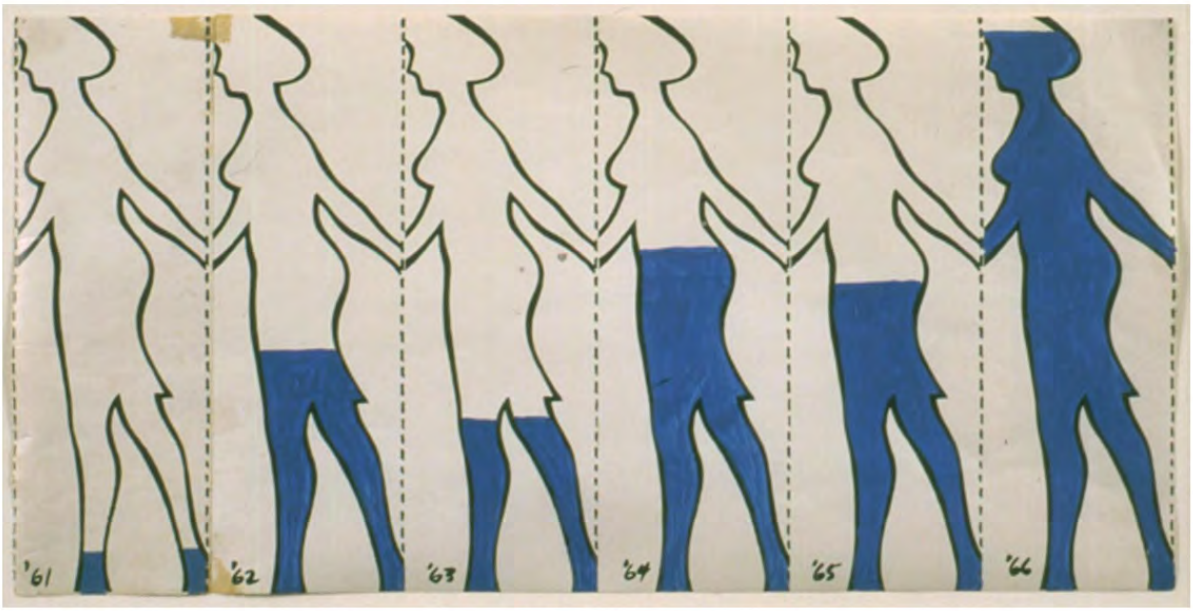
What began as a retrospective has become a memorial. Snow died of pneumonia in Toronto on January 5. But his fruitful, witty, Zen-like spirit pervades the School.

The Berkshire Eagle

'MICHAEL SNOW: A LIFE SURVEY'

At The School, Jack Shainman Gallery pays tribute to the legacy of the prolific, artistic polymath Michael Snow

By Sharon Smullen, Eagle correspondent May 17, 2023



Michael Snow's "In the Blue" is on view as part of "Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955-2020)" at The School in Kinderhook, N.Y.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

KINDERHOOK, N.Y. — When New York City gallerist Jack Shainman opens this year's exhibition on Sunday, May 21, at his upstate showcase, The School, the moment will be bittersweet.

The show "Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955 - 2020)" celebrates the Canadian artist known as a multifaceted painter, photographer, sculptor and jazz pianist who also created ground-breaking — and polarizing — experimental films.

In January, right in the midst of planning this much-anticipated exhibition, Snow died at the age of 94.

Shainman was introduced to Snow's work in 1984 by his late gallery co-founder, Claude Simard.

"Claude was Quebecois and an artist, and Michael is a living legend in Canada. But at that point in my life, I never imagined I could be working with him."

In the quarter century he knew Snow personally and represented him, Shainman presented shows in New York City and saw the artist's work exhibited around the world. Over the years, whenever the subject of a show at The School arose, "Michael would say, oh, I've got to make new work, I'm not ready. He was always busy."

"I had always planned on working with him to install the show," Shainman said. Instead, recalling Snow's ideas, he thought, "how would Michael have liked this?"

In the decade since reopening the century-old former high school once dedicated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Shainman has presented major shows by world renowned artists — Soundsuits by Nick Cave, bottle-cap tapestries by El Anatsui, collaboration paintings of Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat — as well as compelling art of Africa and the diaspora.

Shainman, who grew up in Williamstown where his late father, Irwin Shainman, led Williams College's music department and co-founded Williamstown Theatre Festival, also curates group shows; but for this exhibit, the entirety of The School is dedicated to Snow.

There are 86 works in the solo exhibition, representing the breadth and depth of Snow's often interwoven creative disciplines seen around the world during his long career.

"Some pieces have stickers on them from all the shows in different places they've been," Shainman said, "the crates are like old steamer trunks."

The show includes nine film works, one on a slide projector. A highlight of the show is rare 16mm screenings of Snow's iconoclastic 1967 film, "Wavelength," at 1 p.m. every Saturday and at the opening. Shot over a week, for 45 minutes the camera slowly zooms across a sparsely furnished room with minimal human activity towards a photograph on a windowed wall. A shorter 15 minute digital version "WVLNT" is also on view. "He cut it in three and overlapped it, so you're seeing a very different film," Shainman said.

A site-specific video, "The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets," named for its inaugural 2009 Barcelona screening, projects a scene from outside the gallery on to piled-up white museum plinths. Shainman will screen images of the corner of 20th and 10th Avenue, where his Manhattan gallery is located. "It adds this urban edge to the show which I really like," he said. "It was Michael's idea and I think it's wonderful."

Snow, a professional jazz pianist, features his music in the film "Piano Sculpture." "It's four screens with just his hands playing the piano," Shainman said. "It's a really whimsical piece."

"He was such a master at making stuff out of nothing. You know those artists where sometimes people aren't sure if it's art or not? That's when you know it's really good."

The Berkshire Eagle

Michael Snow's "Adamic Auto," paper on board, 1957.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Snow's "Walking Woman" series is a centerpiece of the show. Developed and expanded during the artist's decade in New York City from 1963 to early 1970s, it depicts a single female silhouette in multiple media, from drawings and sculptures to a life-size cutout photographed around town. "There's the sculpture he hauled all over the place, it feels like a piece of folk art in a funny way," Shainman said.

While in New York, Snow associated with avant garde artists such as Richard Serra, Chuck Close and Steve Reich. Ultimately, he returned to Canada.

If he'd stayed, things would probably have been different for him, Shainman said. "But he was never about notoriety, he wanted to do new things and be exceptional. Even up until the end, he was working and pushing it."

As a photographer, Snow created composite images such as the multilayered "Fish Story" long before Photoshop, Shainman said. In one large photograph, three naked women seen from behind view Cezanne's bucolic masterwork "The Large Bathers."

"Michael once told me it was a play on painting versus photography," Shainman said, "but also he wanted to set the viewer one step away, too.

"I'm still trying to wrap my head around all of Michael's levels of meaning and content. You can't really define him, he's not part of a school per se, although he's revered in the experimental film world."

As one of Canada's premiere artists, iconic public sculptures in his native Toronto include "The Audience," gilded clusters of hyper-enthusiastic

baseball fans looming over the Blue Jays stadium entryways; and “Flight Stop,” a flock of geese flying through Eaton Centre Mall’s atrium.

Among numerous awards and honors, Snow was made Companion of the Order of Canada and Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres by France.

Openings at The School are always festive occasions, with music, refreshments, and copious pizza from nearby La Bella’s that the art lovers — many bused by Shainman from New York City — pounce on with abandon.

Besides the Snow exhibit, outdoor sculptures by various artists on The School grounds range from Fernand Léger’s “Walking Flower” to Hank Willis Thomas’ giant cartoon speech bubbles and oversize silver hair pick.

“Michael was not only a great artist,” Shainman said, “but also such a lovely person, really generous and kind and funny. And humble.”

“I hope people will leave with a better understanding of the complexity and breadth of his work.”

IF YOU GO

What: “Michael Snow: A Life Survey (1955 - 2020)”

Where: The School, Jack Shainman Gallery, 25 Broad St., Kinderhook, N.Y.

On view: Through Dec. 16

Gallery hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturdays.

Opening reception: 1 to 6 p.m., Sunday, May 21.

The New York Times

Michael Snow, Prolific and Playful Artistic Polymath, Is Dead at 94

He was a painter, a musician, a photographer and a sculptor. But he was best known for experimental (and often contentious) films like "Wavelength."

The artist Michael Snow in an undated photo, framed by an image of the Walking Woman, which was his trademark for much of the 1960s. Mike Slaughter/Toronto Star, via Getty Images

The New York Times

By J. Hoberman

Published Jan. 6, 2023 Updated Jan. 10, 2023

Michael Snow, a Canadian painter, jazz pianist, photographer, sculptor and filmmaker best known for “Wavelength” — a humble, relentless, more or less continuous zoom shot that traverses a Lower Manhattan loft into a photograph pasted on its far wall — died on Thursday in Toronto. He was 94.

His wife, Peggy Gale, said the cause was pneumonia.

“Wavelength” (1967), hailed by the critic Manny Farber in Artforum magazine in 1969 as “a pure, tough 45 minutes that may become the ‘Birth of a Nation’ in Underground film,” provided 20th-century cinema with a visceral metaphor for itself as temporal projection. If it also saddled Mr. Snow with the weight of an unrepeatable masterpiece, it was a burden he bore lightly.

Mr. Snow was a prolific and playful artist, as well as a polymath of extraordinary versatility. “I am not a professional,” he declared in a statement written for a group show catalog in 1967. “My paintings are done by a filmmaker, sculpture by a musician, films by a painter, music by a filmmaker, paintings by a sculptor, sculpture by a filmmaker, films by a musician, music by a sculptor.” And, he added, “Sometimes they all work together.”

The New York Times

A moment from Mr. Snow's "Wavelength" (1967), which one critic said "may become the 'Birth of a Nation' in Underground film." Michael Snow/Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Whatever his medium, he seemed to be constantly rethinking its parameters. "A Casing Shelved" (1970) is a movie fashioned from a single projected 35-millimeter photographic slide showing a bookcase in his studio and a 45-minute tape recording of Mr. Snow describing the case's contents.

In the 16-millimeter film "So Is This" (1982), which consists entirely of text, each shot shows a single word as tightly framed white letters against a black background. Another film, "Seated Figures" (1988), is a 40-minute consideration of landscape from the perspective of an exhaust pipe; to make that film, Mr. Snow attached the camera to the carriage of a moving vehicle.

He began his film career with animation and capped it with the digitally produced feature "*Corpus Callosum" (2001), a cartoonish succession of wacky sight gags, outlandish color schemes and corny visual puns rendering space as malleable as taffy. Because he was waiting for technology to catch up with his vision, the film took 20 years to realize.

Mr. Snow's work was often based on the paradox of two-dimensional representation and sometimes demanded a physical or psychological shift in the viewer's position. "Crouch, Leap, Land" (1970) requires the viewer to scrunch down beneath three suspended Perspex plates.

The New York Times

Mr. Snow's "Photo-Centric Initial Installations for Marketing and Social Media," as seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2014. Philadelphia Museum of Art

"Mr. Snow's approach to photography is both heady and physical, a rare combination," Karen Rosenberg wrote in The New York Times in a 2014 review of a retrospective devoted to his photography at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. "The show makes you wonder, though, why Mr. Snow's photography isn't as well known as his films."

The reason may be that his best-known film was a true cause célèbre — the most outrageous American avant-garde film after Jack Smith's quite different "Flaming Creatures" (1963). Laurence Kardish, a former film curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, said a screening of "Wavelength" in March 1969 was disrupted by "shouts and counter shouts and walkouts." Many attendees of MoMA's screening, part of its often experimental Cineprobe series, were "lost," Mr. Kardish recalled in an interview for this obituary in 2016, although he said he believed Mr. Snow "enjoyed the brouhaha."

The New York Times

Mr. Snow's "Fish Story" (1979,) color photos on acrylic paint. Michael Snow/Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

In an interview in 1971 with the Canadian film magazine Take One, Mr. Snow recalled that the first screenings of an earlier film, "New York Eye and Ear Control" (1964) — which combined a cacophonous free-jazz soundtrack with a classically constructed non-narrative montage — caused disturbances both in New York and in Toronto, where "somebody wrote a review with a headline saying '300 Flee Far Out Film.'"

Take One quoted that headline on its cover. Inside, the filmmaker and writer Jonas Mekas described a recent screening of “Wavelength” at the Anthology Film Archives in New York:

“There were fist fights in the auditorium and at least two members of the audience were seen with handkerchiefs on their faces, all bloody, and someone stood up in the auditorium and shouted, loud and angry: ‘I know what art is! I studied art in Italy! This is a fraud! I’ll get Mayor Lindsay to close this place.’”

Mr. Snow’s sequel to “Wavelength” was a film titled with a double arrow in which, for 52 minutes, the camera — positioned in a nondescript classroom — pans back and forth and sometimes tilts up and down to create what might be called a perpetual motion picture.

Mr. Snow’s “Flash!” (2001). Michael Snow/Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Michael James Aleck Snow was born in Toronto on Dec. 10, 1928, the son of Gerald Bradley Snow, a civil engineer, and Marie-Antoinette Françoise Carmen (Lévesque) Snow. The family was distinguished. One of Mr. Snow’s paternal great-grandfathers, James Beaty, had been mayor of Toronto and a member of Canada’s Parliament in the late 19th century; more

recently, his maternal grandfather, Elzear Lévesque, had served as the mayor of Chicoutimi, Quebec, about 125 miles north of Quebec City.

Mr. Snow attended Upper Canada College and the Ontario College of Art, from which he graduated in 1952. He made his first film, the animated short “A to Z,” in 1956 (an excerpt from it was included in “*Corpus Callosum”) and had his first solo exhibition soon after. In 1961, he introduced a stylized, curvaceous silhouette, which he called the Walking Woman, that would be his trademark for much of the 1960s.

The silhouette was featured in paintings, sculptures and photographs, as well as in “New York Eye and Ear Control.” — a movie notable for its improvised soundtrack by the saxophonist Albert Ayler, the trumpeter Don Cherry, the bassist Gary Peacock and the drummer Sunny Murray. (Mr. Snow never played formally with these musicians, but he did have a combo, continuously called CCMC despite its shifting personnel, with whom he cut several albums and regularly performed in Toronto.)

In 1979, Mr. Snow created “Flight Stop” for the atrium of the Eaton Center, a multilevel mall in Toronto. The piece consisted of 60 life-size Canada geese fashioned from fiberglass and suspended from the top of the atrium, frozen in flight. Dick Loek/Toronto Star via Getty Images

The Walking Woman project continued after Mr. Snow and his wife, the artist Joyce Wieland, moved to New York City in 1963 and became part of a group of avant-garde artists that included the composer Steve Reich, the sculptor Richard Serra, the playwright Richard Foreman and the

filmmakers Hollis Frampton and Ken Jacobs, as well as the critic Annette Michelson and a number of jazz musicians, among them the pianist Cecil Taylor.

Increasingly concerned with Canadian subject matter, Mr. Snow and Ms. Wieland returned to Toronto in the early 1970s. They divorced in 1990, and Ms. Wieland died in 1998. Mr. Snow married Ms. Gale, a curator and writer, in 1990. In addition to her, Mr. Snow, who lived in Toronto, is survived by their son, Alexander Snow, and a sister, Denyse Rynard.

Mr. Snow's first Canadian feature was "La Région Centrale" (1971), which used a computer-programmed, motorized tripod that could rotate the camera 360 degrees in any direction to create a vertiginous three-hour landscape study; back in Canada, he continued to work in a variety of media and revived his music career with the CCMC ensemble.

In 1979, Mr. Snow was commissioned to create an installation for the atrium of the Eaton Center, a new multilevel mall in downtown Toronto. The piece, "Flight Stop," consisted of 60 life-size Canada geese fashioned from fiberglass and suspended from the top of the atrium, frozen in flight. When the Eaton Center festooned the birds with ribbons for the Christmas season, Mr. Snow enjoined it to remove the decorations on the grounds that his intentions had been compromised. The Ontario High Court of Justice affirmed his rights, and the Copyright Act of Canada was amended to protect the integrity of an artist's work.

The New York Times

Mr. Snow in 2009 in front of his projection "Condensation (A Cove Story)." Michael Stuparyk/Toronto Star, via Getty Images

"Flight Stop" became something of a municipal landmark. So did Mr. Snow himself, who went on to create more public artworks in Toronto. In 1994, a consortium of Toronto arts institutions celebrated his work with multiple gallery exhibitions and a complete film retrospective, as well as concerts, symposiums and the publication of four books, each devoted to a particular aspect of his oeuvre.

Nothing even remotely comparable was ever attempted in New York, his temporary adopted hometown, although Mr. Snow's impact on New York's avant-garde was considerable.

"One of little more than a dozen living inventors of film art is Michael Snow," Mr. Frampton, his fellow filmmaker, wrote in 1971. "His work has already modified our perception of past film. Seen or unseen, it will affect the making and understanding of film in the future.

"This is an astonishing situation. It is like knowing the name and address of the man who carved the Sphinx."

Maia Coleman contributed reporting.

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Michael Snow, Legendary Experimental Filmmaker and Artist Behind 'Wavelength,' Dies at 94

BY ALEX GREENBERGER January 6, 2023 12:51pm

Michael Snow.
COURTESY ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

Michael Snow, an experimental filmmaker and artist whose formally audacious work tests its viewers' perception of time and space, has died at 94. A representative for New York's Jack Shainman Gallery, which represents Snow, confirmed his death.

Snow's art broaches heady questions about whether photographs and films truly capture what passes before a camera. Puns abound, and a slithery sense of humor can be found beneath his art's austere surfaces.

For this reason, critic Manny Farber called Snow “a brainy inventor who is already a seminal figure and growing more influential by the day” in 1970. “Incapable of a callow, clumsy, schmaltzy move, he’s a real curiosity, but mostly for the forthright, decent brainpower that keeps these films on a perfect abstract path, almost always away from preciosity,” Farber wrote.

Snow’s works have appeared just as as widely within arthouse theaters as they have within museums and commercial galleries.

Between 1966 and 1967, Snow had created what is now his most famous work, Wavelength. It’s today considered one of the most important experimental films of all time, and it once even outranked narrative movies like Suspiria, Star Wars, and Blade Runner on a Village Voice list of the 100 greatest films of all time.

For much of its 45-minute runtime, Wavelength consists of little more than an office that includes a prominently placed yellow chair. Its footage, lensed via what appears to be one largely continuous take, was shot on different film stocks, lending the work a handmade quality; its pacing is slow and meditative. As the film goes on, its camera zooms ever closer to a wall that has a photograph of the ocean hanging on it. The sound of a sine wave is heard throughout.

The effect of viewing Wavelength can be difficult to describe. Some have compared it to an attempt to communicate with the occult, given that we feel as though we’re meant to see something that isn’t actually visible. Others have admired it as a landmark of structuralist filmmaking, which seeks to distill cinema to its most basic qualities, often with an eye to the medium’s materiality. The critic J. Hoberman once called the film “an unrepeatable masterpiece.”

In the ensuing five decades, Snow, whose career took him from Canada to New York, would translate his experiments across multiple mediums. “My paintings are done by a filmmaker, sculpture by a musician, films by a painter, music by a filmmaker, paintings by a sculptor, sculpture by a filmmaker, films by a musician, music by a sculptor … sometimes they all work together,” he once said.

Photography was often at the center of all these different bodies of work, and when he had his first U.S. museum retrospective, in 2014, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the exhibition was appropriately titled “Photo-Centric.”

Some of his photographic works attempted to mull how we see by creating voyeuristic situations. Crouch, Leap, Land (1970), a grouping of three plates that show a nude woman enacting the three titular verbs, are hang down over the floor, so that the viewer must look up from beneath and adopt the camera’s perspective. Paris de judgement Le and/or State of the Arts (2003) is an image of three naked women, who are seen from behind and posed before a reproduction of a famed Paul Cézanne painting of bathers. As they look on at this Post-Impressionist masterpiece, we gaze at them viewing the piece.

Other photographic works took on sculptural qualities, imploding any boundaries between the two mediums, as was the case in 1983's Handed to Eyes, a hand-tinted picture of blobs of clay.

In interviews, Snow drily said of his multimedia experimentation, "I have ideas, and the wish to attempt something; I muse about it, sometimes for a long time, and then finally 'attempt' it."

Michael Snow was born in Toronto in 1928. He attended the Ontario College of Art and initially started out in the world of advertising design. Dissatisfied with his job, he went hitchhiking in Europe and then embarked on a career as a professional musician. He played in jazz clubs in Canada at night; during the day, he created paintings in his studio.

In 1961, he and his wife, the artist Joyce Wieland, moved to New York. Early on, he showed with Poindexter Gallery, the same space that also represented abstractionist painters like Jules Olitski and Willem de Kooning. But it was his ties to the New York film world that ultimately brought him fame.

Under the aegis of Jonas Mekas, Snow was able to screen his works for crowds that included artist Nam June Paik and filmmaker Shirley Clarke. It wasn't until he screened Wavelength at a festival in Belgium and won the grand prize for it that he realized the following his work had gained.

Within Canada, Snow was considered one of the most important artists in recent history, with solo shows staged over the course of his career at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. He was picked to do the 1970 Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Yet his art has been prominently featured outside Canada too. It was included in Kynaston McShine's 1969 show "Information" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which has been credited with helping to solidify the Conceptualist movement, and in the 1977 edition of Documenta in Kassel, Germany.

Wavelength is hardly the only film by Snow to receive acclaim. The three-hour La Région Centrale (1971) includes little more than 17 unbroken shots of the mountains in Canada. Lensed using a robotic arm, each shot crawls along slowly, but for many, the effect was riveting. In Artforum, John W. Locke wrote that La Région Centrale was as "radically different from other contemporary films as Eisenstein's in the 1920s were."

Not every critic was pleased with Snow's films. *Corpus Callosum, a 2002 film about the digital world that focuses mainly on office workers, was given in a mixed review in the New York Times by Elvis Mitchell, who wrote, rather bluntly, that "the movie goes on and on, using repetition to comment on repetitive behavior."

Snow seemed totally unfazed by the fact that his work may not have been to everyone's taste.

In 2021, he told the Brooklyn Rail, “Now that I’m ‘iconic,’ audiences tend to stay respectfully through even my longest films, unlike the old days when some people lost patience after just a few minutes and exited abruptly, sometimes noisily.”

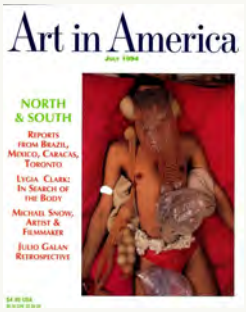
Art in America

Michael Snow's Experimental Films Toy with Perception and Representation

By *Ken Johnson* January 6, 2023 5:33pm

Michael Snow with one of his Walking Women pieces at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1984.
MIKE SLAUGHTER/GETTY IMAGES

Canadian experimental filmmaker ***Michael Snow*** *(https://www.artnews.com/t/michael-snow/) died on Jan. 5, 2023. This article originally appeared in the July 1994 issue of* Art in America.



The July 1994 issue of *A.i.A.* with a work by Lygia Clark on the cover.

Michael Snow is most widely known for making the kind of excruciatingly difficult experimental films that brainy theorists love to love and from which ordinary people stay away in droves. *Wavelength* (1967), which is mainly a hypnotically slow zoom from one end to the other of an 80-foot loft, is considered one of the great miracles of the avant-garde cinema. But as was demonstrated by a very large, 43-year retrospective exhibition at Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and at the Power Plant, a municipal gallery, Snow, who was born in Toronto in 1929, has not confined himself to filmmaking; he has worked in a dazzling variety of modes over the course of his career. Since graduating from the Ontario College of Art in 1952, he has produced representational as well as abstract paintings, sculptures and installations for the gallery and for public sites, mixed-medium assemblages and collages, performances, guerrilla street art, photography, holograms, sound pieces and slide projection works. In addition to all that, Snow has enjoyed a parallel career as a professional jazz musician and he has an extensive resume of concerts and recordings to his credit.[1] (This dual career has enabled Snow to avoid ever having to take a permanent teaching job.)

Snow's art self-reflexively toys with its own procedures, rules and limits of representation. This can and at times does seem a narrowly pedantic pursuit, even if spiced, as it frequently is, by humor and eroticism. But if it is true that we know things only through representations in our minds, then to represent (or deconstruct) representation itself is potentially a means of opening windows onto the inner workings of mental experience.

Although marked by playfulness and protean inventiveness throughout, the diversity of Snow's career would otherwise seem to defy critical generalization. But a unifying theme can be discerned: that is, a focus on the interplay of reality and illusion. Ever since the early '50s, Snow has been addicted to the thrill that happens when you shift attention back and forth between the material facts of an art work's physical being and the immaterial fictions of its representations. It is what this focus reveals about the nature of consciousness that gives Snow's work its philosophical depth and urgency.

By framing and reframing images, illusions, reflections, metaphors and other sorts of visual representations as well as pieces of the real world, Snow now produces brain-teasing puns, paradoxes, perspectival shifts and unexpected confrontations that confound our usual ways of distinguishing between the actual and the representational. In his plastic work, Snow is often only entertainingly clever, but at its best, his work can trigger an exhilarating awareness of the viewer's own thought processes. In a few cases, such as the film *Wavelength*, his work can make you feel that you are on the brink of metaphysical revelation.

THAT HAIR-RAISING LEAP from sensation to imagination and back again is, of course, one of the archetypal experiences of modernist painting, which is where Snow started out. A small painting made under the very obvious influence of Paul Klee announces the theme explicitly. Called *Man Examining a Line* (1953-54), it is a bust-length depiction of a person fancifully outlined on a richly mottled painterly ground who holds between his fingertips a brightly painted stick or piece of string—a line that functions both as an element within the fictive space of the picture and as a literal line on the surface of the canvas, and that also typifies the fascination with ambiguities of representation that will preoccupy Snow for the rest of his career.


Michael Snow: still from *Wavelength*, 1967, 16mm film, color, sound, 45 minutes.
NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, OTTAWA

It is not until the end of the 1950s, however, that Snow begins to break free from the confines of traditional modernist painting and to focus more specifically on the conceptual. Before that, he looks like a conventional, facile (though not unengaging) painter trying to find a style of his own. The influence of Klee gives way to the influence of Abstract Expressionism—de Kooning and Kline, especially—as in the mid-'50s he produces modestly scaled but radically abstracted, painterly pictures of furniture and room interiors. A little later, he is working loosely within a grid format; in *News* (1959), gray and black rectangles embedded in a flickering gray field suggest a painterly equivalent of the front page. Later, rectilinear shapes and lines become flatter, bolder and less atmospheric; paint is dripped and splashed in a jaunty, matter-of-fact fashion.

Around 1960, Snow begins to question those fundamental conditions that define painting as painting. *Lac Clair* (1960), for example, is a monochromatic blue square with lengths of masking tape applied along part of the edges of each of its four sides, a tactic that emphasizes the objectness of the stretched canvas; *Colour Booth* (1959), a freestanding piece consisting of two intersecting planes of painted plywood, takes painting off the wall; *Red Square* (1960), an irregular grid composition made by painting on a folded canvas and then presenting the canvas unfolded and stretched, challenges conventional procedures of the medium. In these works and others, Snow is working in the gap between painting and sculpture, and it is conceivable that he might have gone the way of Frank Stella or Ellsworth Kelly, painters who pushed the limits but never completely broke with the idea of painting as a fundamentally esthetic enterprise. He might also have become involved with process art.

In 1961, however, Snow shifted from primarily formal to primarily conceptual imperatives. This change is heralded by what looks like a step back. In a series of collages and drawings revolving around flattened and simplified representations of the female figure, he seems to pick up a figurative direction he had left behind five or six years before. What issues from these works, however, is a motif that frees him from painting as traditionally conceived: an image Snow called the Walking Woman, which he used as the exclusive subject and the formal anchor of his art from 1961 to 1967.

> The way Snow's films immerse and aggressively toy with — and even attack — a viewer s sensibilities is, in large part, what makes them so compelling.

The Walking Woman is an image selected from many drawings of female figures he was making at the time. The life-size, silhouetted profile of a young woman in mid-stride was originally cut out of a piece of cardboard. With full breast and derriere contours, a bouffant hairdo and a tight, short skirt, she is mildly sexy in a generic, modern style. (Without the bit of skirt, which is indicated by a small flip at the knee, she could be nude.) Significantly, her hands and feet and the top of her head are cut off, which implies that the image is or was framed; the Walking Woman is therefore not a representation of a woman but a representation of a representation of a woman. Such a frankly stereotypical image looks as though it might have been taken from some advertising logo, which led many to mistake Snow for a Pop artist.

But for Snow, the Walking Woman was not a Pop icon but a device to which he could moor a wide-ranging process of conceptual experimentation on the formal, technical, contextual and representational possibilities of art itself. The work in this series has more to do with the formal and conceptual innovations wrought by the likes of Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Johns and Dine than with the kind of sociological ironies associated with Warhol or Lichtenstein. And it is impressive if not astonishing how many different ideas are embodied in the Walking Woman works included in Snow's retrospective. The series may be read as a near-comprehensive, historical catalogue of modernist and avant-gardist impulses.

Many of these works explore painting as painting: there are flat, richly colored, painterly compositions that recall Matisse and relate to Color Field painting of the '60s. Others comment on style, such as *Mixed Feelings* (1965), in which each of 15 Walking Woman images is made in a different manner: as a cartoon, as an impressionistic painting, as a hard-edged image with stripe, etc. Some works focus on canvas shape—for example, *Five Girl-Panels* (1964), in which the figure is variously squashed, stretched or tilted into a series of canvases that range from short to tall to diamond shaped. In several paintings. Snow plays with the figure-ground relationship by cutting the figure free and placing it in front of its background.

SCULPTURAL WORKS are equally various: one from 1961 is a cubist construction made of small blocks of wood; in *Corner Piece* (1963) the figure is made into a knickknack shelf; in *Project* (1961) the image is painted onto an assemblage of drawers. In several works, parts of the negative space around the figure are projected into sculptural volumes. Snow also put the image into non-traditional contexts: he took a full-size version into the street and photographed it as people walked by; he placed the image as a small ad in the Village Voice; and he secretly put small versions into books at bookstores.

Finally there are works that play explicitly with levels of reality and representation. In the three-canvas work *Hawaii* (1964), a portrait of the Walking Woman is seen as an actual painting, as a painting represented within the fictive space of another painting (on the wall in a Pop-style room) and in the shape of a trapezoid, so that it seems to exist in an implied, but not represented, perspectival space. Several other paintings can be viewed through a window of tinted plastic that stands a few feet from the wall. These works address the shifty relationship between the real and the representational. Anything "real" can be reframed as fictional; perhaps nothing, after all, is nakedly real.

As the foregoing descriptions may suggest, what is of primary interest in these works is neither form nor image per se. Rather it is the relationship between form and illusory image that is philosophically at stake. More specifically, each formal variation evokes a figure that exists in the imagination independent of its specific material incarnation. You could say that the Walking Woman series is like the work of a goddess-worshipping cult; what interests Snow, however, is not the mythopoeic but the psychological phenomenology: the way consciousness operates at the intersections of such fundamental dualities as sensation/Imagination, perception/idea or mind/matter, These philosophical preoccupations have continued to determine Snow's plastic art from the late '60s to the present (about which more later).

> The diversity of Snow's career would seem to defy critical generalization, but a unifying theme can be discerned: a focus on the interplay of reality and illusion. He is addicted to the thrill that happens when you shift attention back and forth between the material facts of an artwork's physical being and the immaterial fictions of its representations.

In light of the subsequent growth of feminist consciousness, it is a good thing for Snow that in 1967 he abandoned the Walking Woman image, which seems a bit tacky from today's perspective. But there is something less obvious and more interesting to be considered in Snow's use of the image than the issue of simple sexism. For Snow's repeated objectification, manipulation and even abuse of his female surrogate may tip us off to something deeper: an attitude of intellectually domineering willfulness that tends to repress sensuality and poetic resonance in favor of analytical scheming. It is this attitude that makes Snow's plastic pieces—the *Walking Woman* work as well as the post-*Walking Woman* work—less satisfying than a viewer might wish.

Yet when we turn at this juncture to Snow's films, it seems that that domineering quality has now become a strength. The film medium extends Snow's philosophical imperativeness and the impact of his manipulations of materials and images beyond the work itself to operate directly on the viewer. You can't distance yourself from the films as you can from paintings or sculptures; and the way that Snow's films immerse and aggressively toy with—and even attack—a viewer's sensibilities is, in large part, what makes them so compelling.

AS WAS HIS PAINTING and, in an expanded sense, his Walking Woman series, Snow's films are based on modernism's reversal of the traditional relationship between form and content. Snow has repeatedly pointed to Cézanne as an inspirational model. Just as Cézanne's paintings assert their own material surfaces at the expense of their representational illusions, Snow's films emphasize the filmic qualities and conditions to which we expect to be

oblivious when we watch conventional movies. A Hollywood movie encourages us to enter fully into the fictional world it represents and to lose awareness of our actual circumstances and even of the fact that we are watching a film; it's only when a movie isn't working that we think about how long it is. In Snow's work, we are as much aware of the film medium itself (its qualities of light, texture, color and sound, the way the camera frames and composes) and the circumstances of a film's presentation (its duration in actual time as opposed to fictional time, our own presence in front of a white screen) as we are of what is represented. In fact, Snow deliberately impoverishes or destabilizes the elements of fiction that conventional films depend on— character, plot, setting, narrative pace— in order to secure the audience's focus on the immediate, actual experience of the film. Raw, homemade qualities further enhance sensuous immediacy and undermine pure illusionism.

Snow's refusal to give audiences a coherent illusory world into which they can escape is what makes his films, like Warhol's, unendurable for most people. Moreover, his films can be very aggressive toward the audience. Unlike paintings, movies act on the viewer's perceptions kinetically, and Snow's films can be distinctly unpleasant. Disjunction, repetition, extreme duration, harsh light, color and sound, dizzying contradictions of gravity, disorienting points of view: these qualities can make you feel bored, irritable, confused and even victimized. (In one instance, I had to flee the theater because a relentlessly repeated back and forth and up and down sweeping of the camera was making me literally sick.) The strategic willfulness apparent in the Walking Woman works is here directed full force at the viewer, and one understands why audiences sometimes erupted into riotous protest during early showings of Snow's films.

But that ruthless quality is also the strength of the films. Snow does less in these works than he does in any other medium to ingratiate himself with the audience. Each film follows its own predetermined logic and, in the best of them, there is an awesome grandeur about the implacability with which it fulfills itself. Challenging though they are, Snow's films can also be formally beautiful, conceptually intriguing, mysterious, mesmerizing, suspenseful and humorous. And despite a reversal of the usual form-content hierarchy, illusion is not wholly eliminated; rather, as with the Walking Woman works, it is the complication of the relationship between the actual and the imaginal that is at stake. In film, however, Snow realizes visual, metaphorical and philosophical possibilities beyond anything he'd managed in static art.

Snow's first film (not counting a seven-minute animated movie made in 1956 was a Walking Woman work. *New York Ear and Eye Control* (1964) consists mostly of long takes of Walking Woman cutouts placed in various natural and urban settings along with a sound track of raucous, improvisational jazz. But the best approach to Snow's use of the medium may be to concentrate on his most famous work, *Wavelength* (1967), which is only his second film but which embodies the central issues that Snow will deal with in his subsequent film work.

In its basic structure, *Wavelength* verges on a kind of abstract minimalism. The camera is fixed in one place for the 46-minute duration of the film. From an elevated position, it focuses on a wall at the far end of an 80-foot-long loft, where there are tall windows looking out onto the street and a few pieces of furniture, including a chair and a desk. As the film progresses, the frame slowly moves forward, creeping almost imperceptibly toward the wall; at the same time, an electronically produced sound rises from a low hum to a high-pitched whine in a long, steady glissando, an aural reflection of the visual zoom. In itself, this structure may sound monotonous, but there is a nice elegance in the way the zoom and the glissando reflect each other, and in the way both reflect the real time of the film. Around this basic armature there also occur a variety of visual transformations and discrete events that tend to produce a dreamlike interweaving of different levels of reality, illusion and fantasy.

AT THE BEGINNING of the film, the viewer beholds what seems to be a conventionally realistic cinematic space. Here the first of just four brief events involving human actors happens. Several people enter rolling a large bookcase; they deposit it at the far end of the loft, and then they leave. Shortly thereafter, two women enter, sit at the far end of the room and listen to the Beatles' song "Strawberry Fields" on a radio. This, too, seems an ordinary event, but the song adds a different dimension— music and fantasy—and, in effect, announces a departure from "normal" reality. After the song ends and the women leave, there's a long period during which a series of photographic transformations takes place. Using different colored gels and different kinds of film stock, Snow causes extreme changes in color, value, focus, texture and positive-negative relations that function as painterliness does in modernist painting to heighten our awareness of the medium itself. We are subjected to a nearly abstract filmic splendor of color and light. But these formal manipulations also have a psychological effect. They shift the quality of atmosphere and mood from mundane to hallucinogenic. Combined with the slow zoom and the rising glissando, they evoke a strangely ominous and decidedly oneiric sense of urgency.

Far into the film, the third human event happens: following some loud crashing sounds, a man staggers into view and collapses on the floor. Not long after, a frightened woman enters the scene and calls someone named Richard on the telephone to tell him about the fallen man, whom she presumes to be dead. After hanging up, the woman leaves. There is no resolution to these events—we never find out who the man is or whether (or how) he died, or anything about the woman or Richard. There is something weirdly comic about such an attenuated narrative. In a sense, Snow is debunking conventional, story-based moviemaking, saying, essentially, that narrative events, for his purposes, are not more important than other more strictly formal events that happen in a film. And yet these human events combine with the visual and aural momentum of the zoom, the glissando and the atmospheric changes caused by color, light and texture shifts to create a palpable narrative drive; as abstract as it is, the film nevertheless has an almost Hitchcockian feeling of mystery and suspense.

By this time, the camera has drawn very close to the far wall, and has begun to focus on a small rectangle, a photograph tacked up between two windows. It is, we finally discover, a photograph of the ocean—a dark, serene, black-and-white picture of rippled water. After this image fills the entire frame for a few minutes, the film ends. It is a quiet ending, perhaps anticlimactic, but also poetically conclusive and mysteriously moving. Given the preceding human events, you can't help thinking of this movement from the "real" space of the loft to the still, fictive oceanic space of the photograph as, metaphorically, a movement from real life to the cosmic hereafter. As movies so often do, the film ends—by implication, at least—with death.

PART OF THE FASCINATION of *Wavelength*, then, is in the way it lends itself to extensive formal, conceptual and philosophical analysis; intellectually it is intensely provocative. Think only, for example, of its use of framing: how the film frame, a kind of window, moves from a distance toward actual windows and arrives at yet another sort of framed window, the photograph, with which it merges in the end. This movement is formally satisfying, but it can also be seen as an obliquely romantic "plot," a kind of love story in which a disembodied but active visual will enters and moves through space to achieve union with an embodied, passive, natural other. Here Snow's masculine willfulness finds its perfect metaphorical embodiment in the penetrating gaze of the camera, and the action can be read not only as a sexual coming together of male and female, but also as a metaphysical marriage of mind and matter. Whatever exegesis it inspires, the beauty of the film lies in the way its meanings are embedded in its raw visual plenitude. (The title, incidentally,

is a complex pun referring to the physics of light and sound, the film's essential mediums, and also to the time and distance traversed in reaching the ocean waves.)

Before returning to Snow's plastic art, it would be well to mention three other movies, if only to show how adventurously he has experimented with the medium. One of his most rigorously Minimalist films is *La Région Centrale* (1971). For this film, Snow had a machine built that would rotate a camera 360 degrees around an invisible point, moving horizontally, vertically and in every other possible direction. Snow then helicoptered into the Canadian wilderness and set up this machine on an unpopulated mountaintop, where he shot film for what became three hours of pure landscape.

At the other extreme of complication and artificiality is *Presents* (1980-81), in which the triumph of modernism is allegorized. In this film, an elaborate but obviously phony set—an apartment interior—literally rolls back and forth in front of the camera as a man and a woman struggle to move naturally while searching for some unspecified object throughout the apartment. The subject is the rickety, old-fashioned construction of "reality." At a certain point, the picture plane attacks the set: the camera is mounted on an invisible machine behind a transparent panel, which moves onto the set and begins crushing everything in its path. Thus the modernist picture plane flattens illusionism. After the set is destroyed, there follows an hour-long montage of non-narrative film. A hand-held camera follows falling or flying things (a parachutist, birds, waterfalls), sweeps across landscapes and cityscapes and passes over the bodies of naked women, favoring the abstract dynamics of motion over the conventional imperatives of representation or narrative.

Finally, *So Is This* (1982), a silent, 45-minute film, is striking in that it consists entirely of single words projected one at a time and for varying lengths of time (mostly white on black). Here is a quote from the film that conveys something of its self-referential humor:

> Sometimes the author of this film is present when his films are screened and can thus answer questions about them. One question which the author expects is: "Why would anyone want to do such a thing as this?" followed by, "Wouldn't a book be better?" If Mr. Snow is here on this occasion he will attempt to answer such questions in speech after this film is over. It's going to he a very interesting film and perhaps such a question will be answered by the film itself so to speak!

Thus, like all Snow's films, *So Is This* sets up a paradoxical tension in the viewer between mental, imaginal experience (the fiction of a voice that addresses the audience) and the here-and-now actuality of light projected in real time on a screen.

AS REPRESENTED BY the Toronto retrospective, the creative peak of Snow's career seems to have come at the end of the 1960s. He lived in New York from 1962 to around 1972, and he apparently benefited from the stimulation and pressure of a vital avant-garde scene. (In 1970, he represented Canada at the Venice Biennale.) Indeed, this period is considered to be so important that a separate essay in the catalogue is devoted to it— "Around Wavelength: The Sculpture, Film and Photo-Work of Michael Snow from 1967 to 1969," by Philip Monk—and it was given a separate exhibition space at the AGO.

This small show-within-a-show had a cohesiveness, a feeling of rigorously distilled and fulfilled purpose, that set it apart from the much longer periods that preceded and followed it. The *Walking Woman* image is now gone, and the influence of Minimalism's preference for formal reduction, serialization, industrial materials and fabrication is evident. These are Snow's most sculpturally physical works, but they are still about vision and consciousness. In *Scope* (1967), for example, you look into one end of a long steel box and see a periscopic view of the opposite end of the box. The view is not very interesting until somebody else happens to look into the other end; internal mirrors then reflect the other person's presence with unexpected immediacy. As I was looking, a woman peered in at the other end; surprised to find me gazing out at her, she visibly flinched and laughed out loud. Works like *Scope* in effect reframe the frame, putting into it not an expected fctive space or object but something real, or virtually real; such pieces make us wonder about how we selectively, and maybe self-protectively, frame our world.

In relationship to what Snow will do in the years to follow, the most consequential works in this section were those involving photography. Like film, photography is particularly well-suited for Snow's purposes because its highly convincing illusions are always contradicted by its physical qualities. Press (1969), for example, is an absurdist demonstration of the paradoxes of photography. Snow photographed sundry materials (spaghetti, an egg, a tube of paste, a pair of gloves, etc.) one at a time, clamped flat under glass. He then displayed the resultant black-and-white photographs in a grid format clamped under a heavy sheet of transparent plastic. This arrangement comments on photography's ability to contain the illusion of three dimensions within a two-dimensional format. In addition, it punningly reflects modernism's fetishization of flatness. (It also predates by a decade and a half the very physical treatment of photography by the Starn Twins, who appear to have been influenced by Snow indirectly, if not directly.)

In one of the most compelling of all Snow's photo-works, however, ironic self-reflexivity is superseded, as it is in *Wavelength*, by a kind of metaphysical poetry. *Atlantic* (1967) is a wall-hung grid of 30 stainless-steel boxes, each of which contains a photograph of the ocean's surface (all are slight variations on the same photograph that appears at the end of *Wavelength*). The most immediate effect of this work is optical. The image of rippled water is repeated and blurrily reflected in the slightly flared sides of the boxes, which makes the whole piece shimmer and wobble almost surrealistically. The viewer also seems to be looking through the actual grid, as though through a window to a fictive world beyond. This conjunction of the geometric structure of the grid and the limitlessness of the water can be read as a transcendental marriage of body and soul, culture and nature, the rational and the irrational, the finite and the infinite. A wedding of opposites that reflects the extremes of the psyche itself, *Atlantic* offers something that verges on a religious experience.

OF THE TWO DIVERGENT directions suggested by *Press* and *Atlantic*, it is the former that Snow mainly pursues in the decades that follow. In his work of the '70s, '80s and '90s (represented at the Power Plant, a large, rehabilitated industrial building, by more than 60 pieces), he has explored photography itself as a means and as a subject with the same single-minded focus and unpredictable inventiveness that was typical of his variations on the *Walking Woman* theme. (A handful of sculptures and paintings from this period were also included, but they seemed peripheral to Snow's primary involvement in photography.)[2]

What Snow tends to do with each of his photo-works is to zero in on a particular characteristic or element of photography that we take for granted and to defamiliarize it through punning literalization, reversal of expectation or some other manipulation. *Crouch, Leap and Land* (1970) deals, like *Press*, with photographic space. Kneeling down to look up at the underside of three waist-high panels, you discover a sequence of black-and-white images of a naked woman; seen from below (through a transparent floor), she crouches, springs up and comes back down. Momentarily, you believe that she is jumping into actual space; yet when you stand up, you see that, of course, there is no such space—only those thin panels. The revelation is oddly surprising; somehow,

the mind becomes captivated by the illusion and is startled by its disappearance. Snow's method of tricking you into an act of voyeurism is also noteworthy. It is worth observing that the connection between looking and desire is one of the artist's favorite subthemes.

Almost all of Snow's works from this period deal with the discrepancy between two or more ways of looking at photographs. You might think such an approach would become predictable, but what's impressive is how he keeps finding new ways to match form and concept. Here are a few more examples: in *Of a Ladder* (1971), photographs of parts of a ladder are sequentially stacked up the wall, creating a formal, absurdly literal version of the illusory image. In *Meeting of Measure* (1983), a commentary on scale, an image of a human foot placed on top of a cardboard box full of little clay figures shows that the box is a foot square; but because the whole photograph is dramatically enlarged, the foot, which is normally a measure of actual scale, becomes fantastically huge and threatens to crush the tiny people in the box. In *Egg* (1985), a holographic image of the artist in the act of cracking an egg and dropping its contents is projected above a real frying pan, creating an almost hallucinatory confusion of the real and the illusory. *Speed of Light* (1992) is a large color transparency of a rustic, curtained window attached to a light box so that the light from behind glows through the curtain, conflating actual fluorescent light and fictive sunlight. With these and many more works, Snow again and again refreshes our awareness of the complex and contradictory relationship between reality and its representation. He also makes us marvel at the sheer fertility of his conceptual imagination.

BECAUSE OF ITS diversity and ingenuity, the post-'60s section of Snow's retrospective was the most entertaining of the three sections (four, if you count the films). However, it also exposed certain of the artist's limitations. What's problematic about these later works is similar to what is disappointing about the Walking Woman series. Because of Snow's relative lack of engagement in the development of form or image as ends in themselves, individual pieces tend not to be very esthetically or symbolically gratifying. Although some are very technically complex—*Redifice* (1986), for example, is a massive box with many windows and holograms, each displaying an elaborately constructed two- or three-dimensional image—single works are more interesting as part of the collective record of the artist's thinking and strategic decision-making than as traditional esthetic objects. But because each work ostensibly addresses some more or less familiar art-related idea (i.e., the tension between representation and abstraction, the idea of negative space, the objectivity of the medium, style as subject, etc.), the oeuvre becomes an ongoing series of didactic, even academic (albeit witty) lessons in modernist theory and practice. And because of the way Snow distills or isolates his conceptual points, his works often read as one-liners or illustrative demonstrations of ideas.

Finally, too much self-reflexivity can begin to feel claustrophobic. You start to yearn for a glimpse of the world outside the studio. In this regard, it's instructive that one of Snow's most compelling works is a series of tiny, richly hued still-life pictures—*Still-Living (9 x 4 Acts, Scene One)* (1982)—in which the formal beauty and symbolic intrigue of miniaturized assortments of odds and ends (boots, horns, bottles, a lobster, tools, bones, rope and wire, etc.) are more absorbing than the conceptual commentary on photography that the piece also offers. In sum, you might wish that Snow would give his pieces more room to breathe, that he would let them grow beyond their pre-conceived limits. (With the films, as suggested above, Snow's extremism in carrying out his plans and his involvement of his audience prevent those works from seeming too neatly self-enclosed.)

It is interesting to consider here, as well, certain broader possibilities that are implied but not pursued in Snow's enterprise. The deconstruction of photographic representation, for example, has been extended by many ambitious American conceptual artists of the 1980s (Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman and Louise Lawler, to name three) into ideological, social critique. And as for the aggressive emphasis on immediate context in Snow's films, it is possible to imagine such a method extended to institutional and other sorts of contexts. Hans Haacke's expansion of his subjects from the micro-ecology of the gallery to the macro-ecology of international systems of culture, business and politics comes to mind as an example. This is not to argue that Snow ought to involve himself in some sort of ideologically adversarial project; it is only to say that the narrowness of his persistent self-referentiality can make you wish he'd take up some of the wider implications of his own ideas.

Snow's best works, however, are so philosophically enchanting that you can be persuaded to set aside such reservations. One of these, *iris-IRIS* (1979), is in part about photography's seeming capacity to freeze a moment in time. A diptych of 4-foot squares, its left-hand panel is a photo of a wall in a bedroom viewed from the foot of the bed. A postcard depicting a mountainscape is attached to the wall and, on a table in front of the wall, something is burning in an ashtray. This flame and a certain quality of light create the illusion of a specific instant in the past. The right-hand panel of this work is painted flat gray and has an actual postcard attached to it—apparently the same card as the one that appears in the photograph. Thus an object in real time is juxtaposed with an illusion at a fictive moment. But the "actual" postcard is the same size as the representation of the postcard in the photograph—a contradictory situation. If the depicted postcard is in truth the same size as the actual one, then its representation ought to be smaller because it is further away in illusory space. But if the postcards are not the same, then which, one wonders, is the original, the real one? Perhaps the one in the photograph is the real one and the "actual" one is a fabrication. Trying to sort out the paradoxes and contradictory levels of reality here has the strange effect of engaging the viewer in a directly experienced deconstruction of the real: each time you shift your frame of reference, you enter a new reality. There is no absolute truth. This, one of the essential philosophical and experiential insights of modernism, is the center around which Snow's art has always revolved. □

NOTES

1. There are points of contact and overlap between Snow's art and musical careers, but mainly they have been separate enterprises. Although not discussed in this article, Snow's musical career was addressed by the AGO retrospective, and a separate catalogue devoted to his work in music and sound was published along with the catalogue for his art and film work.

2. Also included was documentation of a number of public art works that Snow has produced over the years. Among these are the two works for which Snow is best known in Toronto: a flock of life-size, sculptural representations of Canadian geese hung in the atrium of Eaton's Centre, a huge commercial mall in the city's downtown area; and *The Audience*, a set of colossal cartoonlike representations of sports fans attached to the outside of the Skydome, where the Blue Jays play their home games. That the man who made *Wavelength* could also make such popular public works says a lot about his versatility and his disregard for that hobgoblin of little minds, consistency.

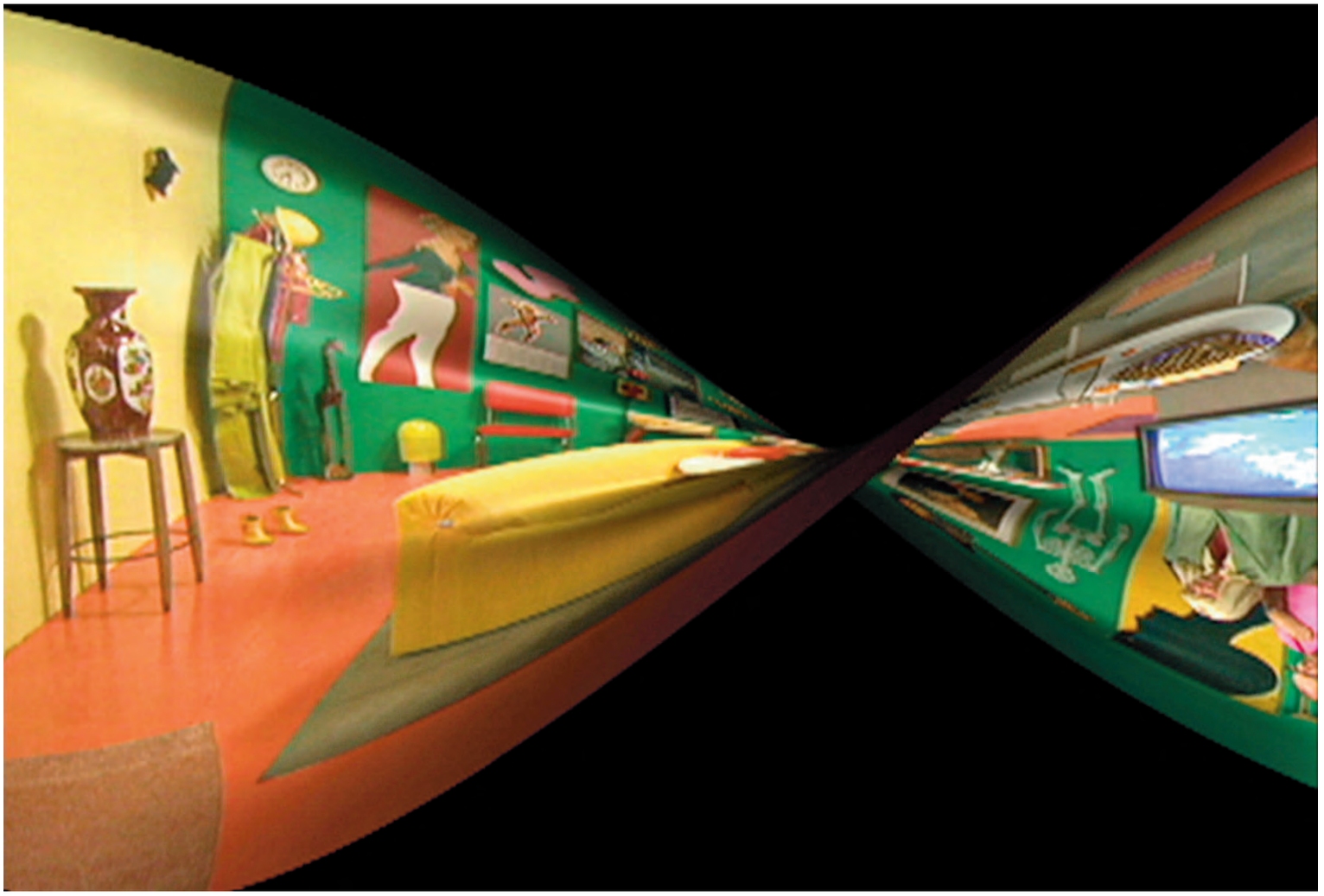
"The Michael Snow Project" was presented at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Power Plant from March 11 to June 5, 1994. Each of the three major sections of the show was organized by a different curator: Dennis Reid, curator of Canadian art at the AGO, developed "Exploring Plane and Contour: The Drawing, Painting, Collage, Foldage, Photo-Work, Sculpture and Film of Michael Snow from 1951 to 1967." Philip Monk, curator of contemporary art at the AGO, curated "Around Wavelength: The Sculpture, Film and Photo-Work of Michael Snow from 1967 to 1969." Louise Dompierre, associate director and chief curator of the Power Plant, organized "Embodied Vision: The Painting, Sculpture, Photo-Work, Sound Installation, Music, Holographic Work,

Films and Books of Michael Snow from 1970 to 1993. ” The exhibition catalogue includes a lengthy essay by each curator. A brochure containing an essay by Jim Shedden on the films was also provided.

Two related books are *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press/The Power Plant/Art Gallery of Ontario, 1994) and *Presence and Absence: The Films of Michael Snow from 1956 to 1991*.

MICHAEL SNOW 1928–2023

FEW POSTWAR ARTISTS have altered our perception of space and time as much as Michael Snow has, and yet the full depth of his tireless experimentation remains unfathomed. In the following pages, film historian **P. Adams Sitney** pans across the expanse of the Canadian polymath's nearly eight-decade-long career, while artist **Arthur Jafa** zooms in on *Wavelength*, 1967, that metaphysical milestone of avant-garde cinema that exemplifies Snow's desire "to make seeing palpable."



Opposite page: **Michael Snow, New York, 1964.** Photo: John Reeves. Above: **Michael Snow, **Corpus Callosum*, 2002**, digital video, color, sound, 92 minutes.

ON JANUARY 5, Michael Snow died in Toronto. He was, at ninety-four, one of the last of the great generation of North American avant-garde filmmakers and one of the earliest ever to be discussed in *Artforum*. Of those I wrote about in the first two editions of *Visionary Film* (1974, 1979), the only artists to have survived Snow are Kenneth Anger, Ernie Gehr, Ken Jacobs, Lawrence Jordan, Peter Kubelka, and Yvonne Rainer, along with the "newcomers" of the second edition, Robert Beavers and Joel Singer.

In their lifetimes, none of Snow's filmmaking peers ever attained his success or acknowledgment, not even Jonas Mekas (1922–2019), who gained worldwide fame in his final decade. This was due, in part, to the variety of the arts Snow practiced and to his being Canadian. After nearly a decade in New York, where he established himself as a central filmmaker, he returned in 1971 to Canada, where he received major sculptural commissions, for a suspended flight of geese to decorate Toronto's Eaton Centre, and for gargoyles of ecstatic sports fans to grace facade of the city's SkyDome (now the Rogers Centre). In a 2015 article commemorating Snow's 1970 exhibition in the Venice Biennale, one writer called him "Canada's coolest living artist." Snow was indeed cool: funny, good-humored, generous, gregarious, unusually sane, and self-assured.

He trained as a painter at the Ontario College of Art, traveled internationally as a young jazz musician, and learned cinema while working for an animation studio in Canada. Once he resettled in New York, he found a wide circle of friends in the downtown arts community: Chantal Akerman, Richard Foreman, Hollis Frampton, Gehr, Philip Glass, Jacobs, Babette Mangolte, Mekas, Annette Michelson, Rainer, Steve Reich, Richard Serra, Amy Taubin, et al. For his first film made in the United States, *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964), Snow used his jazz contacts to build its impressive soundtrack.

That film is the ne plus ultra of the fusion of jazz and cinema (contrasting figures and depth). However, its achievement was not recognized until after Snow had made his most famous film, *Wavelength* (1967), which explores the nature of the zoom lens. I know of no single film that made as deep an impression on American avant-garde cinema. Closest to it, in that respect, was Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963). Like that of Smith's film, the impact of *Wavelength* was intensified by that fact that its maker was relatively unknown when it was first screened.

The forty-five-minute work, shot entirely in the artist's loft studio on Canal Street, has affinities in its aggressive duration with the films Andy

Warhol had been making for the previous three years, but that aspect, combined with its second-by-second fluctuations of light and texture, gives it a complexity and a look that were utterly new to avant-garde cinema. Thus, *Wavelength* cut a path for a number of emerging filmmakers. In recognition of that, in 1969, I wrote "Structural Film," an essay that immediately engendered a controversy lasting two decades.

The success of *Wavelength* encouraged Snow to investigate other facets of filmmaking paraphernalia and the projection situation. It was followed by parallel cinematic manifestos: <---> (aka *Back and Forth*, 1969), exploring the horizontal and vertical panning potential of the tripod's swivel head; *La Région Centrale* (1971), for which Snow used a custom-built equatorial mount to capture all the baroque movements Stan Brakhage pioneered in his *Anticipation of the Night* (1958), but which is radically divested of Brakhage's signature subjectivity; and *Rameau's Nephew (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (1972–74), which offered an encyclopedic array of sounds made by the human body, including language and musical instruments. Each of these films, like *Wavelength* before them, constituted a *summa technologiae* of at least one fundamental dimension of the cinematic experience.

After that, Snow continued to make films, mostly in Canada, with similar ambitions: *Breakfast (Table Top Dolly)* (1976) examined forward camera movement as a force field; *Presents* (1981) challenged Brakhage's dominance of montage and the handheld camera; *So Is This* (1982) aspired to be the ultimate film of only words on the screen; *See You Later* (1990) hypothesized slow motion as a cinematic element requiring investigation; *To Lavoisier, Who Died in the Reign of Terror* (1991) presciently foresaw the obsolescence of film and celebrated its emulsion; **Corpus Callosum* (2002) redefined video; and *Cityscape* (2019) tried to do the same for IMAX. However, the films made after 1974 never had the resonance or influence of his earlier masterpieces.

From the whole of his filmography, it's clear that Snow was always concerned with the nature of self-conscious perception and with temporal sequences. In fact, most of his output in other media reflect the same preoccupations. The humor and parody that play a large part in all his later films may have contributed to the decline of their reputation as "serious" works. In *Rameau's Nephew*, he pokes fun at Plato's aesthetics, Bob Dylan's music, and even me.

In 1981, feminist critics attacked the use of the many female nudes in the montage of *Presents*. Snow's reputation in the United States never quite recovered from that myopic view of an otherwise fascinating film. It reprises the phenomenology of <---> by opening with a still camera photographing staged action on a mobile set, moving jarringly back and forth.

I suspect that Snow's absence from New York after the early 1970s took a toll by cutting him off from the main currents of avant-garde cinema and its reception. The strongest evidence of this would be his acknowledgments of his predecessors within the visual text of *So Is This*: Aside from the (then young) Su Friedrich and Serra, he cites only Canadian antecedents, curiously omitting James Broughton, Frampton, George Landow, and Paul Sharits and obscuring that brilliant film with a rather provincial tonality. Similarly, nowhere did he acknowledge that Frampton's *Palindrome* (1969) had preceded *To Lavoisier* by more than two decades in its manipulation of chemical hues on film stock, or that the traveling shot that transforms the ground throughout *Seated Figures* (1988) into colored horizontal lines essentially reproduces and elongates Gehr's *Field* (1970). Snow overlaid that image with the shadows of a rambunctious audience, themselves precursors of the SkyDome gargoyles. The shadowy figures may actually refer

Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967, 16 mm, color, sound, 45 minutes. Amy Taubin.

ARTHUR JAFA

now i/s the time.

IN MANY WAYS, even before I knew exactly what I was looking at, I took *Wavelength* as a kind of long goodbye, an extended adieu to Western vanishing-point perspective. Or, at the very least, a goodbye to the obvious inferences, i.e., the eye-I dyad at the very center of Western classical ideas of (split/bifurcated/troubled) consciousness, mind/body, man/nature, foreground/background, and all its decidedly phallic impulses. Penetrating space, penetrating gaze as apex being. And none of the above even remotely meant as a critique. Michael Snow being, idea-of-the-north/star-like, a true Canadian, down to his spooky insistence on there being a point (neither/nor wave particle).

Snow was surfing the event horizon, consciousness being the board he/we rode in on. An entangled, seemingly entropic, Whitmanesque songing of the body electric. A fingering which (like Kubrick's *2001*, that other deep-space probe), having traversed the distance between here and there, arrives at a full stop beyond which progress, rational (Western) comprehension, fails.

I haven't seen *Wavelength* in almost forty years. Still, I remember the exact context and terms under which it was viewed (it was the same night as my second viewing of Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, my first of Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer*) and its indelible impact on my sense of what a film could be.

Its move toward stasis (a paradox), still life as moving image. Not *nature morte* but nature *submerged*, sublime, sublimated beneath oceanic dread tomb/womb, transatlantic, Drexciyan breaks of/with consciousness, hence my *AGHDRA*. Down here, calmly, yet actively entombed with all these dead Africans, and Bin Laden too.

Wavelength describes a heat death as cool, as inadvertently engendered (immaculate, like Miles), as any totally deracinated (black) being could possibly, in fact inevitably, be. A bar as hard as I U me. □

ARTHUR JAFA IS AN ARTIST BASED IN LOS ANGELES. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

Left: **Michael Snow**, ***New York Eye and Ear Control*, 1964**, 16 mm, black-and-white, sound, 34 minutes. Above: **Michael Snow**, ***Breakfast (Table Top Dolly)*, 1976**, 16 mm, color, sound, 15 minutes. Below: **Michael Snow**, ***Wavelength*, 1967**, 16 mm, color, sound, 45 minutes.

I know of no single film that made as deep an impression on American avant-garde cinema as *Wavelength*.

to the occasionally negative reception of so-called structural films, such as his own and Gehr's.

Annette Michelson crystallized Snow's reputation in the US art world when she published her essay "Toward Snow" in the Summer 1971 issue of this magazine and the editors put a still from *Wavelength* on the cover. Shortly before that, the Art Gallery of Ontario had published an exhibition catalogue, *Michael Snow/A Survey* (1970). A succession of grants from the Canadian government followed. One of them enabled the construction of the mount of *La Région Centrale*. Snow and his then wife, the artist Joyce Weiland, even threw a massive party for Pierre Trudeau in their Chambers Street loft that the prime minister attended. (Snow would divorce Weiland in 1990 and marry the writer and curator Peggy Gale, with whom he had a son.) Five years after the *Survey*, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press issued *Cover to Cover* (a photographic book to be read from both the front and the back, republished recently by Light Industry). In 1993, the Art Gallery of Ontario and Knopf published *The Michael Snow Project*, consisting of three volumes of critical essays—*Music/Sound 1948–1993*, *Visual Art 1951–1993*, and *Presence and Absence: The Films of Michael Snow 1956–1991*.

Admirably, he refused to allow *Wavelength* to be distributed digitally. Instead, he issued *WVLNT (Wavelength for Those Who Don't Have the Time)* (2003), where thirds of the film are superimposed on one another, obviating the loss of visual detail that would have resulted from digitizing the original. Gartenberg Media Enterprises distributes a fine DVD version of *Rameau's Nephew* together with a superb book on the film by Ivora Cusack and Stéfani de Loppinot in both French and English.

I saw Snow for the last time in 2005, when he gave a magnificent piano concert at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. More than twenty commercial recordings make up his discography. □

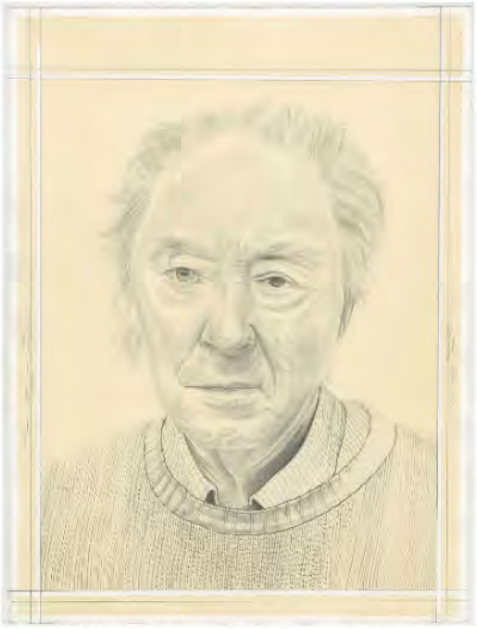
P. ADAMS SITNEY IS THE AUTHOR, MOST RECENTLY, OF *THE CINEMA OF POETRY* (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014).

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Art | In Conversation

Michael Snow with Raymond Foye

"To create something new, one must break some rules. But those rules must also be familiar, and *worth* breaking."



Portrait of Michael Snow, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

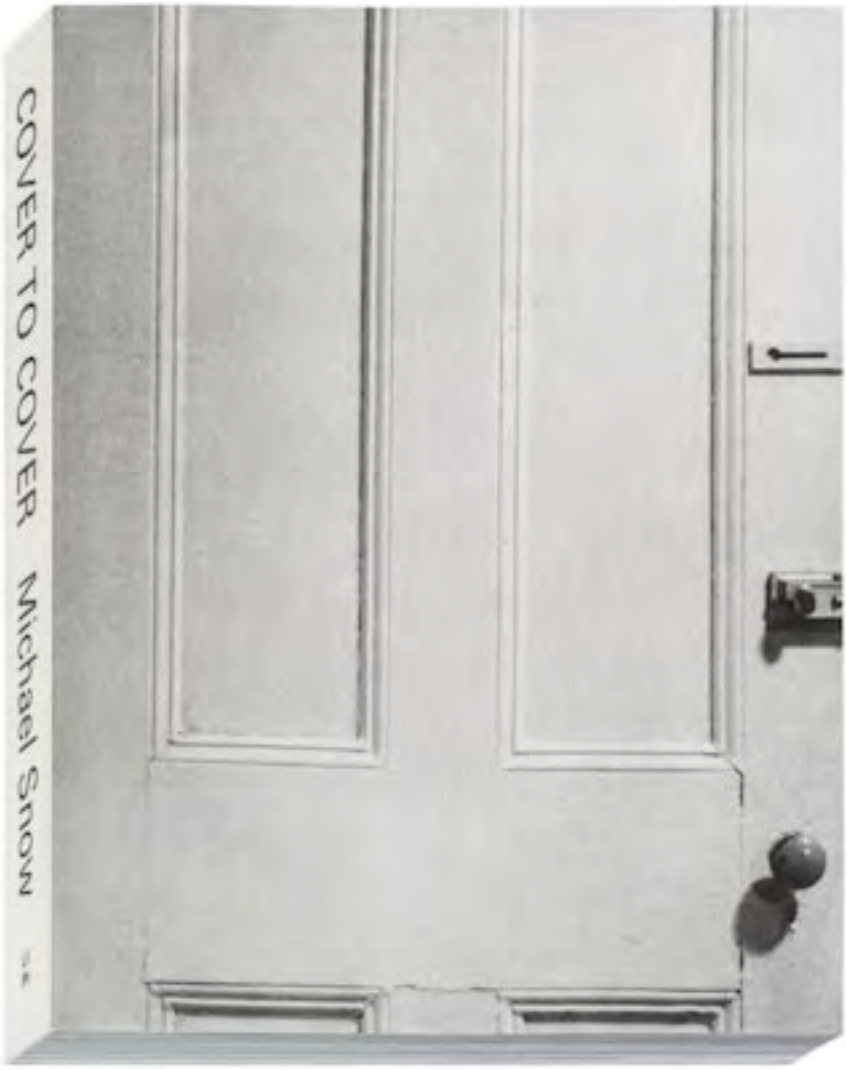
"I shot *Wavelength* in three weeks after thinking about it for a year," Michael Snow once said of his 1967 masterpiece. It is a remark that typifies his calculated and cerebral approach to art, yet no sooner does one characterize his work as such than the opposite arises, for *Wavelength* is also a work of great passion and intensity. The key to his work is this balance of opposites, held in place by a vision and sensibility that is by turns precise, ironic, and philosophical, often with a strong dose of Duchampian humor. Let's call it "Snow's Paradox," and it applies to the man himself: famous and neglected, celebrated and obscure. Few artists of our time have made such a compelling body of work over such a wide range of media: paintings, drawings, films, sequential photographs, sculptures both private and public, artist's books, sound works, and musical compositions. It is a strangely selfless body of work—another remark that gives lie to itself, since he also somehow stands at the center of every work. He is there and he is not, just as materiality and demateriality consistently swap places in his work.

Now 92, Michael Snow continues to make new works that consistently challenge what we think we know about perception, art, and life. Our interview was conducted by email over several weeks early in 2021. We began by discussing the re-issue of *Cover to Cover* (1975) and the restoration of *Wavelength* (1967), both of which I consider to be perfect works of art. From there we moved on to more recent work. Sadly, even a lengthy interview like this can only touch on a handful of works, and I regret we did not discuss musical works such as *The Last LP* (1987), his *Collected Writings* (1994, Wilfrid Laurier University Press), or his recent large-scale sculptures in Toronto. I would like to express my gratitude to Michael's wife, Peggy Gale, and his assistant, media artist Mani Mazinani. I would also like to acknowledge John Klacsmann at Anthology Film Archives, and the artist and filmmaker Bradley Eros, for the many stimulating exchanges we shared about Snow's work during the course of this interview.

Raymond Foye (Rail): I remember when *Cover to Cover* (1975) first appeared, I felt you'd taken the artist's book to a whole new level. Can you describe the creative origins of that book? Did it begin as a fully conceptualized work? Was there improvisation involved, such that the work evolved in the course of the execution, much the way a painting would?

Michael Snow: I was asked by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) if I would be interested in composing and publishing a book about my work to be published by NSCAD Press. This was a wonderful proposal. NSCAD Press was publishing several interesting books by artists about their work and it would be an honor to be amongst them. I spent some time considering how this might be done and finally arrived at a clarification. If the press was in favor, rather than a book about my work, I would make the book a work. A book work.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



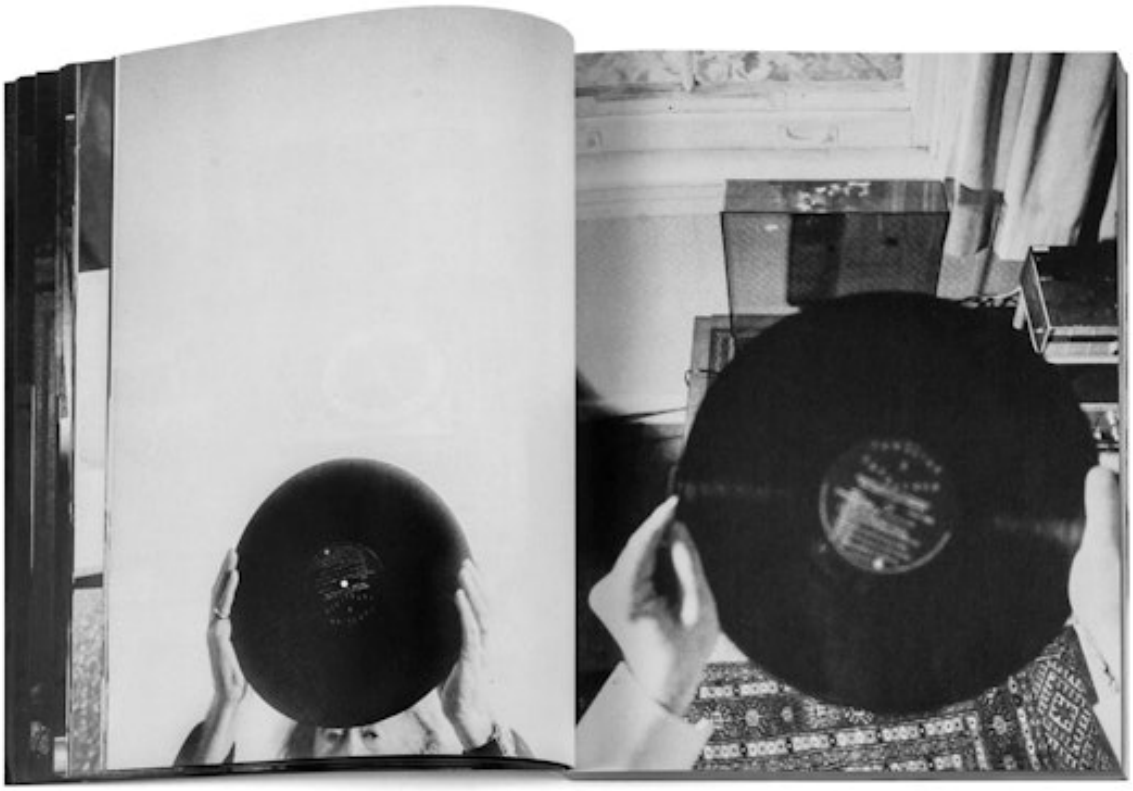
Cover to Cover

I already had ideas for such a work. As a student at the Ontario College of Art a couple of decades earlier, I took a class in design and the professor assigned us to take an existing book and design a new front cover, spine, and back cover. I had been introduced to the anatomy of a book before *Cover to Cover*.

I decided to use photographic images to center the formal principles of *Cover to Cover* on the conversion of the three dimensional subject to the two dimensional plane/page—recto/verso: the other side is always the other side. I planned and composed every element of the book, with this principle in mind. Two photographers (Keith Lock and Vince Sharp) each equidistant from the subject (Michael Snow) faced each other on opposite sides, using multiple strategies to coordinate their shutters. We would first define the motion of a sequence, then divide it into steps, which determined the translation of movement to still image.

Rail: I cannot see *Cover to Cover* working as anything other than black and white.

Snow: That's true. *Cover to Cover* functions on opposites. It could be done with color, but black and white seems more sculptural. Involving color would be another value, because the issues would be more complicated.



Cover to Cover. Interior Spread.

Rail: The work has always reminded me of Duchamp's famous *Door, 11 rue Larrey*, from 1927. It is a work that points towards a multidimensional space, which I find to be a theme of your work—exploring other dimensions of time and space which are there but we don't often recognize.

Snow: You are right that *Cover to Cover* resembles Duchamp's door. There was no particular influence, but of course I have admired Duchamp's jest. I visited him once when I lived in NYC. He was kind enough to let me shoot a few seconds of film, which I intended to include in my *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964), but finally I didn't use it. Unfortunately I don't recall why I decided to reject it.

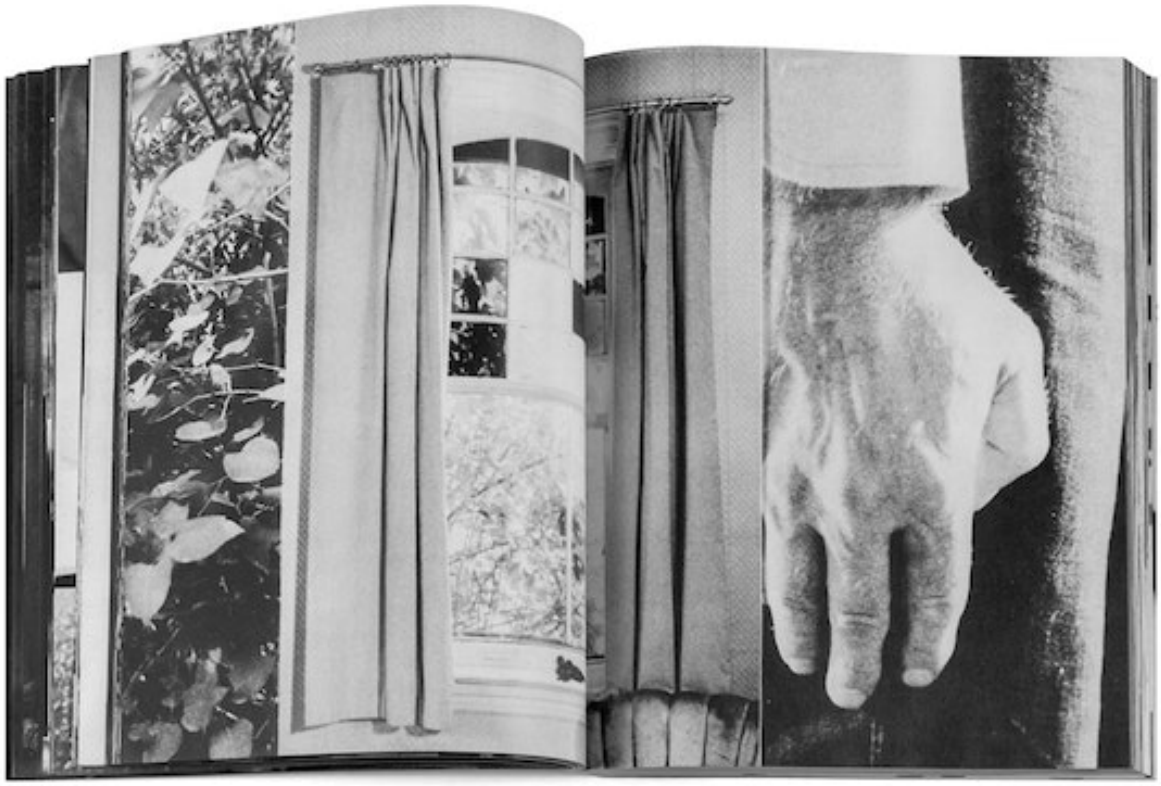
Rail: *Cover to Cover* is a work that begins and ends in the same place after traveling through a wide range of confounding spatial states. This reminds me of *Finnegans Wake*, where the first

and last sentence connect up. Have you ever thought of this reference? Was James Joyce ever an important figure for you?

Snow: I am honored *Cover to Cover* reminded you of *Finnegan's Wake. Cover to Cover* is more clearly systematic, functioning as it does on opposites, rather than tangents or apparently random associations.

Rail: *Cover to Cover* is really a space-time continuum, isn't it?

Snow: Yes.



Cover to Cover. Interior Spread.

Rail: Space is put through a variety of permutations: it is folded, mirrored, flopped, inverted, and at times it is disengaged from points of orientation. Is this essentially the subject of the book?

Snow: Although what happens in *Cover to Cover* is sequential, I think it can be rewardingly dipped into. There are a number of different "narrative" sequences. But what is, I think, most interesting, is to check both sides of the page (recto/verso leaf). This book itself is the subject here. It is self-referential. The viewer is a participant. It must be looked at manually, which is why I call it "sculpture."

Rail: I suppose many of the spatial permutations I have listed are all specific characteristics of the photograph (and negative).

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Michael Snow, *Shade*, 1974. Courtesy the artist.

Snow: The spatial permutations are also physical ones. The individual units (pages) of the book are two-dimensional, but all together they constitute an object. *Cover to Cover* is part of a family of two-sided works that I've done, e.g. *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974), which includes two synchronized 16mm projectors on opposite sides of a suspended aluminum screen—a piece owned by the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa) but was also shown as part of *Into the Light* at the Whitney Museum (2001–2002). A simpler work is a suspended transparency, *Shade* (1979) that is a life-size photograph of a man's back seen from behind; of course the "other side" of the figure does not show his front view. There are others.

Rail: Where does this sense of space come from, for you? Does it come out of painting? I find a lot of similarities (in ideas) between your works and the works of Jasper Johns, in the way space is depicted. For example, when the two edges of his canvases are joined up, something happens—things connect, and a continuum is revealed. He is also an artist who has worked extensively with monochrome. Was Johns an influence on you as a young artist?

Snow: I agree that to an extent my sense of space comes out of painting. That's where I started (along with music). I'm not conscious of any influence from Jasper Johns, but I see that there are similarities in our respective treatment of this simultaneity of two dimensions with three.

Rail: Thinking back to your youth, which artists would you say have had the biggest influence on your work?

Snow: Before I went to the Ontario College of Art (Toronto) I remember being stunned by Picasso's work as it was featured in a *Life* magazine article. Later, learning more, I was even more impressed by the range of what he did.

Rail: Your early shows in NYC were at the Poindexter Gallery. Around that time Elinor Poindexter was showing de Kooning, Diebenkorn, Jules Olitski. How did the connection to Poindexter Gallery come about? Was it a context you were comfortable with, and were you happy with the shows you had there?

Snow: Though I had a regular gallery in Toronto, when I moved to NYC I wanted to be represented there too. At the time, galleries would look at slides and photos if a meeting was arranged, and I visited several in my search. A couple of important people, like Richard Bellamy, came to my studio, but nothing came of it, until Elinor Poindexter liked what I showed her. I was surprised because my work was completely different from the artists whose work was being shown there, though of course I admired them. I was very happy with my exhibitions there, one a "Walking Woman Works" show, and another was sculpture.

Rail: It seems to me you could never have carried your ideas and concepts as far as you did if you had stayed exclusively with painting or sculpture. Would you agree?

Snow: You're probably right. Working on the "Walking Woman Works" from 1961 to 1967, I had decided to use every possible approach to what one could do with and to that outline and plane. It became clear that movement was a possibility, as was photography, both of which led to film and performance and everything else. The development was natural, and I continued with that. Work came from work: creating new forms led to additional possibilities.

Rail: Could *Cover to Cover* ever work as an exhibition or environment, or does it strictly function as a book object for you?

Snow: For me, this is strictly a book object. It's sculpture.

Rail: Since you're an artist who spans the analog/digital divide, how would you characterize the relative merits and demerits of digital vs. analog in the various media that you work in?

Snow: Digital tools are far more streamlined—more mental than physical, in a sense—but given that I grew up in an analog world, all my work until fairly recently grew from that, I remain more comfortable with analog means. I depend on assistants for most technical aspects today.

Rail: Your record *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964) was my introduction to free jazz, and a very good one to say the least. I always wondered how you came to involve Albert Ayler in that project, and what was he like to work with, if you did engage him personally?

Snow: A friend, the poet and jazz fanatic Paul Haines, told me that he had heard a new tenor sax player who was amazing, and that I should hear him. This was Albert Ayler, and he was playing in a midtown club the next night. I went to hear him, and he was impressive.

I had just received a commission from a Toronto group, Ten Centuries Concerts, to make a film involving the music that I considered the most avant-garde being played in New York at that time. Albert Ayler and the two musicians playing with him when I first heard him, Gary Peacock on bass and Sonny Murray on drums, came to mind immediately. With Ayler's input, I added Don Cherry, John Tchicai, and Roswell Rudd, to make up the group that played the soundtrack for *New York Eye and Ear Control*. I asked the group to improvise a 30-minute piece—no solos, all ensemble playing—and they did that without reference to the film itself. Together, they played a classic of free improvisation, and the soundtrack was issued as an LP by ESP-Disk. The conversation during the recording session was pretty much practical, but the results were great.

Rail: You seem to be one of the few artists who has successfully been able to use time as both subject and medium. Do you follow developments in science? Are you familiar with the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Ontario, and the work of physicist Lee Smolin? I ask because his research is profoundly focused on the question of time, treating it as much of a physical or "real" dimension as space.

Snow: Actually I've read *The Trouble with Physics: The Rise of String Theory, The Fall of a Science, and What Comes Next* (2006) by Smolin, and am generally aware of the Perimeter

Institute. A long-time friend, sculptor Royden Rabinowitch, is linked with Perimeter and has enthused about their work as it relates to his own concerns.

You can't manipulate time but you can *seem* to manipulate it. In my film **Corpus Callosum* (2002), for example, the whole film at a certain point is repeated backwards and inverted, before righting itself again towards the end. Any form of editing is in fact "manipulating" time. In *See You Later/Au revoir* (1990), the original video recording was about 30 seconds but the film as completed has been "stretched" to nearly 18 minutes.

Rail: Richard Serra once said to me, the experience of the sculpture is the sculpture, not the physical object. I know Richard was very inspired by your work—so many artists and musicians of that period were.

Snow: Richard and I saw each other often when I lived in NYC and he often talked about ideas or projects he was working on. His work is both eminently physical but also intellectual. When we first met, he was throwing molten metal against the meeting-place of the floor and wall. I think that Richard experiencing my films made him want to make films.

Rail: For many who saw *Wavelength* (1967) at the time, it was a shocking and stunning experience. For me it is a perfect work of art. Obviously you began with a strong overall concept, yet it is clearly handmade and full of minute decisions, many very painterly. At what point did you begin to have a sense of the full magnitude of the effect that work was having on the public?

Snow: When I had my "by-invitation" first screening for friends at a theatre arranged by Jonas Mekas, the audience included Shirley Clarke, Ken Jacobs, Nam June Paik, George Kuchar, Ken Kelman, Joyce Wieland, Richard Foreman and Amy Taubin, and a couple of others. Jonas enthusiastically told me I should send the film to a festival soon to take place in Belgium, and he even offered to help pay for a new print. Until then, I assumed I'd only be able to show it a few times, but Jonas's suggestion changed everything, and I won the Grand Prize at Knokke-le-Zoute.

Rail: I asked a young friend recently if he'd ever seen *Wavelength*, and he said yes. Where did you see it, I asked? "I watched it on my phone," he replied. Needless to say, my heart sank. Would you have a similarly distressed reaction? How do you feel about your work on the internet?

Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967. Courtesy the artist.

Snow: I would have been equally distressed. Young people have given me similar stories. Maybe seeing my films on a small screen will make you want to see them as a projected film, but I am not convinced. This is an ongoing issue, especially as actual film projectors are increasingly difficult to find. There are only a few labs that can make new 16mm prints now. And with COVID-19, there are growing numbers of requests for online screenings for students.

Rail: For me your work is characterized by a lot of seemingly "opposed" positions: it is extremely imaginative, yet highly formal. I find it often deeply emotional, but at the same time very distant. Do you see or feel these "oppositions" yourself?

Snow: I like to think that my work involves a range of thoughts and feelings on the part of the spectator. For me, the work develops from itself, and these "opposites" feel intrinsic and natural.

Rail: Are you bothered when people try to examine you as a Canadian artist? Do you ever think about what that characterization might consist of?

Snow: I don't really know what "Canadian" stands for these days. It used to be "hewers of wood, drawers of water" or "Canadians are always so polite"—hardly accurate now. Realities shift, and opinions are usually out of date.

Hollis Frampton remarked on my "flat Ontario Scottish delivery"—a surprise to me—when he asked me to do voice-over for his film *Nostalgia* (1971). My mother was francophone Québécoise. What might be "Canadian" will be an unknown for almost everyone. Beer commercials are pretty interesting ("My name is Joe …"). Politics aren't the same here-and-there.

Rail: A fellow Canadian artist who I have always thought of in relation to yourself is Glenn Gould, also an artist who understood media, how to use it as a means and a tool to put his vision into the world. Not just recording technology, but the many documentaries he made for the CBC. In particular his radio documentary *The Idea of North* (1967), which certainly reflects many themes that are germane to certain works of yours, in my mind at least. Did you ever meet him?

Snow: My collection of *The Goldberg Variations* started in 1955 with Wanda Landowska's early harpsichord version, but for me, Glenn Gould's two recordings are both extraordinary accomplishments. Unfortunately I never met him, though I had friends who were his good friends. *The Idea of North* remains rather famous but I have only a partial knowledge of the work.

Rail: Recently I came across a quote by Glenn Gould:

"The trouble begins when we start to be so impressed by the strategies of our systematized thought that we forget that it does relate to an obverse, that it is hewn from negation, that it is but very small security against the void of negation which surrounds it. And when that happens, when we forget these things, all sorts of mechanical failures begin to disrupt the functions of human personality. When people who practice an art like music become captives of those positive assumptions of system, when they forget to credit that happening against negation which system is, and when they become disrespectful of the immensity of negation compared to system—then they put themselves out of reach of that replenishment of invention upon which creative ideas depend, because invention is, in fact, a cautious dipping into the negation that lies outside system from a position firmly ensconced in system."

Snow: This is a difficult passage. I think I understand his final sentence, "because invention is, in fact, a cautious dipping into the negation that lies outside system from a position firmly ensconced in system." Invention equals making something new. To create something new, one must break some rules. But those rules must also be familiar, and *worth* breaking. One needs a position before finding or demanding an alternative. Is that right?

Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: I see it as about the dialectic of creating a work of art that is of necessity formally structured, while just outside that structure lies a world full of emotions and experiences that are, essentially, chaotic, but which are feeding that work. Okay, I'm really using this quote as a segue to talk about *Wavelength*, which like most people I initially saw as a "structural" film, but I increasingly see as an "occult" film: it's about a dimension of reality that is hidden, a meditation on the darker powers of art. Or as Nietzsche said, "Look not into the abyss, lest the abyss should look into you."

Snow: I agree with your saying that *Wavelength* has an almost occult aura surrounding it. I have been told a number of times by various people that seeing the film changed their life.

Rail: John Klacsmann told me the first thing he noticed when beginning the restoration process was how many different film stocks you used in *Wavelength*. There's Kodachrome, and Ektachrome, there's Kodak color negative, and color positive which would have been printed from the Kodak color negative. Then there's Dupont black and white reversal stock, and

Agfachrome color reversal stock. That's pretty much an inventory of all commercially available 16mm film at the time. Was this intentional?

Snow: The decision was entirely intentional. In my planning, the constant, physically inalterable subject was going to be "the office" with the yellow chair. But I'd planned to film it in as many ways that I could. One way to accomplish that would be to try different film stocks, and I had some old, out-dated reels that would give an element of "chance" to results. I purposely used some stocks "wrongly," for example, shooting "daylight" film at night with tungsten light.

Rail: Almost all the splices in the film are tape—why tape and not cement, which might be considered more "professional"?

Snow: Tape splices are a little bit easier to remove, if you want to. I wanted to be able to change some of my decisions, as the edit progressed.

Rail: The color positive sections in the film have now faded to magenta. Would you keep it that way, as an artifact of the deterioration, or if it could be fixed digitally would you prefer that?

Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967. Courtesy the artist.

Snow: This is a daunting question. If there is some evidence left on the film indicating what the original color was, then I'd suggest trying to match that. That will be difficult to do, and though I might be the only person who could suggest what color should go there, I don't think I should try. At the same time, I am not intrigued by evidence of deterioration; the original was what I intended. Perhaps John Klacsmann, on the basis of his archival work, might make an informed guess as to the original tones.

Rail: Did you originally show *Wavelength* with a live reel-to-reel soundtrack, or was the sound always on the film?

Snow: At the first private screening I used film and audio separately. The "room" sound was on the optical track of the film, but the electronic glissando (sine wave) was on a quarter-inch tape, which was controlled separately from the audio track. I kept the sine wave separate because I expected that I would be present at any possible future screenings, and I would control the tape sound in response to whatever acoustics were offered by the circumstances of the room. Discussing this possibility with Jonas, we soon realized that it would be impossible to control the separate tape-recorder sound, so I decided that I should make a new sound mix that included the sine wave glissando with the room sound already there.

Rail: Why are the opening titles so very brief?

Snow: I didn't want anything else on the screen except *Wavelength*, so I made the credits as swift as possible.

Rail: Why does Ken Jacobs get a credit—was it his camera?

Snow: Yes. It was his camera, and he didn't want it left in the studio overnight, so I took it back each night to Chambers Street where I was living. I had the camera for about two weeks.

Rail: And what about the yellow chair?

Snow: Without my being conscious of it during the shooting, the sense of significance that I hoped the yellow chair would have came through. I painted it yellow for the occasion. Even then I wasn't sure what I intended with the chair and its placement but afterwards I was satisfied somehow.

Rail: I think anyone who really watches the film carefully (let alone restores it) is struck by how handmade it is, right down to the unit structure—the individual frames. Klacsmann was surprised at how much superimposition you did—B-rolls (color) superimposed over A-rolls (the loft). Would you say your training as a painter was at play here?

Snow: I guess so, though *Wavelength* is filmic, not painterly, despite the color mixing. I'm definitely not conscious of there being any influence between the two. There's a lot of editing but most of that disappears, as there's no change of scene. The zoom is the only motion, and the zoom was hand-done by me. I could have arranged something more mechanical but I liked the direct aspect of making those decisions. Maybe my hand manipulating the zoom is painterly.

Rail: Is this the first restoration work that has been done on the film?

Snow: Yes. There have been no changes to the film itself since it was made, though of course each new print might be slightly different, as certain film stocks become no longer available.

Rail: I don't know of many artists who deal with the physical world in such a concrete way as you do, and yet your work always seems to possess a very strong metaphysical dimension. It almost seems like the steady accumulation of "real" or concrete instances leads to a state that is paradoxically very abstract. What would you say about this observation?

Snow: The film image is made of time and light, so that despite the success of "realism" the personages that are pictured are always phantoms. *Wavelength*, in particular, tries to make apprehension of film's nature a factor in the spectator's experience-conscious.

Rail: *Wavelength* always struck me as being like an acid experience—seeing the metaphysical dimension just behind the world of appearances. One thing I have always wondered is did you have any experiences with LSD in the 1960s, and if so can you describe what you might have noticed or learned?

Snow: In the year before I made *Wavelength* I had several experiences with LSD where objects and people were sensed as infinite. Experiencing *Wavelength* is not an imitation "trip" but is informed by those insights. The long zoom, leading to an image of the ocean and through the wall itself, suggests all that, as do the flashing colors.

Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: Is this quote of yours about "Strawberry Fields Forever," from an interview with Robert Enright in *Border Crossings*, accurate?

Q: Why was "Strawberry Fields" the song used in *Wavelength*?

A: When I shot the film, I knew that as far as the sound and the images went, I had to accept what the traffic was going to do. So when these two women go in and one of them turns on the radio, I felt that I had to accept whatever sound came through in the same way that I accepted the sound from the street. But what came out was "Little Drummer Boy" by Joan Baez, which I really hated. I just couldn't see that it had any place in the film. If she had turned on the radio and it was scrambled news, I would have used it because it was coming in from outside, but then I was faced with having to make a choice. "Strawberry Fields" had just come out and seemed appropriate.

Snow: Yes, the quote is accurate. I was ready to accept anything, but Joan Baez was going too far.

Rail: Are you aware that the original lyrics that Lennon sings were, "No one is on my *Wavelength* …"?

Snow: No, I didn't know that, thanks. Incidentally, John Lennon and Yoko Ono saw *Wavelength* many times and liked it.

Rail: At what point were you able to begin to support yourself through your work, and prior to that how did you earn a living?

Snow: My first job out of OCA was entry-level advertising design and I hated it, then I spent a year hitch-hiking in Europe with a friend and playing jazz. After my first exhibition in Toronto I was hired by George Dunning to learn animation on-the-job. That was important. Then I began to work as a professional musician, playing jazz in local clubs, and working daytimes in my studio, painting. The music/painting cycle continued successfully until Joyce and I moved to New York in 1961.

Rail: Do you think you could have had the same breakthroughs in your work if you had not come to New York?

Snow: At the for-friends first screening of *Wavelength*, Jonas Mekas suggested I send the film to a festival in Belgium. It won the Grand Prize and caused a lot of wonderful things to happen. That could only come about because I was in New York.

Rail: I was speaking with Henry Kaiser the other day and he said you were one of the finest improvisors he's ever played with. Have you ever tried to examine that state of improvisation? Can you describe it, how it functions? Is it a release from the necessary practical demands of making a film or painting or sculpture, where one must have more of a plan in place?

Snow: Free improvisation is the process which jazz always wanted from its beginning.

Rail: Off the top of your head, what are some of your favorite jazz albums?

Snow: Perhaps surprisingly, I no longer listen to records at all. But I have a number of LPs by Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, and I have a soft spot for the Jazz Composers Orchestra because they rehearsed in my New York studio.

Rail: What musical group, historically, would you like to have been a member of?

Snow: Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers.

Rail: Is the analogy of the laboratory appropriate? You design a work the way a scientist would design an experiment: there's a question you wish to investigate, an idea or hypothesis, and then there's a set of procedures/rules put in place. Once the work is launched, the extraneous variables in the environment then come into play and the work takes on its own life.

Snow: Yes.

Rail: I feel like your works are, amongst other things, all thought experiments of one sort or another.

Snow: I suppose there are some works that are stricter than others in terms of a predetermined system being put in place.

Rail: I often get the sense that you must be as much of a surprised viewer of the work as the audience is later on.

Snow: That's true.

Michael Snow, *Cityscape*, 2019. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: I want to discuss a recent work of yours, *Cityscape* (2019). Seeing this video on the computer monitor is quite vertiginous. It must be especially so on the IMAX screen. Is this part of the desired effect?

Snow: I've never intended my films to induce nausea or vertigo, though I've had previous comments about this effect from other works, especially *La Région Centrale* (1971), but also *Back and Forth* (1969). Making the films, I never thought about nausea as a possible audience reaction. The kind of acceleration that happens in my films is undoubtedly, rarely experienced.

Rail: Can you briefly summarize what your idea or thesis was in making this film?

Snow: ***Cityscape*** is one of the family of works dealing with camera motion, an interest dating back to *Wavelength.* My friend Graeme Ferguson, one of the originators of IMAX, suggested doing a version of *La Région Centrale* in that format after seeing the film, but for me the idea held little interest. I felt *La Région Centrale* was complete and I had accomplished my purpose.

Years later, I was approached again to make a short film with IMAX, now in digital format, and this time I thought, instead of a landscape film, vast and unpopulated, I would be interested in looking at my own city, a more linear view. The part of Toronto that is seen in *Cityscape* is actually rarely seen by its citizens. We seldom think of Lake Ontario at the foot of Yonge Street, but the skyline viewed from the islands just offshore is interesting. The title makes clear that the city is the subject.

Rail: Was *Cityscape* a revisiting of the concerns of *La Région Centrale*, a coda or an epilogue to that vast work? Or do you prefer not to see *Cityscape* in those terms at all?

Snow: ***La Région Centrale*** has a deliberate purity. No people are seen, and the only man-made thing is the camera. Its support never appears, though we recognize its shadow from time to time. I wanted the camera movements to be part of the family: sun, moon, earth.

Rail: Often works of yours have predecessors in other works. Is that a way of trying out the idea in another medium or context?

Snow: Sometimes I take on something that was previously avoided. For example, I'd always rejected narrative cinema for its reliance on "stories," then I had the idea of a "short story" and made *SSHHOORRTY* (2005), a brief sequence with a classic narrative arc, which is then cut in half and superimposed together. The dialogue is in Farsi and subtitled in English, but both languages are obscured by the superimposition.

Rail: Many things come to mind watching *Cityscape*, not all of them formal. One thing I thought about is your relationship to Toronto. This is quite a marvelous portrait of that city. I thought of Vermeer's *View of Delft*, the clarity, the light, the flatness.

Snow: Vermeer is one of my favorite artists.

Rail: There is a strange moment in *Cityscape* where a bird flies across the sky and suddenly the whole spatial configuration for a quick moment is shattered. Somehow when it appears, once or

twice, it makes for a beautiful counterpoint to everything else, it seems like true freedom. Was that something you noticed?

Snow: When I saw the bird I first thought, "Oh Damn!" but soon I said to myself, "Maybe not."

Rail: I barely recognized Toronto when watching *Cityscape*, not having visited the city for many years—I thought I might be looking at Seattle or Sydney or somewhere in China. You must have seen Toronto go through some extraordinary changes.

Snow: Toronto was already a different place in 1971 or 1972 when I came back from living for 10 years in New York. I'd left without a backward glance, but then things were changing. Immigration, partly. Scale. More interesting restaurants, new galleries. The change over 50 years is remarkable.

Rail: In *Cityscape* there's a hardness and relentlessness to the technology that you don't seem to shy away from. Can you relate to that observation?

Snow: No reason to shy away from it. "Relentless" is a term I've heard before.

Rail: The sound-image relationships in your works are always so strange and marvelous. They are parallel, not derivative. Is there any general operating principle in that regard?

Snow: Every film is different. My first film was silent (*A to Z,* 1956). *New York Eye and Ear Control* recognized that sound and image could be the basis of a film. *Wavelength* began with two soundtracks (the sine wave was separate at first, though was always intended to be placed there.) I don't have a single, overarching point of view, but consider each situation for its own sake.

Rail: Specifically, where perception is involved, are there any philosophers or thinkers who you find particularly valuable?

Snow: Nietzsche and Wittgenstein.

Rail: I've been reading Marshall McLuhan again and finding him more relevant than ever. Did his work make a big impression on you at the time? He must have been a considerable figure in Toronto at one time. Did you ever encounter him?

Snow: I've been in several gatherings where he was also present, but I never actually knew him. Once, we sat together waiting to be interviewed separately for a radio program, but neither of us spoke after "hello." George Dunning (Graphic Films, where I worked for about a year) considered him a friend. I remember reading *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*. McLuhan was certainly talked about here then, but it seemed to me that some of his observations were academic, in the sense of being part of a university view, not a view of quotidian life. I was wrong.

Rail: Many of your films were very long, and not much happened in the way of "action"—they were about careful extended experiential observation. Could you get away with that today, or are attention spans too truncated by media overload and gadgetry?

Snow: Now that I'm "iconic," audiences tend to stay respectfully through even my longest films, unlike the old days when some people lost patience after just a few minutes and exited abruptly, sometimes noisily.

Rail: It's very hard to come up with general sweeping statements about your work, because every work you make is so different from the next. Every piece of yours seems to occupy its own world, distinct from each other. Do you think this has been an obstacle for your audiences and your critical reception in general? You certainly don't seem to have done anything to mitigate or alleviate that condition.

Snow: My work tends to attract a more specialized attention to specific works. There has been some fine writing about individual films, for example, but I've never been slotted into a "movement" or genre. I don't think of this as an obstacle, but your observation is accurate. I really don't think of the audience in advance or while making the work; I just hope they will find interesting what *I* find interesting.

Rail: Tell me about *Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids)* (2002). It's one of my favorite films of yours. It doesn't seem like you are doing anything more than making a simple recording of something that is happening directly in front of you. Nature itself seems to be making a structural film and you are just recording it. It's extremely compelling. It also reminded me somewhat of Robert Frank's later works, which seem poised somewhere between the still and moving image.

Michael Snow, *Solar Breath (Northern_Caryatids)*, 2002. Courtesy the artist.

Snow: At our cabin in a remote part of Newfoundland, I've often noted the unpredictable movements of the cotton curtain against the open window facing our dining table, just before sunset. It was impossible to capture on film, because an extended recording period was necessary to capture the effect. Much later, with video, I could record a full hour, but the action of the evening breeze is fleeting. I caught it only once. My wife Peggy and I were eating dinner as the sun was setting. We tried to be quiet, but you can hear the sound of dishes and cutlery. True, the image is mesmerizing, and often I've seen people sitting there in a gallery, watching the curtain move, then slap against the screen (in the open window) as if against the gallery wall. Sometimes they stay for a long time, watching. The sound is quiet, but crucial. Over the hour-long recording, the back-lighting of the sky moves perceptively towards a deeper yellow-gold.

Michael Snow, *Solar Breath (Northern_Caryatids)*, 2002. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: Has it been important for you to spend time in nature, especially in such a remote place?

Snow: In recent years, our summers overlooking the ocean have generated much of my new work. The isolation and silence, the lack of interruption, has been inspiring. Each day, there is the weather, and a quiet dinner to look forward to.

Rail: There's a lot of engineering in some of your works. Do you enjoy that aspect of the making?

Snow: Some of that engineering is done by other people. As digital has taken over film and everything else, I can't rely on my "hands-on" approach, and need assistance with technology, editing etc., even cut-and-paste design.

Rail: In the 1960s Frank Stella and Carl Andre were quite adamant that there was nothing to a work of art aside from the physical materials. Do you agree with that, or do you accept the "aura" of a work of art?

Snow: Physical material alone can be pretty boring. Of course a real work of art has an aura.

Contributor

Raymond Foye

Raymond Foye is a Consulting Editor at the *Brooklyn Rail*.

ArtReview

The Uncanny Properties of Print: Michael Snow's 'Cover to Cover'

Chris Fite-Wassilak Book Reviews 22 July 2021 ArtReview

Accordioned depictions of sitting, walking, even doing nothing, become extended meditations on how we experience the world

Courtesy Primary Information

A man walks into a room and puts a vinyl record on a turntable. He goes outside, gets into his car, drives to a gallery and picks up a book. That, on one level, is what happens in Michael Snow's photobook *Cover to Cover*. It's also a meta-book that makes unique use of the medium. And it can be read backwards or forwards.

Books these days have a varied half-life: hyperlinked ebooks, audiobooks that can be heard at 1.5x speed, AR story-maps. *Cover to Cover* is a time-capsule reminder of the uncanny properties of the printed page. Canadian artist Snow, a veteran filmmaker now in his nineties, made *Cover to Cover* as a book artwork in 1975, shortly after his film *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974), the product of two cameramen filming each other from opposite sides of a room, was completed. In the resulting two-part projection (each part projected onto opposite sides of the same aluminium sheet) we can choose to watch, from either of the camera's perspectives, a woman walk between them and, at one point, spraypaint a green circle onto a piece of clear Perspex. The technique gives a materiality to the projected image, as if trapping it within the plates of a microscope slide ready for examination. *Cover to Cover* deploys a similar conceit: the actions described are photographed simultaneously from two opposing angles, so that on one side of the page we see, for example, a door, and on the other the back of the man standing just on the other side of that door.

The back-to-back setup gives flipping through the book a physical playfulness: at one point, facing off from two sides of a typewriter, the page you're holding becomes a doubled embodiment of a blank page (both representationally and literally); at another, we see the corner of a sitting room, the opposite side facing in towards the ivy-tangled outside of that part of the house, the page somehow becoming a brick wall. The book makes no bones about disclosing the process of its making; at several points the photographers capture each other from across a room or a street. It all might sound like a neat little spiral snake eating its own tail, a conceptual gotcha, but as soon as you begin to recognise and settle into a pattern, the book shifts again, turning what you think you're seeing inside out. *Cover to Cover* instructs you in how to read it as you go, asking you to digest inversions and sly twists, as well as literally turning the book upside down. Images you thought were simply showing you what was going on become photographs that get folded up or enclosed into a book within the book.

Reading *Cover to Cover* is much like watching one of Snow's films: visually quite mundane, where what happens isn't as important as how it's being shown to you, with a

sustained focus that sits with a relatively simple idea for longer than you might think. Accordioned depictions of sitting, walking, even doing nothing, become extended meditations on how we experience the world. Underwriting the intensity of Snow's work is a consistent sense of his wry smile, being quietly profound with a casual shrug. Snow is a rare beast: a structuralist with a sense of humour, a filmmaker who recognised that tinkering around with the limitations of the medium was also a way to rewire our sense of everyday perception – using art as a means to capture and crystallise the whatthefuckness of strolling around with a thinking, feeling body. Here he uses the means of a photobook to trace the contours of his body, his house and the existential possibilities of a book itself. Books, those weighty space-fillers, can turn your brain inside out; the means to reconfigure reality are right at our fingertips.

Cover to Cover *by Michael Snow, Primary Information/Light Industry, $30 (2020 softcover facsimile reprint of 1975 original)*

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SWITCH

Screen Space

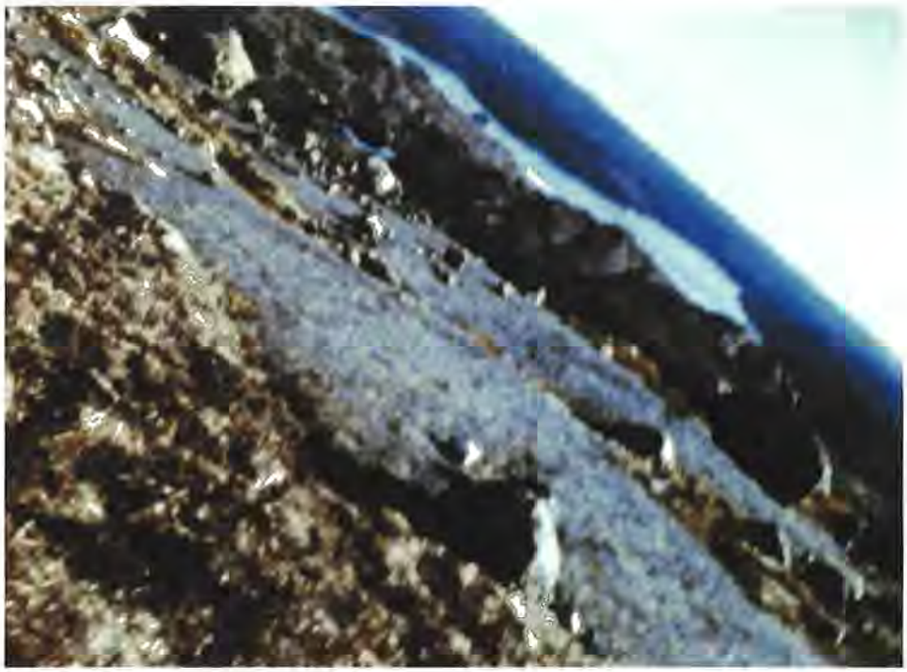
ISSUE 3, SPRING 2010

FEATURING:
Martha Langford on Michael Snow
Lucy Reynolds on Avant-Garde Film/Video Legacies
Jon Davies on Ryan Trecartin
Helena Reckitt on 'Nothing to Declare'

PLUS:
Trevor Paglen
Steve Reinke
Anton Vidokle

Michael Snow's Films 1966–1971

by Elizabeth Legge



Michael Snow
La Région centrale, 1971,
Still from a 16mm film.
Courtesy the artist and the
Canadian Filmmakers
Distribution Centre (Toronto).

Between 1966 and 1971 Michael Snow, then living in New York, made three key films which affect our experience of occupying space and passing time in unforeseen ways.

The first of these films was the legendary *Wavelength* (1967), a 45-minute zoom into the depths of a mostly empty loft space, accompanied by the steadily rising sound pitch of a mechanically generated sine wave. There are four incidents in the film: two men install bookshelves against a wall; two women come in and listen to part of The Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever" on the radio; a man walks in and drops dead right in the line of the slowly oncoming zoom; and, finally, a young woman makes a frightened telephone call ("And he doesn't look drunk, he looks dead!").

It may be hard to imagine how those apparently slim pickings generate such interest, but *Wavelength* has fascinating qualities created by its less obvious 'events': the keening buzz of the sine wave that eventually shreds off into faint siren-like wailing threads; intense colour fields of red, green, orange, and purple that saturate the image; passages of strobing white light, shifting exposures and negative monochrome; the effect of being in an indoor granular snowfall. The film turns to a kind of double vision that makes us feel as if what we are seeing is happening in our eyes and minds rather than on the screen.

Artists at the time had been widely experimenting with new techniques for working on film – splicing together found footage, scratching or drawing directly onto the film, having strobing and flickering bombardments on screen, or very long static shots that altered ordinary viewing habits and expectations of the scale and pace of existence. Watching *Wavelength*, we hover between a feeling of heightened attention and constant distraction, and that fluctuation makes us conscious about the ways in which we perceive things: as the zoom carries us along its path our attention is distended in new directions. The visual effect is partly that we are moving forward into a deep space toward the windows at the far end of the loft; but, in fact, since all that is happening is that the zoom lens is being turned to narrow the stationary camera's field, the effect is also one of overriding flattening. It is not travel into real space – as it would be were the camera moving in a tracking shot – but a spatial creation that could only happen in a film, through a lens.

In the mid- to late-1960s any kind of philosophical thinking about perception was filtered through the work of that ubiquitous Canadian public intellectual, Marshall McLuhan, who saw the artist's task as creating works that could help the collective psyche adjust to the unfamiliar barrage of new electronic media. Snow's use of zoom and sine wave certainly suggest that kind of recalibration of our visual sensation. McLuhan's thinking, though, had been filtered through the LSD culture that was part of the mainstream by 1966. *Wavelength*'s effects seem to resonate with the acid guru Timothy Leary's crypto-mystical visions of the distorted lights, music and colours of a 'trip'.

But if *Wavelength* seems to send aerial roots into the intellectual and artistic culture of the time, it is nevertheless only like itself. The zoom ends on a black and white photograph of waves, which punningly sums up the waves of light and colour that let us see the film. We even feel briefly that we are being carried out over the waves. But you might say Snow 'stills' the waves, as the photograph reminds us that film's motion is really a sequence of stills. All in all, Snow's zoom and sine wave constitute a kind of test drive of the possibilities of human experience.

Snow's next 'camera motion' film, ⟷ *Back and Forth* (1969), is built around a side-to-side camera pan at speeds ranging from the extremely slow to dizzyingly fast. The pans are punctuated at each end by a hollow sound that suggests hitting up against some imposed limit. The camera

Michael Snow
Wavelength, 1967, Stills from a 16mm film. Courtesy the artist and the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (Toronto).

starts out facing a wall, and then pans to the left to show a long view of a classroom, so that there is a wider arc to the left than to the right. This oscillation picks up speed, until it is a sheer field of energy; then, at its most intense point, the pans begin to sweep up and down. The setting and camerawork suggest the era's boxed in structures of authority–1968 was, after all, a pivotal year of anti-establishment and anti-Vietnam War riots and strikes, in France and the United States. The film has a jolting physiological power, and can bring on motion sickness, a powerful reminder that seeing movement can trigger a physical sensation of bodily movement even when we are still.

With the third of these films *La Région centrale* (1971), Snow moved into a treeless Canadian wilderness, beautiful but absolutely not picturesque, uninhabited as far as the eye can see. The scope of time in the film matches its spatial scale: at three hours, it is a very long film, seeming to prolong time as much as taking time. With the engineer Pierre Abeloos, Snow designed a machine that held the camera on an articulated mechanical arm, capable of moving in variable directions and at different speeds, potentially describing an entire sphere. Concealed behind a large rock in the wintery landscape, Snow adjusted a panel controlling the machine. The effects of the film are unexpected: when the camera moves quickly it seems as if the landscape itself is moving, streaming by in ribbons, as if it had been flattened out by centrifugal forces. This is most striking in the night sequence in which the moon seems to fling around like a spermatic tetherball. The soundtrack is made of electronic beeps, described by Snow as a "kind of nervous system." These beeps have a progressively intense effect, like a faulty alarm; but they finally unhinge from the speed of the camera movement in the last half-hour as sound and picture come apart with a euphoric energy.

Made at a time of national concern about Canadian identity, Snow turned to our wilderness mythology to pose philosophical questions about the ways we physically experience the world and our engagements in it, through nimbly forceful manoeuvres in time and space as they exist in moving pictures. In a sense, Snow took the ambitions of the space race and moon landing of 1969 back to the home planet; and these films still exert a powerful pull, something like gravity.

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Michael Snow: Screen Writing

Search your mind. Remember where you were (in some theatre, in some city), sitting in the dark, awash in fresh cinematic impressions. Credits and acknowledgments were rolling by, sometimes straight, sometimes punning, as a surplus of cinematic gaming. If this was 1969 or later, and you'd already been ⟷ *Back and Forth* (1969) with this filmmaker, you were probably sitting tight, not wiggling your arms into your jacket, because you were anticipating more action on screen, some final gesture that would yet blow your mind.

by Martha Langford

Michael Snow
The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets, 2009, Real-time video projection and site-specific wall/screen structure composed by the artist for each installation. Installation view: 'Recent Snow', The Power Plant, 2009–2010. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery (New York), Galerie Martine Aboucaya (Paris) and àngels barcelona gallery. Photo: Steve Payne.

Michael Snow
SSHTOORRTY, 2005, Still from a 35mm film. Courtesy the artist and the Canadian Filmmakers Distirbution Centre (Toronto).

"Auteur, auteur!" you might be shouting, but not "Author, author," except possibly on a few historic occasions: the premieres of *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (1974), *So Is This* (1982), and *SSHTOORRTY* (2005). Screenwriting–the production of a screenplay–has never been the prime ingredient of this auteur's cinematic oeuvre, though the exceptions just cited are exceptionally fine.

The auteur in question is Michael Snow, whose recent projected works were presented by The Power Plant in a survey exhibition this past winter. This thematic approach seems refreshing–very recent Snow–making a link to his most recent public art work, *The Windows Suite* (2006).[1] There are, however, significant precedents in his work. Snow has been using video technology since the early seventies, though he was never part of the Portapak bubble, having in a sense committed himself to an investigation of the other moving picture medium, which was film. Still, video was there, and quite visibly part of the common culture as an instrument of record and instantaneous transmission. Snow exploited the latter feature when he modified his camera-activating machine, the acrobatic wonder used to film *La Région centrale* (1971), into the mesmerizing kinetic sculpture *De La* (1972). The film had concentrated spectatorial attention on a day in the life of a *truly* moving camera, set to do its business on a rocky hilltop somewhere in the wild. The sculpture was in many ways the film's opposite: the machine's limbs and sinuous movements drew attention to themselves; the synchronous output of the video camera was not to one screen, but to four monitors set around the room; the setting was not wild, but ruled as only a white box can be–a place of limited participation, under the watchful eye of a museum guard.

Real-time video was recognized by artists, such as Snow, as a tool with potential for art. Its function as an instrument of security and surveillance was already well established. With economy and precision, Snow followed *De La* with a statement about the nature of video technology in the form of an installation. This work consisted of a ceiling-mounted video camera, a projector and an X taped on the floor. That is its technical description–the work functions as it should when a visitor stands on the mark, whereupon his or her image, shot from above, is compressed into a projection on the floor. Snow called this work *Observer* (1974). In many ways, some quite literal, *Observer* anticipated works featured in

Michael Snow
That / Cela / Dat, 1999, video programmed for one projector and two monitors. Installation view: 'Voici', Palais des Beaux Arts (Brussels), 2000. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery (New York), Galerie Martine Aboucaya (Paris) and àngels barcelona gallery.

Michael Snow
De La, 1972, Aluminium steel, mechanical sculpture with electronic controls, video camera, four monitors, and painted circular wooden base. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa). Courtesy the artist.

the 2009 exhibition – the product of Snow's concentration on video over the last ten years. The willing participation of a mobile visitor, entering and exiting the work (inscribed and erased as visible presence), is crucial, as are certain other features: the tension between 'being here' and being represented 'there' through technological displacement; the screen as a 'found' surface, demarcated by the artist in a Duchampian gesture; that same irregular surface as a palimpsest; and the fixed stare as a phenomenon that writes itself into cinematic history. But Snow, being Snow, means that these clarifying statements about a medium are always clearest in contradistinction to other forms – forms found in translation from one language to another, and extending that process in spectatorial response. For, as Gary Shapiro has shown, "Translation is an infinite relation."[2] Snow, especially in his video installations, is a producer of relational forms.

Bruce Elder, another distinguished filmmaker and writer, once wrote: "All three [Marcel Duchamp, Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow] doubted that words or images give us untroubled access to material objects, as even the existence of real (objective, material, unchanging) objects is open to doubt." And then, driving the point home about language, Elder continued: "Loss of faith in the ability of words to deliver things is a consequence of passing beyond the psychological stage Jacques Lacan called the *Imaginary*." Elder's text adeptly steers us through the Lacanian shoals of language-doubt and language-acquisition, because he wants to make a point about the benefits of never quite terminating the journey, but rather lingering in the passages opened up by Snow's work, and in particular his use of camera movement and verbal forms. These strategies, Elder argues, reignite our faith in language as a possible bridge between unknowns: the unfathomable other and the equally elusive self.[3] To be sure, Snow's, and by extension Elder's, is not the dictionary definition of *language* as "the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in an agreed way."[4] Snow's method of communication is a use of language to continuously renegotiate such agreements: one reason, among many, that his work appeals.

So the first word here under renegotiation is 'screenwriting' and a glance at the title of this essay confirms that I've already begun to test that agreement by breaking the compound word up – a pale imitation of what Snow can get up to, and emphatically does in a work such as *That / Cela / Dat* (1999), the earliest installation included in 'Recent Snow: Projected Works by Michael Snow'. *That / Cela / Dat* is the issue of Snow's silent film *So Is This* (itself a magisterial exercise in authorship) crafted in a style of direct address to you, sitting in the audience. As Catherine Bédard explains, "It's a film in which language does not claim to show us anything other than the film it describes, a film that may be 'reduced' to a string of word-images pointing, essentially, to the film itself, words that aim various witticisms (like arrows) at the art of pointing."[5] Self-reflexive in the extreme, the film considers what it might have been ("a book") and what it might yet become ("a French version"), as well as the social aspects of film screenings ("Sometimes the author of this film is present when his films are screened and can thus answer questions about them."). *The film considers*, the film saucily usurps the role of screenwriter to talk over the author's head through the letterforms made visible on screen through the power of the projector beam. And the voice is powerful, exhorting the spectator to "Stick with it" and to value the film's staging of sociability ("When was the last time you and your neighbour read together?").[6] *So Is This* also has its political dimensions, despite its disclaimers. Language is political in Canada, as in Belgium where *That / Cela / Dat* was commissioned. Based on *So Is This*, and formally honouring its frame-by-frame delivery of word forms, *That / Cela / Dat* adopts three voices – three languages (English, French and Flemish) to address its audience. There is the dominant voice, whichever language is occupying the large central screen, and there are the two other voices, communicating through video monitors on either side of the screen. Simultaneously, these voices grapple lucidly, albeit silently, with the difference between 'this' and 'that'. The spectator is again reading with his or her neighbour, but with a difference – a position in the space (*a prise de position*) that expresses language preference, that talks back, in other words, to those *other* words. *That / Cela / Dat* sets up a different kind of relationship, potentially dialogical, and with equal potential for disagreement, depending on the setting and the mind-set of the participant, *you*. The film points at itself, while the installation, as more of a constellation, points at you and you and you, in at least five languages including those of film and video.

Snow's cinematic languages are resolutely uncommon, in their emphasis on aspects of this cultural form and its tools that have somehow been naturalized into neglect. What he does in effect is denature them by making their form-building functions more visible, audible and palpable. The 45-minute stuttering zoom, that is the visible component of *Wavelength* (1967), anatomizes that everyday way of looking called 'staring' in a series of simple yet hallucinatory effects. Another way of

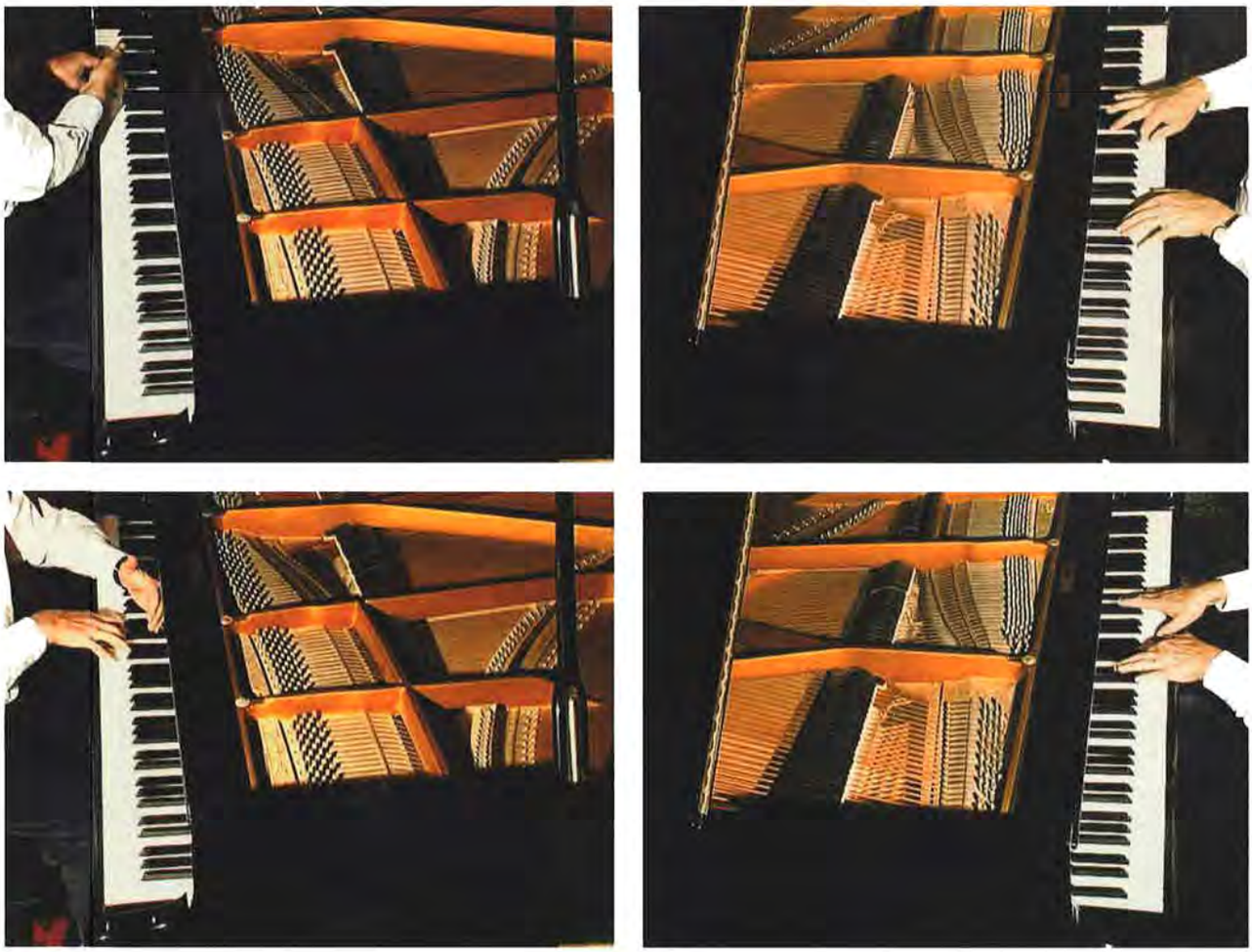
Michael Snow
WVLNT, 1967–2003.
Still from a DVD.
Courtesy the artist.

emphasizing, or reactivating, atrophied perception is temporal manipulation (speeding up or slowing down), which translates to the screen as something neither fast nor slow, but as failing vision or grave intonation. His *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* (1970) needs to be mentioned here, for the factors just mentioned, as well as its insistence on the rules of slide projection – rules that Snow naturally breaks. As one might narrate it, *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* translates an artist's (or art historian's) illustrated talk into the imagined experience of an audience member arriving late, forced into a bad seat, then held there helpless as the misshapen image disappears and returns, its presence and absence unnoticed by the disembodied author/describer whose voice is held hostage to what appears to be happening on screen.

Through translation, Snow invites the spectator into the cinematic flow of a well-planned thought experiment. To keep her bearings, the spectator effectively re-translates Snow's translation by explaining it to herself as the cinematic experience unfolds. The enduring fascination of Snow's cinematic enciphering is that it never fully decodes, in part because the process of reflection just described – call it memory – is running parallel with an immediate perception that is generating predictions – call it imagination. Their furious race constructs a dense, polyphonic and not entirely trustworthy set of recognitions. This is the nature of cinema. Snow's work makes the seated figure conscious of this burst of activity and also makes it pleasurable – a stroke of genius, one might say.

But whose stroke is it? One of Snow's great gifts, it has been argued, is his ability to direct spectatorial attention. Philip Monk, writing at the time of Snow's last exhibition at The Power Plant, borrows this power by citing the artist in a subhead, 'See it my way.'[7] The critic Thierry de Duve makes Snow's work all about language in his 1995 review article subtitled 'The Deictics of Experience, and Beyond.'[8] In terms of years, creative leaps and critical reactions, we are light years away from de Duve's semiotic system. Yet we are still beholden to it, as beholders of Snow's recent work, writers and readers of its critical reception.[9] Current writings on Snow emphasize the haptic dimensions of his work – the exploratory palpation that it initiates in the mind of the spectator.[10] This is very different from following the direction of a pointing finger or a deictic pronoun, and in Snow's recent work, different modes of inscription are at play. The ghost is in the machine; the form seems to write itself; transparentness and the layering of transparencies create 'accidents'; the cinematic site is even mobilized as an afterimage of something that was never stable, that

Michael Snow
Condensation . A Cove Story, 2009, Blu-ray DVD projection. Installation view: 'Recent Snow', The Power Plant, 2009–2010. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shanman Gallery (New York) Galerie Martine Aboucaya Paris) and àngels barcelona gallery. Photo: Steve Payne



Michael Snow
Piano Sculpture, 2009. Stills from a synhronized 4-DVD projection. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery (New York), Galerie Martine Aboucaya (Paris) and àngels barcelona gallery.

never stood still. 'See it my way' has become something possessible by its activators. Put another way, people experiencing Snow's projections do so in the only way possible, which is *their way*, and the work speaks to that viewing condition.

Snow's cinematic languages are resolutely uncommon, in their emphasis on aspects of this cultural form and its tools that have somehow been naturalized into neglect. What he does in effect is denature them by making their form-building functions more visible, audible and palpable.

Video projections are often sampled, rather than watched from beginning to end. The spaces, amenities and protocols of an exhibition space encourage the visitor to drop in and drop out. The choice is yours, the work suggests: there may be a bench in the room with *SSHTOORRTY*, but nothing obliges you to sit on it, to share the moment with a perfect stranger. Likewise, nothing obliges you to give up your seat as the back of the room fills up with heavy-breathing standees. But as you lose track of time, immersed in the romantic triangle being played out in repetitions of colourful shapes and letterforms on screen, your forgotten companion, tired or hungry, may come to tap you on the shoulder. This interruption is allowed: the space of an installation is a social space; it is *permissive* in ways that a cinema is not. At the turn of this century, as more and more galleries began to present installations, Snow considered the transformation of the spectator from seated figure to *flâneur* within a common culture of appropriation–another form of sampling. He also watched with horror as his canonical work was pirated and re-presented on the Internet in unauthorized, low-quality digital copies. Negative inspiration can be a beautiful thing: it prompted Snow to create *WVLNT: Wavelength for Those Who Don't Have the Time* (1967–2003) by dividing the 45-minute *Wavelength* into three equal parts, and layering them into a 15-minute DVD. In 2005, *WVLNT* became a gallery projection that visitors tended to sit through two or more times, to fully experience the memory work of the montage. This technique is not new to Snow: layering constitutes an extended family of resemblance in his oeuvre, returning to his collages and foldages of the early 1960s. His film *Reverberlin* (2006) is a relatively new member, an improvisational musical event visually thickened and temporally exploded: the recording of an actual performance, a 55-minute concert given in Berlin in 2002 by CCMC (a musical group comprised of Snow, Paul Dutton and John Oswald), becomes an aural platform for layered visual passages of past and future performances by

Michael Snow
Tap, 1969, Framed black and white photograph, framed typewritten text on paper, tape player, speaker, wire, and audio tape. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa). Courtesy the artist.

the group. 'Recent Snow' featured a musically related installation: a four-screen projection work entitled *Piano Sculpture* (2009) that centred on his dynamic piano playing.

The life of sound is another feature of video installation that distinguishes it from cinematic experience and forms another branch of Snow's families of resemblance. Sound leaches out into the light from the darkened room. Who can say where the installation begins, where to draw the line around its virtual space? In the case of *Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids)* (2002), when do the dominant sounds of a curtain snapping in the breeze and flapping into folds against a screen, or the background noises of clinking china and murmuring voices, reach the spectator in the gallery *beyond*? In *SSHTOORRTY*, when do the insistent chimes of the doorbell and the tinkling piano draw the spectator upstairs? Dispersing sound is one of Snow's favourite strategies, used early in his work as a clarifying Magrittean provocation. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* translates into Snow's work in a myriad of ways. When it comes to sound, his early installation *Tap* (1969) is not just the discrete aural or haptic experience, but also its multiple representation in dispersed elements (sound, image, text, object and line). The origins of the sensorial experience are never perfectly clear, but lead the willing visitor around what is supposed to be primarily a visual domain, an art gallery, by his or her ears. In Snow's video installations, the line from one sensorial experience to another has been replaced by something softer that ebbs and wanes, something like the fog that rolls in and out of *Condensation . A Cove Story* (2008).

Produced by time-lapse digital photography, *Condensation . A Cove Story* registers a view that Snow has been staring at for nearly four decades from his rural property in Newfoundland. It is a landscape love story, as the title suggests, compressing weather-events that took place over a set period of time into a reverential meditation on Mother Earth. The fixed camera position is Snow's vantage point, and his to represent in the transformative and immersive scale of the piece projected in a gallery. The work figures its inconstant relation with the spectator–such is Newfoundland weather, after all–while silently engraving its sublimity in cultural and personal memory.

More inconstant still, and more proximate in both time and space, is *The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets* (2009). Originally created as a site-specific piece for the àngels barcelona gallery, the work consists of the feed from an externally-mounted video camera onto an assemblage of plinths. The title refers to a cultural construction, which is the history of Cubism, an important influence on Snow's development as an artist. The creation of an irregular screen has its antecedents in Snow's work:

Michael Snow
The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets, 2009. Real-time video projection and site-specific wall/screen structure composed by the artist for each installation. Installation view: 'Recent Snow', The Power Plant, 2009–2010. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery (New York), Galerie Martine Aboucaya (Paris) and àngels barcelona gallery. Photo: Steve Payne

Structural Legacies

Lessons in How to Assimilate the 'Seminal'

by Lucy Reynolds

Michael Snow
See You Later / Au revoir, 1990, Still from a 16mm film. Courtesy the artist and the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (Toronto).

Peter Campus
Anamnesis, 1974, Closed circuit video installation. Courtesy the artist.

'Seminal' and 'pioneering' are the adjectives most commonly affixed to the film and video works of Michael Snow and Peter Campus[1], the subjects of two recent exhibitions at The Power Plant. While both artists continue to produce work, now made and presented in digital formats rather than on video or film, their contributions are still read mainly in canonical terms, through the historic filter of works that established their reputations some forty years before.

The reception of Snow's recent installations is haunted by his 1967 film *Wavelength*, for example, which has come to epitomize North American Structural filmmaking. Meanwhile, appraisals of Campus's work frequently return to *Dynamic Field Series* (1971) or *aen* (1977), works which embody the performatively-inflected, monitor-based minimalism of early American video art, while also situating him alongside contemporaries such as Bruce Nauman or Dan Graham, particularly related to his explorations of closed-circuit video technology.

As recent works by both artists attest, they continue to engage actively with new visual technologies and to make new explorations of old themes: Snow's *SSHTOORRTY* (2005), for example, developed the narrative disjunctures he first explored digitally in **Corpus Callosum* (2002), whereas Campus's *Inflections: changes in light and colour around Ponquogue Bay* (2009), commissioned by the British Film Institute in London, continues his interest in landscape painting and the digital sphere.

Despite this continued productivity, critical and curatorial interest circulates around their 'seminal' or 'pioneering' works of earlier decades, suggesting that Snow and Campus have been variously assimilated throughout their careers to the changing cultural agendas of different epochs of film, video and visual art culture. *Wavelength* has merited numerous re-assessments since its first critical affirmations by critics such as P. Adams Sitney and Annette Michelson. In her recent re-reading of *Wavelength*, Elizabeth Legge notes how, for critics like Michelson, Snow's film "established itself as a beacon and touchstone of intellectualism in film,"[2] at a time when artist's filmmaking in the United States "had to stand up to radical cultural reassessments" and theorizing about "the ontology and political function of film," from French journals such as *Critique, Quel Tèl* and *Cahiers du cinéma*.

Campus's videos and installations have also been appropriated to contextualize current critical and curatorial re-evaluations of film and video. The earliest example is Rosalind Krauss's famous article on the effects of video art, 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism'. Krauss perceived the participating presence of the viewer in the video installations *mem* and *dor* (both 1975), made visible through closed-circuit video technology in the gallery, as rupturing the "narcissistic enclosure" that she observed between artist and camera in the work of contemporaries such as Vito Acconci.[3] Crucially, Krauss also compared the viewing conditions of Campus's installations to the "temporal values" of minimalist sculpture, simultaneously establishing a critical affirmation and a chronological link to a defining end point of American modernism, one credited with shifting the experience of art from autonomous object to the contingencies of viewing.[4]

Another recent affirmation of Campus's pioneering significance was the widely acclaimed and critically rehabilitative Whitney Museum of American Art exhibition, 'Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964–1977' (2001), which included Campus's closed-circuit installation, *aen*, among projects by Snow, Acconci and others. Both archival and regenerative,, exhibitions such as 'Into the Light' have arrested the material disintegration of early video technologies by reasserting this legacy through scholarship and exhibition. As the moving image is increasingly assimilated into the museum or gallery as a projection–thus re-asserting cinematic roots rather than the sculptural, monitor-based presentations which had characterized video art in the preceding decades–curator Chrissie Iles's exhibition not only proposed precedents, but set up a comparative framework through which to consider current assumption developments about what has come to be titled 'artists' moving image' or, as Maeve Connolly suggests, in one of the few studies to address the area, "artists' cinema" or "gallery film."

Connolly concedes the inherent complexity of artists' current engagement with the moving image, proposing that: "artists' cinema' does not signify a unified or coherent historical formation. Instead, it refers to a series of competing claims made for and by artists and art practice in relation to cinema and the wider context of moving image culture."[5] Her point implies that tracing historic trajectories, as Iles had done in 'Into the Light,' has helped to navigate the proliferating concerns and forms which gallery-based work has taken during the last decade, assigning iconic status to forerunners such as Snow and Campus in the process. Indeed, Connolly refers to the "genealogical" nature of many of these claims, "seeking to frame artists' cinema as an extension of another form of art practice, such as experimental film, post-minimalist installation, video art or performance."[6]

From either end of video art's short history, both Krauss and Iles align Campus to a modernist chronology and position him against and within the trajectories of 20th century art in order to orientate their own epoch. Campus's video works might therefore function predominantly as signifiers, adaptive to the contingent concerns of the given time and space of the retrospective or article in question, particularly at moments of significant conceptual or technological shifts and flux. It could also be argued, in a decade where market forces have infiltrated untold institutional areas of the visual arts[7], that Campus, Snow and their counterparts may also have come to represent a period of perceived radicalism, epitomized by the dematerialized conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s, and embedded in the radicalized counterculture of the period.

Whereas Krauss or 'Into the Light' positioned Snow and Campus within a map of historical or critical trajectories, either on the page or in the museum, recent artists such as Emily Wardill and Sophie Bélair Clément materially embody Snow and Campus's film and video experi-

Peter Campus
mem, 1975, Camera, projector and infrared light. Installation view: BFI Southbank Gallery (London), 2009–2010. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Dave Morgan.

Emily Wardill
Sick Serena and Dregs and Wreck and Wreck,
2007, Still from a 16mm film.
Courtesy the artist and
LUX (London)

ments through their questioning, and even abrasive, processes of practice and performance. As Peter Osborne has suggested, this younger generation's formal re-evaluations of film and video work from the 1960s and 1970s reflect: "a more general experimental rearticulation and refunctioning of technologies of perception and patterns of artistic and social use"[8]; providing points of orientation for their own unfolding and unresolved relationship to artists' moving image: its histories and modes of reception.

This is not to suggest that either artist is working to the same systematic models of materialist formalism that Structural film once represented. Indeed the value of Wardill and Bélair Clément's engagement has been to draw out those aspects of formal practice which would perhaps not have been recognized by Structuralist filmmakers. Beyond its undeniable formalist intent, Snow's assertion that *Wavelength* was "a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings, and aesthetic ideas," and that the film's references to narrative, or "four human events including a death,"[9] find echoes in the fragmented use of dialogue, and the allusions to mythological, as well as biblical, narrative used by Wardill in *Sick Serena and Dregs and Wreck and Wreck* (2007).

Like *Wavelength*, Wardill's film consciously rejects the cohesion of an overriding narrative, employing instead the faceted patterns of stained glass windows as its key reference and recurring image. She compares her film's construction to the "specific compartmentalisation that you would have in stained glass windows,"[10] which function simultaneously as individual images and constituent parts of the window's larger spectacle, treating stained glass as a working structure for the discrete but adjunct narrative components of her filmmaking. The stained glass in Wardill's film operates almost as a metaphor for Structural film's analytical materialism, referring in its tinted translucency to the materiality of the film strip, and suggesting, in the cellular detail of the window's individual ventricles, the analytical focus of Snow and his British counterparts such as Peter Gidal.

Indeed, Wardill perceives her predominant interest in Structural film as relating to the demanding and rigorous process of decipherment that it requires from the viewer. She refers to Structural film's "awareness of the opacity of communication, an insinuation of material which is used in different ways and can be very strong, a hardness – which I think is very relevant today."[11] With this in mind, a recent work by Wardill, *Sea Oak* (2008), draws more directly on the radicalism associated with the film and video artists of the 1960s and 1970s, who asserted the political implications inherent to cinema spectatorship. Wardill correlates the bracing, heady didacticism of Structural film and the subject of her work, a left-wing think-tank located at the Rockridge Institute in Berkeley, California, noting a shared commitment to understanding and unravelling the processes of communication, both visual and verbal: "...this idea of there being a materiality to communication which is impossible to ignore and which can be used for political ends, which they both seem to share."[12]

The resultant film is without film image, yet retains the materiality of the film strip, not as a vehicle of projected light but as a conduit for Wardill's interviews with members of the Rockridge Institute, as their disembodied voices are released through the optical soundtrack of a centrally positioned 16mm projector. For Wardill this seemed the most fitting reflection of their study of political rhetoric "which trades on the ambiguity of metaphorical images, images which are doubly ambiguous because they are being suggested or described rather than supplied visually."[13]

Made and first exhibited just before the 2008 US presidential elections, *Sea Oak* proposes a radical form which cites Structural film as a potential model of how political thought might be inscribed in formal analysis, yet

Sophie Bélair Clément
with the collaboration
of David Jacques
See You Later / Au revoir: 17 minutes en temps réel,
2008, Still from a video.
Courtesy the artist.

CANADIANART

FEATURES

Déja Viewed: Michael Snow on Looking Back, and Ahead

SEPTEMBER 20, 2016

BY LEAH SANDALS

A 1970 copy of *artscanada* with a cover story on Michael Snow, in recognition of his showing at the Venice Biennale's Canada Pavilion.

As I step off the bus towards Michael Snow's house, I feel like I am carrying his entire career in a No Frills bag. Well, maybe not his entire career, but a good chunk of it.

In advance of our interview, Snow has suggested that I dig through ***Canadian Art***'s archives—which also include a treasure trove of copies of our predecessor ***artscanada*** (1967–1983) and an earlier magazine also called ***Canadian Art*** (1943–1966) to see if I can find a cover he did after winning a contest in 1951, when he was an OCAD student.

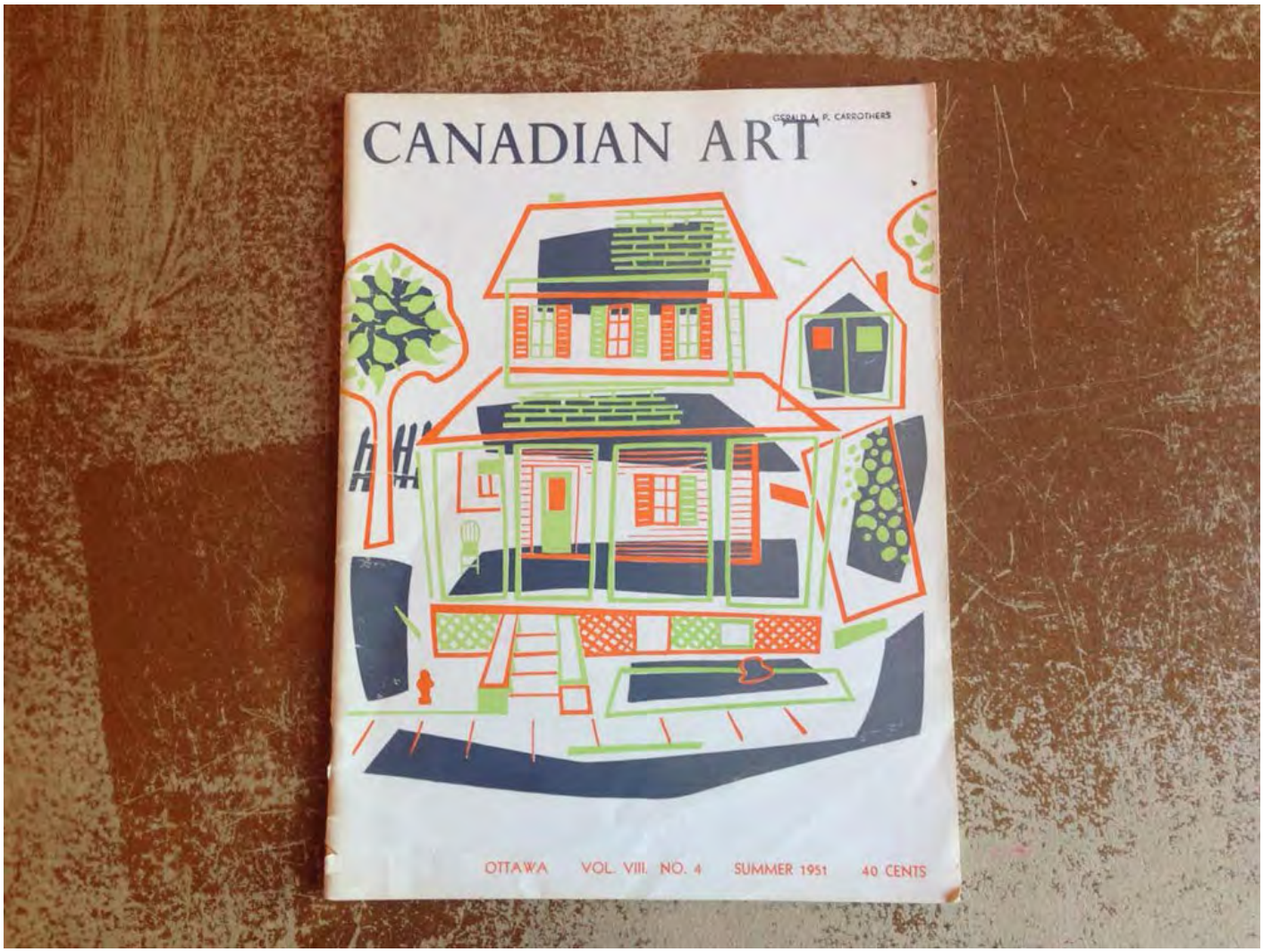
I have found that 1951 cover Snow did as a student—an energetic green and orange work called ***Ontario House***—as well as a 1970 copy of ***artscanada*** that featured him on the cover in recognition of his showing at the Venice Biennale's Canada Pavilion that year. Also in the bag: magazines with cover stories on Snow from ***Canadian Art***'s Summer 1986, Spring 1994 and Summer 2000 editions; printouts of online stories we did about Snow in 2012 (for his AGO sculpture show, "Objects of Vision") and in 2014 (for "Photo-Centric," a survey in Philadelphia); and a couple of copies of ***artscanada*** that include articles on his practice.

It is appropriate, in many ways, for me to bring the magazines, even if it is not quite appropriate for me to bring them in a grocery bag. Snow is the honoured guest at the Canadian Art Gala this week, and while locating and reading these texts, I have been reminded (as if one needs to be) of the great significance of Snow's practice to the art world in general and to Canadian art in particular.

As a musician, photographer, filmmaker, painter, sculptor and more, Snow was multidisciplinary well before that was the standard mode of a contemporary artist. Articles from as early as 1970 speak of Snow as "one of the most important aesthetic sensibilities" of the late 20th century. It's a reputation that has only grown over the years, with exhibitions and screenings still on the go at top museums and galleries worldwide. The No Frills bag weighs heavy in my hand.

Snow sees me coming up the steps, and opens the door before I can knock. As we walk through the living room, I see catalogues of recent shows in Italy and the United States. Among the many artworks lining the walls, I spy a framed print of Snow's ***Flight Stop***—the Canada geese perpetually in a state of near-landing at Toronto's Eaton Centre—propped on the floor. As we pass a baby grand in the centre of the narrow room, Snow plonks a finger on one of the keys. I tell him it is a nice piano, and he tells me it belonged to his mother.

We settle in the small kitchen on red upholstered chairs. Glass bottles of various colours line the windowsill. I start taking magazines out of the No Frills bag. We begin the interview, or conversation.



When he was a third-year student at the Ontario College of Art, Michael Snow won a cover competition for *Canadian Art*'s Summer 1951 issue. The title of the work? *Ontario House*.

Leah Sandals: I'm glad you asked me to bring these magazines.

Michael Snow: I just thought you should refer to them because I was thinking about my history in relation to *Canadian Art* and it goes a long way back. This cover [pointing to 1951 edition] is from when I was at OCA [the Ontario College of Art].

An interesting thing about this [artwork on the 1951 cover] is that it was influenced by Stuart Davis. I had seen some of his work, and I liked it quite a bit.

And all of a sudden, now, Stuart Davis has a show at the Whitney, and there are references to Stewart Davis all over the place. And I haven't seen him mentioned for the last 50 years!

LS: It is interesting how things return and recur. The first thing I wanted to ask about is what it might be like for you to see all these publications together, from 1951 to the present day, almost.

MS: Well, it's wonderful in some ways, because they are all kind of echoes of events—exhibitions and things like Venice. It's fantastic.

LS: And it's a lot to consider, I bet.

MS: The thing I like is that I'm still here.

LS: That is a good thing! On a similar note, I've noticed much has changed in the world since I became an art student 20 years ago, and I'm assuming much has changed since you were an art student back in 1951—both in the world at large and in the art world in particular. I was wondering what changes in these decades have struck you the most.

MS: Well, the art world was very small in the '50s in Toronto. In terms of galleries, there were two or three private galleries—the Roberts Gallery, the Picture Loan Society run by Douglas Duncan... and maybe that's it. This is before Carmen Lamanna and Av Isaacs.

And I do remember knowing about *Canadian Art* and appreciating the fact that it discussed artists that I might see—that I might even know. Because there was very little of that.

The societies, like the Ontario Society of Artists and the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, they had these quite big group shows pretty much every year, so that was the exhibiting of a kind of local art.

LS: When did you know you were going to be an artist? Who was helpful in getting your career started?

MS: I had a wonderful teacher at OCA, John Martin, and I used to show him work that I was doing apart from the work that was part of the course we were taking. On one occasion, he told me that there was an exhibition being planned by the Ontario Society of Artists for the Art Gallery of Ontario, and that I should submit two paintings which I had just done—which, of course I never would have thought of. And they were accepted.

When I was in high school, the art teacher was a painter and a friend of all the Group of Seven people, like Lawren Harris. And [through her] I got the art prize. I didn't even know that I was making art—I made comic strips and stuff like that. But I got the art prize, and on the basis of getting the art prize, I decided that I should study art.

The other influential person shortly after OCA was George Dunning, who was the head of a film company in Toronto. After OCA, I worked for a year in commercial art—and I was really terrible at it. Then I went for almost a year to Europe, hitchhiking around and playing music. When I came back, I had an exhibition at Hart House, of drawings, and I got phone call from this man who had seen the show and liked the work and very much wanted to meet me. So we met, and he told me

that he ran an animation company, and that he thought that my drawings showed that I was interested in film—which I wasn't—and he offered me a job learning how to do animation, which was just absolutely incredible. All of a sudden I was involved in film.

LS: And then you became very well known for film works later on, like *Wavelength* and *La Région Centrale*.

MS: Yes, then I became a filmmaker.

On the same subject: Jonas Mekas.

When Joyce Wieland and I moved to New York in '62, Jonas was very influential in the underground film scene, which we, in Toronto, didn't know much about. And he was the reason why I sent my film *Wavelength* to a festival in Belgium. I didn't know anything about the festival—he told me about it and he urged me to send it. And it won the grand prize, and brought about an amazing change in things.

The Summer 1986 issue of *Canadian Art*, featuring a cover story on Michael Snow and the hologram work he created for Expo 86 in Vancouver.

LS: So what would you have done, do you think, if you hadn't gone into art?

MS: Well, I started to play music in high school, and I continued to play professionally. So that was, right from the beginning, also another career.

At times, I thought I should stop and concentrate on being a visual artist, but I didn't.

For a while, I was playing with a band, and we were quite busy. We worked pretty much all one year at the Westover Hotel [now Filmores in downtown Toronto]. Around '59, '60, something like that. And I had a studio and I made some art that turned out to be interesting at the same time.

LS: And that music practice has continued up to the present day—just a few weeks ago, you played a show at Yonge-Dundas Square. And earlier, you mentioned that the piano in your living room belonged to your mother. Can you tell me a bit more about your first experiences of music?

MS: My mother was a very good pianist. She wasn't professional, she never played in public, but she could read anything.

Sometimes, when I was in public school, she wanted me to study piano, but I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do anything, actually; I was very obstinate, ridiculous, a serial rebel.

On one occasion, she thought she would go so far as to arrange a meeting with a piano teacher for me, and said she would pick me up at school and take me there. So I told my friends to tell her that they didn't know where I was.

Then, I discovered jazz on the radio, and I was interested in the piano parts of it—Jelly Roll Morton and Duke Ellington. So I started to teach myself how to play piano, and in a few months I was playing in bands. I met other people who were interested in the same kind of music, and we started to play.

When Joyce and I decided to go to New York, I thought that was a good occasion to stop playing. And I did stop playing at that time, for a while. But during that time, I became more involved in sound in every way.

LS: So when you did give up music for a bit, you focused more on sound in your installations and films.

MS: Yes, sound in the films became a very important thing.

LS: I'm guessing that there is something you get from making music that you don't get from making art. What is that?

MS: Right from the beginning [in music] it was the improvisation that interested me. Improvisation in jazz is often thematic—there are styles. And I started with that. But eventually it became totally free improvisation.

And I don't free improvise with any other medium—except, maybe, well I did a lot of drawing starting when I was at OCA and in the next couple of years. They might be improvised.

But basically, with the artworks—sculpture or photographic work—there's not that much of an improvisation. They are planned. And the same with the films.

So music is, in that sense, a completely different activity and has its particular excitement in that it has never been never played before.

LS: Now, I'm curious about what your favourite albums are—your desert-island discs. What do you think?

MS: One of Glenn Gould's *Goldberg Variations*, which covers so much terrain. There isn't anything better.

But after that would be some of the Jelly Roll Morton recordings, and his band the Red Hot Peppers, and then more modern jazz—Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk.

The Spring 1994 issue of *Canadian Art*, featuring a cover story on "Michael Snow: Forty Years of Achievement," by Adele Freedman.

LS: You have had such a multifaceted practice, which wasn't common when you were starting out, but is much more prevalent now. What are the biggest lessons you have learned through all these practices?

MS: Even if you don't know where you are going, you should go in the direction that is somehow indicated.

You can't really predict the effect of something, or details of a bigger kind of gesture, and sometimes it takes a little while to learn what you have done.

Watching [a work] and hearing it again, and considering what it is that you did, will sometimes imply what the next thing should be.

LS: Interesting. What examples come to mind?

MS: Well, to make the film *La Région Centrale*, I conceived of a machine that moved the camera

under orders, so to speak. And then I did an installation with that machine. I was surprised to find myself thinking, "this can also do that."

You know, about two years ago, there was a conference at the Louvre on *La Région Centrale*—three days of papers by people from all over Europe, and a showing of the film, which is a three-hour film. This was a film that was made in '69 or '70, and it's very much still around.

LS: So what did you learn about *La Région Centrale* from being at that conference? What did you learn about it anew?

MS: There were very interesting readings of the sound in *La Région Centrale*, different interpretations of the sound-image relationship.

LS: And while I'm curious about the origin of many of your works, this seems like a good time to ask, where did *La Région Centrale* develop for you, initially?

MS: What led me to it was the [previous] film called *Back and Forth*, which is built completely on back-and-forth panning.

The idea for *La Région Centrale* was that it should be a landscape, and should be completely spherical movements.

La Région Centrale was totally experimental, in the sense that I conceived of the movements, but I'd never ever seen anything like it. When I was shooting, I had a kind of score, but I also improvised.

In one week, it was shot, and we got the film to the lab in Montreal, and next day or so, we went to have a look at it. It was completely new to me. I had never seen anything like it.

It could have been [different]. There was a lot involved, with the helicopter.

LS: You rented a helicopter?

MS: To get there. That was one of the most extreme risks that I've taken. Because there could have been something wrong with it—something wrong with the camera, with the helicopter.

Some parts [of the film] were better than others. Mostly, it's pretty good.

LS: Interesting that you had no clue how it would turn out, initially. What are your favourite films?

MS: It's hard to say. There are a couple of films by Paul Sharits that I like. And also by Ernie Gehr. And Ken Jacobs, Ron Rice. Stan Brakhage's *The Art of Vision*.

Brakhage was very influential in a kind of clarifying way, because I wanted to not do what he was doing.

LS: Why did you not want to do what Stan Brakhage did? Was it your "serial rebel" thing?

MS: Of his work, I thought, he's a great filmmaker, and, in some ways, too personal and expressionist. I thought that the machine-ness of the camera ought to be stressed, not negated.

What he did was very diaristic, personal—and I think it's great, what he did, and that was a very avant-garde thing to realize that films don't have to be made by a crew with a 35mm camera. Stan wasn't the only person who did that, but that's what experimental film was founded on—that one person could do it. And Stan was definitely the leader.

Now, Stan hated ***La Région Centrale***. And he didn't like ***Wavelength***, either. So, in the community of experimental filmmakers, which was small, in New York and San Francisco, [that] was known. He was a great lecturer, and in his lectures he would describe why he thought ***La Région Centrale*** was wrong.

LS: What was your reaction to his critique?

MS: I thought it was somewhat understandable considering what he did. What I did wasn't an attack on him, but it was something that was somewhat opposed, in a sense.

But the wonderful thing about that one day I got a letter, a 20-page handwritten letter from him. He had just seen ***La Région Centrale*** and totally changed his mind. "It's not this, it's this, it's this, I see what you meant by this." And that letter was followed by another letter.

His wife was a Torontonian, and he mentioned that she had persuaded him to give it another chance. And then he changed his mind. Not only did he change his mind, but he really shared what he thought in great depth with me. Wonderful thing to do.

LS: It's a very generous response. Related to this story: Why has the personal not been of interest to you? Or why do you think you have held off on dealing with the personal in your art?

MS: Well, it might be that the personal style is an aspect of instrumental playing in jazz. Playing jazz is much more personal and stylistic than playing classical music in general.

So it might be that, for me, that kind of personal thing was being taken care of by music. And film as something machine-made started to take on an importance in my thinking.

The Summer 2000 issue of *Canadian Art*, featuring a cover story on Michael Snow in Paris by Bart Testa.

LS: You mention Stan Brakhage's wife was from Toronto, and I want to ask more about this city. Why did you return to Toronto from New York?

MS: During the time that I was living in New York, it was here, in Toronto, that often I had many shows.

And I guess it was partly political, because Joyce kind of got involved in supporting Pierre Trudeau. And I was in so much in Canada, anyway, that we thought Canada looked interesting.

LS: Your partner was a nationalist, or patriotic, so that was part of the package.

MS: Yes, that's true.

LS: I'm still intrigued about why you decided to stay here as a base after that time period. What ties you to this place?

MS: Well, my mother is dead now, but she was alive during those years. And the family part of it was actually important—the other aunts and uncles and cousins. Which I don't see very much, but I still had a connection with them, especially with my mother. So that was one of the reasons.

Mostly just seemed like it would be to be part of something that seemed to have a more creative energy than it had when I left.

LS: So the Toronto scene changed, too, which made it more amenable.

MS: And there was some experimental film. The CFMDC [Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre] was starting, which was modelled on the New York Film-Makers' Cooperative, one of the things that Jonas did.

Toronto wasn't a competitor for New York, but it looked like it would be a pleasure to contribute to a kind of new energy.

LS: Where in Toronto did you grow up—what area?

MS: Well, in the first years of my life we moved to Montreal. My father was a civil engineer and the company he was working for asked him to move to work on something in Montreal. And there, he had an accident where he lost one eye, and eventually he became blind.

So there were a couple of years in Montreal, and then when the accident happened, we spent a year in Chicoutimi, which is where my mother came from and where I started school.

Then after that, a year in Winnipeg, which was also related to his work, and then we came back to Toronto, and lived on Belsize Drive, which is near Davisville, and then the rest of the time we lived on Roxborough Drive in Rosedale.

LS: Nice. And was your dad able to continue being an engineer after he lost his sight?

MS: Well, he did some kind of freelancing work. Some guys that had worked for him started their own company, and they had him work on making the bids for possible jobs. So he did have a little bit of work; he learned how to read braille quite fast.

So my sister and I would try to read the plans to him, and he would make notes. He did a little bit of that kind of stuff.

LS: Interesting. I think Sarah Milroy, writing for our website in 2012 about your AGO show that year, mentioned your dad's loss of vision, and the fact that sometimes people speculate that that's where your own interest in perception came from.

MS: Obviously, I wasn't affected as much as he was.

He came to one of the shows that I had at the Isaacs Gallery when it was on Yonge, with his cane. And looked at the paintings like this, [a few inches away from the canvas].

My nickname was brother. Everybody called me "brother," including my mother.

So this one time, I'll never forget, he [looked at the painting and] said, "That's a nice colour, brother."

LS: So he had some limited vision?

MS: He could see the colour.

LS: That's a great story. Now, my sense is you always have exhibitions happening these days—that the work continues to circulate in wider spheres. What's on the go right now?

MS: There is a concert coming up which is two pianos, with Diane Roblin; that's at Array Space in Toronto in October. Recently we responded to a request from my Paris gallery, Martine Aboucaya, about wanting to make a different installation of a video work of mine called *The Viewing of Six New Works*. So we spent a couple of hours making revisions and sending that to her. And that particular work, a version of it, is on exhibition right now in Ireland, at the Butler Gallery in Kilkenny. What is very gratifying is that my work continues to have an audience and the audience is growing, in a sense.

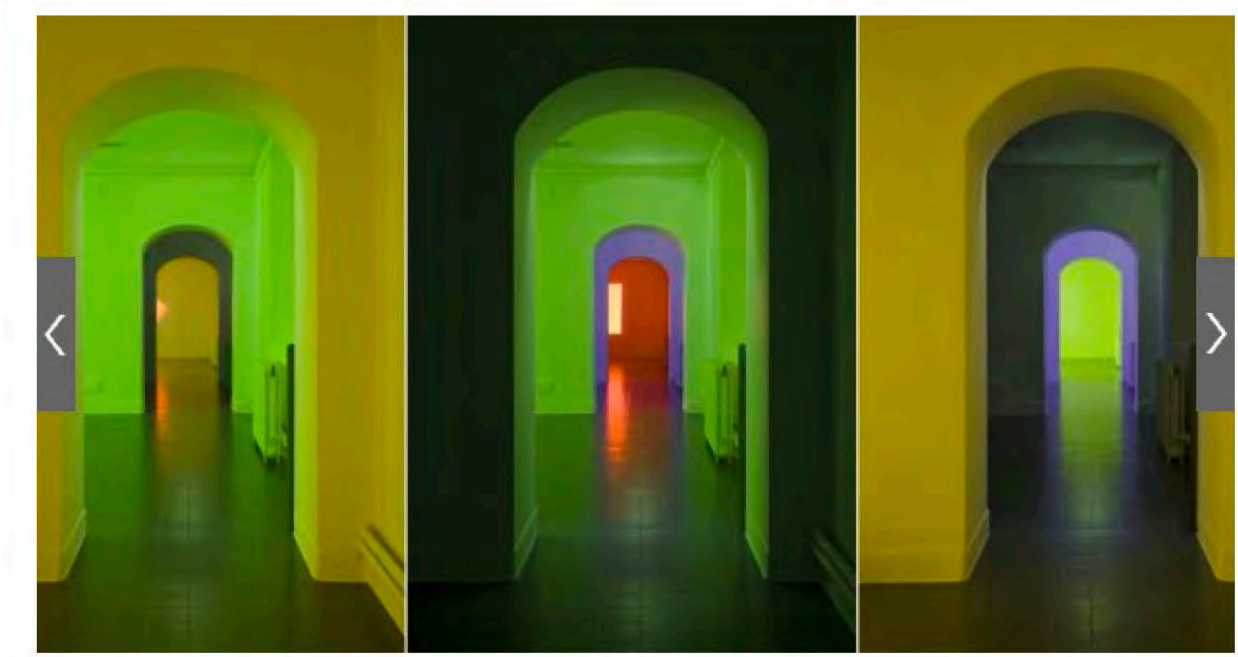
Michael Snow will be the honoured guest at the Canadian Art Gala on the evening of September 22 at Andrew Richard Designs in Toronto. For more information, please visit canadianart.ca/gala2016. This interview has been edited and condensed.

THE IRISH TIMES

A chance to see through Michael Snow's influential eyes

The Canadian artist sets his sights on Kilkenny

Aidan Dunne August 16, 2016



Triptych from The Viewing of Six New Works by Michael Snow. Copyright Michael Snow. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery and Butler Gallery. Photograph: Roland Paschoff

The Viewing of Six New Works – *Michael Snow*
Butler Gallery, The Castle, Kilkenny
★★★★★

The distinguished Canadian artist Michael Snow may not be as well known as some of his contemporaries, but he has probably been more influential in shaping the languages of contemporary art, from experimental film to sculptural installation. His impact extends further than fine art – to arthouse cinema, for example.

He is hard to categorise. You can add painting, drawing, photography and writing to film and sculpture. He also started out as a jazz musician and has never given up music.

Given all that, *The Viewing of Six New Works* is agreeably straightforward. The experience of looking and the nature of perception have consistently been at the heart of Snow's visual work. In 1967 and 1971 he produced two of the most famous experimental films ever made, *Wavelength* and *La Région Centrale*. The former, featuring several performers and set in an apartment, is composed of a series of slow zooms. Implied narrative hints, delivered in elliptical form, are never explained or concluded, but the work was a vital part of a 1960s upheaval in cinematic language.

Wavelength is only 45 minutes, but *La Région Centrale* is three hours, without the props of performers or narrative. Shot with a camera mounted on an elaborate, custom-made apparatus on a mountaintop in north Quebec, it is as if the film is an exercise in pure seeing: the eye is set free to roam at will, from the ground immediately below to the farthest reaches of the landscape and into the depths of the sky. Time passes, the familiar is turned on its head, becomes completely abstract – and then suddenly comprehensible again.

Fast-forward to 2012 and *The Viewing of Six New Works*. Snow is still fascinated by the nature and means of seeing. The piece, which is ideally installed in the sequence of rooms that make up the Butler Gallery, is about looking at art and looking generally. Even when examining a static object, the process of looking is itself dynamic, and Snow sets out to capture that dynamism.

Each of the six pieces is keyed to a colour and each is a changing view of a monochrome oblong, in whole or in part, scanned by a restless eye, or more accurately eyes. The forms dance and transform as the watching eyes negotiate them. The eyes are Snow's, tracked and recorded in the act of looking, in just the way that we might enter a gallery and make our way from painting to painting. Except that in the Butler the process is short-circuited or turned on its head. We end up looking at the process of looking, which is there, pinned down, on the wall.

It may sound austere and minimal, and it is, but it's also light and playful in tone. That's true of Snow's work generally. While it has generated a wealth of theoretical analysis and speculation, it stems from a certain innocence of vision on his part, an ability to ask simple questions and look for simple answers. In doing so, he manages to illuminate things we take for granted, prompting us to really think anew about seeing.

Until October 9th, butlergallery.com

ARTFORUM

Michael Snow

LA VIRREINA IMAGE CENTER
La Rambla, 99
July 9–November 1

Michael Snow, Powers of Two, 2003, four photographic transparencies, 16 x 8.5'.

The real subject of Michael Snow's retrospective—encompassing fifty years of the Canadian artist's forays into film, sound installation, video, painting, and sculpture—is the viewer. Snow's work reveals a genuine, open-ended interest in visual perception, especially as it relates to the two-dimensional plane. There's a lot of play—with windows, projections of windows, reflection, opacity, and transparency. Powers of Two, 2003, features four enormous freestanding transparent photographs of a couple having sex, with the man turned away while the woman is staring, in frank absorption, at us. Circle around to the other side of the image, which everyone seems to do, and you will not be rewarded by the man's expression.

Snow makes a clear distinction between video installations that are meant to be viewed in a gallery, like paintings, and those that require a seated commitment. Wavelength, 1967—a groundbreaking avant-garde film upon its debut—is an example of the latter and is screened only twice a day. The film is composed of a continuous forty-five-minute zoom shot that moves us from one end of a loft to a point on the opposing wall; people come in and out, day becomes night, there are sudden flashes of color, a death. But mostly it is a film of an empty room, or, more accurately, of how we perceive it. Through the slow, relentless tightening of the visual field, the work shows us how vision is impressionistic and multilayered, affected by emotional states, memories, and split-second sensory reactions.

— Jessica Lott

THE VILLAGER

Buhmann on Art: Michael Snow

March 19, 2015 | Filed under: Arts | Posted by: The Villager

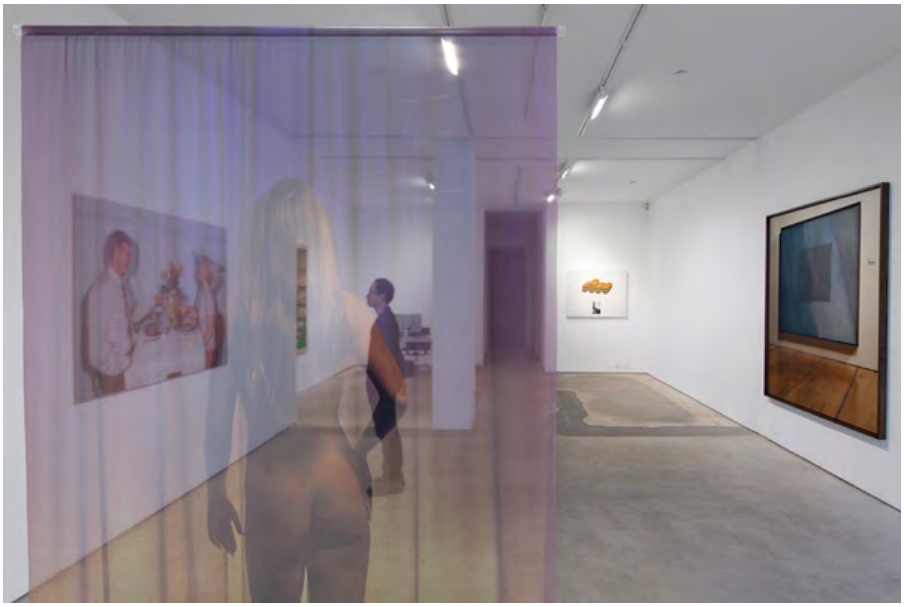
"That/Cela/Dat" (1999 | DVD projection | 60 min. | loop.).

BY STEPHANIE BUHMANN (stephaniebuhmann.com) | Though Michael Snow's oeuvre is multidisciplinary — including painting, sculpture, video, film, sound, photography, holography, drawing, writing and music — his contemplation remains the same. He is focused on exploring the nature of perception, consciousness, language and temporality.

"Times" (1979 photograph | 74 1/4 x 77 1/8 inches | 73 3/4 x 76 3/4 x 2 1/4 inches | Artist proof | Edition 2 of 2, with 1 artist proof). ©Michael Snow. PHOTOS Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Snow has received honorary degrees from the University of Toronto (1999), the University of Victoria (1997) and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (1990), among others, as well as many prestigious awards, such as the Guggenheim Fellowship (1972) and the Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres, France (1995, 2011).

While considered a leading experimental filmmaker, having inspired the Structural Film movement with his groundbreaking 1967 film "Wavelength," for example, Snow has also been active as a professional musician since the 1950s. He has played piano and other instruments with various ensembles, but most often in free improvisation with the Canadian Creative Music Collective, Toronto.



Installation view, "Michael Snow: A Group Show."

Along these lines, one can expect an exhibition that is multi-faceted and hard to pigeonhole, reflecting the artist's various interests and substantial expertise.

MICHAEL SNOW: A GROUP SHOW
Through April 4
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ARTFORUM

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Michael Snow

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J. Hoberman

A HUMBLE, RELENTLESS, more or less continuous zoom shot taking forty-five minutes to traverse a Canal Street loft into a photograph pasted on the far wall, Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) provided twentieth-century cinema with a definitive metaphor for itself as temporal projection—and also burdened Snow with an unrepeatable masterpiece.

That the artist has a reputation as a painter, a sculptor, a musician, a video maker, and, mainly, a filmmaker gives "Michael Snow: Photo-Centric" a polemical thrust. At the very least, this highly concentrated exhibition supports the Bazinian assertion that modern art is essentially a reaction to photography ("manifestly the most important event in the history of the visual arts"). More specifically, the show suggests that Snow's own strategies, regardless of medium, have been determined by his understanding of the photographic process.

Fashioned two years after *Wavelength*, the Polaroid self-portrait *Authorization*, 1969, is as perfect in its modest way as Snow's perversely static motion picture: The artist made a rectangle of adhesive tape on a mirror and photographed himself within that frame, then pasted the photo in one corner of the taped rectangle and repeated the process until the photographs effaced his reflection. The subject of the work is the procedure via which Snow arrived at finished object; the author's "signature" is inscribed as his gradually disappearing image. Snow has his predilections—a prurient fondness for female nudes and elegantly deranged grids—but his pieces are autobiographical in a highly specific way, typically concerned with the conditions of the work's own making.

"Photo-Centric" is thematic rather than chronological, and much of the work dates from the early '70s. Two big ideas dominate: the paradox inherent in the representation of volume in a two-dimensional field, and its opposite—the insistence that a photograph is also a thing. (Snow calls his photos "events-that-become-objects.") The photographic pieces are sculptural. For instance, the assemblage of sixteen photos of various materials squeezed flat beneath Plexiglas plates that constitutes *Press*, 1969, is itself squeezed beneath a Plexiglas plate held in place by four large clamps, further enriching the pun.

Curated by Adelina Vlas, the show encompasses a half century of work, beginning with *Four to Five*, 1962, sixteen photographs of Snow's early trademark, a life-size silhouette called the "Walking Woman," positioned in various Toronto locations where it alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) functions as a chunk of negative or positive space. One of the most recent pieces, *Paris de jugement Le and/or State of the Arts*, 2003, is not dissimilar: This near-full-scale photograph of three naked women, backs to the camera and tan lines flaunted, up against a reproduction of Cézanne's *Large Bathers* (from the PMA's collection, as it happens) stages a competition for attention in the enforced democracy of the two-dimensional picture plane.

At first glance, Snow's work looks formalist, but the basis is usually conceptual. (His motto might be William Carlos Williams's "No ideas but in things.") At the same time, his strongest pieces are perceptual. What you see is what you get. Like his sculptures (mainly simple, aggressively artless forms that are in some way interactive), Snow's photographs can demand a physical shift in the viewer's position. *Crouch, Leap, Land*, 1970, requires one to scrunch down under three suspended Perspex plates, thereby approximating the camera's position as one peers up voyeuristically at three photographs of a nude woman's leap that were themselves taken from beneath transparent flooring. It's all a matter of perspective. The floor piece *In Medias Res*, 1998, is a photograph of a Persian carpet, as well as a bird's-eye view of an escaped parrot in flight.

Many of the works in "Photo-Centric" consider what happens when something is photographed—or painted and then photographed, or vice versa. A pair of timed cameras face off in *Line Drawing with Synapse*, 2003. The exhibition's first big image is *Times*, 1979, an enlarged photo of a painting of a square; here the oblique camera angle suggests that the canvas is slightly rhomboid, provoking a subtle geometric disorientation.

Around the time he was working on *Wavelength*, Snow noted that "when you narrow down your range and are looking through just that narrow aperture of the [camera] lens, the intensity of what you see is so much greater." The purest—or most primitive—example of this may be his 1982 *Seated Sculpture*, fashioned from several shaped steel plates: The viewer ducks inside to sit and contemplate a flat, black, rectangular void about seven feet away.

Snow's strongest pieces are perceptual. What you see is what you get.

It is a viewing device for induced tunnel vision or perhaps the cinema of negative space à la *The Flintstones*.

Eschewing as it approximates the cinematographic apparatus, *Seated Sculpture* is not included in "Photo-Centric." (Neither is Snow's 1975 book-object *Cover to Cover*, a portable static "movie" in which two cameras document the artist going about his daily routine from the front and behind or from opposite sides). But *Digest*, 1970, provides an even more dramatic and hands-on instance of cinema by others means. Snow filled a metal basin with various objects, periodically pouring liquid polyester over the assemblage and photographically documenting the process; twenty-three of these photos were then laminated and left in a pile for viewers to look through, and in so doing enact a virtual excavation of the basin. The effect is that of a reverse-motion time-lapse movie made material.

"Photo-Centric" itself leaves the impression that Snow, now eighty-four, wakes up every morning pondering the paradox of two-dimensional representation. Another artist might have gotten an entire gallery show—even a career—out of variations on nearly any one of these pieces. It's confounding that none of New York's major museums has yet given Snow a full-fledged retrospective. □

"Michael Snow: Photo-Centric" is on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through April 27.

J. HOBERMAN'S *FILM AFTER FILM: OR, WHAT BECAME OF 21ST CENTURY CINEMA?* IS RECENTLY OUT IN PAPERBACK FROM VERSO.

From left: **Michael Snow, *Press*, 1969,** gelatin silver prints, Plexiglas, polyester resin, metal, wood, 72 x 72 x 10". **Michael Snow, *Digest* (detail), 1970,** twenty-three laminated C-prints, aluminum container, plastic; photographs each 16 x 14"; container 7⅛ x 12⅝ x 10⅜". **View of "Michael Snow: Photo-Centric," 2014.** Foreground: *In Medias Res*, 1998. Background, from left: *Paris de jugement Le and/or State of the Arts*, 2003; *Multiplication Table*, 1977; *Waiting Room*, 1978; *Digest*, 1970. Photo: Constance Mensh.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

MICHAEL SNOW *A Group Show*

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | FEBRUARY 27 – APRIL 4, 2015

BY CHLOE WILCOX

In the exhibition *A Group Show* at Jack Shainman Gallery, Michael Snow shows and tells us, repeatedly, how and with what his art is made. Now this might make you think about formalism and the dramatics of the Greenbergian yesteryear, the artist drawing attention to the ontological identity of his medium(s), renouncing pictorial depth, etc. Maybe this makes you yawn. But the six artworks, spanning from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, that comprise this compact but bright exhibition don't. Snow, whose work only flirts with formalism, is, in fact, all about illusion—the illusory blending of virtual and real, representation and represented. His art brings together these categories—at once juxtaposing and collapsing them—in the process, laying bare the artifice of art and making a loving and lovely joke of it.

The first artwork you encounter in the gallery's front room is "VUEJUV" (1998), a photograph of a naked woman standing on a stage against a curtain printed on a free-hanging sheer cloth. She stands (floats) with her back to her viewer, her butt cocked in a coy contrapposto, long golden hair waving down her back. In the background are the vertical undulations of the drapery. This bawdy image shyly fluttering and flapping in the gallery is curious and mesmerizing.

Snow is being punny. He has given us a picture of a curtain *on* a curtain—a joke about the postmodern obsession with sign and signified, and about the supposed, yet much contested, "reality" of photographic images. He has also given us an image that is transparent and, like a negative, equally readable viewed from the front or the back (as the palindromic title indicates). This two-way transparency punctures the age-old art fantasy rooted in Renaissance perspectival painting, namely that a picture is a window into another world. Here, the mirage—the hallucinatory vision of an oasis in the desert—is perhaps a better metaphor. The viewer looks at this photograph ready to delight in the visual pleasures of the fleshly body so gamely offered, only to confront *through* it the white gallery wall, a door frame, another visitor blinking awkwardly back from the other side.

Mounted on the wall nearby, the photograph "Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001" (2001) proffers its own slew of photography jokes. The pictured couple's doggedly frozen poses, in spite of the mayhem that unfurls around them—flying rolls, surging wine—point to the contrivances that lie behind the photographic images. Snow seems to make a sly allusion to Cartier-Bresson's famous "decisive moment"—the split second, caught by a lucky camera, when there is a perfect confluence of "significant action" and optimal formal arrangement—but with one crucial difference: here, the "decisive moment" has not materialized spontaneously, like some readymade tableau. Rather, it is the camera's flash that generates the pandemonium that is the subject of this photograph; this havoc is just as construed as the portrait it interrupts.

A video piece, "That/Cela/Dat" (2000), projected in the gallery's back room provides a welcome immersive experience after the slight spareness of the front room. The video—a projection flanked by two standard-issue square video monitors displaying the same text, word by word, in English, French, and Dutch—deals most obviously with the conceptual themes of the show, flashing phrases like "This is electric light projected on this," or "Some of you are not looking at this. That's okay. Some are. Thanks!" that explicitly reference the work's (im)materiality, status as an artwork, and relationship as such to its viewers.

Michael Snow, "Flash! 20.49 15/6/2001" (2001). Laminated color photo on aluminum 48×72″. Edition 1 of 2, with 1 Artist Proof. Courtesy of Jack Shainman.

Michael Snow, "VUEJUV" (1998). Color photo on cloth on plastic tube, 68×51″. Courtesy of Jack Shainman.

But these artworks are not only about the black chasm of theory. They are also about aesthetics and humor, and in these realms Snow does not fail to impress with his characteristic palette of bright secondary and tertiary colors—shades of pale pinks and blues, chrome green, ochre, violet, fulvous yellow—and cheeky compositions. Who can't smile at the happily deranged expressions plastered on the faces of the portrait-sitters in "Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001"? Or at the idea of a photograph of an abstract painting hanging in a gallery, hanging in a gallery ("Times")? Or at the fact that you are observing someone observe you observe a butt?

Sitting alone in the dark room watching the video, I felt moved and pleased by the sweetly awkward syntax Snow employs: "Also, there are many other interesting works in this exhibition. This is just one of many. It is kind of special, though." A distinct voice, mischievous and friendly, emerges in the cadence and stilted choice of the words (Snow carefully timed each word's appearance and duration on the screen). Snow tells us what this work is literally (pixelated light, words strung together by an artist), but he shows us something else too. "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" wrote wry René. "Ceci n'est pas, évidemment, une pipe," says an even wryer Snow in this video. This is not, *obviously*, a pipe. With the addition of a single word, Snow suggests the opposite of Magritte's famous statement. Rather than undermine the idea of pictorial realism, he implies that the image of the pipe *is* in fact a pipe. The sign is the same as the referent. Art is what it is made of—paint on a canvas, light on a wall, light captured on film—but it is also many other things too: emotion, beauty, the thing it represents, specialness.

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

Multiple Exposures, Looking Both Ways

Michael Snow's Photographs and Other Works in Philadelphia

By KAREN ROSENBERG

Published: February 6, 2014

PHILADELPHIA — In Michael Snow's 45-minute film "Wavelength" (1967), the camera gradually zooms in on a wall in his studio. "Wavelength" is a classic of experimental cinema, but it ends with a photograph and might, in a way, be one. That interpretation is encouraged, at any rate, by "Michael Snow: Photo-Centric," an engaging survey of his photography at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

"Wavelength" has been much celebrated, along with other films by this Canadian artist, like "La Region Centrale" (1971), in which a camera attached to a robotic arm captures sweeping, alien views of the Quebec mountains. But Mr. Snow is a bit of a polymath; he also paints, sculpts, performs as a jazz pianist and assembles photo installations that are as rigorously structural as his films but are also, surprisingly, quite playful.

He hasn't had a museum show of his photography since 1976, when the Museum of Modern Art gave him a small "Projects" exhibition. "Michael Snow: Photo-Centric" gives us a long overdue look at his work in the medium — starting with projects from the 1960s that overlap with film and performance and continuing to supersize staged color prints that reflect photo trends of the early 2000s.

Michael Snow: Photo-Centric, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, includes "Handed to Eyes," (1983), which blurs the lines separating photography, painting and sculpture. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Rosenberg, Karen. "Multiple Exposures, Looking Both Ways" (Philadelphia Museum of Art exhibition review). *The New York Times*, 6 February 2014: C26, illustrated.

Many works are very much of their time, conversant with conceptual photographs and video art by Bruce Nauman, John Baldessari and others, but a few look shockingly current. Mr. Snow's 1983 print "Handed to Eyes," for instance, could be mistaken for something in MoMA's New Photography series; it's a tint-painted picture of abstract blobs of clay that confuses photography, painting and sculpture.

"I have added the camera and its products to the traditional tools of the painter/sculptor," he wrote in an essay reprinted in the catalog. "My photographic works are an art of the studio, not of daily life."

Statements like these make this exhibition a nice complement to MoMA's current show "A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio" (reviewed in this section) and to the International Center of Photography's "What Is a Photograph?" But the Snow show, organized by the Philadelphia museum's assistant curator of modern and contemporary art, Adelina Vlas, also has plenty to offer fans of his films, beyond the scheduled screenings. The piece "Atlantic," for instance, might be thought of as an extension of "Wavelength"; it encases a photograph of the ocean, similar to one at the end of the film, within a gridded metal frame that makes the waves appear to bob and weave as viewers walk by.

Mr. Snow's approach to photography is both heady and physical, a rare combination. For every work that needs to be teased out in the brain or eye or both, like the light-distorted grid of "Glares," there's one that requires some action.

For "Crouch, Leap, Land" (1970), visitors must squat beneath the artwork to see the three serial photos of a jumping nude (shot through a Plexiglas floor from a similarly low vantage point). The photographs are displayed horizontally, parallel to the gallery floor. And for "Digest," viewers can don cotton gloves and flip through a stack of laminated photographs that represent cross-sections of a related sculpture. (This process is a lot more interesting than it sounds.)

Throughout, they are reminded of the distortion that's latent in all photographs. For one of the show's earliest works, "Press" (1969), Mr. Snow sandwiched foods and other objects between metal and plexiglass and took pictures; fish guts ooze and spaghetti sauce splatters, parodying the compression of objects in the camera's field.

In "Times" (1979), meanwhile, he plays with the mistaken impression of scale that can result from the enlargement and cropping of photographs. The image appears to show a large-scale abstract painting hanging on the wall of a gallery, but the extra-wide floorboards in the picture reveal that the art, and its wall label, are actually dollhouse-size objects captured in close-up.

Mr. Snow's didacticism can grate, as can his pun-happy titles. (A blown-up photograph of a drawing of a table is titled "Multiplication Table.")

And his most recent works, staged tableaus, deploy the figure to tacky effect; "Judgment of Paris" (2003), which pits three nudes with visible tan lines against Cézanne's "The Large Bathers," looks less at home at the Philadelphia Museum (owner of the Cézanne) than it would at Art Basel Miami Beach.

Rosenberg, Karen. "Multiple Exposures, Looking Both Ways" (Philadelphia Museum of Art exhibition review). *The New York Times*, 6 February 2014: C26, illustrated.

The mural-size transparency “Powers of Two,” from the same year, is a bit better; offering multiple, voyeuristic perspectives on a couple in a bedroom, it recalls both Jeff Wall’s backlit photographs and Eric Fischl’s canvases. Curatorial comparisons to Manet and Velázquez, however, are a stretch.

And although the early works are strong overall, a few feel derivative. “Authorization” (1969) seems clearly modeled on William Anastasi’s 1967 “Nine Polaroid Portraits in a Mirror,” even though Mr. Snow embellishes the photo-within-a-photo conceit by including an actual mirror as the support.

The show makes you wonder, though, why Mr. Snow’s photography isn’t as well known as his films. It exemplifies the restless experimentalism of the 1970s as much as anything by, say, Robert Smithson or Dan Graham. And, like “Wavelength,” it cuts right to the essence of the medium.

“Michael Snow: Photo-Centric” ends April 21 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2600 Benjamin Franklin Parkway; 215-763-8100, philamuseum.org.

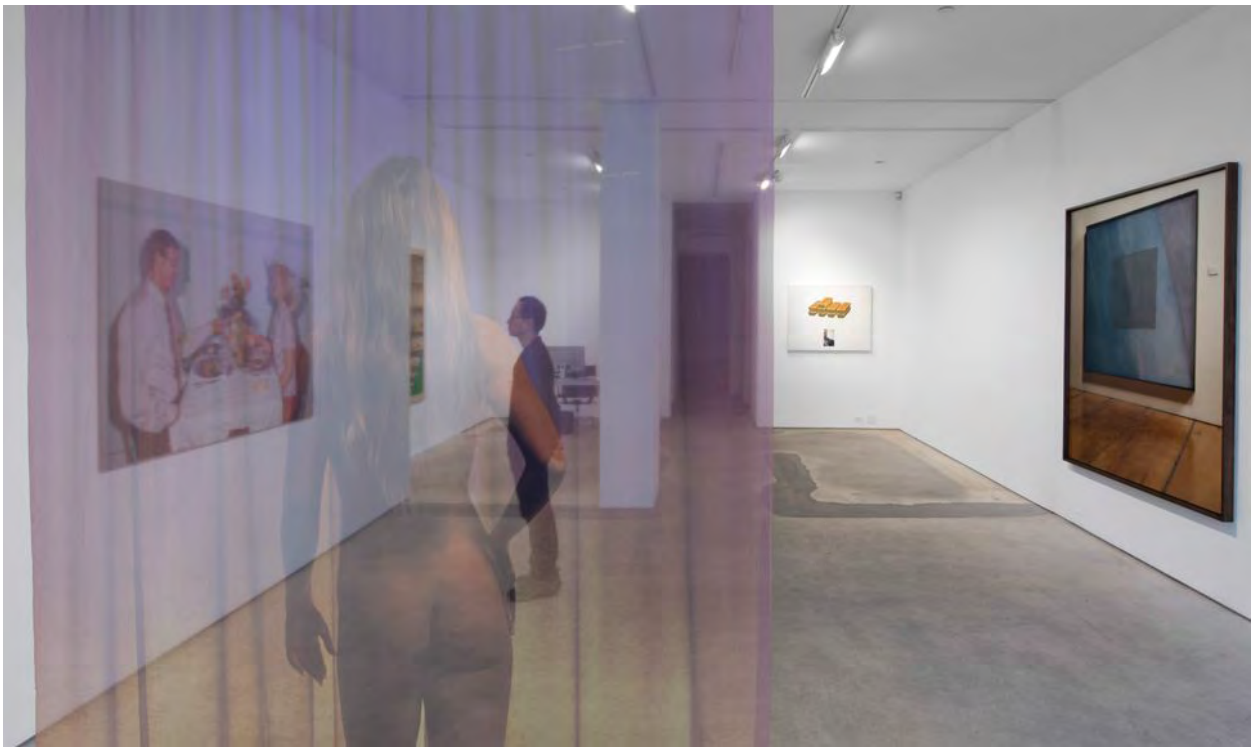
A version of this review appears in print on February 7, 2014, on page C26 of the New York edition with the headline: Multiple Exposures, Looking Both Ways.

Rosenberg, Karen. “Multiple Exposures, Looking Both Ways” (Philadelphia Museum of Art exhibition review). *The New York Times*, 6 February 2014: C26, illustrated.

BLOUIN ARTINFO

Different Ways of Looking: Michael Snow's "A Group Show"

BY CRAIG HUBERT | MARCH 12, 2015



Installation view of Michael Snow's "A Group Show" at Jack Shainman Gallery.
(©Michael Snow, Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

"A Group Show," Michael Snow's cheekily-titled solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea (through April 4), continues the work that went into the Philadelphia Museum of Art's "Photo-Centric" show a year ago, the 85-year-old Canadian artist explained in a recent conversation. Snow is known primarily for his experimental films, most notably the 45-minute zoom across a Canal Street loft called "Wavelength" (1967). His show in Philadelphia highlighted his expansive body of photographic work, much of which had not been seen in the United States in over four decades (the last exhibition of his photo work in the United States was at the Museum of Modern Art in 1976).

Many of the pieces in “A Group Show” are newer and polymorphous, collapsing photography with painting and sculpture into a single work. “VUEƎUV” (1998) features an image of a nude woman from behind staring out a curtained window. The photograph is printed on cloth and drapes from the ceiling, mimicking a curtain, and evokes Snow’s earliest “Walking Woman” series. But its sculptural qualities also reveal its photographic foundations. “It’s a sensual thing of the transparency, the true two-dimensionality of a photo,” Snow said after remarking that that piece resembled a photo print hanging to dry. “This work makes you experience the actual nature of a photograph, in that it’s almost not there.”

The nature of photography is something Snow returned to many times during our conversation. “Flash!” (2001), the most traditional piece in the exhibition, features a couple sitting down for a meal that has been upended by a gust of wind that appears to be emanating from the camera itself. “I noticed the kind of aggressive quality of flash photography, for example Weegee’s photos,” Snow said, and recreated the disruption by simultaneously blasting the subjects with a wind machine and a camera flash. “It’s the essence of what happens with flash photography,” Snow said, “the instant that it takes what it takes.”

“Flash!” is also very funny, a quality that extends through all of the work in “A Group Show” but is not often mentioned when talking about Snow. “Over the Sofa” (1992-96) is “a play on the potential value of art,” Snow said, featuring a photograph of a couch attached to the bottom of a canvas, a pile of gold bricks painted above the image. “It’s not exactly belittling, but it just means almost anything can be put over the sofa,” he said, chuckling. “It could even be this painting of gold bricks.”

But beyond the punny title, the piece, with its multiple layers of pictorial information, realigns our ways of looking at images. I was struck by the recurrence, when looking at his photographic work, of cinematic motifs. When I mentioned, while looking at “Times” (1979), a photograph of a painting inside a gallery, a connection to his film “Wavelength,” he reluctantly agreed that the piece had the quality of a zoom, but stressed no direct

connection to his previous work. “Fish Story” (1979), with its gradually enlarged images of a speckled trout — which Snow caught himself near his cabin in Newfoundland and, he said with a grin, ended up eating — also simulates a zoom or even a film strip.

In the back of the gallery is the enticing “That/Cela/Dat” (1999), which features no images at all. Projected on three screens — two small monitors to the side of a larger projection in the middle — is the story of the work we’re sitting in front of, told in three different languages, in white text on black backgrounds, simultaneously. A literal sequel to “So Is This” (1982), Snow was interested in the dialogue a piece has with the spectator, and the echoes the three languages created when presented side-by-side. It’s also funnier the longer you stick with it, the words, when not explaining the origin of the work, promising the viewer that it won’t embarrass them, ensuring that it will continue to be there if they leave the room, and even beginning to question its own existence, at one point asking: “Wouldn’t a book be better?”

Following our conversation about his work, we began talking about jazz. Snow is an avid piano player, and has been playing in jazz bands since he was a teenager. When he originally came to New York in 1962 — he lived there for approximately a decade — he said that he straddled three different worlds: music, film, and jazz. When I asked about a possible relationship between his music and visual art, he was resistant. “I played every night, after spending all day at the studio making art work,” he said about his time in New York. “But they didn’t really have any connection. It was just that the same guy did them.”

TORONTO STAR

Tuesday, February 3, 2015
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MOVIES

Entertainment / Movies

'What you see is what you get' with Michael Snow program at Lightbox

The Michael Snow exhibit at TIFF Bell Lightbox opens with his film Wavelength.

By: Peter Goddard Visual Arts, Published on Fri Jan 30 2015

It seems rarely a year or two goes by without a Michael Snow exhibition somewhere on the planet. And two questions inevitably crop up: What's the exhibition about exactly? And which Michael Snow will show up, the filmmaker, video provocateur, the installation master or who-knows-what-else?

Starting Jan. 31 TIFF is programming WYSIWYG The Films of Michael Snow — "what you see is what you get" — that is on its surface a year-long retrospective of Michael Snow film-work, his early calling card on the international art scene.

But things are rarely this cut-and-dried. Solo Snow at the Galerie de L'UQAM in Montreal a few years back underlined how difficult it was in dealing with the multi-faceted nature of the artist's practice. Nevertheless Barcelona's Palau de la Virreina will show the artist in full, glorious multi-practice form with Michael Snow: Sequences: A Retrospective starting in July. (I almost forgot to note Michael Snow: Photo-Centric at the Philadelphia Museum of Art last spring surveyed mostly of Snow and photography while buying three works in the process.)

All this makes him seem like The Shadow of the avant-garde, not seemingly really there while everywhere at once. The artist's own clarity of thought — in conversation or in writing he makes everything sound so reasonable, even obvious — coupled with the irresistible ambiguity of the work itself make the indefatigable 86-year-old more sought-after than ever.

And WYSIWYG may produce an unexpected breakthrough. Curated by Chris Kennedy, the series — wrapping up in December with A to Z, Snow's first film made in 1956 made while working in Toronto with Beatles' Yellow Submarine director, George Dunning — leaves audiences a clearer understanding of the degree to which Snow's work flows from his musical thinking, practice and gnarly pride of being a musician first and mostly

foremost.

“I have been playing actively since 1948,” he tells me with a finality to settle the question once and for all.

(Speaking of pride: The artist’s recent $950,000 statement of claim against Lightbox development partners, stemming from the cancellation of a proposed piece of public art, has been settled to his satisfaction, Snow says.

“We’ve come to an appropriate and satisfactory resolution,” says Neall Haggart, Daniels Corp. executive vice-president.)

WYSIWYG opens with Wavelength (1967) paired with Snow in Vienna, a 2012 jazz-inflected muscular Snow solo piano performance directed by Laurie Kwasnik. It must be considered as one of the greatest concert films in Canadian music history. Snow declined TIFF’s wish that he also perform live before the Jan. 31 screening.

“I’m very proud of it musically,” Snow told me.

Two more musical-channeling films follow on Feb. 21: New York Eye and Ear Control, (1964) the defining “Walking Woman” film, with its free-jazz score and Reverberlin, (2006), charting his work with the CCMC music collective in a near-hallucinogenic visual/music counterpoint. La Région Centrale (1971), showing April 23, is a landscape painted by musically directed motion: the remote controlled camera recording a patch of hard scrabble Québec landscape, was activated by electronic impulses sine waves, the wavelengths of pure sound.

Timing is also a factor working for WYSIWYG. In its time, Wavelength was seen as a one-off perceptual dazzler, the “Birth of a Nation of Underground films.” But revisiting a larger spectrum of his work shows how deeply Snow’s work has entered the consciousness and practices of several generations of artists now active. Snow’s tropes and tricks — the deliberately klutzy-looking digital edition in Corpus Collasum, (2002, no screening date yet) — have now taken on a historical resonance.

“That kind of cheesy digital stuff is what kids are now doing, that letting it look like it was a mistake,” says Kennedy.

“I’m a filmmaker myself. And while watching Michael’s work again for the retrospective I kept seeing things in them that made me think, ‘oh, yeah, that’s where I got my idea from.’

“Whether you like it or not he has done things you have to contend with. His films represent the subconscious of experimental filmmaking.”

WYSIWYG: The Films of Michael Snow is a year-long series starting Jan. 31 at TIFF Bell Lightbox. Peter Goddard is a freelance writer and former Star movie critic. He can be reached at peter_g1@sympatico.ca

From left: **Christopher Williams, *Bergische Bauernscheune, Junkersholz, Leichlingen, September 29th, 2009***, inkjet print, 17 x 21⅝". **Michael Snow, *Authorization*, 1969**, Polaroid Type 55 prints, adhesive tape, mirror in metal frame, 21½ x 17½".

PHILADELPHIA

"MICHAEL SNOW: PHOTO-CENTRIC"

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART · February 1–April 27 · Curated by Adelina Vlas · In *Authorization*, 1969, Michael Snow transformed the seemingly static, two-dimensional photographic medium into something both sculptural and performative: Shooting his own reflection with a tripod-mounted camera, he then pasted the resulting self-portrait onto the mirror's surface, repeated the process four more times, and exhibited the collaged result. That same year, in *One Second in Montreal*, Snow took a different tack, producing a motion picture using only a series of still images of snowy landscapes. Both works showcase the Canadian artist's eccentric approach to photography, a medium fundamental to his entire oeuvre and the focus of this survey at the Philadelphia Museum (the first exhibition to specifically address this element of his practice since "Projects: Michael Snow—Photographs" at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1976). Curator Adelina Vlas will bring together some thirty pieces made between 1962 and 2003 in which Snow diffracts photography across painting, sculpture, film, and music.
—Branden W. Joseph

"RUFFNECK CONSTRUCTIVISTS"

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART · February 12–August 17 · Curated by Kara Walker · In 2006, Kara Walker made her curatorial debut at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with her post-Katrina exhibition "After the Deluge." Her sophomore effort's mash-up title, "Ruffneck Constructivists," conjoins the ethos of Russia's revolutionary avant-garde with MC Lyte's early-1990s track. Walker will go beyond her authorial interest in the psychosexual phantasms of American cultural history in selecting more than thirty recent works by artists from the US, Eastern Europe, and South Africa: Dineo Bopape, Kendell Geers, Arthur Jafa, Kahlil Joseph, Jennie C. Jones, Deana Lawson, Rodney McMillian, William Pope.L, Tim Portlock, Lior Shvil, and Szymon Tomsia. Muscularly responding to ideas of space, policing, and antisociality, the show will emphasize works in sculpture, installation, video, and photography, and will include a full roster of performances, talks, and screenings. The catalogue is designed by artist A. K. Burns, with original texts by Walker and architectural theorist Craig Wilkins.
—Thomas J. Lax

CHICAGO

WILLIAM J. O'BRIEN

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART · January 25–May 18 · Curated by Naomi Beckwith · William J. O'Brien's feverish material explorations regularly succumb to restrained, taxonomical displays when entering the public arena. At Chicago's Renaissance Society in 2011, O'Brien installed a tiered arrangement of modestly scaled ceramic objects. Last winter, he hung grids of felt compositions and framed oil pastel and inkwash works on paper at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York. For this survey exhibition at the MCA, to be complemented by the first major catalogue devoted to the artist's work, roughly one hundred of O'Brien's abundant artifacts will be "organized like a poem," with stanza-like groupings convening disparate objects including textiles, paintings, colored-pencil abstractions, ceramics, and glitter-coated assemblages. One of the show's earlier pieces is a 2008 line drawing that depicts a nude clown with a conspicuous erection, riding a camel-like circus animal—an allegorical figure that, in its Calder-esque clarity and simplicity of means, should stand out as an anomaly in O'Brien's vast field of work shaped by intuitive, romantic energies.
—Michelle Grabner

"CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS: THE PRODUCTION LINE OF HAPPINESS"

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO · January 24–May 18 · Curated by Matthew S. Witkovsky, Mark Godfrey, and Roxana Marcoci · Conceptual artist Christopher Williams's first museum retrospective, featuring his trademark photographs, films, and videos from the last thirty-five years, is sure to be a nontraditional survey: Williams has conceived all three incarnations of this traveling exhibition as works in their own right, each fitted with site-specific interventions that will reflect on the architecture of that venue. An extensive publication—more artists' book than catalogue—accompanies the project, containing essays by Godfrey, Marcoci, and Witkovsky along with a wide selection of source material: lists, budgets, contracts, and manifestos authored by Daniel Buren, Morgan Fisher, and Scritti Politti, among many others. Characteristic of all Williams's output, this book analyzes the parameters and conditions of its own production. *Travels to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Aug. 2–Nov. 2; Whitechapel Gallery, London, Apr.–June 2015.*
—Willem de Rooij

BLOUIN ARTINFO

MODERN ART NOTES

Art-focused Journalism by Tyler Green

January 30, 2014

The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow

The Modern Art Notes Podcast is the title of this podcast. The rest of this podcast will sound just like this. This podcast will consist of single words presented one after another to construct sentences and hopefully (this is where you come in) to convey meanings. This, as they say, is the signifier. This podcast will be about one hour long. Does that seem like a frightening prospect? Well, look at it this way: how do you know this isn't lying? Perhaps after a while this word after word system will change into something else. Well, take this's word for it. This is the way it's going to be.

New paragraph. Most of this podcast was taped on Tuesday but for various reasons could not be downloaded until now. Thanks to the Philadelphia Museum of Art for its assistance in placing these words on this screen. Some of the following considerations and decisions preceded the production of this podcast: On February 1, the Philadelphia Museum of Art will open an Adelina Vlas-curated exhibition of **Michael Snow**'s photographic works titled This is the title of my exhibition. Since this is not her exhibition and the "this" in her title is not the title of this exhibition and hence the producer (Tyler Green) of this podcast decided to retain this title and to include the foregoing reference to issue in this podcast. This is still the title of this podcast. So is this. Paprika Mariposa recently gave the producer an animated GIF she made of the word this. This is not that. This is not a script. Warning: This podcast may be especially unsatisfying for those who dislike having others listen over their shoulders.

Next there have been several films or podcasts that concentrate on texts, for example, Bad at Sports, No Challenges Remaining, Hang Up and Listen!, Radiolab and The Moth have made excellent use of podcasts. The producer would have liked to have been first but it's too late. Priority is energy. In some respects, this is first. Obviously this is not the first time that this has

Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online.
http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.

been used for the first time. This belongs to everybody! This means this, you think this, we see this, they use this, this is a universe! So what is important is not this, but how this is used.

New paragraph: Some of the more cultivated members of the audience may regret the lack of in-depth semiological analysis in this podcast and note that the vocabulary used is quite basic. This is in line with the producer's attempt to not talk over the heads of people and not cater to a small but vocal intellectual element in our society. Why make podcasts that only a few people will see? Is there anybody listening to this right now? The producer didn't intend his other texts for a small elite, he just did what he thought was right at the time. Perhaps this will be more popular. This is kind of intimate isn't it? It's just between it and you. But maybe this isn't the right time for this. Perhaps with the end of the world imminent, as usual, people want to hear about a new way out. Whoops! Perhaps this shouldn't have mentioned a "way Out"! Stick with it. Just think of this as entertainment. It's not all going to be such heavy going. Some parts are going to be just plain fun! Remember that old saying: "Sticks and stones may… etc." There'll be not one word about El Salvador, no mention of Trudeau and political commitment whatsoever. So relax and enjoy yourself.

Sixth paragraph. Yes of course there will be a French version. At the moment the producer cannot afford to do this but he is planning to apply to the Quebec Minister of Culture for assistance. Just for now though: en Francais le litre de ce film sera: ceci est le litre de ce podcast. Ca fait penser l'auteur au tableau bien connu de Magritte. Ceci n'est pas une pipe. C'est vrai ici aussi. L'auteur aime beaucoup le mol "ceci." Back to English. If you don't read French you should learn. Canada is a bilingual country.
Fifth paragraph: Now back to this podcast. You can download it directly to your PC/mobile device.Listen on SoundCloud. Subscribe to this at iTunes, SoundCloud, Stitcher or via RSS. Stream this at MANPodcast.com.

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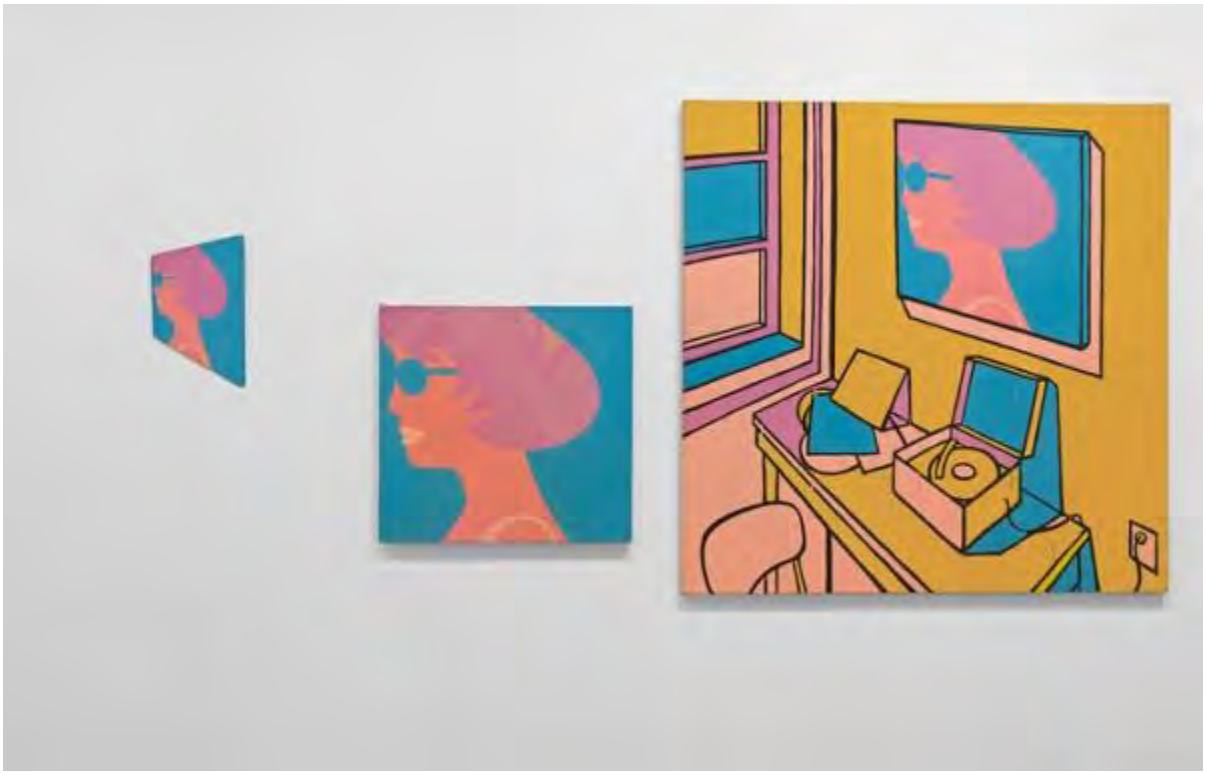
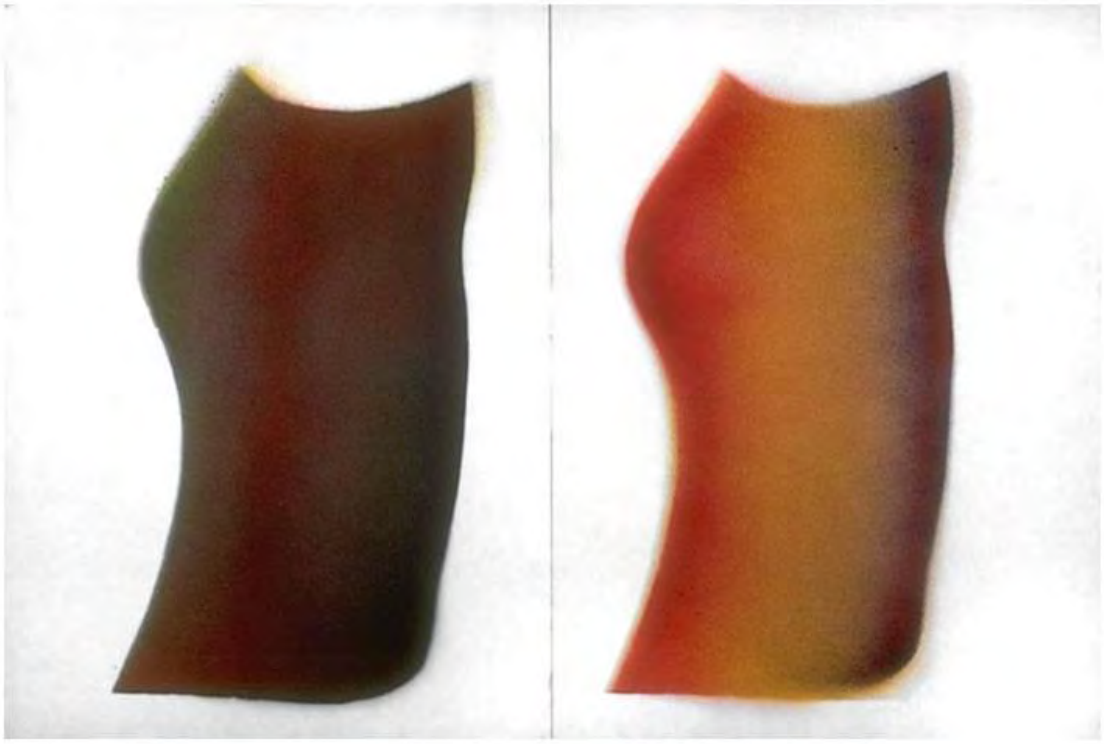
For images of art discussed on this, click through to the jump. For a list of Philadelphia Museum of Art programs and screenings associated with the exhibition, see this page.

Michael Snow, *Four to Five*, 1969/1991. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Michael Snow, *Hawaii*, 1964. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

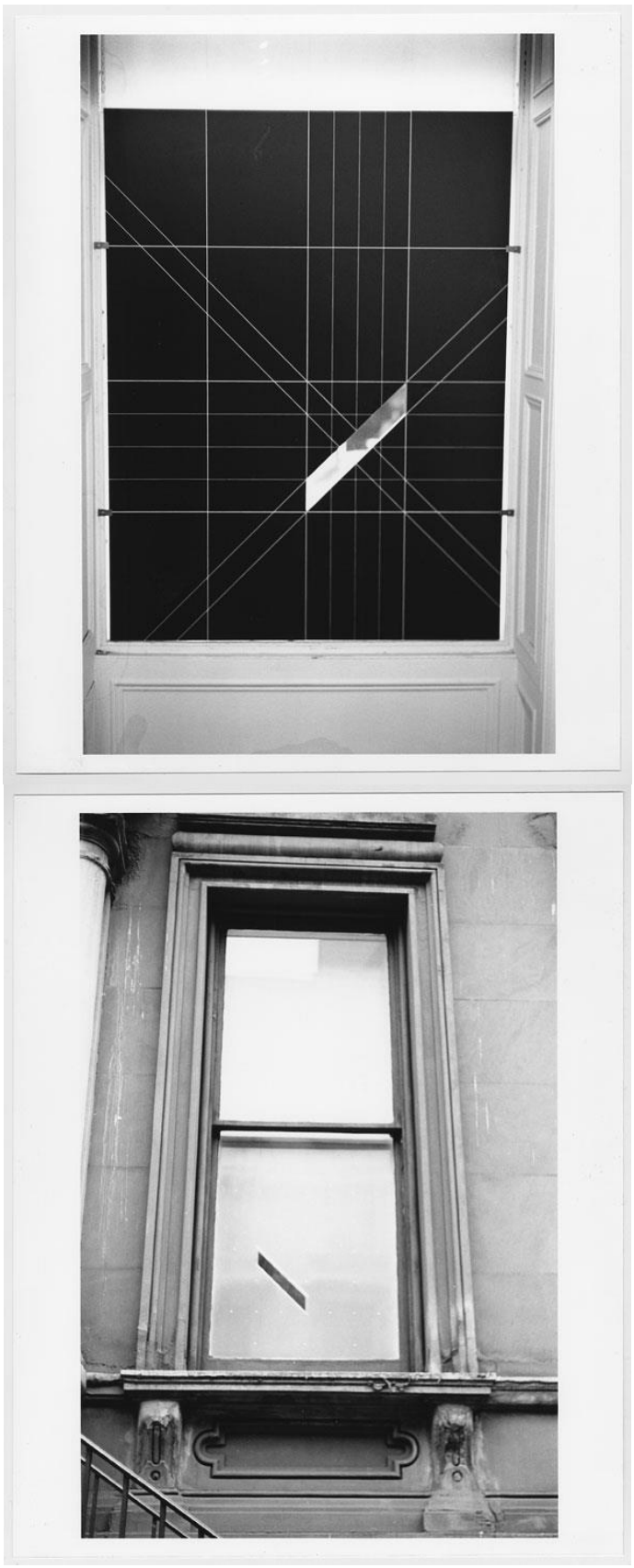
Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.



Michael Snow, *Two Skirts*, 1964. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Michael Snow, *Blind*, 1968. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.



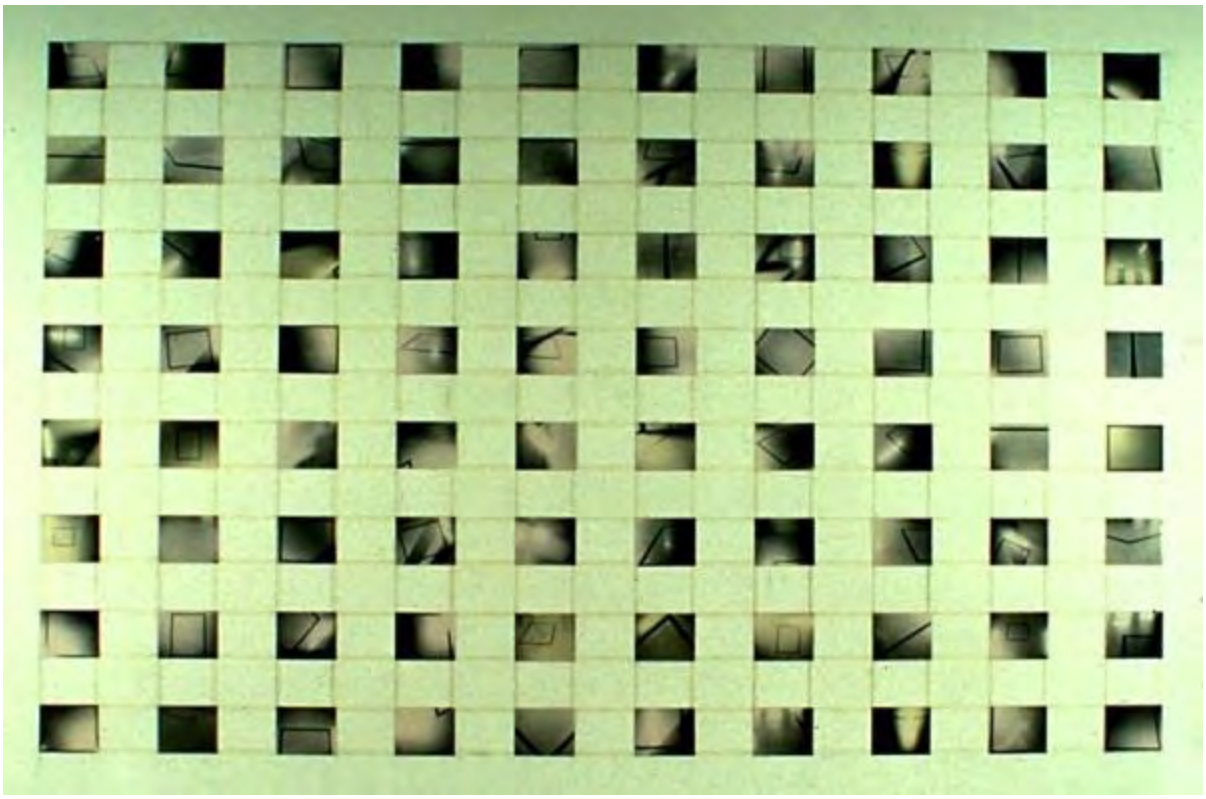
Michael Snow, *Sight*, 1968. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Green, Tyler. “The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow.” *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.

John Singer Sargent, *Venetian Interior*, ca. 1880-82. Collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Michael Snow, Atlantic, 1967. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

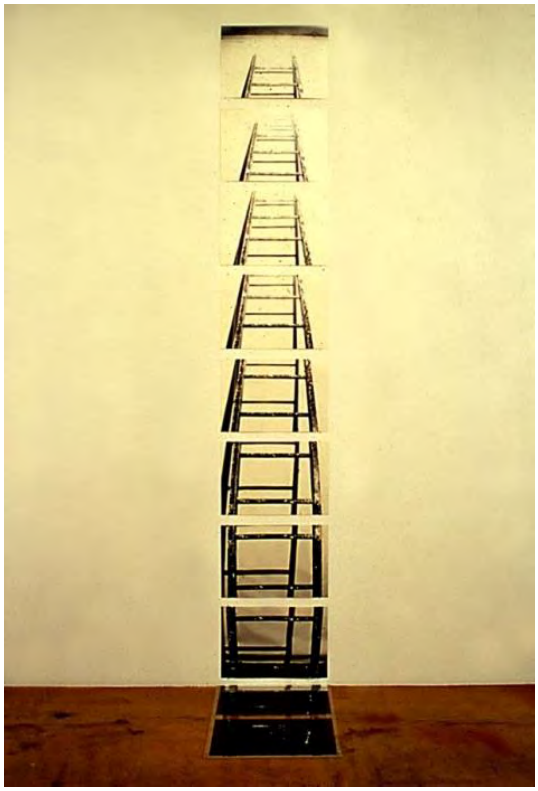
Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.



Michael Snow, *8 x 10*, 1969. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Michael Snow, *Crouch, Leap, Land*, 1970. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

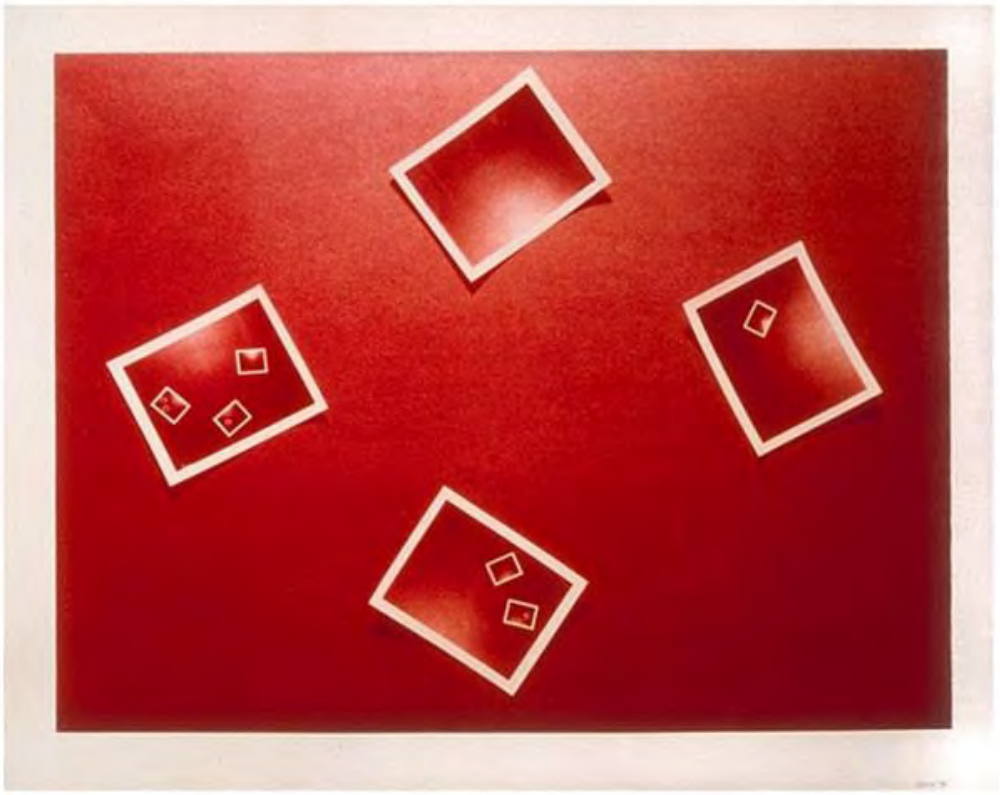
Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.



Michael Snow, *Of a Ladder*, 1971/1999. Collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

Michael Snow, *Glares*, 1973.

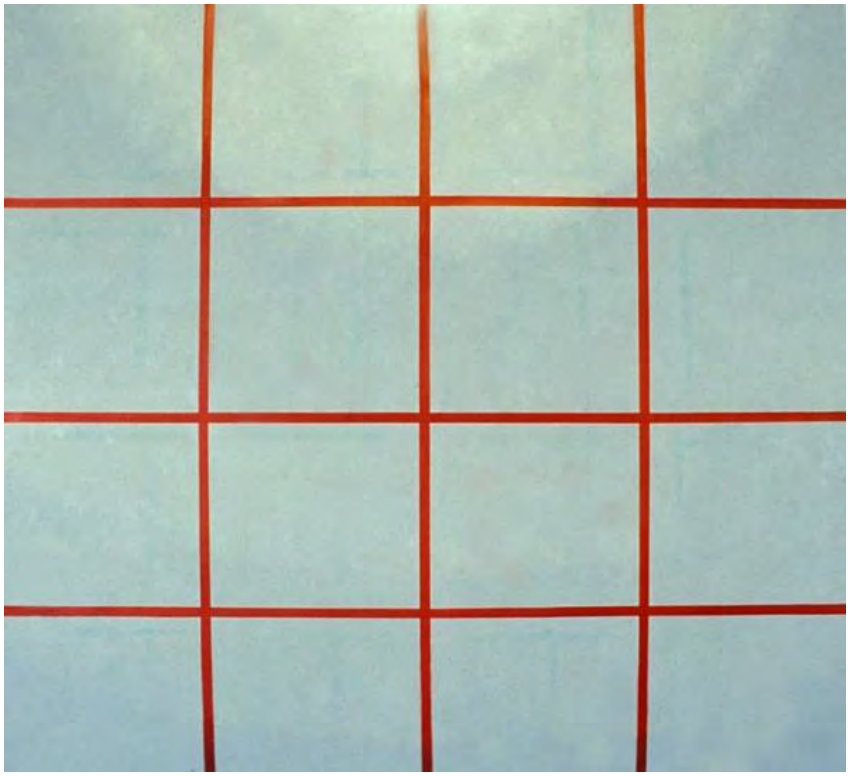
Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online.
http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.



Michael Snow, *Red 5*, 1974. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.



Michael Snow, *The Squerr (Ch'art)*, 1978. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Michael Snow, *Immediate Delivery*, 1998. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Green, Tyler. "The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow." *Artinfo.com*, 30 January 2014. Online. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2014/01/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-michael-snow/.

Michael Snow, *Powers of Two*, 2003.

Links to videos/films:

- *Wavelength* (1967);
- [Back and Forth], (1969);
- *La Region Centrale* (excerpt) (1971);
- Solar Breath (excerpt) (2002).

Many other works of Snow's are available on "Digital Snow," which was created by The Daniel Langlois Foundation: Main/entrance page, table of contents, including:

- *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (excerpt), 1974
- *Egg*, 1985.

ARTFORUM
SEPTEMBER 2012
50TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

MEDIA STUDY

MICHAEL SNOW

I'M PROUD of (most of) what I've done in the past, but, apparently unable to learn from the past, I continue to make works in soon-to-be-obsolete media.

Some of the paintings and sculptures I have made since 1956 require medical attention, but many of my "technological" works are in the emergency ward. They were produced in media that are disappearing or have disappeared: 35-mm, 16-mm, Super 8, and 8-mm film; 35-mm slides; quarter-inch audio tape and cassettes; LPs; several breeds of video (½", ¾", DigiBeta, etc.). I have made color and black-and-white photo works on many different grounds; I've even made holograms. And since I've always been somewhat of a purist about medium specificity, chameleoning a work that originally was a particular utilization of the qualities or possibilities of a given medium into a replacement medium is painful. Help!

Two 35-mm-slide-carousel works of 1970, *Sink* and *Slidelength*, were acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 2012. These works are not "just images" (if that were possible); rather, attention is directed to the automatic carousel, the one-after-another presentation of the images that are visibly produced by white light passing through each transparency. But slides are obsolete, and MoMA has understandably urged me to propose ways to make these pieces endure. To attempt to guarantee a future for them, I've managed to have several sets of the slides made by the last remaining lab in Toronto that can make duplicates. For basic preservation I have had digital scans made of each slide. Finally, I propose to stage the two works and shoot an HD-video documentation that could be used in the future when all the slides have finally faded. These new manifestations would have to be labeled as "documentation" or "depictions" of the original works. Ouch! □

Michael Snow, *Sink* (detail), 1970, C-print, eighty 35-mm color slides in timed carousel projector, dimensions variable.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

VISUAL ARTS

Michael Snow's object lessons

JAMES ADAMS
The Globe and Mail
Published Tuesday, July 17, 2012, 5:57 PM EDT

Except perhaps for their children's departments, art galleries tend to be "look-but-don't-touch" zones for patrons.

So it's a bit of surprise to attend Objects of Vision at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and be invited, encouraged even, to crawl under, walk through, sit on, peer into and touch some of the 14 artifacts on display. The show, opening Wednesday and running through early December, collects what its creator Michael Snow calls "a family of things" – "abstract-form sculptures" created at various points in his illustrious, multifaceted 60-year career (from, more precisely, the late 1950s, late 60s and early 80s) but never exhibited together until now.

At 83 the grand old man of Canadian contemporary art and, with Jeff Wall, perhaps the best known Canadian artist internationally, Snow confessed in a brief interview Tuesday that he actually conceived Objects of Vision at least 20 years ago. The 14 works "are each very individual in their way," he observed, "but they also have these aesthetic connections" in that "they're all directors of attention; each work, in effect, tells you what to look at."

Core, from 1982-84, for instance, is a large thimble or obelisk of unglazed clay, 200 centimetres tall, "whose shape says how it should be seen; you have to go around it." At the same time, the ever-playful Snow has made it so high that the viewer can't see the core of *Core.* By contrast, *Transformer,* a long lance of varnished wood, made from a tree that Snow felled near the cabin in Newfoundland he's owned for 30 years and cossetted in a cardboard jacket horizontally suspended from the ceiling by a rope, directs the eye cross-wise, forward and backward, from shaft to point, and up and down, from ceiling to lance.

What gave Snow and the AGO's assistant curator of Canadian art Georgiana Uhlyarik the opportunity to pull these elements together was Snow's winning last year of the Gershon Iskowitz Prize. Established in 1986 to honour a mature artist for his or her "significant contribution to Canadian visual arts," the Iskowitz comes not only with a $50,000 cash prize but also the chance to present a solo show at the AGO. *Voila*Objects of Vision.

Tight, beautifully installed, thought-provoking, elegant, Objects of Vision could, of course, easily be the title of any other Snow showcase of other aspects of his protean and prolific output as painter, filmmaker, drawer, photographer, videographer, even musician. Indeed, not for nothing is this native Torontonian who, lest we forget, at age 47 became the first Canadian ever to have a solo show at New York's Museum of Modern Art, often called "the original multimedia artist."

"Confident" is a word often used to describe Snow or at least the seeming ease whereby he gives himself permission to try his hand at this or that without inviting complaints of dilettantism. But it's not necessarily a term Snow applies to himself. Yes, he admitted, "I think I've mostly won" in terms of accomplishing and presenting what he's set his attentions on over the decades. "But I always do things to see whether they do what they should do. They have to exist. They're not strictly speaking concepts or ideas . . . For me, the idea, the planning, the approach and all that are not really a complete prediction of what the final experience will be. You can't easily know what a work is going to do without having the work."

He said he recently received a request for permission to reproduce one in a series of paintings he did sometime in the 1980s in an upcoming book on Canadian painting. Funny thing is, "it's one painting I've been thinking I might try to paint over. Every once in a while, I think maybe I could have done something better and I might give it another try. So maybe I will with this one [it's in his personal collection] but," he chuckled, "not right now."

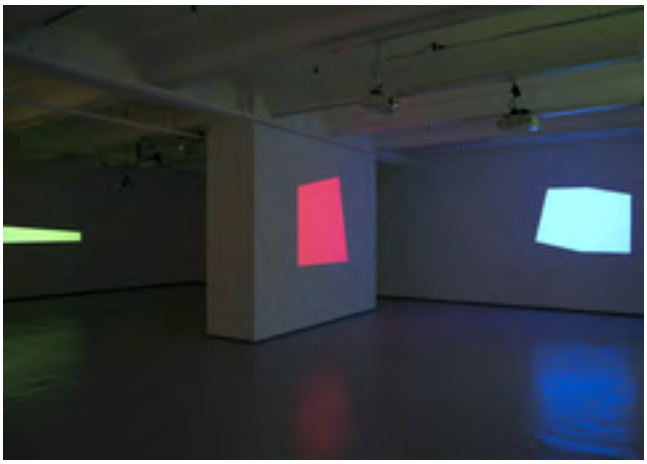
Objects of Vision, or How to Look at Things *is at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto through Dec. 9.*

Adams, James. "Michael Snow's object lessons." *The Globe and Mail*, 17 July 2012. Online.
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/michael-snows-object-lessons/article4424027/>

ARTFORUM
JANUARY 2012

Michael Snow

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY
513 West 20th Street
January 7–February 11



Michael Snow, *The Viewing of Six New Works*, 2012, seven looped video projections. Installation view.
Michael Snow's latest exhibition finds the artist on familiar thematic terrain, playing with abstraction and perception through shifting, tautological strategies. *La Ferme* (The Farm), 1998, is a photo-based work depicting eleven successive frames of 16-mm film cut apart, blown up, and horizontally arrayed. As in the final moments of Snow's seminal *Wavelength*, 1967, the moving image becomes still. Film reverts to its structural components, the vertical vector of the filmstrip recomposed along the horizontal axis of the spectator, her left-to-right gaze recapitulating the camera's. Snow's nearly twenty-three-minute looped video *In the Way*, 2011, proves similarly literal. A series of continually panning tracking shots of the ground, shot from above and projected onto the floor, the work invites the viewer to realize its title, as the footprints clouding its surface make clear.

Snow's most recent installation, titled, with typical self-referentiality, *The Viewing of Six New Works*, 2012, furnishes the show's conceptual highlight. Seven projectors cast monochrome geometries onto seven whitewashed walls, each figure a stand-in for a wall-mounted piece. Stretching, rotating, and contorting in motions more organic than mechanical, the forms variously sweep and crawl across the wall, cropped by unseen frames and marked by subtle inflections. Now rectangle, now trapezoid, now rhombus, these endlessly evolving shapes mimic the act of viewing: the scans of the eye, pivots of the neck, and twists of the torso that make up the so-called art of looking at art, here performed using an interactive technology named TouchDesigner. Moving nonsynchronously, the figures, hypothetically whole yet visible only as fragments, affirm the avant-garde insight that objects are not as they are, but as they are seen. Never manifest in full, they preclude gestalt sensations—those all-at-once comprehensions of form championed by Snow's peer Robert Morris in his "Notes on Sculpture." The frame, here as in so much of Snow's work, trumps all.

— Courtney Fiske

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
JANUARY 2012

The Lookout: A Weekly Guide to Shows You Won't Want to Miss

by AiA Staff

With an ever-growing number of galleries scattered around New York, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Where to begin? Here at *A.i.A.*, we are always on the hunt for thought-provoking, clever and memorable shows that stand out in a crowded field. Below is a selection of shows our team of editors can't stop talking about.

This week we check out Thomas Scheibitz's blocky, collage-inspired compositions at Tanya Bonakdar, wander among Ross Knight's elegantly spare sculptures at Team, and discover Japanese model/curator Mie through the eyes of 35 artists, in a group portrait show at Freight + Volume.

View of Michael Snow's exhibition "In the Way," 2012. Courtesy Jack Shainman.

[…]

Michael Snow at Jack Shainman, through Feb. 11
Michael Snow's show "In the Way" explores the art of looking at art. His recent and not-so-recent efforts here include a colorful light-projection installation of shifting rectangles that questions the way we perceive two-dimensional artworks. Meanwhile, a floor projection piece and an eerie holographic work overturn, in a rather disquieting way, some fundamental notions of three-dimensional space.

"The Lookout" is compiled by *A.i.A.* associate editor Leigh Anne Miller.

TORONTO LIFE

THE HYPE

AGO's multi-decade love affair with Michael Snow continues with awarding of $40,000 Gershon Iskowitz Prize

By Timothy Lem-Smith June 8, 2011

Arguably Snow's most visited creation, Flight Stop soars above oft-oblivious Eaton Centre patrons (Image: Ronnie Yip from the Torontolife.com Flickr pool)

On Monday, the **AGO** announced that **Michael Snow**, the multitalented Toronto-born artist, has won the 2011 Gershon Iskowitz prize for his contribution to the visual arts in Canada. He's the first artist to win the prize since its booty was bulked up by $15,000 to a hefty $40,000 in early 2011.

Snow's victory will hardly come as a shocker to anyone who's seen the 82 works already housed at the AGO, such as his iconic metallic silhouettes in the second-floor atrium. It seems the gallery kind of has a thing for Snow. In 1994 the AGO showed a number of installations as part of a major retrospective called The Michael Snow Project. The same year, they published a grand total of four books about his work.

Besides his AGO appearances, Snow has spent his eight-decade career decorating Hogtown with loads of notable pieces, from the jeering golden fans leaning out of the top of the Rogers Centre to Flight Stop, those oft-overlooked wooden geese that soar above oblivious Eaton Centre shoppers.

The AGO-Snow love affair will continue, as the prize now includes (yet) another exhibit, coming to a gallery near you some time next year. We'll be there.

ARTFORUM
JANUARY 2010

Snow Days

BY JASON ANDERSON 01.26.10

Left: **Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967,** still from a color film in 16 mm, 45 minutes. Right: **Michael Snow, *Flightstop*, 1979.** Installation view, Eaton Centre, Toronto. Photo: Tourism Toronto

IT CAN SOMETIMES FEEL like Toronto is Michael Snow's city, and the rest of us are merely living in it. No other contemporary Canadian artist has made such a thumbprint on the civic landscape, whether through the many iterations of his "Walking Women," the fiberglass Canada geese suspended within the Eaton Centre, or the gargoyle-like fans spilling off the walls of the Rogers Centre. He reached his peak of ubiquity with "The Michael Snow Project," a multigallery exhibition in 1994. By that time, he'd even been forgiven for spending his most prolific years (1963–72) living with his late wife Joyce Wieland in New York. Like so many other peripatetic Canucks before him, he's been thoroughly reclaimed and repatriated.

And like so many artists who find themselves enshrined in their own time, the ever-industrious eighty-one-year-old has remained better known to the hometown crowd for popular public pieces than for the unrulier work that he continues to make. The fact that most of the seven projected works in "Recent Snow"—his first exhibition at the Power Plant since "The Michael Snow Project"—have never before been publicly screened in Toronto may come as a surprise. Then again, Snow's film and video works—always a cornerstone of a practice that also includes painting, sculpture, and music—long ago earned a reputation for being more admirable than accessible. Surely only the hardiest moviegoers would endure the 45-minute-long zoom in his landmark *Wavelength* (1966) or the 266-minute runtime of *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (1970–74).

Yet the new and old Snow works now filling spaces in the city readily dispel that idea. One of the projections at the Power Plant, *The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets* (2009), consists of a real-time shot of an intersection outside the gallery projected onto, and fractured by, a staggered series of rectangles, creating a sort of cubist movie screen. In *Piano Sculpture* (2009), Snow creates a piano quartet with himself playing all four parts in shots projected onto each of the walls. And in the equally jazzy though speechless *That/Cela/Dat* (1999), he fills three screens with texts in English, French, and Flemish that may be roughly identical in meaning but whose contents nevertheless refuse to stay in sync. Like the other works at the Power Plant, it's remarkable for its ingenuity and playfulness, and Snow is once again delighted to confound received notions about word and image, meaning and reception.

In the coming weeks, other venues are presenting rare screenings of earlier works. TIFF Cinematheque offers the most monumental of the lot when *La Région centrale* (1971) plays January 28. Filmed over five days on a mountain peak in northern Quebec with a specially designed 16-mm camera that turns in almost every direction, the resulting three-hour work is less a serene study in landscape than an audacious exercise in disorientation. As he would do throughout his career, Snow reinvests the old business of watching moving images on a screen with an even older sense of awe and wonder.