

ARTIST BIO

Barbara Sternberg has screened widely across North America and Europe, and her work is in the collections of the *Art Gallery of Ontario* and the *National Gallery of Canada*. Sternberg has been teaching at *York University*, working for *Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre*, serving on Arts Councils' juries and committees, helping to organize the *International Experimental Film Congress* (May 1989) and to found *Pleasure Dome Artists' Film Exhibition Group*.

PROGRAMME

1/ *Opus 40* 14:30 min 1979 colour sound

Repetition: repetition in working and living, repetition through multiplicity and series, repetition to form pattern and rhythm, repetition in order and in revealing.

2/ *Transitions* 11:30 min 1982 colour sound

A film of inner life and speaks of time, reality, power. It depicts the disquieting sensations of being between - between falling asleep and being awake, between here and there, between being and non-being.

3/ *Like a Dream That Vanishes* 40 min 2000 colour sound

"A dynamic relationship - a dialectic if you will - between the dark, dense, inert matter of unexposed emulsion and the animating energy of light" ... repetition and variation reminding us that living is, by and large, a matter of repeating things that we have done many times before.

- *Everyday Wonders* in Barbara Sternberg's *Like a Dream That Vanishes* By *William C. Wess*

4/ *Burning* 7 min 2002 colour silent

In *Burning* there's ... "a question of resettling, of continually re - looking, of jogging yourself out of a comfortable view" ... and this continual glancing and re- glancing seems at the very heart of Sternberg's seeing camera practice."

- *Mike Hoolboom*, email to *Barbara Sternberg*

5/ *Once* 3 min 2007 black and white silent w CD sound preface

Poetry, film, light, life. An excerpt from Rilke's *Ninth Elegy* introduces this silent film that evokes the beauty and brevity of life. Images shimmer in an uncanny light. We catch glimpses only.

CURATOR BIO

Nora Hutchinson received her MFA from the *University of Guelph* in 1988. She has a substantial career in teaching and in producing works in video, performance art, music composition and installation. Hutchinson has taught at *The Ontario College of Art* [1982-1996], the *University of Guelph* and *York University*. She has shown her work both locally and internationally. Her awards include *The Lesley Neilson Award*, *The Portland Oregon Award* and *The Video Roma Award*.

TECHNICAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY *Jason Vieira & Khamphiene Phommisai*

GRAPHIC DESIGN BY *Fiona O'Reilly*

INNOVATIVE MEDIA MASTERS GROUP OF NINE – PART 3

Barbara Sternberg Experimental Explorer



Friday March 12, 2010 7 – 11 PM

ARTIST IN ATTENDANCE

Interactive Question & Answer Session

The Factory: Hamilton Media Arts Centre

126 James Street North, Hamilton, ON

905-577-9191 / info@hamiltonmediaarts.org

<http://www.hamiltonmediaarts.org>



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"A path went walking.
The sun glittered on a small rapids
Some morning thing came, beating its wings.
The great elm filled with birds.

I could watch... I could watch." 1

One of Barbara Sternberg's main signature features in her experimental film repertoire is to observe the world in glimpses and glances, not a studied gaze. She says ... "The world is not ours to hold onto." By presenting the viewer with a rush of images, and of slivers and flashes of light and dark, Barbara Sternberg offers fragments of repeated forms, shapes, symbols and patterns in nature.

In Sternberg's film *Once*, "glimpses of shimmering light evoke the beauty and brevity of life. It is about, poetry, film, and light."2 Although this is a silent film there is a spoken prologue from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Ninth Elegy* that speaks of the "transient here" and the "fleeting world."

"This fleeting world, which in some strange way keeps calling to us. Us, the most fleeting of all. Once for each thing ... And we too, just once ... But to have been at one with the earth, seems beyond undoing."4

"In Plato's *Timaeus*, the function of the eyes is described as a two-way process; the eye mediates between the inner realm and the external world of objects."5 Barbara Sternberg's work subscribes to this theory. Imagination, memory, sight and time coincide; inner and outer aspects of sight are linked to the mind and emotions. "Like falls upon like, coalesces and forms the perception of sight. In this philosophical view, the eye acts as a portal, the window of the soul."6

Eyesight consists of continuous oscillating rhythms and micro-movements. By refusing concentric focus Sternberg's camera work resonates with the fleeting essences of seeing and being. Through the gathering of a myriad of visual stimuli, subtle insights can be revealed. Deposits of memories unfold, and scenes transport us to different landscapes and locales ... reminding us of all the *deja vus* carried within us.

"The fly that flies about me now in the dark is every fly that ever flew around me."7

"I film the everyday - the mystery of every day"
- Barbara Sternberg

Sternberg's rhetoric of repetition in her work expresses the sameness that we experience in the everyday. This dayliness is enhanced to include a musical sensibility in her use of rhythm and recurring images. Each movement emerges and re-emerges slightly to become variations on a theme, ... signifying the extraordinary in the ordinary. Her leitmotifs are reminiscent of minimalist composers such as *Steve Reich (It's Gonna Rain)*, *Phillip Glass*, (the *Knee Plays in Einstein on the Beach*) and John Cage's aleatoric / chance music.

Opus 40, for example, is a musical score. *Opus 40* begins as a documentary of factory workers in Sackville, New Brunswick. A full screen shot of these workers moves swiftly to a split screen so that their recurring tasks become doubled ... and doubled again. The soundtrack shifts in and out of phase and is accompanied by the sound of the film projector and the voice - over of Gertrude Stein's word portraits from *The Making of Americans*. The above aural imaging and visual elements are equal and imperative to Sternberg's work.

"Subjects are not there for me to have under control."
- Barbara Sternberg

Notions of temporality are evident for example, in *Transitions*. Past and present/ inner and outer worlds conjoin. Sternberg investigates the elastic quality of time through fragmented imagery and sound. Imagined stories that are present in the visual information are sculpted through audience perceptions and readings.

"Time is the most natural of artificialities. One does not live within its mechanistic specifics."8 The fluidity of the temporal can be like quicksilver or extended as when " an event of a few moments dominates years."9 Sternberg says, " When agitated, past, present and future jumble together." 10

In *Transitions*, a woman alternately lies in a bed and then sits up, lies down, gets up. The soundtrack consists of a voice over whispering " It's windy...I think I'll go to bed. (to) ... I must get up ... feel the wind"11 From this genesis, a cacophony of voice-overs are added and the imagery is looped to include layered visuals. Other soundtracks consist of a journal describing the subject's mother's face and quotes from a text of physics on time and motion.

This study of paralyzed anxiety indicates the inescapable abyss of humanity and our passion and struggle to avoid that darkness. Disturbances of the psyche bring inner and outer worlds together.

"I tend to work against the glossy surface, to mess it up. I see perfection as a barrier."
- Barbara Sternberg

In *Like a Dream that Vanishes*, professor *John Davis* states: "The world is not a very tidy place, we think it is but it is not, in fact it's pretty messy."12

Barbara Sternberg underscores this statement as an aesthetic by employing scratched and blurry surfaces, and high contrast black and white footage in *Like a Dream That Vanishes*. Here, she allows for the dark unexposed emulsion of the materiality of film to coincide with the animating energy of light. This "messiness" and the disavowing of perfection is apt. Perfectionism implies closure, resolution ... a fait accompli. Sternberg's work is elliptical. Her narratives are open, nonlinear and inconclusive. In this way her work is about the constant process of becoming.

In *Opus 40*, "The camera doubles back on its self filming over the shots emphasizing the loss of one generation from one print to another."13 The deterioration from one print to another is like a dissolving and re - emerging of themes that thread in and out of musical compositions.

In Sternberg's film *Burning*, "the film reflexively reveals its own emulsion and the images that emerge from and disappear into its two extremes of daylight's blue hues and indoor light's tungstenn orange tones." Sternberg's disregard of proper lighting techniques gives new credence for colour.

Life slides by us, within us, and through us. The processes of immediacy, the 'now,' are stressed through the dialectics of colour without the interference of 'colour balancing.' Barbara Sternberg's work is about essences ... about the sweep of life and about how we really see. This "truer" eye gathers the multitude of impressions and resulting perceptions. She is a "distant observer," engaged in wondering. She demonstrates the " truer eye" by accepting and presenting all stimuli. She investigates mind, body and spirit continuously. Her work is a journey to the 'window of the soul.'

"Came to lakes: came to dead water,
Ponds with moss and leaves floating,
Planks in the sand.

A log turned at the touch of a foot;
A long weed floated upward;
An eye tilted." 14

References

- 1 *Rilke, Theodore. A Field of Light* (Oxford University Press, 1964. p.16)
- 2 www.barbarasternberg.com/presskit.htm (p.3)
- 3 *Rainer, Maria Rilke. The Ninth Elegy* (www.panhala.net/archive/Ninth Duino Elegy.tml p.1)
- 4 *Harrison, Jim. Dalva* (Washington Square Press, 1988. p.3)
- 5 *Marsh, Douglas. New Dawn No. 111* (Nov - Dec 2008. p.4) 6 *Ibid.* (p.4)
- 7 *Harrison, Jim. Dalva* (Washington Square Press, 1988. p. 64.) 8 *Ibid.* (p. 64.) 9 *Ibid.* (p. 64.) 10 *Ibid.* (p. 64)
- 11 *Sternberg, Barbara. Spotlight Series* (www.cfmdc.org/home.php p.4) 12 *Ibid.* (p.5)
- 13 *Ibid.* (p.1) 14 *Rilke, Theodore. A Field of Light* (Oxford University Press, 1964. p.16)