

Art And Film Collide At Pollock-Krasner House

Publication: The East Hampton Press & The Southampton Press

By Michelle Trauring Sep 9, 2011 1:54 PM

UPDATED Sep 12, 2011 4:13 PM



A scene from Howard Kanovitz's "The Drive-In." COURTESY HELEN HARRISON

Nearly every time art critic Marion Wolberg Weiss finds herself in a gallery, she says there is some sort of video installation to be seen. But the installations inevitably raise a serious question in her mind: What does one call the person who made the film, an artist or a filmmaker?

"I'm a big one on connection of all the arts, like painting and film," she said during a telephone interview last week. "There's a bond between them. But at the end of the day, are they film artists or are they painters?"

The jury's out on an answer, as it's an impossible question, she said, but one that will inevitably be raised during the "Artists on Film" series that she curates at the Pollock-Krasner House in Springs, a museum and study center at the former home and studio of abstract expressionists Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner.

This year's series, themed "Artists Make Movies: Avant-Garde Visionaries," began earlier this month with a selection of Andy Warhol's "Screen Tests." It will continue on Friday, September 16, with Watermill Center founder Robert Wilson's "Video 50." Painter Howard Kanovitz's documentary, "The Drive-In," will screen on Friday, September 23. The series will conclude with filmmaker-photographer Alyson Denny's "Half & Half & Honey," and her collaboration with Joshua White, "Alba," on Friday, September 30.

The venue's history alone was enough to attract Ms. Denny to the series, she said during a telephone interview last week. Her films should nicely dovetail the static works on view.

"These two pieces are like moving, abstract expressionism," she said.

Both works were commissioned for Manhattan apartment installations, she said. In 2009, Ms. Denny and Mr. White—who founded "The Joshua Light Show" in the late 1960s—created "Alba," an hour-long video using white-on-white imagery achieved by some of the most unexpected objects, from a fog machine to an aquarium bubbler in hair gel, she said.

"Josh and I gathered up and bought every conceivable thing, and I had a field day shooting them," she said. "It's all real world material, in some way, but it's shot in a way that would abstract it and layer it. It was really a bonanza."

A year later, another offer came knocking on Ms. Denny's door.

"Someone heard about the first piece," she said. "I was working with this motif of dropping milk and half and half into water, doing different visual dances with that. Someone I knew said, 'That sounds really, really cool. I need that for my apartment.'"

She laughed and added, "I was having a good run."

Her solo project differs heavily from "Alba" because it's mostly shot in black space, Ms. Denny explained. Using digital tricks on top of her real world material, she created a "balletic, colored, liquid dance," she said.

Structurally, the 15-minute piece has two sections. The film's second half

utilizes honey, creating a very different world that some viewers have said looks like outer space, Ms. Denny said.

The annual exhibit is about more than just viewing the films, according to Pollock Krasner House Director Helen Harrison. It's about learning what really makes an artist tick.

"You're not going to see this stuff anywhere else," she said during a telephone interview last week. "It's very specialized and very intimate and you do get an opportunity to talk to someone involved with the film afterward to find out what they were thinking."

Both Ms. Denny and Mr. White will be present for a discussion following their screening, Ms. Denny said.

"We did a talk at Yale last year, we're actually pretty entertaining," she said. "Josh himself is a living legend. He's got a lot of stories."

But when it comes to the question of "film artist or painter?" Ms. Denny said that if she's asked, she doesn't know whether she'd refer to herself as an artist or a filmmaker because she took the opposite path of her counterparts in the series—Mr. Warhol and Mr. Wilson—who are recognized as artists first and filmmakers second.

"I'm trained as a filmmaker, but I took a hiatus as a photographer," she recalled. "I still feel like I'm a visitor in photography. Film is my first love."

"But I became a quote, unquote, artist," she continued. "I never thought of being an artist. I just had these ideas I wanted to play around with in abstract photography, and I got hooked."

But now that she is back into film, Ms. Denny said she's finding her own connections between her two passions through her upcoming projects.

"It's interesting to come back to filmmaking as an artist," she said. "In this case now, I'm carrying through a lot of ideas that I'm working on in still photography. With my background as a documentary filmmaker, it's meaningful that I'm working with real world material. There's something

exciting about that.”

The “Artists on Film” series will continue with Robert Wilson’s “Video 50” on Friday, September 16, at 7 p.m. at the Pollock-Krasner House in East Hampton. Admission is \$5, or free for members. Additional screenings will include “The Drive-In” by Howard Kanovitz on Friday, September 23, and Alyson Denny’s “Half & Half & Honey” and her collaboration with Joshua White, “Alba,” on Friday, September 30. For more information, call 324-4929.