

## *SCREEN* SLATE

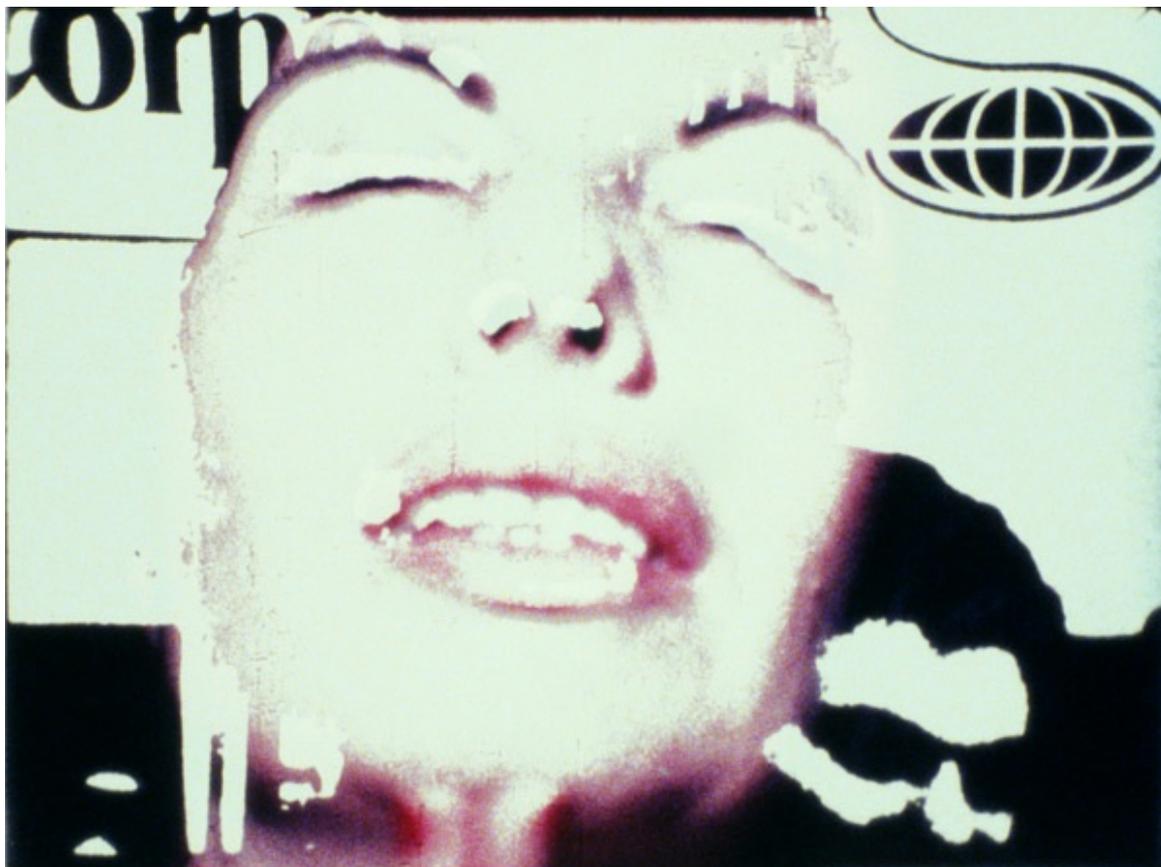


Image from *Thank You Jesus for the Eternal Present* (1973) courtesy of Anthology Film Archives

Featured screenings: **Owen Land** at [Anthology Film Archives](#)

Beginning today [Anthology Film Archives](#) pays tribute to two late greats of experimental film: **Owen Land** and **Robert Breer**. On the occasion of today's Owen Land programs, **Filmmaker Heidi Phillips** guest posts:

The late **George Landow**, who from the late 1970s onward went by the name **Owen Land**, had a long history as a fascinating and elusive figure in the American avant-garde film world since the 1960s. He distanced himself from this scene in the 1970s, though Land and his work have been rediscovered and distributed around the world by **LUX** along with a book *Two Films by Owen Land*, which is assembled and edited by Mark Webber.

Owen Land's work stands apart from other American avant-garde films because of its religious themes. He gives this reason for exploring religious themes in his work, "I've had conversion experiences myself, and I'm interested in observing them in other people; especially radical personality changes." Gregory Springer points out that Land may be the only experimental filmmaker addressing

Christianity with his work. It is necessary to explore this theme in Land's work.

**P. Adams Sitney** refers to George Landow as one of the most devout of the structural filmmakers and perhaps the most sublime. In *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?* (1977-79) the question is asked by the First Panda, "What's a structural film?" The Second Panda answers, "That's easy, everybody knows what a structural film is. It's when engineers' design an airplane, or a bridge, and they build a model to find out if it will fall apart too soon. The film shows where all the stresses are."

Among Land's earlier films, *Bardo Follies* (1967) is the most impressive. This film's main focus is the melting of the celluloid on the frame of the projector. It seems more like a science project than an avant-garde art film; as if the filmmaker is discovering the properties of film itself. The visuals are stunning and the audience is captivated by the anticipation of the film melting. Still, beyond pushing the boundaries of medium this film has little content.

Land's conversion to Christianity in the early 1970s led to a change in his work. He begins to use his personal faith as a theme in his films. The first of these new films, *Thank You Jesus for the Eternal Present* (1973), has a preacher giving a sermon as the audio track. An image of a woman's face appears superimposed throughout the piece. It starts off as black and white high contrast image, then is inverted, layered with itself, and goes to colour near the end of the film. The change from black and white to colour is like going from death to life and references a born again experience.

Land states, "Dealing with anything spiritual is like the tip of the iceberg. Most of it is below the surface and can't be recorded by a camera. In a sense it's an impossible thing to deal with in films." Regardless, he attempts this impossible task in his films. —*Heidi Phillips*