

Indra Devriendt, 'Owen Land, Dialogues', Hart, May 2009

Hart

OWEN LAND 'DIALOGUES'

04.04.2009 - 17.05.2009



Owen Land 'Dialogues' 2007-2009, HD - video, 120', courtesy of the artist, Kunsthalle Bern and Office Baroque Gallery, Antwerp.

In recent years, Kunsthalle Bern has often focused on the legacy of conceptual art and the spatial displacement of film in the 'white cube', as was manifest in exhibition-projects with Knut Åsdam (2005), Pavel Büchler (2006), Marine Hugonnier (2007), and later this year with Deimantas Narkevičius. This spring Kunsthalle Bern is proud to present the first institutional solo-exhibition of seminal American artist and filmmaker Owen Land (formerly known as George Landow). Once an assistant to Gregory Markopoulos and mentored by Stan Brakhage, Land has gained a solid reputation among cinema enthusiasts for his films made during the 1960s and 1970s. His work was associated with the earliest examples of the so-called 'structural' film movement, when Land worked alongside filmmakers like Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton and Paul Sharits, though he distanced himself from this context very early on. According to film historian P. Adams Sitney, Owen Land created "some of the most radical, super-real and haunting images the cinema has ever given to us." Land himself stresses his education as a painter and his early efforts, like the aptly titled 'Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc., 1965-1966', wherein the chemical and physical properties of celluloid are exposed, recall painterly strategies. His visual genius was paired with sophisticated wordplay in his subsequent output. Inspired by educational film ('Remedial Reading Comprehension', 1970), advertisement and television, Land parodies the experimental and structural film-movement itself, as is manifest in his 1975 'Wide Angle Saxon'. Virtuosity in the use of Duchampian double entendres, puns and wit, make these films hilarious at times, and gave Land a special status in the then burgeoning American avant-garde cinema. 'No Sir, Orison!' (1975), a film with an enigmatic palindrome title, features a customer singing a hymn in praise of the supermarket, before kneeling in prayer amidst canned-goods. The 1979 film 'On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?', wherein two actors in a panda suit create a 'structural' film about the marketing strategies for a Japanese brand of salted plums in a checkerboard and polka-dot room, is generally considered to be Land's masterpiece. Thirty years after 'On the Marriage Broker Joke' - his last completed film (with the exception of two rarely screened video-shot projects made in the mid-1980s, 'Noli Me Tangere' and 'The Box Theory', and the unfinished 'Undesirables', 1999) - a new film, 'Dialogues' (2007-2009), will be shown at the Kunsthalle Bern. 'Dialogues', produced by Kunsthalle Bern, will be shown amongst a loose survey of Land's earlier filmmaking.

Owen Land is represented by [Office Baroque Gallery](#) in Antwerp, Belgium. The book 'Two Films By Owen Land' features the complete scripts of Landow/Land's films 'Wide Angle Saxon' and 'On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?', as well as footnotes written by Land interpreting the many references and elements of these two films and a filmography by Mark Webber.