

**Shock, Fear, and Belief:
The Films and Videos of Madi Pillar**



Edited by Clint Enns and Mike Hoolboom

**Shock, Fear, and Belief:
The Films and Videos of Madi Pillar**



Fotografia Rembrandt

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3262 Peru S. G. M. G. Langley





**Shock, Fear, and Belief:
The Films and Videos of Madi Piller**

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Pleasure Dome
<http://www.pdome.org>

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Introduction

Clint Enns and Mike Hoolboom

Beyond the Pleasure Dome, in the various underground cinemas where comrades gather to watch films, lies the realm of the unknown, the space in which strange and unique visions are realized. Despite the joy of creation, art making can be quite difficult and, as the song goes, we often get by with a little help from our friends. In addition to being a wonderful moving image artist, Madi Piller is one of the most generous people working in the Toronto moving image community. She embodies selflessness, always willing to provide an eye, an ear, and a shoulder, in addition to friendship and resources, to any artist working in the fringe moving image scene. Her encouragement of other artists' practices has led to the creation of a substantial number of fringe moving image works, including the artwork commissioned for her major curatorial projects, namely, *Eleven in Motion* (2009), *Hello Amiga* (2012), *OP ART Re-Imaged* (2014), and *The Frame is the Keyframe* (2016).

Madi began her work on the other side of the lens, as a producer of commercials in Colombia. A chance Toronto connection led her to the grail of super 8, and the small miracle of Exclusive Film Lab (and the *Splice This! Fest*), twin engines of practice that helped bring her to Canada, where she embraced a materialist practice. Steeped in the frame-by-frame wonders of animation, her work began to migrate between analogue video, digital way stations, and film emulsion. Her animated comrades taught her that the best movies were short, condensations of experience, whether offering personal portraits, landscape retakes, or abstract reveries.

This publication was a response to Madi's new black and white trilogy, a work inspired by her grandfather's long ago trek from Romania to Peru, and of course by the inner and outer treks she has made as an artist. She's entered a new moment of prolific risk-taking, offering up a lifetime of close attentions with typical generosity. We at Pleasure Dome are so pleased to be able to present her work on a special evening when we'll all raise a glass and wonder how she managed it. For those who couldn't make the show, no worries, the pages to come bear witness, and of course there are the movies themselves: living memorials, dream science.

Animated Self-Portraits



Amy Lockhart's Self-Portrait
from *Animated Self-Portraits / Autoportraits Animés*.

Animating Community

Clint Enns

Animated Self-Portraits / Autoportraits Animés (2012) is a collaborative animation in which eighty-four artists were asked to produce twelve paper illustrations to be animated into short loops forming an omnibus of Canadian animator self-portraits. The images were brought to life by Madi Piller on a modified 35mm animation stand setup in animation legend Eugene Fedorenko's living room.¹ The animators who contributed represent a wide spectrum of animation practices in Canada. Some of the animators worked for the NFB (National Film Board of Canada), others worked in animation studios, and others worked totally independent of any studio or institution. The work is both a celebration of animation made in Canada and a document of the various styles employed by Canadian animators, with the short segments forming a larger self-portrait, namely, a portrait of Canadian animation.

This work is historically significant given the legacy of Canadian animation left by Norman McLaren (whose portrait appears in the film) and the NFB. In 1942, McLaren was put in charge of the NFB's animation department, transforming the landscape of Canadian animation by hiring some of the most creative animators. Since that point, Canada has garnered a reputation for producing innovative and imaginative animation. Historically, animation has struggled to gain legitimacy among the traditional arts due to its mode of production and its association with cartoons. *Animated Self-Portraits* attempts to remove this perceived cultural divide. The diverse selection of animators (many of whom are thought of as artists not animators) eliminates notions around high and low animation or distinctions between animation as art and animation as cartoon. Moreover, by only employing twelve frames, all of the animators are forced into the position of the independent animator.

Animated Self-Portraits was a return to handmade animation techniques for many of the animators, since many of them are now working digitally. All of the portraits in *Animated Self-Portraits* were made using hole-punched paper and alignment pegs, with each image literally bearing the mark of its author. The twelve images, together with animator's instructions, were sent to Piller through the mail, further reinforcing the material nature of the work.² Finally, the individual portraits were compiled by Piller and animated on Fedorenko's 35mm animation stand.

1 Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove animated the Genie Award-winning film *Village of Idiots* (1999) on this stand.

2 Interesting to note, McLaren's first animation gig was with the UK General Post Office (GPO) film unit, a division under the leadership of John Grierson, who would later found the NFB, and hire McLaren.

This project is clearly a labor of love and it is an understatement to say that without Piller's generosity, devotion, and community engagement, this project would not have been possible. As local animation legend Dave Cox explains,

With some irony, I had titled my segment *Swan Song*, insinuating my departure from the industry, due to my declining eyesight due to the onset of my diabetes. I had resisted Madi's requests to participate in this film [*Animated Self-Portraits*] but she was adamant, more persistent, and so very encouraging that I struggled to complete my little segment, with magnifying glasses and lifetime memories.

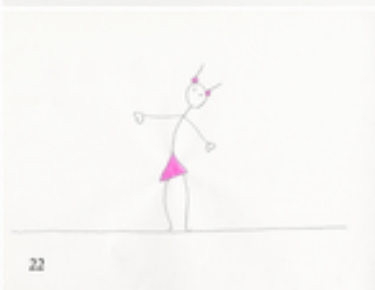
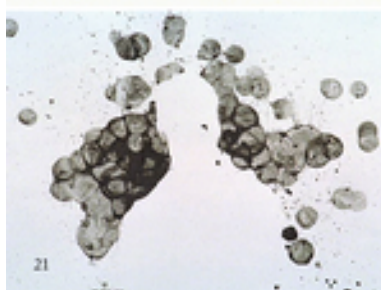
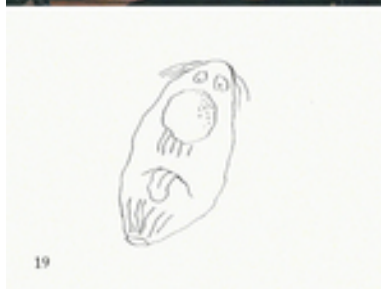
Big thanks to Madi.

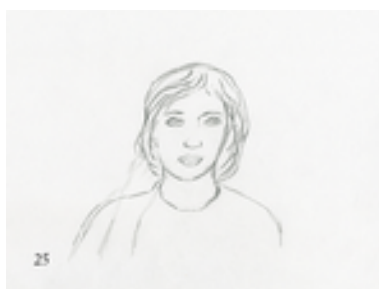
The animators who participated in the project are represented on the following pages and include:

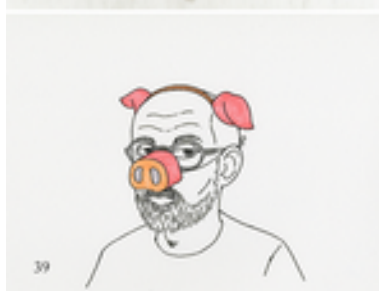
1. Ed Ackerman 2. Kimberly Anderson 3. Stephen Andrews 4. Willy Ashworth
5. Shira Avni 6. Cordell Barker 7. Carol Beecher & Kevin Kuritnik
8. Ellen Besen 9. Marc Beurteaux 10. Jim Caswell 11. Luc Chamberland
12. Martine Chartrand 13. Elisa Chee 14. Marilyn Cherenko 15. Claude Cloutier
16. Richard Condie 17. Dave Cox 18. Siloën Daley 19. Paul Driessen
20. Jacques Drouin 21. Félix Dufour-Laperrière 22. Ann Marie Fleming
23. Nick Fox-Gieg 24. Mike Geiger 25. Suzanne Gervais 26. Joseph Gilland
27. John Halfpenny 28. Bryce Hallett 29. Heather Harkins 30. Chris Hinton
31. Co Hoedeman 32. Larry Jacobs 33. Patrick Jenkins 34. Susan Justin
35. Sharon Katz 36. Jody Kramer 37. Pasquale LaMontagna 38. Elizabeth Lewis
39. Arnie Lipsey 40. James MacSwain 41. Amy Lockhart 42. Craig Marchall
43. Wrik Mead 44. Margaret Moores 45. Lisa Morse 46. Norman McLaren
47. Martha Newbigging 48. Marv Newland 49. Gail Noonan 50. Diane Obomsawin
51. Luc Otter 52. Iriz Pääbo 53. Alan Pakarnik 54. Sylvie Paradis 55. Ishu Patel
56. Michèle Pauzé 57. Janet Perlman 58. Madi Piller 59. Kaj Pindal
60. David Ratzlaff 61. Rick Raxlen 62. Aubry Reeves 63. Richard Reeves
64. Janice Schulman 65. Joseph Sherman 66. Clive Smith 67. Lynn Smith
68. Michael Snow 69. John Straiton 70. Malcom Sutherland 71. Suzie Synnott
72. Hélène Tanguay 73. Paul Teglas 74. Jeff Tran 75. Almerinda Travassos
76. Marie-Hélène Turcotte 76. George Ungar 78. Mike Weiss 79. Craig Welch
80. John Weldon 81. Barbara Whitmer 82. Lynn Wilton 83. Bob Wiseman

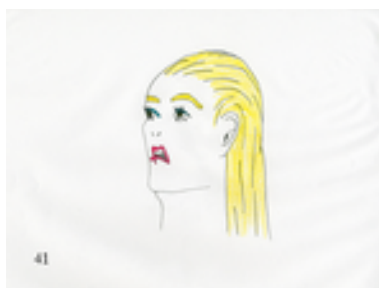


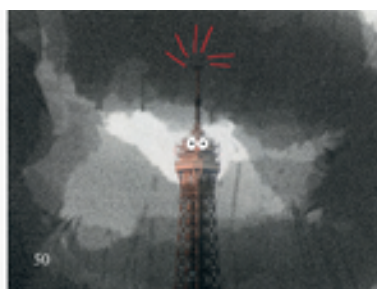


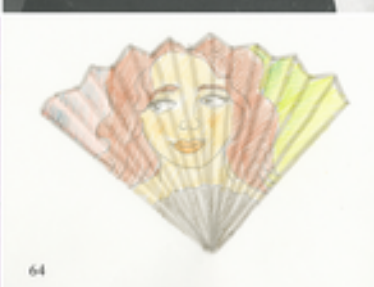
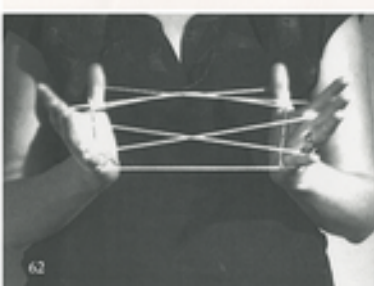
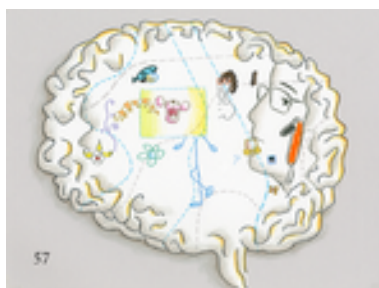


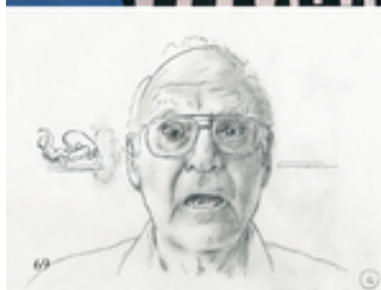


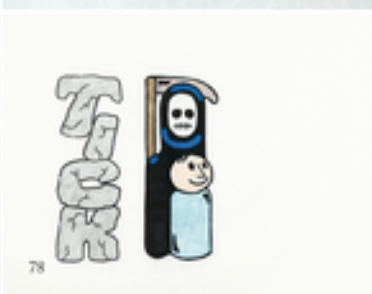


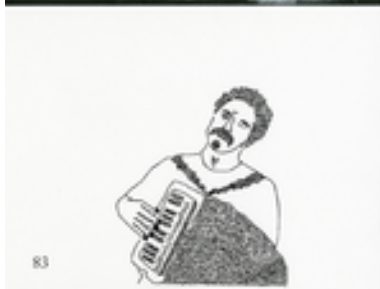
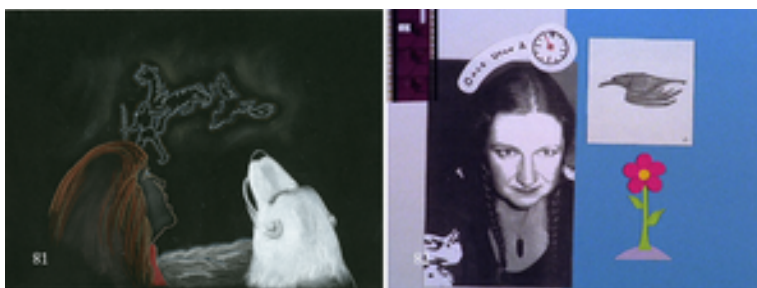


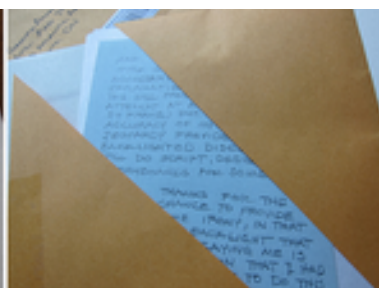












FEB 13/10

Hi MAD!

HERE YOU GO - ME IN 12 DRAWINGS! HA!
THESE ARE MIXED MEDIA INCLUDING CHALK
PASTEL AND COLOUR PENCIL, SO THEY'RE
SMUDGY. I'VE PUT A TRANSPARENCY
OVER EACH ONE AS A PROTECTOR SHEET.
HOPEFULLY THAT WILL HELP. IF YOU'RE
COVERING THEM WITH A GLASS PLATE
WHEN SHOOTING, YOU MAY NEED TO WIPE
THE GLASS - SORRY FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE.
IT'S THE ONLY TECHNIQUE THAT CAME TO MIND!
HAVE FUN WITH ALL THE ANIMATIONS!
CHEERIO -
BARBARA WHITMER

Feb. 10

Hi Madi

Here are my little drawings.
Because I've been creating
everything in the computer those
past years, and I work pretty
much alone, I had no way of
testing them. Your eye will be
the first to see them on me!
Hope they don't suck!
You never know!

MTW
T W

Madi Piller
TAIS
60 Atlantic Avenue
Suite 102
T.O. ON M6K 1X9

Greetings Madi

Here is my contribution to your portrait project. if you will allow me to stipulate shooting instructions i will suggest the following. Field to will be fine. Edges of the paper in the field of view is fine, perhaps desirable. a rough registry of the drawings can be achieved by using any corner of the paper. They are to be single framed. Enclosed with my drawings you will find a sack of 108 sunflower seeds (black oil). These are to be dropped by your hand on to my drawings from a height of 6 inches. No platten is required when shooting these images. Your enthusiasm and hard work are an inspiration to me and i look forward to the results of your selfless effort. Best ——— c. hinton.

CASWELL DESIGN
ILLUSTRATION

Hi MAD!,
THREE MOVES A LITTLE FAST
BUT HOPES THEY WORK FOR YOUR
PROJECT
10 FLD - FLD incl

THANKS,
Jim Caswell

Four Corners Crescent, Brampton, Ontario, L6T 1Z4
Telephone (905) 751-7108 Facsimile (905) 751-3652
E-mail jcaswell@caswelldesign.com

DOPE SHEET ON
OTHER SIDE. ↗

MADI,

TITLE IS NOT ABSOLUTELY
NECESSARY, BUT HELPS THE
EXPLANATION. AS IT APPEARS,
THIS WILL PROBABLY BE MY LAST
ATTEMPT AT ANIMATION (FRAME
BY FRAME) DUE TO THE FAILING
ACCURACY OF MY EYES & THE
JEOPARDY PROVIDED ME BY
BACK-LIGHTED DISCS. I CAN
STILL DO SCRIPT, DESIGN, TIMING,
& STORYBOARDS FOR SOME TIME.

THANKS FOR THE
CHANCE TO PROVIDE
SOME IRONY, IN THAT
THE BACKLIGHT THAT
IS BETRAYING ME IS
THE REASON THAT I HAD
DECIDED NOT TO DO THIS
LITTLE VIGNETTE.

Howe

HOPEFULLY, A HELPFUL DIAGRAM:

THE DIFFERENT LEVELS

TOP



DIFFERENT
ACETATE SHEETS
WITH CRAYON
DRAWINGS.

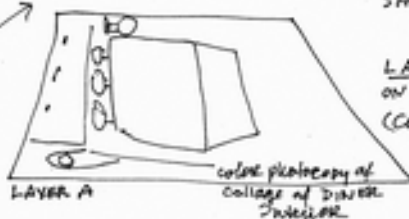


TISSUE PAPERS (# 1-6)
VARYING IN
NUMBER. AT ONE
POINT: ALL SIX
TISSUE SHEETS ARE
ABOVE LAYER B



SHEET OF ACETATE
WITH COLLAGE
PORTRAIT (SCREEN
LEFT) PASTED TO THE ACETATE.
LAYER B GOES
ON TOP OF LAYER A
FOR MOST OF THE
SHOOT

BOTTOM



LAYER A ALWAYS IS
ON THE BOTTOM.
(COLOR PHOTOCOPY
OF A COLLAGE
OF THE INTERIOR
OF A DINER)

* BUT:
NEAR THE END, TISSUE SHEETS
GO BETWEEN LAYER A + B


Dear Madi

Thanks so much for the box + stamps.

Wanted to put more color on it
but all my old felt pens were dry

hope the whole thing works out.

Thanks for including me.

Richard 

SHOOT
ON 2'S
EXCEPT
#9 - SHOOT
ON 1.

Hi Madi!

Here is my animated
self-portrait. It works
as a cycle.

Take Care!
and Thanks!

AMY LOCKHART



I Felt Like an Octopus: An Interview with Madi Pillar

Mike Hoolboom (October 2016)



Mike: One of your earliest movies was shot on super 8 in Colombia and features pop phenom Shakira.

Madi: I was working as the producer at a large ad agency. An opportunity came up to make a TV commercial with Shakira. The creative department's idea was to mimic a music video that U2 did when they played on a flatbed truck that drove through the streets of New York ("All Because of You," November 2004). The soda company in Colombia had already contacted Shakira who was a sensation at that time, though not as famous as she is now. The company paid her to write and perform a song for their soda pop.

The commission went to a director who is a big name in Colombia. But the creative director in the agency hated the idea of shooting with him because he was too straightforward cinematographically, and we wanted to achieve something fresh, in the style of a music video. I said don't worry, I'll bring my super 8 camera and shoot. So while the "real" director worked, I ran around shooting my version of the commercial. Mostly they used my footage because the official footage was too clean and static. It had no energy, zero. My footage caught the spirit of the street. We didn't contract the big crowd, only a few people for close-ups.

We just started driving through the streets with big speakers, and when people realized that Shakira was in their neighbourhood they all came. We had jeeps filled with sodas that were being given away. Who doesn't like free stuff? In the end we had a mass of people following the truck, while others peeked through their windows to see what was happening. None of that was set up.

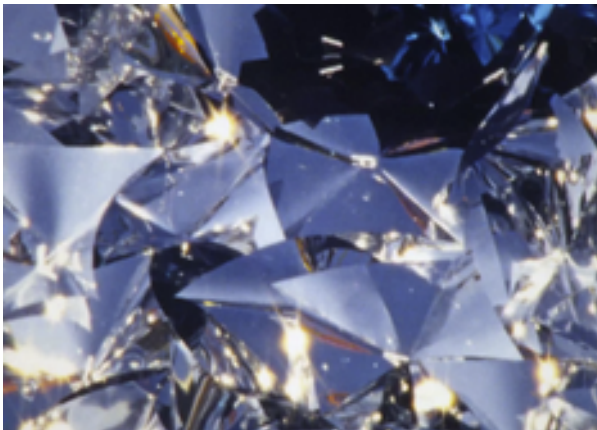


Shortly after that Shakira went to the United States and her look changed dramatically. She lost weight, dyed her hair, and became the person she is now. I have a picture of Shakira hugging me. I'm not even looking at her, I'm just holding onto my super 8 camera. My sister likes to tease me: look who is holding you!

The commercial was made in the same spirit as my Caribana film *Bacchanal* (2014). I like seeing things. When I'm behind the camera I'm looking for the world, focusing on the real moments that are happening. Then things start pouring into view. In *Bacchanal* I wasn't actually looking for those sexy scenes, but then you start realizing that whenever you pick up your camera sex is happening.

Mike: *Bacchanal* is a carefully observed study of Toronto's annual Caribana celebration, a.k.a. the Toronto Caribbean Carnival. It brings hundreds of (barely) costumed dancers together in a street parade.

Madi: It was a beautiful sunny day, splendid. There were colours that made you want to dance. You could feel the East Indian and Caribbean communities the whole grandiose day. These guys prepare the entire year for this day when they rejoin their communities. Most people buy costumes, and they're not cheap. The parade is made up of groups, organizers come up with the group theme and commission someone to design the outfits, and each mas band makes costumes. The community comes together for this.



My husband met a Caribana group that needed a place to build costumes, and he helped them with that. We became close to the group, and were invited to go to the opening party. Later we were offered a ride on the float and I thought, hey, that's a

first class seat, I'm going to be able to shoot what's actually happening during the parade. I was totally enticed by the colours. But as the day went on I saw how some of the crowd was partying.

Mike: Your shooting begins with colour and abstraction, then turns to the dancers, and finally finds dirty dancing at the end.

Madi: It was completely surreal. My camera on the float started discovering the frenzy as the day went on.

Mike: They're basically having sex in public.

Madi: It is what you see.

Mike: Did it make you think about Toronto differently?

Madi: It reminded me how liberated Toronto is today and what I heard of Toronto years ago.

Mike: When you came to Canada, some of your earliest movies were animated. How did your interest in animation begin?

Madi: I've always liked animation, it's a way of expressing things. You don't need to wait for anything to happen, you just start creating. When I worked in advertising, I'd see all the planning that goes into a scene of a family eating, or a guy drinking a soda. You spend three hours to set it up and someone takes a drink and that's it. You wind up with thirty seconds after two days of filming, it's ridiculous. But when we did some TV commercials that were animated, I liked the way animators were left to work on their own. You give them instructions and after a few meetings you trust them to bring in what you need. I admired their craft, and the fact that they could work by themselves. That attracted me.

I never tried to do any animation myself when I was producing commercials, but I did shoot a lot of super 8. I remember making a commercial for Clorets with a couple kissing each other. Kissing, kissing, kissing. It won a prize actually. But the client never wanted it shown on TV because there was too much kissing [laughs]. I shot it on super 8 with a creative director who gave me the idea. That was in Colombia where I worked for an ad agency from 1992-99. In the final years there I was in transition, living in both Colombia and Canada. I had a Canadian permit to go overseas and work. But you only get this permit for three years, after that I had to decide whether I wanted to stay in Colombia or move to Canada. I decided to come here.



Mike: How did you start working on super 8?

Madi: I was coming to Toronto to visit my family. My twin sister had moved here from Peru and eventually brought my parents. While I was in Colombia I often came to visit them, and also to watch films at the Toronto International Film Festival. The first festival I went to was Hot Docs, which was held in a bar on College Street. Then *Splice This!* I was encouraged by Margaret from Exclusive Film (where I was developing my super 8) to submit my work to this festival and that's how I met Kelly O'Brien and Laura Cowell, the organizers. It was a festival dedicated to super 8 films. I continued coming every year to visit my family but I did not see them much because I was completely immersed in film screenings. I took my holidays specifically during the time to attend the Toronto International Film Festival. I started seeing contemporary films that had more experimental tendencies, not the regular mainstream fare. I was always looking for discoveries in the catalogue, anything that had a description including mentions of "super 8 film" or "experimental."

I met my future husband on an airplane. We were pen pals for ten years before we married. On one of my visits to Toronto he gave me a super 8 camera that he had, because I mentioned that I was looking for one. Most of the films I shot in Colombia were made with the first camera that I got from him. It was totally automatic; you couldn't do anything but a bit of zooming. Later on I bought a Nizo from a pawn shop on Queen East. I had my sister here so I would send my films by mail from Bogota, and she would take them to Margaret at Exclusive Film Lab to get processed. Lili, my sister, was the contact between Colombia and Toronto [laughs]. I submitted a film to *Splice This!* which was accepted, and then I sent another. Those acceptances helped me to continue.

That's the way I started with super 8, making a lot of mistakes, carrying my camera everywhere, even while mountain biking. I went into productions and shot my own takes on the side, trying to figure out my vision of the scene being shot. It was a way of training myself. My job in Colombia was director of production at J. Walter Thompson, a big transnational company. Very fun. I opened a gap so that the people at the agency could think differently about how to make commercials. I experimented with creative processes and relations with TV commercial directors in order to realize the full expression of their vision.

I wanted to work between the two worlds of the creative director of the agency and the director at the production house. Once I had a storyboard I would look for imagery and edit from outtakes, found footage, from other TV commercials, music videos, or films. Then I would bring this to the creative director at the ad agency and the TV commercial director and try to design the production with them. In this way I was trying to extract the most from the creative people I was working with. It wasn't just a question of following a storyboard. I opened the door for many young directors.

Mike: Were there people in Toronto who opened doors for you?

Madi: Roberto Ariganello, the former director of LIFT [Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto] was very inspiring for me. One day I was ready to make *Vive Le Film* (2006) and I arrived at LIFT. I wanted to do a test first, and Roberto showed me how to use the Oxberry animation camera. He gave me a few fast instructions, the way he always used to do. He said to me, "Madi, you're going to be alone on this, so you better learn quickly." I got the tests back from Niagara Custom Lab and prepared my artwork for the film. The day I arrived with all the material to start shooting I learned that Roberto had passed away. He drowned in a swimming accident. He had been in Nova Scotia to deliver film equipment to another film co-op. At that moment I felt terribly sad and remembered his comment and realized, yes, I was alone with this. Of course, I had to continue to make the film.

I worked with pictures that were boiled, optically printed, and then painted. There was a craft to making these images, it wasn't just scratching or drawing on film. For the countdown leader in the film I started bleaching the black and white film, manipulating only part of the image, and then adding paint. I thought of how it would look as an inverted image. If I needed blue, I would paint yellow. The whole thing would be reversed in printing. I made a stamp that read, FILM IS DEAD, and another, LONG LIVE FILM. I stamped the film with bleach, and then applied colour paint. The movie is a memory of all the things I learned from Roberto. He was a connector, an amazing guy.

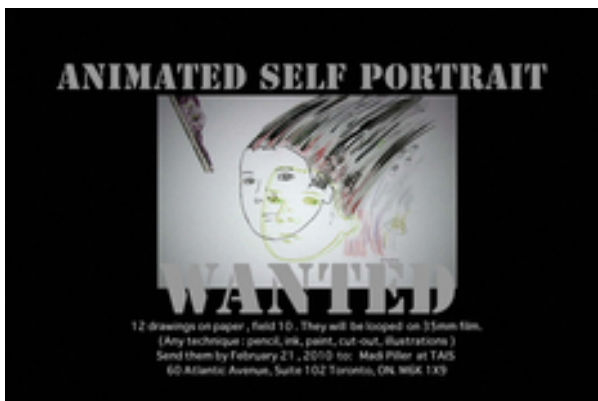
Mike: He was forever urging people to make films, a vital sponsor of community.

Madi: Totally. I met him at a show at the AGO [Art Gallery of Ontario]. I think I asked a question so he came over after and asked if I knew about LIFT and told me that I should stop by. So I went. At that time I was doing TV commercials for a Toronto company. I had landed the title of technical director because I didn't speak much English at the time. I had the technical aspect down very well, and I ended up managing the sets and doing the initial editing. Shortly afterwards, and after my initial visits to LIFT and Niagara Custom Lab, and participating in screenings that Sebastjan Hendrickson put on at Niagara, my thinking switched completely to the arts. I didn't want a producer telling me what to do anymore, it was time for me to start doing my own work.

In the same building as LIFT there was TAIS [Toronto Animated Image Society]. I went to one of their talks and attended a couple of workshops. I remember going to one of their screenings at the NFB's John Spotton Cinema, where Marc Glassman was in conversation with animator Paul Driessen. We went for beers afterwards. Patrick Jenkins was there and encouraged me to become part of TAIS, so I started a relationship between the two floors of the building, TAIS and LIFT. Patrick asked me to join the Board, and I'd never been on a board. He opened that door for me. After he left a lot of stuff happened, TAIS seemed doomed to close. But I thought, no, an organization could not collapse like that.

My husband was able to get TAIS a free space for three years, and I volunteered for more than a decade. I felt I was following the model of Roberto who worked for the community. That is the motivation I brought to TAIS. It's a production center, and since I was producing all of my adult life, I wanted to see people creating new work. They did not have to be only hardcore animators, but people who could embrace animation within their practice of art. That's how I met Stephen Andrews. He used to come and punch holes in paper for the animation film he was making. I shot for him and also helped Libby Hague, and many other artists who came through.

I always felt like an octopus, shaking hands with many artists with different animation techniques. I also worked hard to maintain the focus of the organization as a centre that embraces all sorts of animations, in analogue or digital forms, and mostly that maintains space for the artist. I always thought we should get into wider community involvements to bring artists into other areas of the city, as a way of spreading the voice of TAIS. Eventually, interested people will come back to the organization and join.



Mike: Your *Animated Self-Portraits / Autoportraits Animés* (2012) feels like a community project, an image of community even.

Madi: I asked artists to give me twelve drawings of themselves on paper that I would animate as a loop. Every type of animation appears in the film. At the beginning I thought I would include thirty-five people, but in the end there were eighty-four. It was shown at the Ottawa International Animation Festival, in the Canadian panorama. People loved it! This is a piece that unites all levels of animators, from experimental to industry to independent to those working with the NFB. The project kept growing and the artwork I received was so nice I knew I had to film it in 35mm. The Canada Council for the Arts supported the project so I shot in 35mm and had a professional sound mix with Dolby.

I asked Martine Chartrand in Montreal, Heather Harkins in Halifax, and Gail Noonan in Vancouver to help me get the word out to artists and they were all really helpful. I had so many people, it took much longer to finish; I regret that some people were just tied up on other projects, but wanted to participate. There needs to be a sequel because believe me there are tons of other artists that are so valuable to our world of animation.

Making the film was part of my commitment to a community of animation artists. It was a way of trying to build bridges between different artists of different backgrounds.

The animation stand I used for *Animated Self-Portraits* was set up in the living room of Eugene Fedorenko. It replicated the camera stand that Yuri Norstein used on *Tale of Tales* (1979), one of the best movies ever made. Yuri used a multi-plane

camera setup where the glass layers (that you put the artwork on) move up and down, instead of the camera moving vertically. The camera can move left and right, horizontally. When Eugene Fedorenko and Ross Newlove were working on *Village of Idiots* (2008) they wanted to use the multi-plane system with their cut-out animation technique. That's why they replicated Norstein's set up, with Eugene's ingenious, handmade modifications and additions.

I received many letters from animators, along with their drawings, because some really felt inspired by the project, getting back to analogue work again with punch-hole paper. Many also offered help, which was nice. Marie-Hélène Tourcotte, Paul Driessen, and others sent detailed dope sheets of how their work had to be shot and animated. Richard Condie wrote, "Thanks so much for the box and stamps. [I gave him a box and return-posted stamps for sending his work.] I wanted to put more colours on it, but all my old felt pens are dry." That killed me. Chris Hinton sent black sunflower seeds to animate on top of his drawings as homework for me. One letter said that this is the last project I'm going to do because I'm growing blind from the light coming from the animation table, and I can't work any longer. That was hard to receive.

After it was done, I sent to every contributing artist a DVD, and a poster with a list of the artists, so they could all met each other. It was a way of saying we are all in the same boat.



Mike: Can you talk about your animated short *Anonymous, 1855* (2005)?

Madi: This was a response to media reports about sexuality in the city; you know how the media goes on and on about something, then never talks about it again. It's about the politics of pornography. Pornography has been around for centuries. There's nothing new under the sun. Since the 1800s photographs of naked people and prostitutes have circulated. Why not make a film with these Victorian images?

I wanted to be very explicit and found the pictures in a book of nudes. When you see the first woman she appears defiant, strong and certain. She's the one who is giving pleasure to the guy, more on the dominant side, while the guy just presses her tit. I also like the two girls softly touching. I looked for images showing different situations that are sometimes comedic. Each image is animated with very limited motion. The first image shows a hand combing a woman's pubic hair, I only animated the hand. The two women touching each other's heads also have only their hands moving. A girl is whipped by an older lady. I wanted to show the expressivity of the touch, so the girl's head snaps back.

I like putting numbers in my titles, they provide a frame and context. There's a direct reference – this is what was happening in the 1800s. Or, this film is from 1944. I like these patterns. I remember when I was in school they would talk about an artist, or a literary event, and I always tried to find out what else was happening in history at the same time. I like to situate events on a timeline. That's montage, no?

Mike: Can you talk about *Chambre de Torture, 1944* (2003)?

Madi: It began in 1976 when my father was depressed. One day he said to my mother, "I'm going to start painting." The film shows his first painting: a prison room with blood all around. On the back he wrote, "I vow never to lock a bird in a cage." My mother said, "No, if that's what you're going to do, I don't want you to paint." It was a purging of his war trauma. He was fifteen years old when France was occupied. His father had died at the beginning of the war from a disease, and then he was separated from his mother. He went into hiding until he was captured by the French Resistance, labeled as a spy, and almost killed. Then another fighter said, "No, he's Jewish, he's in hiding." My father remained with the French Resistance for the rest of the war. He saw too many bad things and never talks about them. He made another horrific painting and then stopped. Now he's painting again, but only landscapes and beautiful flowers. His house is full of flower paintings. I had to steal his painting of the bloody room. I brought it to my studio and shot it quite quickly on video and mixed it with some super 8 footage that I scratched. I began to compose a film.



Mike: The movie ends with his painting. Was that always the destination, the goal?

Madi: Yes, that's why I stole the painting from his house. I wanted to make a film about the way my father's youth was truncated by the war. In the beginning you see small dots in the frame, they could be birds in a cage, or my father playing with friends in a school courtyard. I was thinking about the kind of imagery that might recall regular life for a kid, until you have to go into hiding. I collected images. When I went to Germany for the first time I had goosebumps. This is something my husband doesn't experience. His family came to North America in the 1800s, both he and his parents were born in New York. My father only came after the war, so memories are still at the surface, difficult to cope with. My father's cousins in Paris, their mother suffered so much during the war. She had a mental breakdown and spent many years in a hospital. It's difficult for them to forget.

We have new versions of suffering and the refugee crises. The acceptance of these people is still very conflicted, you would think that they would simply be received, that politicians would do better for their own people. That's why my films are so puzzled by questions of territory.

Mike: *7200 Frames Under The Sun* (2011) is a dual-screen landscape project, sometimes shown as installation, sometimes as single-channel video. It feels related to these questions of territory.

Madi: It has a very light feeling, like a trip to the cottage. But I'm talking about the earth and mining and what people fail to notice. It has two screens, both shot on super 8, and they're about what we don't see when we're in that amazing space. We don't see the history, the mining of these prehistorical lands.



Mike: While you've always been a prodigious worker, you've been particularly prolific in 2016, completing a number of short projects, along with a trilogy of beautiful black and white movies in Peru called *Untitled, 1925* (2016).

Madi: I have a poster, Filtrin vs. Banarer (Banarer is my grandpa) from 1925 that triggered my *Untitled* trilogy project. Banarer is my second last name. Madi Pillar-Banarer. My grandpa participated in a big international boxing match against Victor Filtrin, an Argentinian, on September 20, 1925, in the Plaza de Toros in Cusco. I went to Cusco with my husband and Greg Boa. In the place of the bullring I found a wall at the end of a street, a deteriorated house wall forming a corner; that's where the bullfighting arena must have been. We explored this adobe wall, trying to pull out its memory and history.

We visited the archives of the newspaper El Sol in Cusco, which was a room full of old newspapers, not even in boxes. OK, let's look for something around September 1925. There were no pictures of my grandpa but we found an article written after the match. It says that Filtrin delivered a technical knockout in the fourth round. My grandpa was beaten [laughs]. Slowly I realized that Filtrin was a professional boxer (there was a picture of him in the newspaper), a man trying to build up his rankings. My grandpa was just an accessory, the guy who volunteered to fight a professional for some money. I found that beautiful.



I travelled with my husband and Greg Boa, who helped me with filming. I set up the camera frame and Greg would shoot. It was a beautiful way of working together. We both love photography but I have a condition called familial tremor that makes my hands shake. Some days I shake more than others, and you don't want to go all the way to Peru and rely on your nerves to be steady for the day.

Mike: Did you know when you went to Peru that you would make three films?

Madi: No, I never thought about that. I thought I would shoot a lot, so I brought 2000 feet of black and white, and more rolls of colour. We had so much film but in the end it wasn't enough. We spooled it down into small boxes of 100'. Going through customs we had rolls in our pockets, all over the place.

Mike: Were you worried about dust?

Madi: No, although you want to have nice clean shots. We had some shots that had marks on the lens, but I used them in a different way. That's part of filmmaking. Everything was processed at Niagara Custom Lab here in Toronto.

I wanted to make Greg part of the film, he had never gone to South America. I wanted to have somebody with me that wasn't just a camera person, but who would be discovering a new space, a new land. Seeing through his eyes would help reimagine how my grandpa might have approached these new spaces and travels. How do you face adventure? How do you open your eyes and wonder at the marvelous and terrible things you see along the path? I wanted to share that seeing with him.

When we came back he processed the rolls and gave me all of the negatives, which I transferred to digital files. He encouraged me to rework some of the material by step printing on the optical printer, but I didn't want to add more artifacts to the film. I said I would like to have the Andes footage solarized and he did that. For me solarization brings an aspect of luminescence to the film, a layer of silver that is revealed. Since the Incas, the Andes have been mined for gold and silver. Solarization is about bringing the silver that's in the image to the surface. We solarized only these parts of the film and it's used in the second part of the trilogy. The first part, *Untitled, 1925 Part One*, is clean. Like a clean slate of black and white; you see the contrast of the black and white, the contrast of the old city and the sea.



In the second film of the trilogy, *Untitled, 1925 Part Two*, you see the church against the sky, it's so imposing, the same way religion and values were imposed. This is the way my grandfather would have regarded these structures. He came from the small town of Bălți in Romania. More than half the population was Jewish, but in Peru every corner has another tremendous church. The churches are as big as mountains.

During his three years in Peru, including the time in Cusco, he became a Peruvian citizen. He was a referee for a boxing match, he appeared in photos with athletes racing on bicycles and locals on motorcycles, and with teams of soccer players. It looks like he participated in many different sports so he must have met lots of people in Cusco. I'm learning about him through these pictures. For instance, he never told me he was a boxer. The pictures were probably made by Martin Chambi de Cusco, the most amazing photographer of indigenous people in Cusco. I showed the pictures to his grandson and he said that they must have been taken by his grandfather.

Although I always mention my grandpa as a character in the trilogy, this isn't really a series about him, it's about seeing the world the way he saw it, and how I see it after him. What I see makes me suffer a lot, the same problems we had in 1900 are still here today. What I'm bringing is a camera verité. I'm not trying to construct anything.

For *Untitled, 1925 Part Three* it was timely for us to be in Cusco when the biggest ever strike was held to protest about everything! Mining, education, health, all sectors were there. The roads were blocked by the unions, so no one could leave or get in. I felt I was back in the time of 1925 when social consciousness was raised to a high level.

The indigenous movement in Cusco was happening when my grandfather was there. I don't know if he was involved, but years later when he came back to Peru, escaping from Europe's pre-war days, he became involved with the Masons who did a lot of community work in Lima.

With this movie I'm opening questions and questioning myself. What is my relation to these events? I'm white in a country that is primarily indigenous or mixed, so the relationship is not easy. You're always singled out as a white person, a gringa. Gringa. But I feel the ambience and social problems deep in my skin. It's very difficult to cope with.



The tourists want the ambience to be crystal clear so they can see the glory of Machu Picchu. But the mist for me contains the aura of the Andes. Once the mist rises you can see flora and fauna. I'm trying to look past what a tourist sees in Peru. I'm trying to say there is life here, drops of water on these flowers, and then I'm going down to witness what is inside the city. I see people who live a natural life, fighting internally, living their own culture – how they grow potatoes, how they build their houses, how they live their lives in the markets.

Cusco was the center of the Inca empire. If you look at the history of Peru, the Inca Empire occupied a huge territory from Colombia to Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, even a bit of Chile and Argentina. In the early 1900s professionals and intellectuals in Cusco started to give a central place to the indigenous people, but there was always politics working against them. Since 1900 people have talked about change, while so little has changed. We sat with people on our journey and were invited to eat potato soup with them on the roadside. They told us stories so we could hear how the politics are. Why aren't they allowed to prosper? It is very sad.

We stopped at a hanging bridge that was made by hand. We were so afraid to cross or even to step on it. Then we filmed at a small town bullring where every seat was numbered, painted by hand. I thought of the Spaniard's bullfighting ring but, foremost, of José Maria Arguedas's novel *The Yabuar Fiesta* (1941).

The third film reflects on the malaise in the politics of South America, it's a film of despair. I think about the lack of education opportunities. Some still don't know basic math or how to read. You see them carrying flags and fighting for a cause in a system that hardly gives them a chance. I saw that during my youth. I grew up in a military state where you couldn't do anything, you couldn't comment or you would disappear or wind up in jail or wouldn't get your piece of bread. Every day we wake up to another beaten generation. Every year there is another South American country dying of something. It's like a contagion. A political virus.

Throwing Voices: Madi Piller and John Straiton
Stephen Broomer



The amateur filmmaker, working from passion and pleasure, with a firsthand view of strip and sequence, becomes aware – often more urgently than professionalized filmmakers – of the frame itself, how each image is indebted to its adjoining frames, and what rhythm the sequence is giving to the subject as each frame recedes. Those who work a frame at a time, or in fractional sets of frames, develop an enhanced sense of working *in time*. Handling the filmstrip confronts us with past, present, and future. But a reel of film is increasingly past, having been rung out of its creative potential with each new step of shooting, processing, editing. Each step has rendered it more and more a creation. Once exposed and developed, it is past, present, and future, but it is always past. All the more reason that the makers of art cinema, in all of its various manifestations, are prone to crises of community memory, a willful, even eager dispensing of the past. The artist survives by a forced stare into the oncoming frame. It stands, then, as a testament to Madi Piller's generosity that her sense of community-building looks not only toward the future – by fostering in younger artists a wide-ranging appreciation of skill, and an accommodating definition of animation – but to the past, its fissures and blind-spots, a deep knowledge of the artists who came before her. That her filmmaking since 2003 has held at its centre a balance of historical and personal memory only reinforces the esteemed role that history plays in her work, which has often employed found photographs, personal recollection, and other aspects that summon the ghosts of the twentieth century.

John Straiton was a pivotal force in the Canadian independent cinema of the mid-1960s, an independent animator whose first film, *Portrait of Lydia* (1964), received honours around the world, welcomed broadly at both major film festivals and underground film shows. Over the course of a little more than two decades following *Portrait of Lydia*, Straiton completed eight more films, often using an unfocused but masterful range of techniques, including rotoscoping; thirty frame dissolves; single-frame re-photography; and clay animation both in lieu of and in complement to traditional drawing methods. His filmmaking unfolded around his own habits and desires for self-expression, and not out of any plans for “professionalization.” He was, proudly, an amateur filmmaker, working, as he puts it, to please first himself, and then his friends, and then those like his friends. This presumption, that we might find fellow travellers off the back roads of cinema, is one of the gratifying certainties of an amateur film community. The underground cinema, at its very best, hosts a search for kindred spirits.

In 2010, Madi Piller completed a documentary on Straiton, then eighty-four years old, a portrait encompassing Straiton's work in advertising, the genesis of his filmmaking, and the techniques and ideas underlying his films. It is an undoubtedly affectionate portrait, and one that, on its surface, is distinct from the rest of Piller's filmmaking. It is an interview illustrated by excerpts from his films, his home

movies, his paintings and drawings, his advertisements, and by additional photography gathered around the occasion of his interview – scenes of his studio, artifacts of his career. Through the course of the film, Straiton's life story is told, with an emphasis on his filmmaking, by the man himself, with occasional title cards to clarify and fill in gaps, and to introduce the topics at hand. Piller's presence enters the work in a subtle way, in her careful manipulation of Straiton's work as illustrative material, giving the film's biographical features a light and playful tone while allowing the darker dimensions of Straiton's filmmaking – those qualities that emerge from his most mystical work – such as *Portrait of Lydia* and *Eurynome* (1970), to play out with a necessary intensity.

As an artist, Piller's relation to Straiton goes beyond that of subject and documentarian. In her films, one can see the same fluid treatment of form, veering between figurative rendering, photographic abstraction, wispy charcoal lines, and direct application of paint to film. Straiton's work bears strong themes, some first articulated by Piller through her documentary – in particular, a pronounced eroticism, and a confluence of mythic and technological fascinations, are major themes of Straiton's work that gather the films as a coherent body of work, and that also mark them as a distinct auteur contribution to the technological themes of Canadian cinema. In these films, man is both impoverished and enhanced by technology, for technology is an extension of man. Straiton, through his technological extensions, is able to compose films to deliver an intimate, interior world. In her films, Piller has likewise responded fluidly to technology, consistently working within related themes of dehumanization, the consequences of fascism, and the mystical potential of the photographic image. Straiton describes himself as a maker of animated poems, and he undertook his activities as a form of poetry, knowing his ambitions and intentions to be distinct from those of the professional filmmaker that made his advertisements. Piller is, likewise, an animating poet. In her other work as a filmmaker, but also in her work as a community builder and curator, she has long embraced a broad and accommodating definition of animation. For Piller, all cinema is animation. Some films persist in realist illusion, others turn a mirror on consciousness, and still others move a frame at a time, in pure abstraction. But all filmmakers are sequentially stamping out their images on film strips, and the projector reacts with a seance, casting rhythm out of absolute stasis.

Piller's portrait reveals other dimensions of Straiton's creativity, including his half-century-old hobby of ventriloquism. The ventriloquist's dummy that Straiton produces at the end of the film serves a metaphoric purpose as well, inferring that this, too, is animation, that animation is a common thread across Straiton's activities, but also across those art forms that serve to lend a living presence to the inanimate. The eroticism that runs through Straiton's films further extend this theme, and resonates in Piller's films as well: it affirms that acts of love and

communion are indeed acts of animating the other and the world at large.

Vive Le Film



A History of the Dead and the Long Living (Copied and Pasted)

Christine Lucy Latimer

The famous cries, 'Le Roi est Mort! Vive le Roi!' are perhaps all that remains familiar to us today of the sophisticated funeral rituals of the French Renaissance kings. They point at once to the central concern of these rituals: succession.

||A||

The first known declaration of "The King is Dead! Long Live the King!" made in 1422 with the death of France's King Charles VI and the succession of his son, Charles VII.

The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to 'memory', or to the French word *même*. It should be pronounced to rhyme with 'cream'.

||B||

The first known suggestion of the "meme," coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976.

The 600-year-old “dead and long-living” succession declaration is still in common use today - a popular online meme. It denotes a paradigm shift, just as in times of monarchic rule, but now refers to what should be celebrated or laid to rest in consumer culture.

Print is dead. Long live print.

||C||

Though the declaration runs rampant on the Internet, it seems to have generally less dramatic implications nowadays. Mostly it is used as an attention-grabbing “irony” so that a blogger can make a case for how the paradigm hasn’t shifted all that much and we shouldn’t panic. Things will remain relatively the same, or viable substitutions will keep us from being horribly inconvenienced.

Betamax is dead, long live VHS

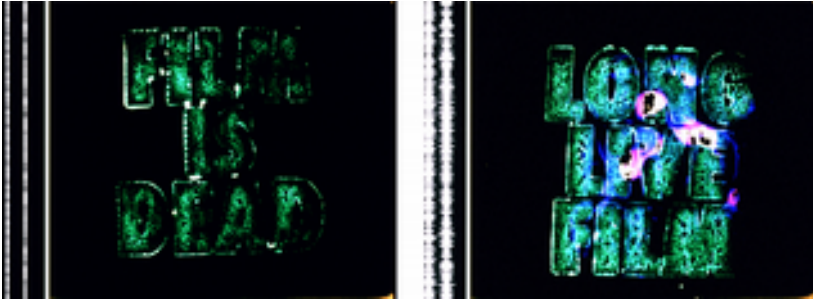
||D||

Still, the pervasiveness of the meme, the tactical overuse of it, has the potential to trivialize our relationships to and comprehensions of the obsoleting of technologies, processes, and things.

**Film Photography Is Dead, Long Live Film
Photography .**

||E||

Changing definitions in moving-image and reproduction technologies, frequent as they are, often become adapted to fit the statement.



||F||

A family portrait taken in 1927 (during a celebration of her grandparents' engagement) is at the heart of Madi Piller's moving-image short *Vive Le Film*. Following World War II, her grandparents would be the only survivors among those depicted in the portrait.

**The old year, how its moments fly!
Its hopes, its joys passed quickly by;
Its sorrows—yea, their memory lives,
But time its healing blessing gives;
While leaves and snow and all things sing.
“The King is dead, long live the King.”**

||G||

Film footage of her elderly grandparents years later, sharing a kiss, somehow wound up being thrown into the garbage and permanently lost. Piller's sister thankfully had a beta tape transfer of this footage.

**"And yet it almost makes me weep,
Aye! weep and cry, alas!
When I think of one who lies asleep
Down under the quiet grass.
For he loved me well, and I loved again,
And long in homage bent,
And prayed for his long and prosperous reign,
In our realm of sweet content.
But not to the dead may the living cling,
Nor kneel at an empty shrine:—
The King is dead, long live the King!"
Said the Lady Jaqueline.**

|||

From the video material provided by her sister, Piller extracted every frame in sequence, printing them out on paper and painstakingly re-photographing them onto 35mm motion picture film. Piller also did this with her existing 1927 family portrait, printing it out and animating it in various states of detail and decay. With these handmade reproductions, she makes *Vive Le Film*. Her grandparents' kiss is revived. The multiples generated from her family photograph traverse the screen, expanding and contracting in film strip slices adorned with sprocket holes.

The tremendous news was already abroad, and the boy learned it from a thousand voices at once—"The King is dead!" ... The tears sprang to his eyes and blurred all objects. For an instant he felt himself the most forlorn, outcast, and forsaken of God's creatures—then another cry shook the night with its far-reaching thunders: "Long live King Edward the Sixth!" and this made his eyes kindle, and thrilled him with pride to his fingers' ends. "Ah," he thought, "how grand and strange it seems—I AM KING!"

|||

Piller challenges the tenuousness of technology and memory in *Vive Le Film* by initiating successors to her lost footage. A new film is born amidst the loss, interacting with (and obstructed by) stanzas of colourful, emulsion-lifted abstraction. This new film refers not only to celluloid's physicality, but also the mechanics of film transport. Sprocket teeth, pressure plates, and angled shutters are depicted in hand-drawn animations, demonstrating the path Piller's original family footage might have taken through both camera and projector.

It's interesting to note that in 1956 the entertainment publication *Daily Variety* had as a page one headline, "Film Is Dead!" above an article announcing the invention of videotape. Certainly, videotape changed many things in the entertainment industry; it broadened the possibilities. It did not, however, kill film. Today many have the opinion that anyone can make a movie, now that you don't need expensive lights, film stock, a large crew, and a studio. Just pick up the camera and shoot.

|||

Within *Vive Le Film*, agency is therefore taken to recover (literally) lost celluloid memories via a hybrid, reconstructive process that incorporates film, video, and the printed page. The shifts in the evolution of moving-image and reproduction technologies refer to and inscribe a new family record. This lends a bellow of legitimacy to the "dead and long-living" declaration, bridging the strange gap between monarchy and meme. *Vive Le Film* makes paradigmatic shifts apparent, but does so with creative strategies that allow for "transmission of a unit of imitation ... related to memory." Piller laments the loss of celluloid on celluloid, demonstrating how memories can be triggered and restored through acts of repetitive and imperfect imitation.

Image A: Jennifer Woodward, "Funeral Rituals in the French Renaissance," *Renaissance Studies* 9, no. 4 (December 1995): 385–94.

Image B: Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

Image C: Katie Ewer, "Print Is Dead. Long Live Print.," *Marketing Society*, March 9, 2016, <https://www.marketingsociety.com/the-library/print-dead-long-live-print>.

Image D: Samuel Gibbs, "Betamax Is Dead, Long Live VHS," *The Guardian*, November 10, 2015, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/nov/10/betamax-dead-long-live-vhs-sony-end-production>.

Image E: Nicole Andermatt, "Film Photography Is Dead, Long Live Film Photography. Why Shoot Film?," *Nicole Andermatt*, March 9, 2016, <https://nicoleandermatt.com/why-shoot-film/>.

Image F: Film stills from Madi Piller's *Vive Le Film* (2006). This film was one of several commissioned in 2006 by the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto for their twenty-fifth-anniversary screening series Film is Dead! Long Live Film!

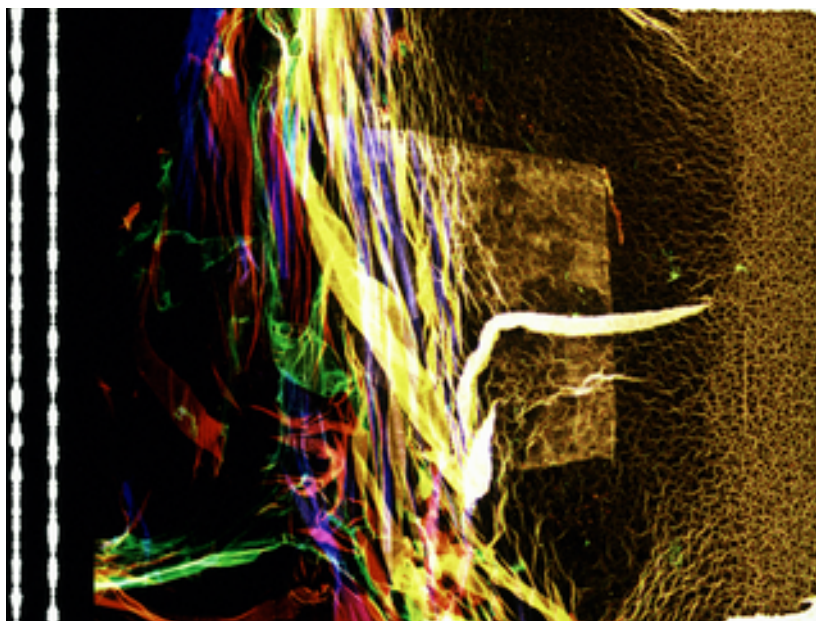
Image G: G.H.R., "The King Is Dead Long, Live the King," in *The Freemason's Repository*, ed. Henry W. Rugg (Providence, R.I.: E. L. Freeman & Son, 1884), 110.

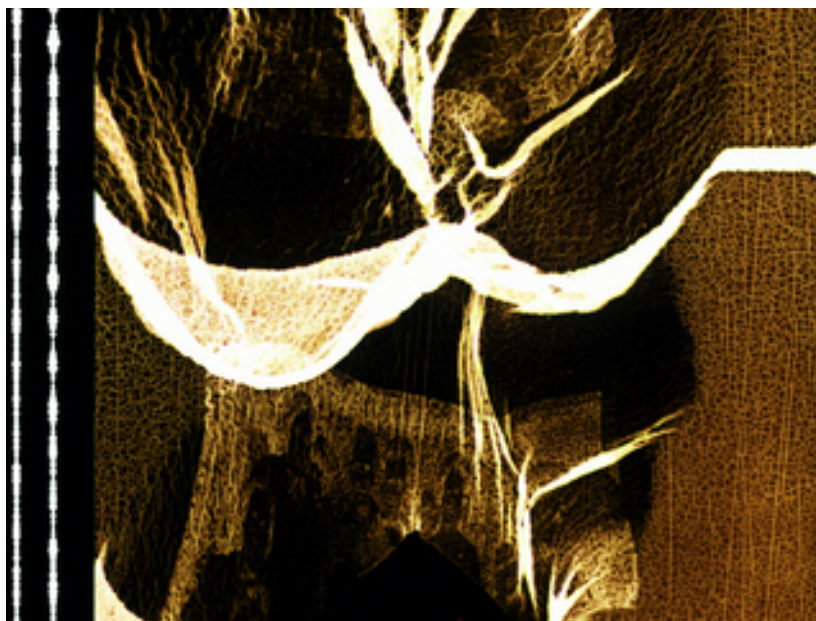
Image H: Phoebe Cary, "The Lady Jaqueline," *The Magazine of Poetry*, vol. 6 (Buffalo, New York: Charles Wells Moulton, 1894), 87.

Image I: Mark Twain, *The Prince and the Pauper* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Originally published in 1881.

Image J: Cathy Haase, *Acting for Film* (New York: Allworth Press, 2003).







Untitled, 1925



Following South

Stephen Broomer

Untitled, 1925 is a suite in three parts, through which filmmaker Madi Piller retraces a journey taken by her grandfather, Isaac Banarer, from his native Romania to Peru. Her tracing of this journey is not simply a physical re-enactment, a visit along a mapped route, but a confrontation with the nature of identity itself. Piller's accompanying texts tell us that through the course of Banarer's journey, he became a Peruvian citizen, a citizenship that later, with the coming of the Second World War, carried him and his family out of Europe to safety. With this suite, Piller confronts her identity, not by definitions of blood or sensibility, but as the result of a complex migration, an identity pitched between civilizations, each with their own deep roots and legacies. In a reductive sense the films mirror Banarer's journey upon landing at the Pacific coast and travelling from Lima to Cusco in the southeast, and yet, each film is enhanced by Piller's skill and poetic spirit to cast the journey elsewhere, into the metaphysical and memorial. Each film renews this task with narrations that ruminate on identity, time, and memory; and each has a distinct character in its imagery, in its interior relations of landscape to abstraction, to figurative presence and absence. In this way, the work is a travelogue in only the most porous sense, more memoir than diary, not a mere record, but a carefully deliberated reflection.

I. The Pacific Coast

As the suite begins, Piller speaks of mass migration, and of an uneasy relation between the city of Lima and the nature that surrounds it. The patterned rugs and decaying facades of the city – its ornate balconies, curtained windows; the huge steel doors of a church – will soon stand in sympathy with other forces in the region, gulls and ducks performing their own rituals. Water careens down rocks, through a set of locks in a harbour, the largest steps. The city is seen through the steel bars of a railing. From a lookout point, the first sight of civilization: gulls and trawlers, a crowd of circling, bobbing ducks. The ducks spin and the gulls dive in mass unisons, amidst all of these signs of man. And all of these signs point to absence. In the shattered brick walls and curtains rippled by wind, Piller betrays the city in repose, a city which has borne the brunt of transient visitors, a landing port for those journeying inland.

Piller's hand holds a photo of Isaac Banarer against a backdrop of the docks, and this image gives way to fields, without a sign of human presence but by the signature of their tilling. The docks rise up over restless waters. When the image becomes interminably static, subtle variations of light bleed in. The soundtrack, of percussion with a falling decay, enhances the film's spatial relations, the reverberations of each staccato beat becoming a call-and-response memory-game in itself: the strike, the resonance. As the film ends, on the shoreline, the gulls shake off water. As we leave

this city it maintains its illusion of emptiness, like a painted landscape, and the clouded hills, the waves breaking on the rocks, persist in their remote continuity.

II. Port of Shadows

Piller's introduction reminds us that this journey is a conflict between the romantic character of nature, and its unpredictable silences. The image finds us elsewhere along this journey: a restless sea, and wooden shacks erected over rocks and steep drops. The images glow unnaturally, assuming the perfect shape of something summoned out of the unconscious – water on a rocky shoreline, an image of Isaac Banarer, flags billowing in the wind. The images are flattened with a milky grey light, suddenly shifting to a sharp contrast of white and black. Rails are laid across an unsteady ground, disparate from the more traditional Andean pathways, built over time by the migration patterns of man and beast. The history of the land is etched upon its rocks. Silhouettes of buildings reveal a style that speaks as near to cathedral tradition as it does to the electric fantasy of the twentieth century, elaborated in bulbous poles.

Photographs show the stately dress of stadium entertainment, antique and distant. A boxing bout plays out in the stagger of animation: this must be, or must be a substitute for, Isaac Banarer's Peruvian boxing match. Bowed music comes in short bursts against the bleating of children and animals. Speech varies in tempo and volume as it plays against the restless noise of the crowd. A pan along stones gives way to a pan of market stalls, each line again glowing at its edges. At this film's outset, having travelled inland, Piller has turned to the stone to reveal time itself; it has given her only perceptual and sensual mysteries. The image has become stone-like by its silver visions; as a result, it has assumed these enigmas.

III. Everything remains the same

Piller's narration has shifted from reflection to frank yearning, for a life of rich and earnest perception. When the image arrives, it is of the sea, so still that grains and specks of light show more movement than its waves. As the waves become agitated, the sky darkens. In a park, light bleeds down through trees, as Piller manipulates the aperture, giving us only glimpses of the full scene. This image is reduced further, to vibrant white lines, streaking horizontally in movement, that suggest again that electric century, like the staggered time of a tape rewinding. As in the suite's earlier parts, the landscape is bereft of human presence save for that of Piller, behind the camera, and these compositions are stretching to a vast scale. The landscape takes on qualities of painterly brushstrokes. There is a contrast between ashen vapour and fog against the mountain ranges, and along the mountains stand preserved ruins of the Inca. This atmosphere achieves a grace against the coarseness of the land. The scale becomes intimate again as Piller admires the stalks of wet flowers, and blades of grass.

We are returned to the present as children play soccer under the windows of little shops and homes. People walk through the stone streets and steps of the densely built city of Cusco. Chickens and ducks are held in a pen, and by a revolutionary sympathy, the film cuts from the caged animals to survey a line of striking workers, quickly passing over the faces of many indigenous Peruvians in lines, and then, slowing to hold still on the faces of individual men and women, settling on the face of a child before shifting back into timed exposures.

A man makes bricks, densely packing wet cement into wooden molds, and a woman picks mushrooms on a hillside, daily labours that see their continuity in an entrenched tradition and skill set. An inland reservoir, packed on all sides by steep stone drops, reminds us as we approach the end of this journey of not only the tremendous beauty of Peru, but the menace of earthly things, the menace of those geographic forms by which our identities have been historically cast. An arena, arranged for la Tauromaquia, has its seats designated and divided by hand-painted numbers and lines, each level extending in a circle around the centre. It has become the measured schedule of an immense timepiece that summons pilgrims to gather around rebellions and main events.

Amidst Dust and Chaos

Genne Speers

1923: A twenty-two-year-old travelled to Lima, Peru from Romania. In 1925 he journeyed to Cusco via Mollendo.

2016: A filmmaker, his granddaughter, makes a trilogy of films and in the process revisits that journey - conjuring the past through a modern day pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage unites the terrestrial and the spiritual, the physical and the intangible. The act of travelling and moving through and over landscape and place activates an assemblage of possible associations that the trilogy seeks to reveal.

The Travelogue

With her camera Madi Piller records the spaces, architecture, and landscape of her grandfather's journey. There is silence, emptiness, and echoes. The camera explores, investigates, and peers around corners. The images reveal a kind of palimpsestic space that accumulates traces, turning the buildings and structures into repositories for memory and history. These films are reminiscent of a Sebaldian travelogue where time is elongated and halted all at once. Where wandering and exploring can trigger memories, real and imagined, setting into relief a constellation of events, histories, and people. In his novel *Vertigo* (1990), W. G. Sebald writes, "How strange it is to be standing leaning against the current of time." In this trilogy Piller layers fact and fiction, text and image, historical events and personal biography, folding time in on itself. Sites that have been lived in are filled with the presence of absence. What we see points to what is no longer ... or at least no longer seen. Haunted.

"I went to Cusco, but in the place of the bulring I found a wall."

The Auto-Ethnographic

Piller retraces the journey of her grandfather and in the process implicates herself in some of the larger social formations of Peru and elsewhere. War, migration, exile, and social struggles.

"I confront my identity as he did in the past."

The trilogy ends in contemporary Cusco where, in the early 1900s, the Indigenismo Movement began and spread throughout Latin America. Her grandfather ended up there in 1925.

"I felt like I was back in 1925 when social consciousness was at a high level."

She wonders what her connection to all of this could be. The recreation of the journey conjures the spirit of her grandfather and his time, while Piller narrates a kind of “ghost poetry” over blackness. When eyes are opened the black and white images – chiaroscuro, solarized, clean and high contrast, scratched and inverted – expose a certain desire to harness something intangible. This trilogy is about seeing the world the way her grandfather saw it.

“I’m learning about him through these pictures. Although I always mention my grandpa as a character in the trilogy, this isn’t really a series about him, it’s about seeing the world the way he saw it, and how I see it after him.”

What kind of importance can place have? What can be revealed through recreation? Are there secrets trapped in the windows and walls?

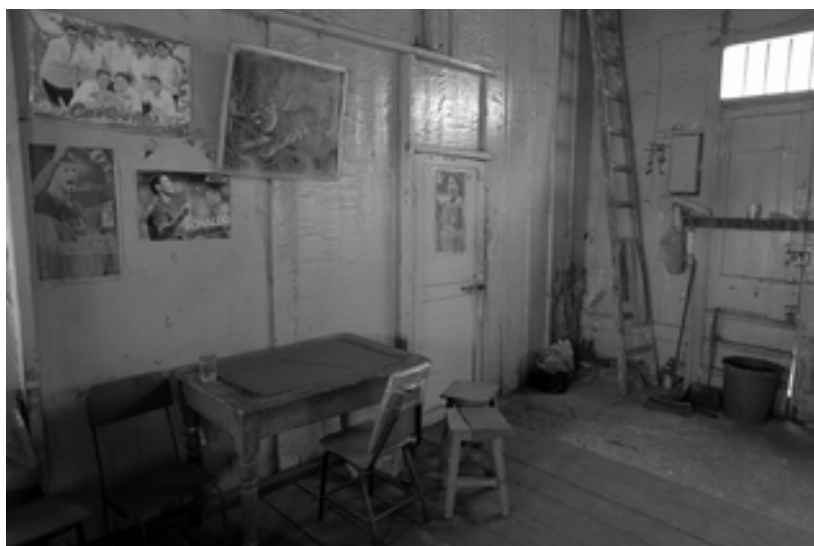
During the filming of *Untitled, 1925* Madi made a series of black and white photographs. The following portfolio was chosen and sequenced by the artist.













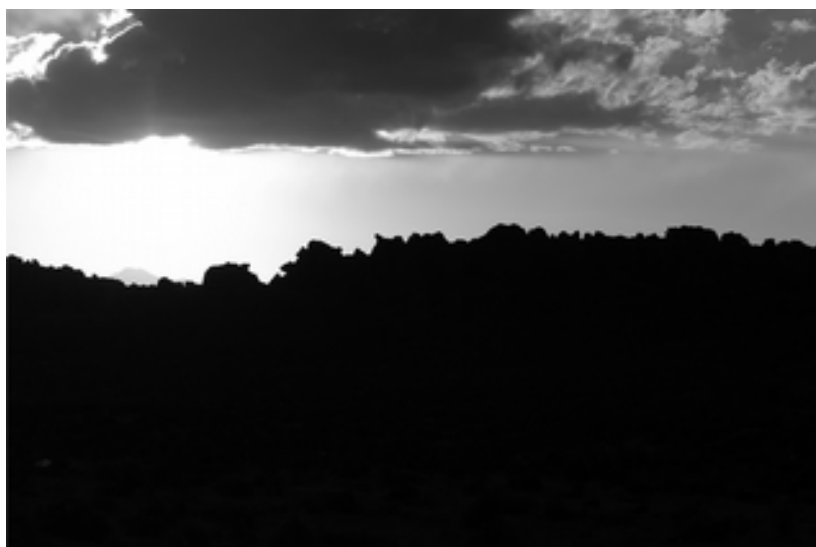










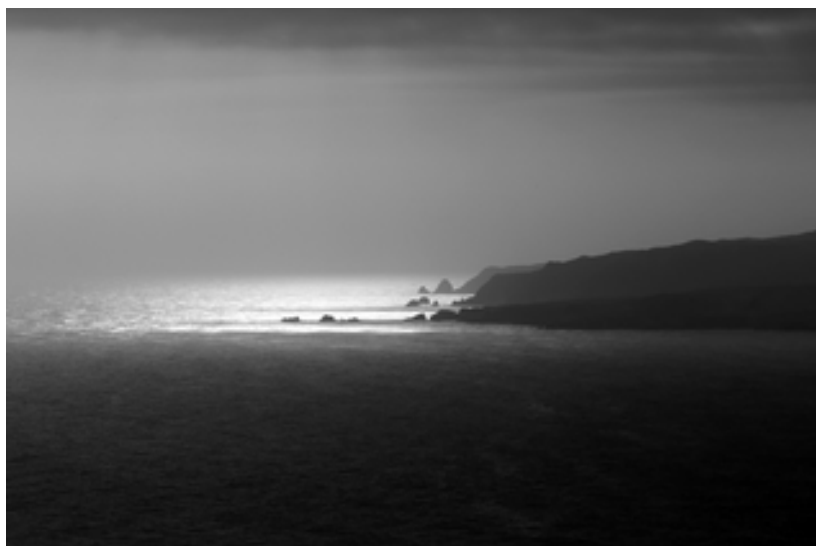










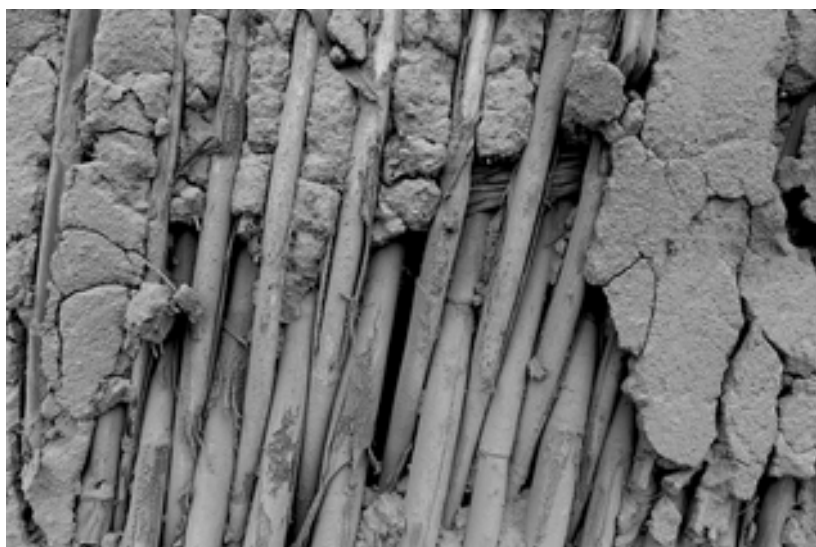


































Movies

Peace in Colombia (2:43 minutes, 1997, super 8 -> ¾" U-matic)

Shot in the countryside surrounding Bogota, Colombia. Madi works behind the scenes of a TV commercial (that she produced) for a campaign to vote for peace in the upcoming elections. The smiling actor boys grin through their prosthetic makeup, then lie down dead on the ground. Teen soldiers grimace as smoke bombs simulate fire fights. The director counsels his young charge – more intensity, more pain! Buildings blow up, a grenade rolls towards a sleeping comrade in slow motion, a family flees their house. Lighting and makeup enter to recreate the illusion, actors mug, and the director takes a final bite. Kinetic, compulsively watchable, driven by urgency.

Correspondence (4:19 minutes, 1999, super 8 -> DV)

"We all choose sides eventually," the film repeats, before its first movement, a blur of racing sailboats. The second brings us a pair of intercut dances, dark-suited Jews and beach revellers, all male. The third movement is also a dance, in the snow, pixellated. The fourth stays close to a brown cola child on the beach. The fifth follows an old cyclist across a dusty, rocky landscape. Finally, an old man walks with a cane, slower than slow. The day is almost over, life is coming to an end, and with it, the film. Found sound by Piller.

Traffidelic (1:12 minutes, 2000, silent, super 8 -> ¾" U-matic)

Shot from the CN Tower, the handheld camera looks south to the traffic clogs and flows on the Gardiner Expressway. This notebook of a film closes with a suite of ascents and descents from the country's tallest elevator before settling underneath a single downtown tower. Some of these images were recycled for use in *70 meters* (2012).

Process (1:53 minutes, 2001, 16mm)

The artist's first hand-processed footage arrived extremely overexposed. Made in a Toronto School of Art workshop with Simone Jones. With typical invention and ingenuity, Madi begins to write across the blank screen of her pictureless pictures: "Fuck. Process. Shock. Fear. And Belief."

Loops (installation, 2002, triple projection, 16mm loops)

Loop #1: Watery shadows offer a lattice of lines and wavy rectangles, coloured by hand.

Loop #2: A composition of colour using optical printing and coloured filters laid directly onto the surface of the film. Everywhere the evidence of the hand, the splicing tape, and the labour of bringing together materials.

Loop #3: A swirl of cascading textures, coloured paint on film, re-animated and

slowed via optical printing.

Legend (5 minutes, 2002, super 8 and DV -> 16mm)

This animated brief is driven by a native legend (and allegory) that recounts how wolves were turned into dogs. Music by Eduardo Gonzalez.

My Best Friend's Son (1:52 minutes, 2003, super 8 -> ¾" U-matic)

We open with a suite of intertitle transcripts from Alanis Morissette's monster 1995 hit "You Learn;" the song rolls over black and white pics of a young boy and his father palling around an amusement park. The adult world appears in miniature cars, boats, trains, or else in delighted distortions in a bevy of curved mirrors, the camera flowing with its subject, forever in motion. Filmed on super 8 in Columbia, then processed and transferred to ¾" U-matic at Toronto's Exclusive Film Lab, then edited in Bogota, this casual vignette won an honourable mention from the National Film Board on International Home Movie Day.

Graffiti (1:50 minutes, 2003, super 8 -> 16mm)

Building reflections in water. Originally shot on super 8, then optically printed onto 16mm stock, then hand-painted with red ink and reprinted. The architecture is flowing, breathing. It was hand-painted twice; the first version had too much colour for the artist, so she spent several more weeks repainting the works frame by frame.

Chambre de Torture, 1944 (2:29 minutes, 2003, super 8, mini DV, and 16mm -> mini DV)

Based on the filmmaker's father, this movie allegorically replays his experience in wartime France. We open with a playful animated abstraction, three dots conversing as if they were children playing in the yard. These dots dissolve into a nightmare forest, filled with animated gunshots and looming spectres. As a Jewish teenager, Madi's father went into hiding in Strasbourg. When the war ended, he entered the building that he had watched German soldiers entering and exiting from his hideaway. It was the local headquarters. He found a room there with hooks in the ceiling, and layers of blood covering the walls. Years later, in the 1980s, her father announced that he was going to start painting again, and he drew exactly this scene, a haunting memory that appears in the movie. Sound mixed by Eduardo Gonzalez.

Goodwill (1:10 minutes, 2004, 16mm -> mini DV)

First Nation drums and voices give a living beat to this animated short. Stones gather and circle, a stick bears the word "goodwill."

Anonymous, 1855 (1:28 minutes, 2005, mini DV)

Photographs of nineteenth-century couples involved in mutual masturbation and spanking are subject to minimal animated reveries. The whole frame quivers with old

pleasures while isolated body fragments are set into motion. Each vignette opens and closes with an iris, each inviting its viewers to engage in one of the oldest sexual pleasures: the act of looking.

Etudes #2 (1:40 minutes, 2006, silent, 35mm)

Shapes flutter and disappear, and then reappear in a dance of theme and variations. The scratched and hand-painted emulsion offer a horizon of expanding and contracting lines.

L'Étranger/The Stranger (2:50 minutes, 2006, super 8 -> 35mm)

Begun with super 8 shot by Madi for a peace campaign in Colombia. The footage shows actors portraying guerrillas blowing up police stations and killing their own people. Either I will shoot them or they will shoot me. The moment of panic between these two impossible choices is replayed by taking the image through different generations of media; each frame was laser-printed, hand-painted, and finally optically printed onto 35mm. Sound by Eduardo Gonzalez.

Vive Le Film (2:13 minutes, 2006, 35mm)

A joyous animated celebration of the machines of film-on-film, this large-gauge short was made as part of LIFT's twenty-fifth-anniversary program *Film is Dead! Long Live Film!* It turns around a photograph of the artist's Romanian grandparents, taken at a more secure moment, their 1927 engagement party. Two decades later, following the Second World War, her grandparents would be the only ones left alive. Sound by Madi Piller and Eduardo Gonzalez.

Toro Bravo (3:40 minutes, 2007, DV -> 35mm)

A circus of bloodshed. This movie was made on a digital still camera (Canon D20), and then blown up to 35mm, all edited in camera. Here the filmmaker replays bullfights she recalls as a child in Peru, some shot by her father in the 1970s and then rotoscoped. Dark mining sand was used to lend emotional heft, along with charcoal drawings, cut-outs, and photocopies. The red blood was made by using plasticine on paper.

The Old Debate of Don Quixote vs. Sancho Panza (2:20 minutes, 2007, DV and super 8 -> DV)

Mixing live-action hand-processed footage with animated interludes (drawings in charcoal, cut-outs, photocopies, and photographs). The voice-over is based on a poem by Priscila Uppal which offers the difference between men and women (women read and write books [too smart for their own good – unhappy], men fix cars). Made in collaboration with Priscila Uppal (voice and poetry). Sound by Eduardo Gonzalez. Produced for LIFT Poetry Projections 2007.

Sous L'œil du temps/Beneath the Eye of Time (3:16 minutes, 2010, DV)

Hand-drawn loops via paint-on-glass animation show a pair of dogs forever fighting, or else a mythical bull shimmering in its golden glory, attracting malevolent gazes, or being knocked over. At times the pictures veer into abstraction, dreams without an interpreter. The flames are also a flower. Each action begets the next, as the interdependent chain of living and dying continues. When humans appear the bloodletting begins; they bring a rain of skulls, a triumph of the skeleton. Based on the story "One Little Goat" from the Haggadah. Music by Bob Wiseman.

John Straiton (45 minutes, 2010, DigiBeta, super 8, and 16mm -> DV)

Madi's longest movie is a portrait of veteran Canadian animator John Straiton. Between 1964 and 1987 Straiton made ten 16mm movies using plasticine, rotoscoping, cut-outs and cel animation. A hyper-charged, collage-filled labour of love, this homage proceeds via episodes looking at Straiton's day job in advertising and his growing interest in cinematography ("I only learned by doing it"). Funny, irreverent, and filled with good-time, home-movie tech jokes, the movie works hard to catch the spirit of domestic adventure and self-made media. "I only made that film to show my friends ... What I called them at the time was animated poems." Sound by Eduardo Gonzalez.

My Buddha (installation, 2011, superimposed slide projection with 16mm loop with Richard Gorman painting)

Installation remembering Richard Gorman at the Christopher Cutts Gallery.

Left to Paradise (4:24 minutes, 2011, super 8 and DV -> DV)

The telephone wires tremble and the piano is drunk. We are on a trip it seems, arriving at a suite of photographs that return us to the artist's former home in Peru. A stand of broken stones, a brace of children, a solo boy looking back from a suitably faded wall. Each picture is punctuated by an animated version of itself, as if the pictures were a heady drop of wine swilled in the mouth, savoured in all its variations. "Come live your dreams," the soundtrack croons, though it often slows to a crawl, as if the effort of conjuring dreams was already too much. Finally this love story of past and present looks at a couple embracing with increasing desperation on the street.

7200 Frames Under The Sun (3:20 minutes, 2011, silent, dual projection, super 8 at 18 fps) // (3:20 minutes, 2011, super 8 -> DV with sound)

The film is comprised of two super 8 films, each fifty feet, created in camera. One film animates the landscape with methodical incremental movements that flash rapidly changing images, offering the flora of northern Ontario. The second film focuses a lingering lens on outcroppings of solid rock exposing fossil-like imagery and sensual shapes that visually insinuate their primal connection to the advance and

retreat of the glaciers that were central to their formation. An intriguing soundtrack of experimental music, composed by John Halfpenny, pulsates throughout with a reverberating fusion of dense electronic tones, including some that bring to mind the sound of whales, which might be interpreted as a reminder that the shield was once completely submerged under ancient waters.

Commissioned by LIFT for their thirtieth anniversary. The sound was added when transferred to video for their screening. The digital version has been adapted for installation and presented at WARC gallery as solo exhibition that included John Halfpenny's soundtrack.

70 meters (17 minutes, 2012, silent, super 8 at 18 fps)

Lonely cityscapes collide in a memory idyll shot in a scarred and silvery black and white. The country appears in a slow-moving colour, a restful idyll. There is at last time to look, and to feel the landscape looking back.

Animated Self-Portraits / Autoportraits Animés (8:49 minutes, 2012, 35mm)

Can a movie also be a community? This labour of love brings together no less than eighty-four Canadian animators of all stripes – from Michael Snow to the maestros at the National Film Board. Each was asked to provide twelve drawings of themselves which Madi animated on a special 35mm rig. A joyous compendium of outsiders, of barely contained rage and good humour. Music by John Halfpenny. Mix by Eric Culp and Alan deGraaf. Sound design by Joseph Doane.

My Elliot (3:18 minutes, 2013, super 8 with digital soundtrack)

Elliot canes his way slowly into the frame in his blue bathrobe, singing “Oh, what a beautiful morning” on the soundtrack’s voice-over. He sits on a bright blue chair, where his breakfast is waiting for him. Elliot Yarmon is ninety-four, still laughing, taking it one spoonful at a time. A sudden acceleration of camera time speeds his day along into darkness, and then he is back in the chair eating his breakfast again, while he sings “Happy Birthday” on his answering machine. Soundtrack by Elliot Yarmon.

Suddenly All Changed (5:49, 2013, silent, 16mm)

Each year more than a dozen artists make a pilgrimage to Phil Hoffman’s week-long Film Farm retreat, where community spirit and black and white high contrast film dance together. This movie bears the obvious marks of bucket processing, offering glimpses of film drying on a clothesline, as if film, and the inspirations that only film might inspire, were the real harvest here. A suite of microscopic views follow, the camera hovering nervously, before the filmmaker appears in the river, immersed, part of the landscape, the observed.

Film on Film (3:18 minutes, 2014, super 8 with digital sound)

Kaleidoscopic structures mirror and dissolve in a circular iris, shimmering with colour, perfectly abstract, shot on super 8 film. The pictures were prepared by painting 35mm film frame by frame. These frames were optically printed and the resulting footage was hand-processed and manipulated. These images were then transposed to acetate cels before being re-animated onto super 8 using reflections in glass. Original music by Rick Hyslop.

Bacchanal (15 minutes, 2014, silent, super 8 at 18 fps)

The filmmaker announces, "It's about music and asses." Madi turns her poetic lens towards Caribana, North America's largest street festival, an annual celebration of Caribbean culture held each August in Toronto since 1967. In this edition a light-kissed suite of glittering objects wink in the sun, before the first face appears, framed in a golden headdress. Dancers gather, the camera staying close in a dance all its own. As the day progresses and the bodies shine with the endless exertion of display, the dirty dancing begins, serial public frottage with audience members temporarily lifting the city's chronic restraint. Twerk rules.

Dimensions: The Fungi Affair (installation, 2015, Oculus Rift, sculpture and single channel video)

This made-for-a-gallery installation features Madi's first foray into the dizzying world of virtual reality. Begun with a series of mushroom photograms onto 35mm film, the VR converts these tactile impressions into an immersive walkabout environment, where movements are controlled by the viewer.

Passage (40 seconds, 2015, DV)

Made during a residency in Dawson City in the Yukon, this hand-drawn animated movie shows a landscape that is broken up into lines and human-made geometries that finally turn into homes. (The movie asks, What is the cost of home?) Horses (or are they dogs?) are tied to a sled so they can transport their human masters. What was once wild is now under control again, restrained and newly useful.

Loops (performance/installation, 2015, triple projection, 16mm loops)

A trio of loops cut for a show in the Setzkasten Gallery in Vienna. Painted found footage. Live sound by the Strangers, and Butoh dance by Adrien Gaumé.

Sunday Solitude (4 minutes, 2016, super 8 and 16mm -> DV)

Shots of an artist's studio moments in Vienna in grainy black and white give way to a rush of agitated trees, and then nightlights turning, amusement park incidentals, daytime park casuals, before a graveyard visit in negative turns the mood sober. All of this fleeting, vanishing, disappearing, hardly remembered. Electronic music courtesy of B. Fleischmann.

Into the Light: The Film Resistance (3:42 minutes, 2016, 35mm -> DV)

Mushroom spores contacted onto 35mm for a decade are collected, then printed onto high contrast black and white film, before hand colouring. A cosmological impression, a dazzle of specks and ribbed circles. Made during a residency at MQ21 in Vienna. Music by Stephen Voglsinger, recorded live at Sternstudio Gallery, Vienna during a film performance in April 2016.

Before and Beyond the Image (performance/installation, 2016, 16mm loop, slides, sculpture, and sound reader)

An animated self-portrait in black and white, the artist lifts her arms and as soon as she touches her head, the drawings dissolve into photographic representation. Live sound produced from a sound reader. All the elements are left as an installation once the performance is over.

Untitled, 1925 Part One (7 minutes, 2016, 16mm -> DV)

Each of the trilogy's three parts begins with a Spanish voice-over, translated into English in a series of short subtitles. They are ghost poetry, speaking for and about the artist's grandfather, who dared the crossing from his native Romania to Peru in 1923 at the age of twenty-two. Part one is a coastal idyll, the houses are deserted and emit an old light, the waves are rolling, the men, barely glimpsed in the glare, have let their lines out for fishing. Boats and birds turn into temporary shadows. The camera is often on a tripod, steadily looking with an exacting frame, part of the wind, the ruins, the pelicans gathering. Each part of the trilogy is scored with a spare and sober track by Rick Hyslop that provides a delicate counterpoint, here a solo percussion.

Untitled, 1925 Part Two (8:45 minutes, 2016, 16mm -> DV)

Part two in the trilogy continues the search for roots in the artist's homeland of Peru. A stunning and lyrical work imbued with a rare intensity. Beautifully photographed, a masterpiece of stone, steeples, coastline, houses on narrow streets. Footage of the Andes appears in solarized glimpses, the silver mining of this geography echoed in a formal treatment that brings the film's silver up to the surface. Here is a temporary summit and culmination, a summary work, dense with a lifetime of seeing and materialistic practice.

Untitled, 1925 Part Three (11 minutes, 2016, 16mm -> DV)

The titles present a subject haunted by her own whiteness, destined never to fit in. A stony path opens the way, and then a suite of mist-enshrouded shots cover the ruins of old empires and the Andes. The vegetation is wet and newly alive. After the descent, we enter the city of Cuzco, home of indigenous insurgencies for more than a century. The people fill the streets with marches, the markets open, children play football in a courtyard. Bricks are made by hand, potatoes are gathered one at a time,

the old ways are the new ways. In the closing sequence, the numbered seats of a coliseum evidence an old colonial order, where everyone knows their place.

Biography

Madi Piller is a filmmaker, animator, and independent curator currently living and working in Toronto, Canada. Born in Lima, Peru, she began shooting super 8 while working as the director of production at the J. Walter Thompson ad agency in Colombia. When she moved to Canada in 1999, she became involved in the grassroots, not for profit artist-run centre scene. She joined LIFT (Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto) and TAIS (Toronto Animated Image Society), where she worked as a volunteer for eleven years, tirelessly creating programming, promoting the production, distribution, and exhibition of animated movies. For that she received the Ontario Citizenship Volunteer award in 2015. Curatorial projects include: *Eleven in Motion: Abstract Expressions in Animation* (2009), *Hello Amiga* (2012), *OP ART Re-Imaged: Imaginable Spaces* (2014), and *The Frame is the Keyframe: Frame Anomalies* (2016). She is a community advocate, helping to organize and inspire others to share conversations old and new.

Her early work in super 8 and keen interest in frame-by-frame explorations have given rise to a meticulous, formally adept, and materially engaged practice. She has made many animated shorts, including *Animated Self-Portraits / Autoportraits Animés* (2012), a bravura compendium of eighty-four animation artists who were asked to provide a dozen hand-drawn pictures of themselves. These were animated in short loops on 35mm film by Madi, and there was also a handsome DVD produced.

A prolific and hardworking artist, many of Madi's projects often migrate from medium to medium, sometimes as laser-printed frame translations, hand-painted frames, rotoscope, video-to-film transfers, and as digital intermediate. She is deeply in touch with the materiality of her work, rooted in the experience of being a body, in the touch of a picture, and in the way cinema's contact point might transform bodies and territories.

Madi's films have been screened at film festivals, alternative spaces, and contemporary art venues nationally and internationally, including TIFF Wavelengths, the Festival du Cinema Jeune in Paris, Bienal de La Imagen Movimiento in Buenos Aires, and the Melbourne Animation Festival. International residencies include Museum Quartier 21 in Vienna (2015), the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture (2014), and the Independent Imaging Retreat (Film Farm) in Mount Pleasant, Ontario (2013).









