

# Oddball Films

Screenings Thursday & Friday Nights at 8pm | 275 Capp Street, San Francisco, CA 94110

## Strange Sinema 106 - Computeresque: Experiments With Light + Technology - Thur. Nov. 17th - 8PM



Oddball Films presents **Strange Sinema**, a monthly evening of old finds, rare gems and newly discovered films from the stacks of the archive. Drawing on his collection of over 50,000 16mm film prints-the largest archive in Northern California, Oddball Films director Stephen Parr has compiled his 106th program of offbeat, quirky, experimental outtakes and unusual films. **Strange Sinema 106: Computeresque: Experiments With Light + Technology**, a program of films examining the early use of light and computers in cinema featuring pioneers of computer-generated art. The centerpiece of the program is based around a selection of Whitney films, innovators of cinematic computer technologies featuring motion graphics pioneer John Whitney Sr. and brother James and son Michael's work, all profoundly audacious and inspiring in their fluidity, motion and spiritual subtext. John Whitney created some of the first computer-generated animation and motion graphics and **Catalog** (1961) is his remarkable demo reel of work created with his analog computer/film/camera machine he built from a WWII anti-aircraft gun

sight. We follow that with Whitney's **Arabesque** (1975), a legendary masterpiece of shimmering, oscillating waves set to the music of Persian composer Maroocheher Sadeghi. **Experiments in Motion Graphics** (1968) once again features early computer motion graphics by John Whitney and a discussion of the computers prospect as an art making tool. Michael Whitney's **Binary Bit Patterns** (1969) is a hypnotic psych-folk audiovisual experience that suggests a secret symbiosis between the digital and the organic as various Eastern graphic permutations appear, dissolve and undergo metamorphoses on the screen. **Lapis** (1965), made by a spiritualized James Whitney (one of only 7 films he created) and one of the most accessible experimental films ever made; **Lapis** was created with handmade cels evoking a single mandala moving within itself; its particles surge around each other in constant metamorphosis. Various other computer innovators include Gary Demos, the special-effects guru behind **Tron** and **Futureworld** who creates a mesmerizing light show in **I Had an Idea** (1972), the first computer generated music video, Joni Mitchell's **Both Sides Now** (1972) from animator and Oscar winner John Wilson, **Perspectrum** (1974), directed by famed Indian animator Ishu Patel with koto music by Michio Miyagi, this animated short conveys a kaleidoscopic sense of perspective, and **Dragonfold and Other Ways to Fill Space** (1979) created on the Tektronics 4051 Graphics Terminal by Brooklyn filmmakers Bruce and Katharine Cornwell this brilliant computer-generated animation synchronized to rock music provides an introduction to the idea that a one-dimensional line can fill two-dimensional space, Peter Foldes and the National Film Board of Canada bring us the first short made entirely out of computer-generated animation **Hunger** (1973); a dazzling and dark nightmare of metamorphosing images that gives new meaning to "eat the rich", and **Incredible Machine** (1968) from Bell Labs, this film previews early developments in computer-assisted imagery, electronic music, and voice processing. **Plus! Hypothese Beta** (1967), an Academy Award nominated film featuring an isolated computer punch card who creates chaotic and deadly disorder!

**Date:** Thursday, November 17th, 2016 at 8:00pm

**Venue:** Oddball Films, 275 Capp Street San Francisco

**Admission:** \$10.00 Limited Seating RSVP to [RSVP@oddballfilms.com](mailto:RSVP@oddballfilms.com) or (415) 558-8117

**Web:** <http://oddballfilms.blogspot.com>

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**Catalog** (Color, 1961)

Famed cinematic innovator John Whitney's demo reel of work created with his analog computer/film/camera machine he built from a WWII anti-aircraft gun sight. Whitney and the techniques he developed with this machine were what inspired special FX wizard Douglas Trumbull) to use the slit scan technique on *2001: A Space Odyssey*. An eye-opening and inspiring work of early computer generated imagery.



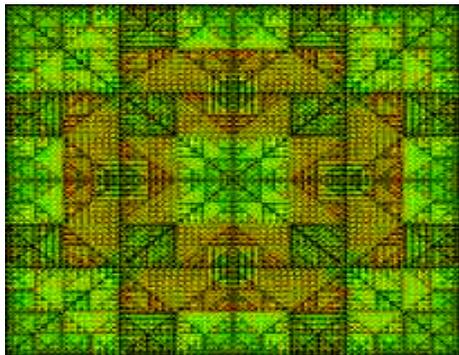
**Arabesque** (Color, 1975)

John Whitney's *Arabesque*, is considered by many to be the seminal computer film. Set to the music of Manoocheher Sadeghi, and created during a residency at IBM Whitney balanced science with aesthetics as he experimented with the eccentricities of Islamic architecture creating whirling, exotic flows of computer generated images. *Arabesque* was one of the first computer generated films that married technology and art in a focused, cinematic manner. Working with his early home-made computerized motion-control set-up, Whitney could produce a variety of innovative designs and metamorphoses of text and still images, which proved very successful in advertising and titling of commercial projects. He also

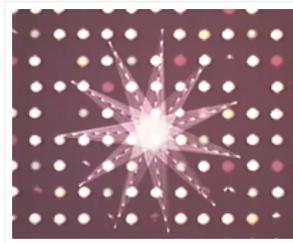
did various commercial assignments including the title design for Hitchcock's feature *Vertigo* (in association with Saul Bass), and the preparation (in association with Charles Eames) of a seven-screen presentation for the Buckminster Fuller Dome in Moscow.

**Experiments in Motion Graphics** (Color, 1968)

John Whitney, Sr., legendary American animator, composer and inventor, is often considered the father of computer animation. In this early profile, he expounds on the process and philosophy behind his pioneering work at IBM and demonstrates some of the fundamental concepts of motion graphics.



**Binary Bit Patterns** (Color, 1969) The

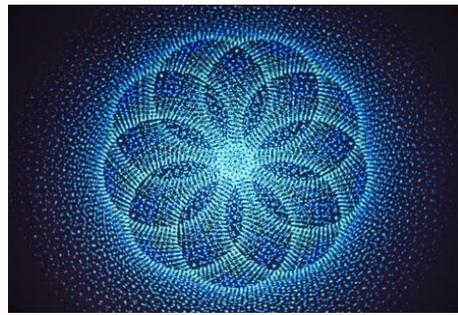


spectacular, fast-paced film features quilt-like tapestries of polyhedral and crystalline figures pulsating and multiplying with a kind of universal logic eliciting a hypnotic, trancelike effect from the viewer. This film echoes a preoccupation with the mandala image and the interest in Eastern meditative philosophy that is seen in the work of the whole Whitney family. Employing computer generated imagery with optically introduced color and flicker effects, Michael Whitney creates a hypnotic, psych-folk audiovisual experience that suggests a secret symbiosis between the digital and the organic as various Persian inflected graphic permutations appear, dissolve and undergo metamorphoses on the screen.

With original sound-score.

**Lapis** (Color, 1965)

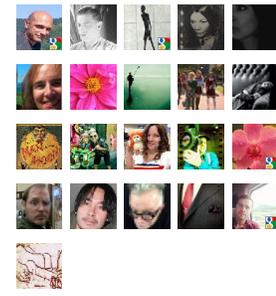
This film, by film pioneer James Whitney consists entirely of dot patterns. Like a single mandala moving within itself, the particles surge around each other in constant metamorphosis, a serene ecstasy of what Jung calls "individuation." For 10 minutes, a succession of beautiful designs grows incredibly, ever more intricate and astounding; sometimes the black background itself becomes the pattern, when paths are shunned by the moving dots. A voluptuous raga soundtrack by Ravi Shankar perfectly matches the film's flow, and helped to make LAPIS one of the most accessible "experimental films" ever made. The images were all created with handmade cels, and the rotation of more than one of these cels creates some of the movements. John Whitney Sr. had built a pioneer computerized animation set-up—the prototype for the motion-control systems that later made possible such special effects as the "Star Gate" sequence of 2001. James used that set-up to shoot some of his handmade artwork, since it could ensure accuracy of placement and incremental movement.



**I Had An Idea** (Color, 1972)

Relic of a revolution? The swirling tubular patterns and bright, optimistic colors still evoke the freshness of the once-new medium. From Gary Demos, one of the pioneers in the field of computer-generated special effects, who was involved in four of the earliest movies to rely on computers to dazzle viewers: *Futureworld*, *Looker*, *Tron*, and *The Last Starfighter*.

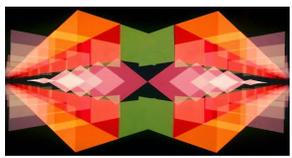
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**Both Sides Now** (Color, 1972)

Pioneering computer animation from John Wilson, whose career started in the late 1940's (winning Oscars for *Gerald McBoing-Boing* and *Toot, Whistle, Plunk, Boom*-an Oddball favorite). This short was the first computer generated music film and was produced for and aired on the Sonny and Cher TV show. The song is Both Sides Now by the great Canadian chanteuse Joni Mitchell.

**Perspectrum** (Color, 1974)

A film without words produced for the National Film Board of Canada. This animated short consists of simple geometric forms, as thin and flat as playing cards, but so arranged that a sense of perspective is conveyed. The effect is kaleidoscopic, but much more active, forming and re-forming constantly to the music. The koto, a thirteen-stringed Japanese instrument, is played by plucking the strings; the sound has a tinkling effect, synched to the glasslike

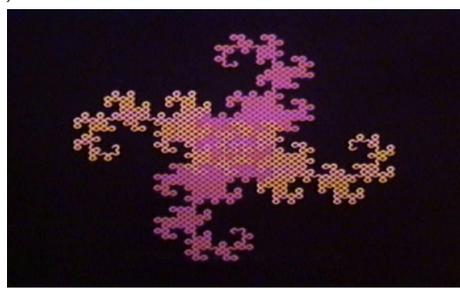


shapes of the moving designs. Directed by famed Indian animator Ishu Patel with music by Michio Miyagi.

**Dragonfold and Other Ways to Fill Space** (Color, 1979)

Various geometric phenomena (the Sierpinski curve, tessellation) are illustrated on-screen in this computer-animated educational film synchronized to rock music providing an introduction to the idea that a one-dimensional line can fill two-dimensional space.

**Bruce and Katharine Cornwell** are primarily known for a series of remarkable animated films on the subject of geometry. Created on the Tektronics 4051 Graphics Terminal, they are brilliant short works, tracing geometric shapes to intriguing music, including the memorable 'Bach meets Third Steam Jazz' musical score in 'Congruent Triangles.' Their work, distributed by the defunct International Film Bureau, is now out of distribution.



For more

info:

<http://www.afana.org/cornwell.htm>

**Hunger** (Color, 1973, Peter Foldes)

At an extremely rapid pace, images dissolve, move, morph and/or reappear into things or objects that become more and more exaggerated and absurd in this witty and disturbing cartoon by Hungarian director Peter Foldes. One of the first computer-generated films, this Jury Prize winner at the Cannes Film Festival and Academy Award Nominee is a satire focusing on the self-indulgence that plagues our 'hungry' world, and depicts a man as he continues to eat, and eat, and eat!

**Incredible Machine** (Color, 1968)

The crew from pioneering research facility at Bell Laboratories demonstrates novel uses of the computer in audio-visual communication research: computer generated graphics; computer-assisted design of an electronic circuit drawn with a light-pen on a cathode-ray tube; simulation of human speech and singing; and composition of music and of abstract or figurative color pictures and animation films.

**Hypothèse Beta** (Color, 1967)

An Oscar-nominated French filmed animation from director Jean-Charles Meunier, which deals with an isolated computer punch



card perforation who tries to join groups of well-behaved perforations, is rebuffed, and finally manages to create complete disorder. Remember punch cards? Neither do I.

For more information about John, James and Michael Whitney's work:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Whitney\\_\(animator\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Whitney_(animator))

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Whitney\\_\(filmmaker\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Whitney_(filmmaker))

Another link to James Whitney's influences and life:

[http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/WM\\_JWsiht.pdf](http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/WM_JWsiht.pdf)

For more info about Bruce and Katharine Cornwell's work: <http://www.afana.org/cornwell.htm>

Curator Biography:

Stephen Parr's programs have explored the erotic underbelly of sex-in-cinema (*The Subject is Sex*), the offbeat and bizarre (*Oddities Beyond Belief*), the pervasive effects of propaganda (*Historical/Hysterical?*) and oddities from his archives (*Strange Sinema*). He is the director of Oddball Films, a stock film company and the San Francisco Media Archive ([www.sfm.org](http://www.sfm.org)), a non-profit archive that preserves culturally significant films. He is a co-founder of Other Cinema DVD and a member of the Association of Moving Archivists (AMIA) where he is a frequent presenter.

#### About Oddball Films



San Francisco's strangest film archive and microcinema, Oddball Films is a stock footage company providing offbeat and unusual film footage for feature films like *The Nice Guys* and *Milk*, documentaries like *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, *Silicon Valley*, *Kurt Cobain: The Montage of Heck*, television programs like *Transparent* and *Mythbusters*, clips for *Boing Boing* and web projects around the world.

Our screenings are almost exclusively drawn from our collection of over 50,000 16mm prints of animation, commercials, educational films, feature films, movie trailers, medical, industrial military, news out-takes and every genre in between. We're actively working to present rarely screened genres of cinema as well as avant-garde and ethno-cultural documentaries, which expand the boundaries of cinema. Oddball Films is the largest film archive in Northern California and one of the most unusual private collections in the US. We invite you to join us in our weekly offerings of offbeat cinema.

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