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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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Report to the National Film Preservation Board

MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
 AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

The Pacific Film Archive, a curatorial department of the University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive at the University of California at Berkeley, is acknowledged as one of the leading film archives and study centers in the country.

The PFA presents one of the most extensive exhibition programs in the country, with over 650 public film and video screenings annually, to a total audience of more than 55,000. Exhibition programs range from silent films with live musical accompaniment to premieres of experimental film and video art, and includes films from every film producing country in the world. In addition, attendance at daytime university classroom screenings number 23,000 annually, and another 10,000 children are served by a weekly children's film series.

The film and video collection contains more than 6,500 titles with particular strengths in the Japanese (more than 1,000 titles), Soviet (Russian, Ukrainian and Georgian) cinemas (more than 200 titles), American independent and experimental film and video (more than 200 titles), international animation, international features, and historical film of the Bay Area. It is comprised primarily of film viewing prints (in 16mm and 35mm gauges) rather than archival masters, with notable examples of the latter including the video master of "Media Burn", the Ant Farm's 1975 commentary on the media age as a collision of Cadillacs and television sets, a unique fragment of the 1918 Italian production of "La Tosca," starring Francesca Bertini, and two installments of the notorious "California Election News," faked newsreels from Upton Sinclair's failed 1934 gubernatorial campaign.

The Japanese collection is the largest of its type in the US, and includes feature films from the 1950s through the 1970s, largely from the Shochiku, Daiei, Nikkatsu, Toho, and Toei film studios. These collections, along with the Soviet shorts and features, and American experimental films, are largely unique among American archives, annually attracting more than 600 researchers who study films in the PFA study center facilities. The PFA Library and Study Center is open 20 hours per week for library access, and 40 hours per week for research screenings. Annually, it serves more than 600 researchers needing individual screenings of works in the collection, and provides library reference and assistance in using the documentation collection to 4,500 researchers. The PFA Library holds collections of 7,000 film posters, 25,000 photographic stills, and over 75,000 clippings files, as well as 5,000 books, 150 periodicals and other reference materials relating to film.

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The UAM/PFA is staffed by 14 full-time and 15 part-time employees, including professional curators, administrators, librarians, theater and archival staff. PFA is an active participant in Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) working groups and conferences, and PFA staff member Nancy Goldman serves on the International Federation of Film Archive (FIAP) Documentation Commission. PFA is working with the National Moving Image Database Project (NAMID) to help coordinate efforts with colleagues at the Museum of Modern Art, Anthology Film Archives, and the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House in the area of preserving avant garde and experimental film; and with the Long Beach Museum of Art, Bay Area Video Coalition, Video Data Bank, and other media organizations in the area of video preservation.

PFA has identified American independent and experimental film as its institutional preservation priority. In recent years, with support from the AFI/NEA Film Preservation program, important films by George Kuchar, Gunvor Nelson and Chick Strand have been preserved. The PFA holdings of more than 160 American independent films have an emphasis on West Coast avant-garde films of the 1960s, including works by Bruce Baillie, Jordan Belson, Bruce Conner, Gunvor Nelson, Pat O'Neill, and James Whitney, among others. These films were produced outside of and as an alternative to commercial films. They represent a diversity of film styles and types, including documentaries, shorts, and feature length works.

Although produced on triacetate film, archivists are all now aware that these materials face preservation problems as severe as that which confront nitrate film. In addition, because of the limited number of prints initially made, and the general inability of independent filmmakers to afford duplicate prints or even adequate storage for their originals, experimental films are at particular risk. As independent works tend to disappear from distribution more rapidly than films produced by the entertainment industry, it is consequently these works that are most likely to be lost unless steps are taken now to ensure their preservation.

The PFA Collection Manager works closely with artists whose films are being preserved, from locating best surviving materials, to the viewing of extant prints, and most of all, to checking and approving laboratory work. This last aspect is especially crucial in the preservation of avant-garde and experimental films, since the works were originally produced to the artist's sensibility rather than the laboratory's.

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In addition to the information above, I would like to make three points with respect to film preservation.

The first point is to reiterate our belief here at PFA in the interconnectedness of collection, preservation, access, exhibition and study of film. We believe that all of these activities are equally vital and important to the activities of a film archive and to the broadening of film culture.

The second is that for practical purposes, proper storage of film and video materials is the most effective means we have to safeguard the most materials.

Finally, at the last conference of the Association of Moving Image Archivists, I participated on a panel regarding estate planning and moving image archives. Although the topic is not a new one to the archival field, the subject has taken on a new urgency given the size and scope of the AIDS crisis. As a field, we face the specter of a generation of visual artists who are dying earlier in their careers, with films and related materials in states of disarray, without the support structures and time to organize a thoughtful bequest agreement with an archive. It is clear that education of the independent filmmaking community and within the archival community needs to be accelerated lest we lose a significant portion of these works for future generations.

Sincerely



Stephen Gong
General Manager

February 2, 1993