

POSTCARD FROM THE AVANT-GARDE

Highlights from the 49th NYFF's Views

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(...)

Jerome Hiler's *Words of Mercury*, paired with Nathaniel Dorsky's pensive, meditative *The Return*, was shot on reversal film and screened on the original print. Both projected at silent speed, these films are clearly born from the same universe, sharing an attraction to similar subject matter—the movement and play of light, brambles and branches foregrounding the sky—yet their formal approaches are distinctly their own. Hiler's film elegantly layers images through multiple exposures, sometimes getting as many as four exposures onto a single roll. Also a stained glass artist, Hiler demonstrates his craft and love of colors. His emotive use of gels impart expressionistic voice to his silent images. Hiler uses a coloring technique that involves a treasured, decades-old bottle of “liquid fade” into which he dips 14 frames of film at a time to create his distinctive fades to black. There are many unique pleasures in Hiler's rarely seen work, which we hope he will share more of in the future.

In tune with Dorsky's and Hiler's reverence for the image, Ute Aurand activates resonance between shots in her meditation on Japan, *Young Pine*. Aurand cuts from the vertical lines of a shoji door, to the torsos of a couple adorned in black-and-white striped shirts, to stripes on the socks of a toddler, whom we follow until a striped umbrella carries us down the street. While the subjects in *Young Pine* are undoubtedly iconic, it isn't so much the content that captivates as the way in which the kinetic energy is carried from one shot to another, crafting a precise and purposefully rendered experience. The crux of the film lies in accentuating rare symmetries—we hear the voiceover of a few women talking while we look onto groups of umbrellas from above, the correlation playfully insinuating a dialogue between umbrellas. Aurand deliberately transitions between sound and silence to command attention. She cuts to silence, and simultaneously to a shot of gardeners as they sweep water and rubble in a shallow pond, the sound of the sensorially rich swooshes is left to our imagination. Aurand reminds us to look rather than be swept away by sonic seduction.

The power of sound becomes visually transmitted in Sylvia Schedelbauer's imposing *Sounding Glass*. The film meditates on the lasting resonances of violence imparted first through a strobe effect, flashing between a shot of trees and blackness. This device has the power to imbue a still image with immense movement, impart an ominous threat onto neutral foliage, and create a mounting sense of tension. We flicker through a series of images depicting forms of destruction, such as burning buildings, storms, explosions, shootouts, as well as other more innocuous images of the forest, birds in flight, mountain ranges, and a rural Japanese town. The effect of these lightning-fast juxtapositions is the bleeding over of content from image to image. Witnesses are interspersed throughout—an eye in close up, and a man in the woods staring from behind a tree. At times these eyes close tightly, as if trying to shut out what's before them. But even in the moments of darkness, as the viewers perceive through the split seconds of black peppering the screen, the previous images stay embedded on the retina. The violence in some of the imagery inescapably taints the rest, casting a shadow over the piece as a whole. Brutality once witnessed, the film suggests, infiltrates all facets of life, persistent and unavoidable. (...)

The whole article:

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