

OFFICE BAROQUE

Philippe Pirotte, 'Dialogues, Owen Land', e-flux, April 2009

e-flux

41 Essex street
New York, NY 10002, USA



Owen Land
Dialogues, or A Waist Is A Terrible Thing To Mind, 2007-2009
DVD, colour, sound, 120 minutes
© Owen Land
Courtesy Office Baroque Gallery, Antwerp

April 2, 2009

Kunsthalle Bern

Owen Land *Dialogues*

April 4th - May 17th, 2009

Curated by Philippe Pirotte

Helvetiaplatz 1
CH-3005 Bern

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). A former 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. Land himself stresses his education as a painter and his early efforts recalling Abstract Expressionist painting through exposing the physical properties of celluloid (*Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering*,

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Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc., 1965-1966). 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. 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, as well as a loose survey of Land's earlier filmmaking. *Dialogues* is an episodic series of short films informed by the artist's study of folklore, myth, history and the theology of all major religions, including Gnosticism and cabala. With a healthy dose of irony and a proudly irreverent attitude toward all kind of orthodoxies Land readily applies the structure of the Platonic dialogue to explore themes of reincarnation, art criticism, and Tantra. In the filmmaker's own words *Dialogues* "concentrates on the events of Owen Land's life in 1985, when he returned to Los Angeles after spending a year in Tokyo, Fukuoka, and Okinawa, Japan. [...] It was a time for much soul-searching about his relationships with women (and with strippers). There are flashbacks to that very formative period, the 1960s when 'we won the sexual revolution' as one character says. Some of the episodes contain events which are more speculative, or imaginative, than literally real." The film also includes musings about Land's artistic forebears and pastiches of other films, including *The Graduate*, *Red Eye* (called *Craven Death Maven*), most of Kenneth Anger's films, and complex allusions to the films of Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage. The exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern will show certain films chronologically, but at the same time search for different types of juxtapositions that function in a more affective way. Much attention will be paid to the installation of the films, exploring the possibilities of occupying the art space and redistributing the relationships between body and image, space and time outside the movie-theatre.

George Landow, who changed his name to Owen Land sometime in the late 1970s, was born and raised in Connecticut, USA, and received formal studies in drawing, painting, sculpture, and industrial design at Pratt Institute, Art Student's League of New York, and New York Academy of Art. He graduated with an MFA in painting from New York Academy of Art. He later studied acting and acting improvisation at Goodman Drama School and Second City, Chicago. His music studies include classical and Flamenco guitar; classical piano and composition; Indian vocal and instrumental music at the Ali Akbar Kahn College of Music in San Rafael, California. He taught at School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Northwestern University, San Francisco Art Institute, and Art Center College of Design, Pasadena California. He founded the Experimental Theatre Workshop at The Art Institute of Chicago, and wrote and directed several musical theatre pieces, with original songs and music, including *Mechanical Sensuality* and *Schwimmen mit Wimmen*. Retrospectives of Owen Land's films have been held at the Edinburgh Film Festival in Scotland, The American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria New York, The Rotterdam International Film Festival in the Netherlands, The Tate Gallery in London, and The Whitney Museum of American Art. In 2004 he featured in the retrospective exhibition *Behind the facts. Interfunktionen 1968-1975*, in the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, Spain, travelling to the Fundação Serralves, Porto, Portugal and the Fridericianum Kassel, Germany. Owen Land is represented by Office Baroque Gallery in Antwerp.

Vernissage: April 3rd, 2009, 6 pm

Opening hours

Tuesday - Friday 11am - 6pm

Saturday/Sunday 10am - 6pm

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