

## **It's A Rat's Life**

**Film Screening at the Saskatchewan Filmpool**

**January 17, 1997**

**Curated by Gerald Saul**

### **Rat Life and Diet in North America**

**Joyce Wieland**

**14 min/1968**

### **My Withered Tomato Friend**

**Sarah Abbott/Michelle Harrison**

**9 min/1991**

### **The Story of the Fish Girl**

**Stella Kyriakakis**

**18 min/1989**

### **Visions**

**Garine Torossian**

**4 min/1992**

### **How To Be A Girl**

**Naomi McCormack**

**14 min/1992**

### **You Take Care Now**

**Ann Marie Fleming**

**12 min/1989**

About three years ago, I found myself in the embarrassing situation of sitting on the exhibition committee and having to turn down a package of films because all of the films were made by men and we could not think of even one film made by a woman which would fit within it. During my course of study in Toronto, I swore that I would find some quality experimental films made by women in Canada even if I had to turn over every rock in the shield. I was pleasantly surprised to find that I did not have to look long or hard, these works were plentiful. I now face the problem of having to choose a short list of them to show tonight, and this is the much greater challenge.

The small sampling in this program features some of the finest filmmakers I encountered. In some cases, I chose shorter films so that I could fit more in. The selection also spans a wide range of avant-garde approaches from structural to lyrical, from political to personal (that is when they are not the same thing). The only well known film I've programmed is Joyce Wieland's *Rat Life*. I just love this

film and decided to bring it in no matter what. Otherwise, the films give a fair representation of what is happening in the Toronto area film scene.

*How to be a Girl* and *My Withered Tomato Friend* both intertwine voice and optical printing to create multi-layered meanings to their repeating audio and visual texts. While *Tomato Friend* twists the diary film genre to convince us that a fictitious traumatic situation exists, *How to be a Girl* demonstrates McCormack's multi-disciplinary control of both her body and her camera.

*Fish Girl* is very fun to me. It falls into the realm of psycho-dramas which were all the rage in the forties and fifties (from Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* to Stan Brakhage's *Reflections on Black*) but seemed to almost die with the rise of the less dramatically influenced avant-garde films of the sixties and beyond. However, these psycho-dramas or trance films have re-occurred and their influence can be seen in the works of David Lynch (*The Grandmother* and *Eraserhead*), Guy Madden (*Tales from Gimli Hospital*) and Michael Hoolboom (*Precious, Shiteater, Sorrow*). This is an important genre of filmmaking as it bridges a gap between the dramatic film and the experimental.

*Visions* is one of those rare gems, a short structural film. Its hand-made quality, with the layers of film literally taped one on top of another, expressed to me that this artist loved film as few can. Torossian is exploring the surface features of the film plane, disguising the content until all we are watching is the emulsion and not the content.

Ann Marie Fleming is one of the most important avant-garde filmmakers making films in Canada today. Previously of Vancouver, she now lives in Toronto and continues to produce powerful diary films and personal and family documentaries. *You Take Care Now* is one of her early films and sets the stage for later work. Fleming uses the film to purge herself of the guilt she carried for other people's crimes against her.

Gerald Saul – January, 1997