



FILM RETREAT

At its core, the retreat offers individuals a space to create art. It takes you away from your daily routine and invites you on an a self-driven creative expedition, providing tools, time and freedom to explore your own practice in a variety of natural settings. The Film Retreat offers the right blend of personal time, creative feedback from other artists, and meal-time camaraderie, all revolving around experimentation and art-making with 16mm film.

Waking early in a private log cabin room at the Spring Valley Guest Ranch, one can catch the sunrise over the surrounding rolling hills as it illuminates the woodland valley. The outlining landscape of southwestern Saskatchewan includes the Cypress Hills area, extending the definition of 'prairie' in its varied encapsulation of forests, badlands and outstanding striated eroded hills, reminiscent of classic Spaghetti Western backdrops. In the main building, an Eaton's catalogue home, breakfast provided consists of fresh fruit, granola, eggs from the chickens on site, and hearty Turkish coffee.

The participants of this long weekend retreat shoot and hand process 16mm film. All filmmaking gear has been generously provided by the Filmpool and consists of many traditional 16mm filmmaking tools, including multiple cameras with a plethora of different mechanical functions, as well as a variety of lenses, tripods, light meters, filters, matte boxes, and other small pieces. From the Bolex line of cameras spring-wound and electric are available. In the Arri line the BL, S and SR ii cameras are available. Kodak Canada provides many different stocks for participants to choose from and in the Spring 2011 retreat, entitled *Rapture*, Kodak donated 1000' of film, or approximately half an hour, to each artist.

Artists are free to develop their own storyboard, types of shots, or experimentation with the medium. Some artists go for day trips to the surrounding beautiful area, while others hang out at the ranch to film the interiors or available subjects such as fellow filmmakers or the residents: horses, cats, or even Bruce the goose. The primary objective is that participants are focused creatively and engaged consistently with their craft.

Hand processing is a key ingredient to achieving a closer connection with one's film. In the darkroom lab it is just your hands and your film.

Agitating one hundred feet of scratchable film as it twists and tangles in a bucket of liquid is invigorating and the process of producing a properly developed result is actually quite forgiving. One way of processing reversal film involves the shamanistic Film Dance [a term coined by mentor Gerald Saul] and the use of the light from our sun to help invert the image to a positive print. Through experimentation at *Rapture* it was found that weaker sources of light, such as a few tubes of fluorescent bulbs, could also be used without too much degradation to the image and at the latest retreat, *Neg*, all film was processed so as to end up with a negative print, saving time spent in the darkroom and eliminating the need to use exceptionally strong bleach. Always striving for ecologically friendly and environmentally conscious ways and processes, in 2012 the retreat will focus on even greener ways of 16mm filmmaking, such as the use of naturally occurring substances in place of chemistry.

In 2010, at *Cricket*, much of the darkroom experimenting consisted of a technique known as solarization, where the film is exposed to light halfway through the time in the darkroom, but only for a brief moment. Too much of a flash of light and the emulsion will be unanimously activated, causing the image to be altogether stripped, while too little yields only a slight fogging or out-of-focus effect. Get the timing just right and the film can possess an other-worldly quality of pulsing between positive and negative while the image duplicates and casts shadows on the film itself in a non-linear overlap. Such experiments bring a deeper understanding of the celluloid medium and create an opportunity for artists to impact their project on a new, more visceral, level. Participants also bring their own ideas and techniques to try. This is part of what makes the Film Retreat so exciting.

Just upstairs from the basement darkroom laboratory is the screening venue, the Saville Theatre. The theatre is a unique piece of Saskatchewan

history. It is a classic prairie church salvaged and relocated to Spring Valley Guest Ranch by the remarkable prairie visionary Jim Saville, curator of the theatre, owner of the ranch, artisan of Chapel Cheeses, operator of the bed-and-breakfast, and lover of the arts.

It is an amazing sight, watching the raw, hand processed works flicker on a wooden wall in a secluded prairie valley, and a palpable creative excitement is generated by the personal immersion of such a hands-on and immediate approach to experimental filmmaking. From pre-production to screening, the artists have complete creative freedom to explore different styles, different practices, and to play with and better understand 16mm film as a tool of creative expression. In the Autumn of 2011, the technique of long exposure for nighttime time-lapse finally worked and it was found that an exposure time of 8 seconds worked very well to capture the setting moon and moving night clouds. Even the experience of running the sometimes-crumpled celluloid through the projector can lead to an expanded knowledge and appreciation for the medium. On that note, there is even the possibility of experimenting with different ways of projecting the work, perhaps through various lenses or prisms. You never know what the artists will bring to the table.

The Film Retreat bolsters confidence and fosters friendships and insights of the developing artist. One such artist, Sarah Huber, an upcoming graduate of the Film program at the University, describes it as being "a low-stress opportunity to engage with my medium. To a filmmaker I don't know what could be better."

§ Berny Hi

film screenings ~ bernyhi.ca/filmretreat
special thanks to the Saskatchewan Arts Board

Retreats and dates:

Film Retreat: Cricket - Autumn 2010

Film Retreat: Rapture - Spring 2011

Film Retreat: Neg - Autumn 2011

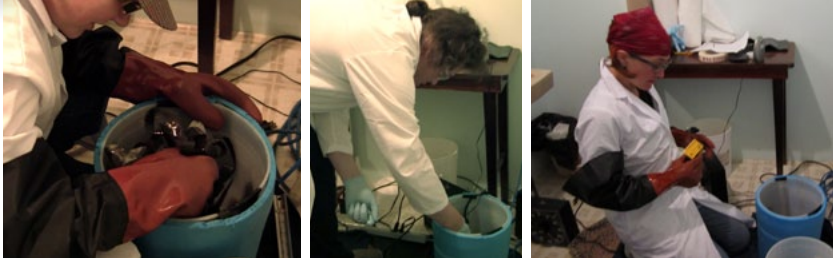
Film Retreat: Green - Spring / Summer 2012

FILM RETREAT

16mm hand processing away from the city
Victoria Day & Thanksgiving weekends, 2010 & 2011



SAVILLE THEATRE VENUE
LAB BASEMENT DARKROOM



D-76 Developer Water rinse Bleach
Water rinse Fixer



SALOON

PLAY
EX. A DEVICE WAS
MADE TO SCROLL
ANALOGUE TEXT

BRUCE THE GOOSE
LOST 1 LIFELONG MATE
& 2 GIRLFRIENDS
TO COYOTES

HEADQUARTERS



SPRING VALLEY GUEST RANCH



VARIED LANDSCAPES & SUBJECTS INCLUDING A RIVER TO SHOOT AT
OR ATTEMPT TO JUMP



HOST RANCHHOUSE
EATON'S CATALOGUE HOME

CAMARADERIE

GEAR



gear donated by
accommodations and
artists' fees granted by
film stock donated by
digital transfer donated by
chemistry donated by

photo by Chrystene Ells

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