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Pleasure Dome

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HOW TO EXPLAIN THE EPHEMERAL AND TENUOUS CHARACTER OF LIFE TO CHILDREN



Films by T.J.
Wilcox

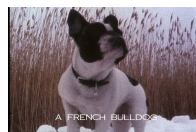
Saturday,
February 2, 8 pm
Cinecycle, 129
Spadina Ave.

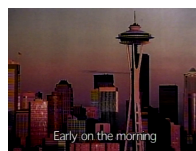
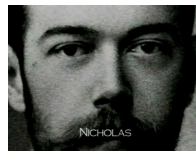


Part of Winter
2008



New York-based
artist T.J. Wilcox
has crafted a
number of lyrical,





witty and poignant short films, quietly sublime little gems one and all.

Screening tonight will be *Garlands 1-6* (2003-5) and *A Fair Tale*

(Extended Mix)

(2007). The aptly

named *Garlands* string together

several self-

contained

vignettes

composed of

footage and stills

both found and

shot (on Super-8)

by the artist

himself, with each

collage imprinted

and guided by

Wilcox's narration.

This narration

takes the form of

subtitles rather

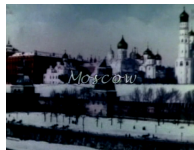
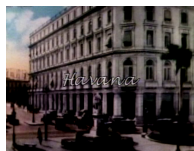
than speech (the

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giving the films a

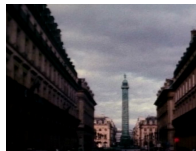
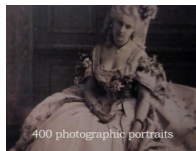
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and often



nostalgic quality. *A Fair Tale* contains one of Wilcox's most memorable stories: a county fair interrupted by an unexpected visitor from the sky.

"T.J. Wilcox's silent 16 mm films are collages of jumpy amateur material, historical images plucked from television, postcards, photographs and animation. They are obviously 'hand made'; he films layer over layer, in grainy, blurred images and overexposed colours. He brings together figures from world history, individuals from his childhood, celebrities and



aristocrats into a cinematic combination of fact, fiction and fantasy.” (Stedelijk Museum). In Wilcox’s delicate celluloid world, the Romanovs’ pet bulldog Ortino, Humpty Dumpty, a deaf house painter and a rodeo queen rub shoulders with stories of the origins of beekeeping and angora cats, the shape of the Long Island bus route, and the famous residents of Place Vendôme in Paris.

Programme Notes:

Programme:
Garlands 1-6
 (2003-5, 48 min.
 16mm on video)
A Fair Tale
 (Extended Mix)



(2007, 9 min.
16mm)



New York-based artist TJ Wilcox has crafted a number of lyrical, witty and poignant short films, quietly sublime little gems one and all. The aptly named *Garlands* string together several self-contained vignettes composed of footage and stills both found and shot (on Super-8) by the artist himself, with each collage imprinted and guided by Wilcox's narration. This narration takes the form of subtitles rather than speech (the films are silent), giving the films a hazy, dreamlike

and often nostalgic quality. A *Fair Tale* contains one of Wilcox's most memorable stories: a county fair interrupted by an unexpected visitor from the sky. In Wilcox's delicate celluloid world, the Romanovs' pet bulldog, Humpty Dumpty, a deaf house painter and a rodeo queen rub shoulders with stories of the origins of beekeeping and angora cats, the shape of the Long Island bus route, and the famous residents of Place Vendôme in Paris. (Jon Davies, *Pleasure Dome*)

T.J. Wilcox was born in 1965 in

Seattle. He lives and works in New York. He received a BFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1989, and an MFA from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena in 1995. Since 1996 he has built up a modest oeuvre of about fifteen film works. Wilcox's work has been seen in important art institutions such as the ICA in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Tate Modern in London. In 2005 the British magazine *After All* devoted a special issue to his work. In the same year

the American
periodical
Artforum
proclaimed his
Garland series
“the best of 2005.”
A hefty
monograph
devoted to Wilcox
was brought out
by the Swiss
publisher
JRP/Ringier in
“06.

**T.J. Wilcox at
Metro Pictures
Art in America,
Oct. 2005 by
Michael Amy**

T.J. Wilcox is
hooked on
cinematic
storytelling.
Piecing together
found footage, old
photographs and
original material,
Wilcox shoots his
films in 8mm and
copies them onto
video for digital

editing (among other effects, they are artificially aged to look archaic). Transferred to 16mm, on reels containing one to three short films each, they alternate between stills and moving images in black and white, sepia tones and color, with subtitles that are of fundamental importance, tying the images together and giving the narratives added meaning.

Wilcox's installations convey the impression of home movies shared with intimates. He projects them in the gallery onto

standard-size
freestanding
screens. The whir
of the machines,
the changing
tones, colors and
degree of focus,
the rhythmic
progression of
frames and the
colloquial style of
subtitles (with their
occasional
spelling errors)
add greatly to the
evocativeness of
the whole. At
Metro Pictures,
Wilcox's *Garlands*
consisted of 16
films altogether
(made in 2003 or
2005), projected
from six 16mm
machines. In one
gallery, different
films were played
in the dark on four
neighboring
screens, allowing
the viewer to slip
from one narrative

to another with a mere turn of the head, thereby adding sensations and layers of interpretation.

The focus of the lovely *Garland 5* (2005) is the Place Vendôme in Paris. It consists of three segments about three famous people for whom the site had special significance. Shots of the Place alternate with images of the characters, and subtitles provide in-depth information. In the section on the 19th-century aristocrat and photographer Comtesse de Castiglione, Wilcox addresses the

theme of physical beauty and its decline as manifested in the Comtesse's behavior and self-portraiture. He touches upon solitude, illness and death in his portrayal of Frederic Chopin, and, in the segment about ambassador and socialite Pamela Harriman, he turns "with a good deal of humor" to sex, money, fame and political clout.

Another *Garland*, about the Romanovs, strings together vintage and original footage, along with many strange details, such as the princesses

sewing jewels into their garments in preparation for their flight, and the execution of Tatiana's bulldog along with the rest of the family. Here, the Bolshevik revolutionaries come off as embodiments of evil in a one-sided portrayal that verges on romantic adulation of the Russian royal family.

Wilcox understands our urge to make narrative sense of the bits and pieces of information we seize from the world around us. He can switch from candy-coated lyricism to blunt cynicism in the flash of an eye,

and his most
captivating stories
are filled with
surprises.
Ultimately, they
are tragic,
addressing history
and memory,
desire and loss.

T.J. Wilcox;
Metro Pictures,
New York, USA
Frieze Magazine,
Issue 90 (April
2005)
by Charles
LaBelle

In the lobby of an
old hospital on the
outskirts of
Marseille is a
commemorative
plaque that,
roughly translated,
reads: "Here the
poet Arthur
Rimbaud ended
his terrestrial
journey." Below it
a quote from his

Illuminations
(1886) adds the
coda: “I have
stretched ropes
from steeple to
steeple; garlands
from window to
window; golden
chains from star to
star, and I dance.”

The mise-en-
scène could
easily belong to a
film by T.J. Wilcox
– the marble floors
with the late
afternoon sunlight
spilling across
them, the spectral
nurses, the plaque
with its gold-leaf
letters. It’s the
type of moment
one often
experiences in a
Wilcox film: a
quizzical
combination of
romantic nostalgia
and bemused
wonderment at

historical minutiae
in which a
recognition of loss
leads to the wistful
sense of
everything being
right in the
universe. Like
Rimbaud's poems,
shot through with
sparkling imagery
and a yearning for
far-off places,
Wilcox's *Garlands*
are often achingly
beautiful and
suffused with a
palpable desire.
Availing himself of
a Symbolist
palette of ambers,
crimsons and
greys, his images
are patinaed but
never dull. His
camera moves
(through a city,
across a
newspaper
clipping) with a
flâneur's gait;
leading the eye

but aiming at the heart, visual pleasure in Wilcox's work is always distinctly corporeal.

It's rare these days to see evidence of the artist's hand in a medium as cool (in the Marshall McLuhan sense of the term) as film or video, but Wilcox makes a distinctive, tactile impression in his films. Shot in low-tech Super 8, transferred and edited on video and then re-transferred and projected as 16mm, there's a smudged, worked-over quality that underscores the base celluloid

materiality of the film. This extends to the presentation of the films, which are projected onto old-style glass-beaded screens. In the gallery the screens and whirling projectors are as much a part of the viewer's experience as the flickering storytelling, creating an atmosphere of intimacy that brings to mind a suburban family room of yesteryear, where home movies (and stag films) are shown amid small gatherings of family or friends.

The lovingly homespun feel of Wilcox's work makes it seductive

and immediately appealing. Richly textured, the films are chock-full of images of quaint, hand-crafted objects and melancholy mementoes of childhood innocence. Honeybees, kittens, sunsets, a flock of birds, are all given long and loving inspections. Overshadowed by a rueful black humour, they possess a hobbyist's attention to detail and reflect an affinity for poignant tales of human aspiration and folly. Over the past eight years Wilcox has populated his narratives with a cast of characters

worthy of a History Channel All-Star Game: Marie Antoinette, the Romanovs, Casanova, Marlene Dietrich, the First Emperor of China, Chopin and Ara Trip have all made their way into one film or another. His works run the gamut from the glamorous to the everyday: *Garland 5* (2005) recounts the unrelated but somehow parallel biographies of the Countess de Castiglione and the American socialite, paramour and ambassador to France, Pamela Digby Churchill Harriman; *Garland 4* (2005), by contrast, lingers

over a hometown
girl rodeo, an
overdecorated
Christmas tree
and a finger
tracing over wet
paint the words “I
have never
forgotten.”

Wilcox has a knack
for making history
personal and
small-scale, owing
partly to the spare
poetic texts that
subtitle the films.
Often combining
first-person
anecdotes with
such genres as the
travelogue,
newsreel,
children’s show,
biopic, nature
programme and
experimental film
(pioneers such as
Stan Brakhage,
Jack Smith and
Jean Painlevé©
come immediately

to mind), Wilcox's filmic universe is a shifting, layered affair in which all things great and small are deemed equally worthy of our attention.

More significantly, there's an underlying cosmology at the heart of his entire project that probes the ways in which all these isolated things, people and places (both past, present and future) are joined.

Which brings me back to Rimbaud and Marseille – the setting for Stephan Tennant's single unfinished novel Lascar.

Tennant, an English dandy whose sensibility

echoes Wilcox's own, was the subject of an early Wilcox piece, *Stephen Tennant Homage* (1998). The antithesis of Rimbaud, who seemed unable to sit still, Tennant once famously spent four years in bed. Embodying a decadent penchant for indolence and reverie, he would surely have loved such Wilcox gems as *Around the World in 80 Seconds* (2003), which tours the globe via vintage postcards from its most famous cities. Experience, that most overrated of pursuits, is shunned in favour of expectant

imagination and aesthetics. A potent distillation, Wilcox's art offers a compelling case for staying at home, where one's pleasures are ample and assured.

**T.J. Wilcox;
Metro Pictures
Time Out New
York, Issue 627
(October 4 – 10,
2007) by Anne
Wehr**

After seeing T.J. Wilcox's show, I found myself thinking about those old Blackglama ads of various high- and low-cultural grand dames vamping in mink coats under the slogan, "What Becomes a Legend Most?" No fur to be found

here (with one scandalous exception; more on that momentarily), but like the creators of that campaign, Wilcox is a seasoned pro when it comes to co-opting pop and historic icons to his own appealing ends.

The works here don't cover new stylistic ground from his 2005 film suite *Garlands*, but if it ain't broke, don't fix it: Wilcox is a magpie storyteller whose romantic fascination with the past is infectious, and this sure-footed exhibition nicely showcases his dovetailing of

original and appropriated material. *A Fair Tale (Extended Mix)* merges three works into one 16mm film. The title piece, a first-person narrative of a childhood journey to a county fair, is followed by *The Jerry Hall Story*, which at just over one minute long may qualify as the shortest biopic ever made. Lastly, there's the tragic tale of the fin de siècle assassination of Austrian empress and horsewoman Sissi, wife of Franz Joseph I. There are also several large-scale ink-jet prints with vibrant watercolor touch-

ups relating to
each segment.

Innocence (and
the loss of it) is an
undercurrent,
most palpably in
Jackie on
Skorpios, a video
about the former
First Lady's fall
from grace after
the whole world
saw her hoo-ha in
some paparazzi
sunbathing
photos;"the
most famous of
which Wilcox
enlarges into a
grainy life-size
collage.

Remarkably, the
image still shocks
even as it recalls a
gentler era than
our own. Now
that's full-frontal
nostalgia.

**Stedelijk
Museum T.J.
Wilcox – A Fair**

**Tale & Garland
One (January 26
– March 4, 2007)**

What do Marie Antoinette, the bulldog of the Romanov family and the Roman Emperor Hadrian have to do with one another? They are all characters in films by the American artist T.J. Wilcox, a typical story-teller. Wilcox guides his visual narratives by the subtitles. There is generally no direct or unambiguous story line; rather, he creates an open relationship between the images and titles. This in turn opens up space for associations; the viewer's own

imagination is spurred into action.

T.J. Wilcox's silent 16mm films are collages of jumpy amateur material, historical images plucked from television, post cards, photographs and animation. They are obviously "hand made," sometimes frame by frame, without the intervention of a professional film crew. Wilcox shoots his own material on super-8, manipulates it digitally, and then transfers the end result to 16mm film stock. He was trained as a painter, a fact that can clearly be seen. He films

layer over layer, in grainy, blurred images and overexposed colours. He brings together figures from world history, individuals from his childhood, celebrities and aristocrats into a cinematic combination of fact, fiction and fantasy which involuntarily draws the viewer along. In his work subjective history is mixed, as it were, with the reality of the news bulletin.

Garland 1 is one film from a series of six. In the films personal memories and stories surrounding historical figures

that Wilcox has reshaped for his own purposes are loosely strung together like a garland. In *Garland 1* we first see shaky, hand-held camera images of vague landscapes and snapshots from a family album: an elegy for the artist's deceased stepmother. This is followed by the story of the slaughter of the Romanovs, the last Russian czar and his family, a mix of historic photographs and documentary images, some staged. The film ends with a bizarre fraise des bois animation. In it tiny characters guard a strawberry plant,

which finally
displays its red
fruit.

The title *A Fair Tale* is an allusion to “fairy tale,” and literally means a carnival story. In it the artist tells about an excursion to a town fair with his parents and their “hippie friends” in 1972. The then seven-year-old narrator is overwhelmed by the attractions: the Ferris wheel, the pig race, and a rain dance by “Native Americans.” In the middle of the performance a parachute jumper unexpectedly lands in the fair. Gigantic clouds of parachute silk

descend over the spectators. The little boy panics as he tries to find his way out from under the cloth. Before anything untoward happens he is lifted out of the billowing silk by a self-controlled arm: the boy's heroic rescuer is no one less than the Indian chief.

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