

FILM



Robert Beavers in Early Monthly Segments

Leave it to Beavers

BY JASON ANDERSON March 15, 2010 15:03

Once a month for the past year, the city's experimental-film devotees have gathered in the Gladstone Hotel Art Bar for rare screenings of seminal works by James Benning, Joyce Wieland, Bruce Baillie, Warren Sonbert and other great artists who occupied the medium's furthest fringes. This Tuesday (March 16), Early Monthly Segments celebrates its first anniversary with a program devoted to American ex-pat Robert Beavers, including [the film that inspired the series' title](#).

Comprised of fragments shot in 1967 and 1970, the film itself is representative of both Beavers' own restless style and the boundary-busting inclinations of the experimental filmmakers of the era. The evening also includes the Canadian premiere of his latest work, *Pitcher of Colored Light* (2007), a more relaxed if equally fragmentary portrait of Beavers' mother with several delightful cameos by her cat.

Perfect for curious newbies whose cravings for visual stimulation can't be sated by James Cameron, Early Monthly Segments' salon-like setting sets it apart from screenings at Images, [Pleasure Dome](#) or [TIFF Cinematheque](#)'s Free Screen series. EMS' three founders and organizers — Images executive director Scott Miller Berry, TIFF Cinematheque projectionist Kate MacKay and filmmaker Chris Kennedy — spoke to EYE WEEKLY about their campaign to show mind-bending works of fringe film to people with drinks in their hands.

Why was Early Monthly Segments created? Did it grow out of some collective eagerness to screen experimental works of a particular vintage and which may have become neglected?

Kate MacKay: Yes and no. Between the three of us there was a collective eagerness to show alternative works, but I don't think that any of us was particularly interested in films of a particular era, vintage or style. Rather, we were excited about the possibility of showing works that we wanted to see. Initially, each of us had ideas for programs that we hadn't been able to find a venue for, and we were also excited to show work that was available locally but hardly ever seen. The first film we showed was a feature-length essay film called *The Perfumed Nightmare* by Kidlat Tahimik, which has been distributed by the CFMDC [Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre] for years. It's a real masterpiece but isn't very well known.

We often also put films from different eras together, contemporary works with historical ones. We also like to show the films of visiting filmmakers, as that can lead to very interesting discussion. In November, we showed a program of films by visiting artist Robert Todd, and in April we will be featuring the films of Ellie Epp while she is in town for the Experimental Media Congress.

Scott Miller Berry: The three of us individually had a vision to present 16mm films in a relaxed space to encourage dialogues before and after the screenings. I think we all felt there was something missing in Toronto. We are very fortunate to have so many festivals and Pleasure Dome and the Free Screen, but there's nothing "regularly" showing, the dates are always jumping around. It came together quite organically — we all work in various experimental-media arts capacities and wanted the freedom to create a regular series where we can shed our day jobs and just share films that we want to see, whether for the first time or to watch again with others. Perhaps because at Images we're only showing new projects, I'm especially interested in showing older films, whether they're neglected, under-appreciated and/or not known by me. This seemed to be one of our organic shared visions for the series.

But we've also shown many premieres — not that we're obsessed with this status stuff! — and are really into showing recent films that haven't been presented in Toronto for whatever reason, like Brent Coughenour's Super-8 feature *I Pity The Fool* in October 2009 with Brent in person, or recent films by Boston's Rebecca Meyers or the upcoming Canadian premiere of Robert Beavers' *Pitcher of Colored Light*.

The freedom to do what we want, without grant writing or funders' requirements is also key. We can respond to someone on the road taking films on a tour. We can bring in a film that's showing in the Northeast USA because shipping will be cheaper... and there's a wealth of 16mm films in Toronto at the CFMDC that aren't shown, like James Benning's *Grand Opera* or Kidlat Tahimik's *Perfumed Nightmare*.

Chris Kennedy: I personally was inspired by my two years spent in San Francisco where I found myself choosing between two different experimental film screenings in one night, which is not so often the case here. Even then, I co-founded a weekly film salon there, because there was still too much work that I wanted to see and often the only way to see it was to make it happen. So when I came back to Toronto, inspired by this experience and the films that I had seen there — many of which never do get shown in Toronto — I was happy to see that both Kate and Scott had a similar urge to make something happen here, and a similar desire to show neglected gems). We're all artists, so programming, watching and writing about this stuff is all inspiration for our own personal work, so we do really want to see and show as much as possible. We are primarily interested in showing 16mm, partly because we find it easier to do right, partly because we unapologetically find it beautiful, but also because there's a wealth of stuff that just doesn't get seen.

Why the salon setting? Did you want to create a context that was different than what usually goes on elsewhere?

Kate: We wanted to do something simple and economical, so as not to depend on outside funding or be limited by the need to have a certain number of people to break even. We also didn't want our programming to be dictated by the requirements of outside funding agencies. But mostly we just wanted a relaxed and fun atmosphere. We are all artists as well as working on other program and with other organizations that show film and video, and are inspired by our work... but it is still work. Early Monthly Segments is what we do on our rare evenings off, so it was important to us that it be fun.

What's so exciting about Robert Beavers' work in particular? Early Monthly Segments is obviously a touchstone work for you and for the series...

Kate: First off we all liked the name Early Monthly Segments. That film came out of a challenge

Beavers set for himself after relocating to Europe. He decided that he would not let a month go by without filming something. We are in a way, setting up a similar challenge for ourselves: not to let a month go by without showing interesting work.

As for Beavers, he is a filmmaker with the kind of spirit and enthusiasm for the medium that we all respect and want to champion. Beavers is a remarkable figure, who has been making work since the 1960s at his own pace and in his own way. His work is meticulous and inventive, and almost always reflects on the medium and mechanics of film and its making — at the same time, he is exploring places and people with that medium.

Chris: A lot of this project is devoted to personal filmmaking, whether its very individual types of filmmaking or getting work from people we can contact through connections we have built over the years. Robert Beavers fits this in a couple of ways. He's been very generous to Kate and I as a person and his films have a unique approach that mixes a formal rigor with a very personal constellation of histories and philosophies. The film *Early Monthly Segments* has long been an inspiration as for me as an artist in its immediacy — it was a structure Beavers imposed on himself when he was young that allowed for a monthly burst of creativity. It seemed appropriate to name our series after this film in an attempt to capture some of its energy.

*Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEKLY.COM
625 Church St, 6th Floor, Toronto M4Y 2G1*