

## CINEMA ON PAPER EXHIBITION

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Have you ever wondered how experimental films are made? Cinema On Paper exhibition draws an insight into the creative process of several iconic experimental films by presenting to us the preparatory outlines, diagrams, annotations and graphic expressions displayed alongside the projections of the final films. Seeing how the films were originally planned and made allows the audience to recognize filmmaker's intentions, ambitions and methods, therefore understand their work in depth.

According to Elena Duque, one of the the curators of Cinema on Paper, the idea of the exhibition occurred in the process of programming this year's edition of (S8) Mostra de Cine Periferico. Kurt Kren was one of the filmmakers to be screened at the festival. After the discovery of his diagrams, the will to exhibit them lead the curators to look for similar examples of other filmmakers who had their films conceived on paper.

Kurt Kren is a filmmaker known for using mathematical systems in his work, starting from the numbering of the titles to determining shot lengths. Cinema on Paper reveals the strategy used by Kren in his key films by exposing his precise and extraordinary diagrams and shooting plans, usually hand-drawn on the kind of square-ruled or graph paper. He plans films like *2/60 48 Heads from the Szondi-Test* according to a pre-established arrangement in his diagram, with which he edits the film on camera. Both the film and the frame plan are displayed one next to another in the exhibition so that it allows the audience to follow the process of the creation of the film. Moreover, reproductions of five more diagrams of Kurt's films are exposed; the diagrams are related to: *3/60 Trees in Autumn*, *4/61 Walls pos. -neg. and Path*, *5/62 People Looking out of the Window*, *Trash etc.*, *31/75 Asylum* and *42/83 No Film*.

The work of another important structural filmmaker, Paul Sharits, is shown at Cinema on Paper. Trained as a painter and graphic designer, Sharits 'drew' his films first with colored ink on graph paper, as blueprints for the completed films, and then proceeded to meticulously compose them frame-by-frame. The filmmaker highlighted the materiality of film while focusing on a complete exploration of the film frame. One of his most famous films *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, is displayed on the TV in the hall of Cinema on Paper exhibition just next to his work diagram. In *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, positive and negative still images of poet David Franks posed against a variety of solid-color backdrops – sometimes cutting off his own tongue with glitter-covered scissors, sometimes suffering a series of glitter-stained fingernail scratches across the face – attain a state of rapid alternations while the soundtrack loops and stammers the word 'destroy' again and again, finally destroying the intelligibility of the word in the process. Sharits' goal was to obliterate the viewer's perceptions by using flickering light, stark imagery and repetitive sound too deeply penetrate the 'retinal screens' and psyches of the audience members, creating a powerful, profoundly visceral and participatory experience. It is striking to see how such an organized scheme transformed into a psychedelic and turbulent stream of images.

The exhibition displays another work of Paul Sharits, in this case a reproduction of the 'filmstrips paintings' called *Frozen Film Frame Study Declarative Mode II*. *Frozen Film Series* were colored film strips that were sandwiched between pixelglas and hung from the ceiling, allowing natural light to illuminate their multicolored frames. The series bring into sharp relief the physicality of film. Each frame invites the viewer to imagine how it could unfold as a part of a stream of images, but it can't, since it is encapsulated in pixelglas. In spite of being frozen, these film frames can still evoke a film that we play in our private cinema of the imagination, with infinite variations. There is no requirement for any device besides our senses to read them. As well as depicting plans for possible films, those detailed film scores have a manic beauty on their own. Viewed today, the images have endless, striking associations with pixels and glitches. Sharit's emphasis on the object of film presages the materiality of blocky low-res aesthetic visible in much contemporary electronic art.

Peter Kubelka, as well as Sharits, planned his films starting from the minimum unit of the frame but in a different way. One of his metric films presented at the exhibition, *Arnulf Rainer*,

combines an image track consisting of black and white frames with a soundtrack alternating white noise and silence. The effect is a flickering screen image and a pulsating sound that is not directly synchronised to the visual pattern, but connects to the visual rhythm by anticipating or referring back to patterns on the screen. *Arnulf Rainer* essentially constitutes a rhythmical modulation of the four basic elements of cinema – light and darkness, sound and silence. The film was shot without the use of camera or editing table and no figures are featured in the images. It is composed solely from transparent and black 35 mm frames and two soundtracks, one saturated with noise, the other untouched. Kubelka likes to compare film frames with musical notes: by composing images in series of 16, eight, six, and four he achieves regular harmonic rhythms that the spectators can feel in their bones. The film was also presented as a wall installation, with film frames arranged in a sequential order, and its reproduction is presented to the viewers of the exhibition.

Sharits was a mentor of filmmaker Bill Brand, whose works are also shown at the exhibition. Brand has created the diagrams for specific works, two of which are displayed at Cinema on Paper. One of them, *Zip Tone Cat Tune*, is a simple home movie of a cat that is reprocessed through a 'Zip-a-tone' dot pattern making a complex of layers. In combination with freeze frames, positive and negative, and color motion, this work attempts to visually construct a system of overlays like those in Baroque musical composition. The second film exhibited alongside its diagram is *Monument*. It dynamically reveals film's basic unit, the frame. The film features simple series of ordinary gas station events that are seen intermittently through the opening display. The sequence is then divided and rearranged 7 times in reverse order. Each time the divisions are greater in number (smaller in size) until finally the film appears to move smoothly backwards, divided by a single frame. Brand creates an editing score and temporary reordering for this film.

Lis Rhodes scores for Light Music are also exposed at the Cinema on Paper. Part of the original footage was generated from the filming of a series of line drawings. Later on, the soundtrack as series of horizontal and vertical lines were drawn with pen and ink on the optical edge of the filmstrip itself. When those are projected onto two opposite facing screens, they appear as an 'optical soundtrack'. What the viewer hears, on the other hand, is the audible equivalent of the alternating images on the screens. The space between the two screens turns the beams into airy sculptural forms consisting of light, shadow and smoke, which encourages the viewer to move around the room: the audience becomes part of the projection. This work was the artist's reaction to what she perceives as a lack of interest and appreciation of European women composers.

Thanks to the exhibition we can see materially how Kubelka's ideas were taken further in the works of R. Bruce Elder, who creates his own editing system for *1857 (Fool's Gold)*. The film combines four types of visual forms: photographed scenes, written texts, mathematical symbols and numerals. The texts included in the film are drawn from Ezra Pound's "Cantos." Elder creates a conflict for the viewer between wanting to read the text that we see and wanting to listen to the text on the soundtrack. He places the image and the text in conflicting positions in order to illustrate the relationship between the coherence of vision and the image as a means towards insight. The soundtrack of the film is constituted by both musical and non-musical sounds. The non-musical sounds that occur in the early portion of the film are "natural sounds" that might occur in nature along with the depicted events. Elder bases the film on the musical composition system created by Joseph Schillinger, which starts from the mathematical formulations and uses compositional techniques based on permutation.

Though she often works frame by frame, as the structuralist filmmakers mentioned above, Rose Lowder's films are not structured before they are shot, but are composed in original sequences that respond to opportunities provided in the moment. Diagrams and schemes in her case derive from annotations made during the filming. Lowder is precise in her technique while allowing for the circumstances of the moment to influence the content of each frame. During each shooting session, Lowder uses custom-designed field notes to identify sequences in twentyfour- frame intervals, and meticulously records the process of the shoot: number of passes through the camera, frame intervals, frame count, content, etc. Once the film is shot, it

is neither altered in the lab, nor edited in the studio, but observed by the filmmaker to determine the effectiveness of the composition. Her creative process is carefully recorded with graphically stunning detail in her notebooks. Consisting of both notes and images, this record is then transcribed—by hand—into her notebooks, creating a visual score that can be used to analyze and communicate the results of each film's structure and the process used to arrive at those results. Cinema on Paper presents her film *Voiliers et Coquelicots* alongside the diagram that was made using this technique. The film features sailboats slowly travelling towards the scarlet fields on poppies.

The last artist featured at the exhibition is Dora Maurer, whose diagram serves as an analytical tool. Combining photographic and graphic components, the four tableaux represent the structure of *Timing* (1973-1980), a 16-mm experimental film, which is based on the concept that Dóra Maurer was folding a canvas, the proportions of which are the same as that of the film. On the tableaux, she illustrated each main sequence of the film, on the one hand with film stills and on the other with drawings depicting the pictures of the film, which in itself is a description of an experiment with the medium of film. So every single tableau is a graphic depiction of an abstract film, while the tableaux in themselves are geometrical abstract works combining the graphic and photographic technologies of reproduction. As an act of analysis, the work precisely reveals the subject of the film *Timing*, that is, the difference between subjective and objective timing. Besides, it also analyzes and demonstrates the aesthetic "surplus" (the beauty of inaccurate, unusual, and non-standard structures) of this difference.

The exhibition showcased the works of 8 filmmakers and their different approach to the creative process, work planning and self reflection. The exhibition opened a window onto some experimental filmmaking practices, providing viewers with tools for a better understanding of the works and methods of analog filmmaking both for experts and neophytes. It's worth to mention that besides the artists exhibited, curators wanted to show also the works and diagrams of the Croatian filmmaker Ivan Ladislav Galeta and Heinz Emigholz, unfortunately was not possible due to various reasons.