

A Biannual Magazine Published by The Power Plant

# SWITCH



## Screen Space

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**FEATURING:**

Martha Langford on Michael Snow  
Lucy Reynolds on Avant-Garde Film/Video Legacies  
Jon Davies on Ryan Trecartin  
Helena Reckitt on 'Nothing to Declare'

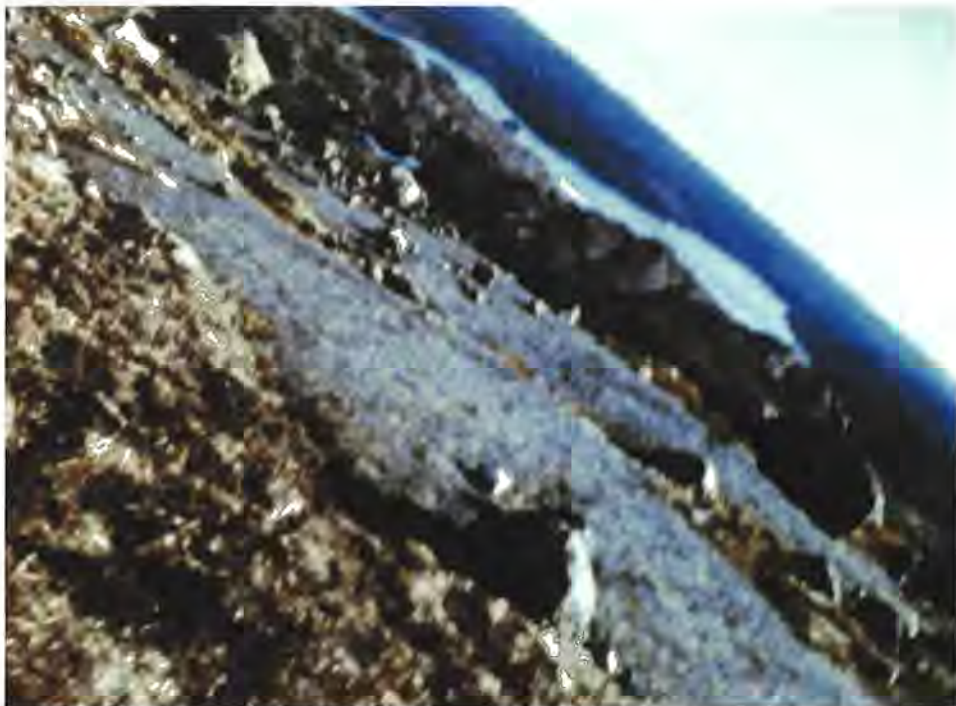
**PLUS:**

Trevor Paglen  
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# Michael Snow's Films 1966–1971

by Elizabeth Legge



**Michael Snow**  
*La Région centrale*, 1971,  
Still from a 16mm film.  
Courtesy the artist and the  
Canadian Filmmakers  
Distribution Centre (Toronto).

Between 1966 and 1971 Michael Snow, then living in New York, made three key films which affect our experience of occupying space and passing time in unforeseen ways.

The first of these films was the legendary *Wavelength* (1967), a 45-minute zoom into the depths of a mostly empty loft space, accompanied by the steadily rising sound pitch of a mechanically generated sine wave. There are four incidents in the film: two men install bookshelves against a wall; two women come in and listen to part of The Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever" on the radio; a man walks in and drops dead right in the line of the slowly oncoming zoom; and, finally, a young woman makes a frightened telephone call ("And he doesn't look drunk, he looks dead!").

It may be hard to imagine how those apparently slim pickings generate such interest, but *Wavelength* has fascinating qualities created by its less obvious 'events': the keening buzz of the sine wave that eventually shreds off into faint siren-like wailing threads; intense colour fields of red, green, orange, and purple that saturate the image; passages of strobing white light, shifting exposures and negative monochrome;

the effect of being in an indoor granular snow-fall. The film turns to a kind of double vision that makes us feel as if what we are seeing is happening in our eyes and minds rather than on the screen.

Artists at the time had been widely experimenting with new techniques for working on film—splicing together found footage, scratching or drawing directly onto the film, having strobing and flickering bombardments on screen, or very long static shots that altered ordinary viewing habits and expectations of the scale and pace of existence. Watching *Wavelength*, we hover between a feeling of heightened attention and constant distraction, and that fluctuation makes us conscious about the ways in which we perceive things: as the zoom carries us along its path our attention is distended in new directions. The visual effect is partly that we are moving forward into a deep space toward the windows at the far end of the loft; but, in fact, since all that is happening is that the zoom lens is being turned to narrow the stationary camera's field, the effect is also one of overriding flattening. It is not travel into real space—as it would be were the camera moving in a tracking shot—but a spatial creation that could only happen in a film, through a lens.

In the mid- to late-1960s any kind of philosophical thinking about perception was filtered through the work of that ubiquitous Canadian public intellectual, Marshall McLuhan, who saw the artist's task as creating works that could help the collective psyche adjust to the unfamiliar barrage of new electronic media. Snow's use of zoom and sine wave certainly suggest that kind of recalibration of our visual sensation. McLuhan's thinking, though, had been filtered through the LSD culture that was part of the mainstream by 1966. *Wavelength's* effects seem to resonate with the acid guru Timothy Leary's crypto-mystical visions of the distorted lights, music and colours of a 'trip'.

But if *Wavelength* seems to send aerial roots into the intellectual and artistic culture of the time, it is nevertheless only like itself. The zoom ends on a black and white photograph of waves, which punningly sums up the waves of light and colour that let us see the film. We even feel briefly that we are being carried out over the waves. But you might say Snow 'stills' the waves, as the photograph reminds us that film's motion is really a sequence of stills. All in all, Snow's zoom and sine wave constitute a kind of test drive of the possibilities of human experience.

Snow's next 'camera motion' film, *Back and Forth* (1969), is built around a side-to-side camera pan at speeds ranging from the extremely slow to dizzyingly fast. The pans are punctuated at each end by a hollow sound that suggests hitting up against some imposed limit. The camera





**Michael Snow**  
*Wavelength*, 1967, Stills  
 from a 16mm film. Courtesy  
 the artist and the Canadian  
 Filmmakers Distribution  
 Centre (Toronto).

starts out facing a wall, and then pans to the left to show a long view of a classroom, so that there is a wider arc to the left than to the right. This oscillation picks up speed, until it is a sheer field of energy; then, at its most intense point, the pans begin to sweep up and down. The setting and camerawork suggest the era's boxed in structures of authority—1968 was, after all, a pivotal year of anti-establishment and anti-Vietnam War riots and strikes, in France and the United States. The film has a jolting physiological power, and can bring on motion sickness, a powerful reminder that seeing movement can trigger a physical sensation of bodily movement even when we are still.

With the third of these films *La Région centrale* (1971), Snow moved into a treeless Canadian wilderness, beautiful but absolutely not picturesque, uninhabited as far as the eye can see. The scope of time in the film matches its spatial scale: at three hours, it is a very long film,

seeming to prolong time as much as taking time. With the engineer Pierre Abeloos, Snow designed a machine that held the camera on an articulated mechanical arm, capable of moving in variable directions and at different speeds, potentially describing an entire sphere. Concealed behind a large rock in the wintery landscape, Snow adjusted a panel controlling the machine. The effects of the film are unexpected: when the camera moves quickly it seems as if the landscape itself is moving, streaming by in ribbons, as if it had been flattened out by centrifugal forces. This is most striking in the night sequence in which the moon seems to fling around like a spermatic tetherball. The soundtrack is made of electronic beeps, described by Snow as a "kind of nervous system." These beeps have a progressively intense effect, like a faulty alarm; but they finally unhinge from the speed of the camera movement in the last half-hour as sound and picture come apart with a euphoric energy.

Made at a time of national concern about Canadian identity, Snow turned to our wilderness mythology to pose philosophical questions about the ways we physically experience the world and our engagements in it, through nimbly forceful manoeuvres in time and space as they exist in moving pictures. In a sense, Snow took the ambitions of the space race and moon landing of 1969 back to the home planet; and these films still exert a powerful pull, something like gravity.

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# Michael Snow: Screen Writing

Search your mind. Remember where you were (in some theatre, in some city), sitting in the dark, awash in fresh cinematic impressions. Credits and acknowledgments were rolling by, sometimes straight, sometimes punning, as a surplus of cinematic gaming. If this was 1969 or later, and you'd already been  $\longleftrightarrow$  *Back and Forth* (1969) with this filmmaker, you were probably sitting tight, not wiggling your arms into your jacket, because you were anticipating more action on screen, some final gesture that would yet blow your mind.

by Martha Langford





**Michael Snow**  
*The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets*, 2009,  
Real-time video projection  
and site-specific wall/screen  
structure composed by  
the artist for each installation.  
Installation view: 'Recent  
Snow', The Power Plant,  
2009–2010. Courtesy the  
artist, Jack Shainman Gallery  
(New York), Galerie Martine  
Aboucaya (Paris) and  
àngels barcelona gallery.  
Photo: Steve Payne.





**Michael Snow**  
**SSHTOORRTY**, 2005, Still  
from a 35mm film. Courtesy  
the artist and the Canadian  
Filmmakers Distribution  
Centre (Toronto).

“Auteur, auteur!” you might be shouting, but not “Author, author,” except possibly on a few historic occasions: the premieres of *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot* (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen (1974), *So Is This* (1982), and *SSHTOORRTY* (2005). Screenwriting—the production of a screenplay—has never been the prime ingredient of this auteur's cinematic oeuvre, though the exceptions just cited are exceptionally fine.

The auteur in question is Michael Snow, whose recent projected works were presented by The Power Plant in a survey exhibition this past winter. This thematic approach seems refreshing—very recent Snow—making a link to his most recent public art work, *The Windows Suite* (2006).<sup>1</sup> There are, however, significant precedents in his work. Snow has been using video technology since the early seventies, though he was never part of the Portapak bubble, having in a sense committed himself to an investigation of the other moving picture medium, which was film. Still, video was there, and quite visibly part of the common culture as an instrument of record and instantaneous transmission. Snow exploited the latter feature when he modified his camera-activating machine, the acrobatic wonder used to film *La Région centrale* (1971), into the mesmerizing kinetic sculpture *De La* (1972). The film had concentrated spectatorial attention on a day in the life of a *truly* moving camera, set to do its business on a rocky hilltop somewhere in the wild. The sculpture was in many ways the film's opposite: the machine's limbs and sinuous movements drew attention to themselves; the synchronous output of the

video camera was not to one screen, but to four monitors set around the room; the setting was not wild, but ruled as only a white box can be—a place of limited participation, under the watchful eye of a museum guard.

Real-time video was recognized by artists, such as Snow, as a tool with potential for art. Its function as an instrument of security and surveillance was already well established. With economy and precision, Snow followed *De La* with a statement about the nature of video technology in the form of an installation. This work consisted of a ceiling-mounted video camera, a projector and an X taped on the floor. That is its technical description—the work functions as it should when a visitor stands on the mark, whereupon his or her image, shot from above, is compressed into a projection on the floor. Snow called this work *Observer* (1974). In many ways, some quite literal, *Observer* anticipated works featured in



**Michael Snow**  
**That / Cela / Dat**, 1999,  
video programmed for one  
projector and two monitors.  
Installation view: 'Voici',  
Palais des Beaux Arts  
(Brussels), 2000. Courtesy  
the artist, Jack Shainman  
Gallery (New York), Galerie  
Martine Aboucaya (Paris)  
and àngels barcelona gallery.



**Michael Snow**  
*De La*, 1972, Aluminium  
 steel, mechanical sculpture  
 with electronic controls,  
 video camera, four monitors,  
 and painted circular wooden  
 base. Collection of the  
 National Gallery of Canada  
 (Ottawa). Courtesy the artist.



the 2009 exhibition—the product of Snow's concentration on video over the last ten years. The willing participation of a mobile visitor, entering and exiting the work (inscribed and erased as visible presence), is crucial, as are certain other features: the tension between 'being here' and being represented 'there' through technological displacement; the screen as a 'found' surface, demarcated by the artist in a Duchampian gesture; that same irregular surface as a palimpsest; and the fixed stare as a phenomenon that writes itself into cinematic history. But Snow, being Snow, means that these clarifying statements about a medium are always clearest in contradistinction to other forms—forms found in translation from one language to another, and extending that process in spectatorial response. For, as Gary Shapiro has shown, "Translation is an infinite relation."<sup>2</sup> Snow, especially in his video installations, is a producer of relational forms.

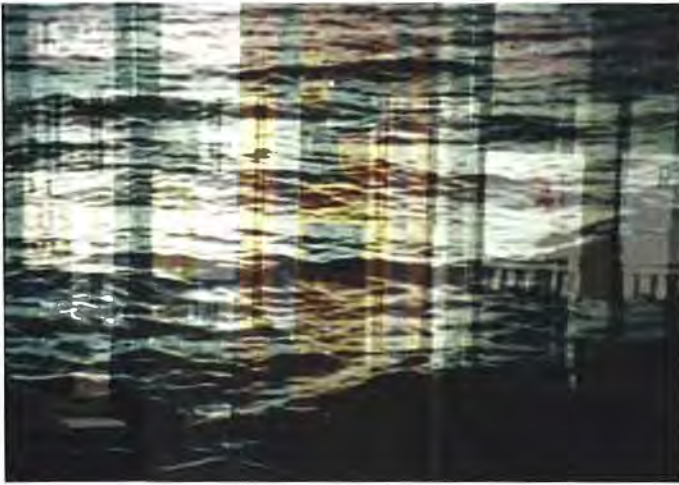
Bruce Elder, another distinguished filmmaker and writer, once wrote: "All three [Marcel Duchamp, Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow] doubted that words or images give us untroubled access to material objects, as even the existence of real (objective, material, unchanging) objects is open to doubt." And then, driving the point home about language, Elder continued: "Loss of faith in the ability of words to deliver things is a consequence of passing beyond the psychological stage Jacques Lacan called the *Imaginary*." Elder's text adeptly steers us through the Lacanian shoals of language-doubt and language-acquisition, because he wants to make a point about the benefits of never quite terminating the journey, but rather lingering in the passages opened up by Snow's work, and in particular his use of camera movement and verbal forms. These strategies, Elder argues, reignite our faith in language as a possible bridge between unknowns: the unfathomable other and the equally elusive self.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Snow's, and by extension Elder's, is not the dictionary definition of *language* as "the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in an agreed way."<sup>4</sup> Snow's method of communication is a use of language to continuously renegotiate such agreements: one reason, among many, that his work appeals.

So the first word here under renegotiation is 'screenwriting' and a glance at the title of this essay confirms that I've already begun to test that agreement by breaking the compound word up—a pale imitation of what Snow can get up to, and emphatically does in a work such as *That / Cela / Dat* (1999), the earliest installation included in 'Recent Snow: Projected Works by Michael Snow'. *That / Cela / Dat* is the issue of Snow's silent film *So Is This* (itself a magisterial exercise in authorship) crafted in a style of direct address to you, sitting in the audience. As Catherine Bédard explains, "It's a film in which language does not claim to show us anything other than the film it describes, a film that may be 'reduced' to a string of word-images pointing, essentially, to the film itself, words that aim various witticisms (like arrows) at the art of pointing."<sup>5</sup> Self-reflexive in the extreme, the film considers what it might have been ("a book") and what it might yet become ("a French version"), as well as the social aspects of film screenings ("Sometimes the author of this film is present when his films are screened and can thus answer questions about them."). *The film considers*, the film saucily usurps the role of screenwriter to talk over the author's head through the letterforms made

visible on screen through the power of the projector beam. And the voice is powerful, exhorting the spectator to "Stick with it" and to value the film's staging of sociability ("When was the last time you and your neighbour read together?").<sup>6</sup> *So Is This* also has its political dimensions, despite its disclaimers. Language is political in Canada, as in Belgium where *That / Cela / Dat* was commissioned. Based on *So Is This*, and formally honouring its frame-by-frame delivery of word forms, *That / Cela / Dat* adopts three voices—three languages (English, French and Flemish) to address its audience. There is the dominant voice, whichever language is occupying the large central screen, and there are the two other voices, communicating through video monitors on either side of the screen. Simultaneously, these voices grapple lucidly, albeit silently, with the difference between 'this' and 'that'. The spectator is again reading with his or her neighbour, but with a difference—a position in the space (*a prise de position*) that expresses language preference, that talks back, in other words, to those *other* words. *That / Cela / Dat* sets up a different kind of relationship, potentially dialogical, and with equal potential for disagreement, depending on the setting and the mind-set of the participant, *you*. The film points at itself, while the installation, as more of a constellation, points at you and you and you, in at least five languages including those of film and video.

Snow's cinematic languages are resolutely uncommon, in their emphasis on aspects of this cultural form and its tools that have somehow been naturalized into neglect. What he does in effect is denature them by making their form-building functions more visible, audible and palpable. The 45-minute stuttering zoom, that is the visible component of *Wavelength* (1967), anatomizes that everyday way of looking called 'staring' in a series of simple yet hallucinatory effects. Another way of





**Michael Snow**  
*WVLNT*, 1967–2003,  
 Still from a DVD.  
 Courtesy the artist.

emphasizing, or reactivating, atrophied perception is temporal manipulation (speeding up or slowing down), which translates to the screen as something neither fast nor slow, but as failing vision or grave intonation. His *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* (1970) needs to be mentioned here, for the factors just mentioned, as well as its insistence on the rules of slide projection—rules that Snow naturally breaks. As one might narrate it, *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* translates an artist's (or art historian's) illustrated talk into the imagined experience of an audience member arriving late, forced into a bad seat, then held there helpless as the misshapen image disappears and returns, its presence and absence unnoticed by the disembodied author/describer whose voice is held hostage to what appears to be happening on screen.

Through translation, Snow invites the spectator into the cinematic flow of a well-planned thought experiment. To keep her bearings, the spectator effectively re-translates Snow's translation by explaining it to herself as the cinematic experience unfolds. The enduring fascination of Snow's cinematic enciphering is that it never fully decodes, in part because the process of reflection just described—call it memory—is running parallel with an immediate perception that is generating predictions—call it imagination. Their furious race constructs a dense, polyphonic and not entirely trustworthy set of recognitions. This is the nature of cinema. Snow's work makes the seated figure conscious of this burst of activity and also makes it pleasurable—a stroke of genius, one might say.

But whose stroke is it? One of Snow's great gifts, it has been argued, is his ability to direct spectatorial attention. Philip Monk, writing at the time of Snow's last exhibition at The Power Plant, borrows this power by citing the artist in a subhead, 'See it my way.'<sup>7</sup> The critic Thierry de Duve makes Snow's work all about language in his 1995 review article subtitled 'The Deictics of Experience, and Beyond.'<sup>8</sup> In terms of years, creative leaps and critical reactions, we are light years away from de Duve's semiotic system. Yet we are still beholden to it, as beholders of Snow's recent work, writers and readers of its critical reception.<sup>9</sup> Current writings on Snow emphasize the haptic dimensions of his work—the exploratory palpation that it initiates in the mind of the spectator.<sup>10</sup> This is very different from following the direction of a pointing finger or a deictic pronoun, and in Snow's recent work, different modes of inscription are at play. The ghost is in the machine; the form seems to write itself; transparentness and the layering of transparencies create 'accidents'; the cinematic site is even mobilized as an afterimage of something that was never stable, that

**Michael Snow**  
*Condensation . A Cove Story*, 2009, Blu-ray, DVD  
 projection. Installation view:  
 'Recent Snow', The Power  
 Plant, 2009–2010. Courtesy  
 the artist, Jack Shanman  
 Gallery (New York) Galerie  
 Martine Aboucaya Paris)  
 and angels barcelona gallery.  
 Photo: Steve Paynter







**Michael Snow**  
*Piano Sculpture*, 2009. Stills from a synchronized 4-DVD projection. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery (New York), Galerie Martine Aboucaya (Paris) and àngels barcelona gallery.

never stood still. 'See it my way' has become something possessible by its activators. Put another way, people experiencing Snow's projections do so in the only way possible, which is *their way*, and the work speaks to that viewing condition.

Video projections are often sampled, rather than watched from beginning to end. The spaces, amenities and protocols of an exhibition space encourage the visitor to drop in and drop out. The choice is yours, the work suggests: there may be a bench in the room with *SSHTOORRTY*, but nothing obliges you to sit on it, to share the moment with a perfect stranger. Likewise, nothing obliges you to give up your seat as the back of the room fills up with heavy-breathing standees. But as you lose track of time, immersed in the romantic triangle being played out in repetitions of colourful shapes and letterforms on screen, your forgotten companion, tired or hungry, may come to tap you on the shoulder. This interruption is allowed: the space of an installation is a social space; it is *permissive* in ways that a cinema is not. At the turn of this century, as more and more galleries began to present installations, Snow considered the transformation of the spectator from seated figure to *flâneur* within a common culture of appropriation—another form of sampling. He also watched with horror as his canonical work was pirated and re-presented on the Internet in unauthorized, low-quality digital copies. Negative inspiration can be a beautiful thing: it prompted Snow to create *WVLNT: Wavelength for Those Who Don't Have the Time* (1967–2003) by dividing the 45-minute *Wavelength* into three equal parts, and layering them into a 15-minute

**Snow's cinematic languages are resolutely uncommon, in their emphasis on aspects of this cultural form and its tools that have somehow been naturalized into neglect. What he does in effect is denature them by making their form-building functions more visible, audible and palpable.**

DVD. In 2005, *WVLNT* became a gallery projection that visitors tended to sit through two or more times, to fully experience the memory work of the montage. This technique is not new to Snow: layering constitutes an extended family of resemblance in his oeuvre, returning to his collages and foldages of the early 1960s. His film *Reverberlin* (2006) is a relatively new member, an improvisational musical event visually thickened and temporally exploded: the recording of an actual performance, a 55-minute concert given in Berlin in 2002 by ccmc (a musical group comprised of Snow, Paul Dutton and John Oswald), becomes an aural platform for layered visual passages of past and future performances by



**Michael Snow**

*Tap*, 1969, Framed black and white photograph, framed typewritten text on paper, tape player, speaker, wire, and audio tape. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa). Courtesy the artist.



the group. 'Recent Snow' featured a musically related installation: a four-screen projection work entitled *Piano Sculpture* (2009) that centred on his dynamic piano playing.

The life of sound is another feature of video installation that distinguishes it from cinematic experience and forms another branch of Snow's families of resemblance. Sound leaches out into the light from the darkened room. Who can say where the installation begins, where to draw the line around its virtual space? In the case of *Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids)* (2002), when do the dominant sounds of a curtain snapping in the breeze and flapping into folds against a screen, or the background noises of clinking china and murmuring voices, reach the spectator in the gallery *beyond*? In *SSHTOORRTY*, when do the insistent chimes of the doorbell and the tinkling piano draw the spectator upstairs? Dispersing sound is one of Snow's favourite strategies, used early in his work as a clarifying Magrittean provocation. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* translates into Snow's work in a myriad of ways. When it comes to sound, his early installation *Tap* (1969) is not just the discrete aural or haptic experience, but also its multiple representation in dispersed elements (sound, image, text, object and line). The origins of the sensorial experience are never perfectly clear, but lead the willing visitor around what is supposed to be primarily a visual domain, an art gallery, by his or her ears. In Snow's video installations, the line from one sensorial experience to another has been replaced by something softer that ebbs and waxes, something like the fog that rolls in and out of *Condensation . A Cove Story* (2008).

Produced by time-lapse digital photography, *Condensation . A Cove Story* registers a view that Snow has been staring at for nearly four decades from his rural property in Newfoundland. It is a landscape love story, as the title suggests, compressing weather-events that took place over a set period of time into a reverential meditation on Mother Earth. The fixed camera position is Snow's vantage point, and his to represent in the transformative and immersive scale of the piece projected in a gallery. The work figures its inconstant relation with the spectator—such is Newfoundland weather, after all—while silently engraving its sublimity in cultural and personal memory.

More inconstant still, and more proximate in both time and space, is *The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets* (2009). Originally created as a site-specific piece for the àngels barcelona gallery, the work consists of the feed from an externally-mounted video camera onto an assemblage of plinths. The title refers to a cultural construction, which is the history of Cubism, an important influence on Snow's development as an artist. The creation of an irregular screen has its antecedents in Snow's work:

**Michael Snow**

*The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets*, 2009. Real-time video projection and site-specific wall/screen structure composed by the artist for each installation. Installation view: 'Recent Snow', The Lower Plant, 2009–2010 Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery (New York), Galerie Martine Aboucaya (Paris) and àngels barcelona gallery. Photo: Steve Payne





## Structural Legacies

### Lessons in How to Assimilate the 'Seminal'

by Lucy Reynolds



**Peter Campus**  
*Anamnesis*, 1974, Closed  
circuit video installation.  
Courtesy the artist.



**Michael Snow**  
*See You Later / Au revoir*,  
1990, Still from a 16mm  
film. Courtesy the artist and  
the Canadian Filmmak-  
ers Distribution Centre  
(Toronto).

'Seminal' and 'pioneering' are the adjectives most commonly affixed to the film and video works of Michael Snow and Peter Campus<sup>1</sup>, the subjects of two recent exhibitions at The Power Plant. While both artists continue to produce work, now made and presented in digital formats rather than on video or film, their contributions are still read mainly in canonical terms, through the historic filter of works that established their reputations some forty years before.



The reception of Snow's recent installations is haunted by his 1967 film *Wavelength*, for example, which has come to epitomize North American Structural filmmaking. Meanwhile, appraisals of Campus's work frequently return to *Dynamic Field Series* (1971) or *aen* (1977), works which embody the performatively-inflected, monitor-based minimalism of early American video art, while also situating him alongside contemporaries such as Bruce Nauman or Dan Graham, particularly related to his explorations of closed-circuit video technology.

As recent works by both artists attest, they continue to engage actively with new visual technologies and to make new explorations of old themes: Snow's *SSHTOORRTY* (2005), for example, developed the narrative disjunctures he first explored digitally in *\*Corpus Callosum* (2002), whereas Campus's *Inflections: changes in light and colour around Ponquogue Bay* (2009), commissioned by the British Film Institute in London, continues his interest in landscape painting and the digital sphere.

Despite this continued productivity, critical and curatorial interest circulates around their 'seminal' or 'pioneering' works of earlier decades, suggesting that Snow and Campus have been variously assimilated throughout their careers to the changing cultural agendas of different epochs of film, video and visual art culture. *Wavelength* has merited numerous re-assessments since its first critical affirmations by critics such as P. Adams Sitney and Annette Michelson. In her recent re-reading of *Wavelength*, Elizabeth Legge notes how, for critics like Michelson, Snow's film "established itself as a beacon and touchstone of intellectualism in film,"<sup>2</sup> at a time when artist's filmmaking in the United States "had to stand up to radical cultural reassessments" and theorizing about "the ontology and political function of film," from French journals such as *Critique*, *Quel Tel* and *Cahiers du cinéma*.

Campus's videos and installations have also been appropriated to contextualize current critical and curatorial re-evaluations of film and video. The earliest example is Rosalind Krauss's famous article on the effects of video art, 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism'. Krauss perceived the participating presence of the viewer in the video installations *mem* and *dor* (both 1975), made visible through closed-circuit video technology in the gallery, as rupturing the "narcissistic enclosure" that she observed between artist and camera in the work of contemporaries such as Vito Acconci.<sup>3</sup> Crucially, Krauss also compared the viewing conditions of Campus's installations to the "temporal values" of minimalist sculpture, simultaneously establishing a critical affirmation and a chronological link to a defining end point of American modernism, one credited with shifting the experience of art from autonomous object to the contingencies of viewing.<sup>4</sup>

Another recent affirmation of Campus's pioneering significance was the widely acclaimed and critically rehabilitative Whitney Museum of American Art exhibition, 'Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977' (2001), which included Campus's closed-circuit installation, *aen*, among projects by Snow, Acconci and others. Both archival and regenerative, exhibitions such as 'Into the Light' have arrested the material disintegration of early video technologies by reasserting this legacy through scholarship and exhibition. As the moving image is increasingly assimilated into the museum or gallery as a projection—thus re-asserting cinematic roots rather than the sculptural, monitor-based presentations which had characterized video art in the preceding decades—curator Chrissie Iles's exhibition not only proposed precedents, but set up a com-

parative framework through which to consider current assumption developments about what has come to be titled 'artists' moving image' or, as Maeve Connolly suggests, in one of the few studies to address the area, "artists' cinema" or "gallery film."

Connolly concedes the inherent complexity of artists' current engagement with the moving image, proposing that: "artists' cinema" does not signify a unified or coherent historical formation. Instead, it refers to a series of competing claims made for and by artists and art practice in relation to cinema and the wider context of moving image culture."<sup>5</sup> Her point implies that tracing historic trajectories, as Iles had done in 'Into the Light,' has helped to navigate the proliferating concerns and forms which gallery-based work has taken during the last decade, assigning iconic status to forerunners such as Snow and Campus in the process. Indeed, Connolly refers to the "genealogical" nature of many of these claims, "seeking to frame artists' cinema as an extension of another form of art practice, such as experimental film, post-minimalist installation, video art or performance."<sup>6</sup>

From either end of video art's short history, both Krauss and Iles align Campus to a modernist chronology and position him against and within the trajectories of 20th century art in order to orientate their own epoch. Campus's video works might therefore function predominantly as signifiers, adaptive to the contingent concerns of the given time and space of the retrospective or article in question, particularly at moments of significant conceptual or technological shifts and flux. It could also be argued, in a decade where market forces have infiltrated untold institutional areas of the visual arts,<sup>7</sup> that Campus, Snow and their counterparts may also have come to represent a period of perceived radicalism, epitomized by the dematerialized conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s, and embedded in the radicalized counterculture of the period.

Whereas Krauss or 'Into the Light' positioned Snow and Campus within a map of historical or critical trajectories, either on the page or in the museum, recent artists such as Emily Wardill and Sophie Bélair Clément materially embody Snow and Campus's film and video experi-



**Peter Campus**  
*mem*, 1975, Camera,  
projector and infrared light.  
Installation view: BFI  
Southbank Gallery (London),  
2009–2010. Courtesy the  
artist. Photo: Dave Morgan.



Emily Wardill  
*Sick Serena and Dregs*  
 and *Wreck and Wreck*,  
 2007, Still from a 16mm film.  
 Courtesy the artist and  
 LUX (London)



ments through their questioning, and even abrasive, processes of practice and performance. As Peter Osborne has suggested, this younger generation's formal re-evaluations of film and video work from the 1960s and 1970s reflect: "a more general experimental rearticulation and refunctioning of technologies of perception and patterns of artistic and social use"<sup>8</sup>; providing points of orientation for their own unfolding and unresolved relationship to artists' moving image: its histories and modes of reception.

This is not to suggest that either artist is working to the same systematic models of materialist formalism that Structural film once represented. Indeed the value of Wardill and Bélair Clément's engagement has been to draw out those aspects of formal practice which would perhaps not have been recognized by Structuralist filmmakers. Beyond its undeniable formalist intent, Snow's assertion that *Wavelength* was "a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings, and aesthetic ideas," and that the film's references to narrative, or "four human events including a death,"<sup>9</sup> find echoes in the fragmented use of dialogue, and the allusions to mythological, as well as biblical, narrative used by Wardill in *Sick Serena and Dregs* and *Wreck and Wreck* (2007).

Like *Wavelength*, Wardill's film consciously rejects the cohesion of an overriding narrative, employing instead the faceted patterns of stained glass windows as its key reference and recurring image. She compares her film's construction to the "specific compartmentalisation that you would have in stained glass windows,"<sup>10</sup> which function simultaneously as individual images and constituent parts of the window's larger spec-

tacle, treating stained glass as a working structure for the discrete but adjunct narrative components of her filmmaking. The stained glass in Wardill's film operates almost as a metaphor for Structural film's analytical materialism, referring in its tinted translucency to the materiality of the film strip, and suggesting, in the cellular detail of the window's individual ventricles, the analytical focus of Snow and his British counterparts such as Peter Gidal.

Indeed, Wardill perceives her predominant interest in Structural film as relating to the demanding and rigorous process of decipherment that it requires from the viewer. She refers to Structural film's "awareness of the opacity of communication, an insinuation of material which is used in different ways and can be very strong, a hardness—which I think is very relevant today."<sup>11</sup> With this in mind, a recent work by Wardill, *Sea Oak* (2008), draws more directly on the radicalism associated with the film and video artists of the 1960s and 1970s, who asserted the political implications inherent to cinema spectatorship. Wardill correlates the bracing, heady didacticism of Structural film and the subject of her work, a left-wing think-tank located at the Rockridge Institute in Berkeley, California, noting a shared commitment to understanding and unravelling the processes of communication, both visual and verbal: "...this idea of there being a materiality to communication which is impossible to ignore and which can be used for political ends, which they both seem to share."<sup>12</sup>

The resultant film is without film image, yet retains the materiality of the film strip, not as a vehicle of projected light but as a conduit for Wardill's interviews with members of the Rockridge Institute, as their disembodied voices are released through the optical soundtrack of a centrally positioned 16mm projector. For Wardill this seemed the most fitting reflection of their study of political rhetoric "which trades on the ambiguity of metaphorical images, images which are doubly ambiguous because they are being suggested or described rather than supplied visually."<sup>13</sup>

Made and first exhibited just before the 2008 US presidential elections, *Sea Oak* proposes a radical form which cites Structural film as a potential model of how political thought might be inscribed in formal analysis, yet



Sophie Bélair Clément  
 with the collaboration  
 of David Jacques  
*See You Later / Au revoir*:  
 17 minutes en temps réel,  
 2008, Still from a video.  
 Courtesy the artist.



FEATURES

## Déjà Viewed: Michael Snow on Looking Back, and Ahead

SEPTEMBER 20, 2016

BY [LEAH SANDALS](#)



A 1970 copy of *artscanada* with a cover story on Michael Snow, in recognition of his showing at the Venice Biennale's Canada Pavilion.

As I step off the bus towards Michael Snow's house, I feel like I am carrying his entire career in a No Frills bag. Well, maybe not his entire career, but a good chunk of it.



In advance of our interview, Snow has suggested that I dig through *Canadian Art*'s archives—which also include a treasure trove of copies of our predecessor *artscanada* (1967–1983) and an earlier magazine also called *Canadian Art* (1943–1966) to see if I can find a cover he did after winning a contest in 1951, when he was an OCAD student.

I have found that 1951 cover Snow did as a student—an energetic green and orange work called *Ontario House*—as well as a 1970 copy of *artscanada* that featured him on the cover in recognition of his showing at the Venice Biennale's Canada Pavilion that year. Also in the bag: magazines with cover stories on Snow from *Canadian Art*'s Summer 1986, Spring 1994 and Summer 2000 editions; printouts of online stories we did about Snow in 2012 (for his AGO sculpture show, "Objects of Vision") and in 2014 (for "Photo-Centric," a survey in Philadelphia); and a couple of copies of *artscanada* that include articles on his practice.

It is appropriate, in many ways, for me to bring the magazines, even if it is not quite appropriate for me to bring them in a grocery bag. Snow is the honoured guest at the Canadian Art Gala this week, and while locating and reading these texts, I have been reminded (as if one needs to be) of the great significance of Snow's practice to the art world in general and to Canadian art in particular.

As a musician, photographer, filmmaker, painter, sculptor and more, Snow was multidisciplinary well before that was the standard mode of a contemporary artist. Articles from as early as 1970 speak of Snow as "one of the most important aesthetic sensibilities" of the late 20th century. It's a reputation that has only grown over the years, with exhibitions and screenings still on the go at top museums and galleries worldwide. The No Frills bag weighs heavy in my hand.

Snow sees me coming up the steps, and opens the door before I can knock. As we walk through the living room, I see catalogues of recent shows in Italy and the United States. Among the many artworks lining the walls, I spy a framed print of Snow's *Flight Stop*—the Canada geese perpetually in a state of near-landing at Toronto's Eaton Centre—propped on the floor. As we pass a baby grand in the centre of the narrow room, Snow plonks a finger on one of the keys. I tell him it is a nice piano, and he tells me it belonged to his mother.

We settle in the small kitchen on red upholstered chairs. Glass bottles of various colours line the windowsill. I start taking magazines out of the No Frills bag. We begin the interview, or conversation.





When he was a third-year student at the Ontario College of Art, Michael Snow won a cover competition for *Canadian Art*'s Summer 1951 issue. The title of the work? *Ontario House*.

**Leah Sandals:** I'm glad you asked me to bring these magazines.

**Michael Snow:** I just thought you should refer to them because I was thinking about my history in relation to *Canadian Art* and it goes a long way back. This cover [pointing to 1951 edition] is from when I was at OCA [the Ontario College of Art].

An interesting thing about this [artwork on the 1951 cover] is that it was influenced by Stuart Davis. I had seen some of his work, and I liked it quite a bit.

And all of a sudden, now, [Stuart Davis has a show at the Whitney](#), and there are references to Stewart Davis all over the place. And I haven't seen him mentioned for the last 50 years!

**LS:** It is interesting how things return and recur. The first thing I wanted to ask about is what it might be like for you to see all these publications together, from 1951 to the present day, almost.



**MS:** Well, it's wonderful in some ways, because they are all kind of echoes of events—exhibitions and things like Venice. It's fantastic.

**LS: And it's a lot to consider, I bet.**

**MS:** The thing I like is that I'm still here.

**LS: That is a good thing! On a similar note, I've noticed much has changed in the world since I became an art student 20 years ago, and I'm assuming much has changed since you were an art student back in 1951—both in the world at large and in the art world in particular. I was wondering what changes in these decades have struck you the most.**

**MS:** Well, the art world was very small in the '50s in Toronto. In terms of galleries, there were two or three private galleries—the [Roberts Gallery](#), the [Picture Loan Society run by Douglas Duncan](#)... and maybe that's it. This is before [Carmen Lamanna](#) and [Av Isaacs](#).

And I do remember knowing about *Canadian Art* and appreciating the fact that it discussed artists that I might see—that I might even know. Because there was very little of that.

The societies, like the Ontario Society of Artists and the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, they had these quite big group shows pretty much every year, so that was the exhibiting of a kind of local art.

**LS: When did you know you were going to be an artist? Who was helpful in getting your career started?**

**MS:** I had a wonderful teacher at OCA, John Martin, and I used to show him work that I was doing apart from the work that was part of the course we were taking. On one occasion, he told me that there was an exhibition being planned by the Ontario Society of Artists for the Art Gallery of Ontario, and that I should submit two paintings which I had just done—which, of course I never would have thought of. And they were accepted.

When I was in high school, the art teacher was a painter and a friend of all the Group of Seven people, like Lawren Harris. And [through her] I got the art prize. I didn't even know that I was making art—I made comic strips and stuff like that. But I got the art prize, and on the basis of getting the art prize, I decided that I should study art.

The other influential person shortly after OCA was George Dunning, who was the head of a film company in Toronto. After OCA, I worked for a year in commercial art—and I was really terrible at it. Then I went for almost a year to Europe, hitchhiking around and playing music. When I came back, I had an exhibition at Hart House, of drawings, and I got phone call from this man who had seen the show and liked the work and very much wanted to meet me. So we met, and he told me



that he ran an animation company, and that he thought that my drawings showed that I was interested in film—which I wasn't—and he offered me a job learning how to do animation, which was just absolutely incredible. All of a sudden I was involved in film.

**LS:** And then you became very well known for film works later on, like *Wavelength* and *La Région Centrale*.

**MS:** Yes, then I became a filmmaker.

On the same subject: Jonas Mekas.

When [Joyce Wieland](#) and I moved to New York in '62, Jonas was very influential in the underground film scene, which we, in Toronto, didn't know much about. And he was the reason why I sent my film *Wavelength* to a festival in Belgium. I didn't know anything about the festival—he told me about it and he urged me to send it. And it won the grand prize, and brought about an amazing change in things.



The Summer 1986 issue of *Canadian Art*, featuring a cover story on Michael Snow and the hologram work he created for Expo 86 in Vancouver.



**LS: So what would you have done, do you think, if you hadn't gone into art?**

**MS:** Well, I started to play music in high school, and I continued to play professionally. So that was, right from the beginning, also another career.

At times, I thought I should stop and concentrate on being a visual artist, but I didn't.

For a while, I was playing with a band, and we were quite busy. We worked pretty much all one year at the [Westover Hotel](#) [now Filmores in downtown Toronto]. Around '59, '60, something like that. And I had a studio and I made some art that turned out to be interesting at the same time.

**LS: And that music practice has continued up to the present day—just a few weeks ago, you played a show at Yonge-Dundas Square. And earlier, you mentioned that the piano in your living room belonged to your mother. Can you tell me a bit more about your first experiences of music?**

**MS:** My mother was a very good pianist. She wasn't professional, she never played in public, but she could read anything.

Sometimes, when I was in public school, she wanted me to study piano, but I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do anything, actually; I was very obstinate, ridiculous, a serial rebel.

On one occasion, she thought she would go so far as to arrange a meeting with a piano teacher for me, and said she would pick me up at school and take me there. So I told my friends to tell her that they didn't know where I was.

Then, I discovered jazz on the radio, and I was interested in the piano parts of it—Jelly Roll Morton and Duke Ellington. So I started to teach myself how to play piano, and in a few months I was playing in bands. I met other people who were interested in the same kind of music, and we started to play.

When Joyce and I decided to go to New York, I thought that was a good occasion to stop playing. And I did stop playing at that time, for a while. But during that time, I became more involved in sound in every way.

**LS: So when you did give up music for a bit, you focused more on sound in your installations and films.**

**MS:** Yes, sound in the films became a very important thing.

**LS: I'm guessing that there is something you get from making music that you don't get from making art. What is that?**



**MS:** Right from the beginning [in music] it was the improvisation that interested me. Improvisation in jazz is often thematic—there are styles. And I started with that. But eventually it became totally free improvisation.

And I don't free improvise with any other medium—except, maybe, well I did a lot of drawing starting when I was at OCA and in the next couple of years. They might be improvised.

But basically, with the artworks—sculpture or photographic work—there's not that much of an improvisation. They are planned. And the same with the films.

So music is, in that sense, a completely different activity and has its particular excitement in that it has never been never played before.

**LS: Now, I'm curious about what your favourite albums are—your desert-island discs. What do you think?**

**MS:** One of Glenn Gould's *Goldberg Variations*, which covers so much terrain. There isn't anything better.

But after that would be some of the Jelly Roll Morton recordings, and his band the Red Hot Peppers, and then more modern jazz—Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk.





The Spring 1994 issue of *Canadian Art*, featuring a cover story on "Michael Snow: Forty Years of Achievement," by Adele Freedman.

**LS:** You have had such a multifaceted practice, which wasn't common when you were starting out, but is much more prevalent now. What are the biggest lessons you have learned through all these practices?

**MS:** Even if you don't know where you are going, you should go in the direction that is somehow indicated.

You can't really predict the effect of something, or details of a bigger kind of gesture, and sometimes it takes a little while to learn what you have done.

Watching [a work] and hearing it again, and considering what it is that you did, will sometimes imply what the next thing should be.

**LS:** Interesting. What examples come to mind?

**MS:** Well, to make the film *La Région Centrale*, I conceived of a machine that moved the camera



under orders, so to speak. And then I did an installation with that machine. I was surprised to find myself thinking, “this can also do that.”

You know, about two years ago, there was a conference at the Louvre on *La Région Centrale*—three days of papers by people from all over Europe, and a showing of the film, which is a three-hour film. This was a film that was made in '69 or '70, and it's very much still around.

**LS: So what did you learn about *La Région Centrale* from being at that conference? What did you learn about it anew?**

**MS:** There were very interesting readings of the sound in *La Région Centrale*, different interpretations of the sound-image relationship.

**LS: And while I'm curious about the origin of many of your works, this seems like a good time to ask, where did *La Région Centrale* develop for you, initially?**

**MS:** What led me to it was the [previous] film called *Back and Forth*, which is built completely on back-and-forth panning.

The idea for *La Région Centrale* was that it should be a landscape, and should be completely spherical movements.

*La Région Centrale* was totally experimental, in the sense that I conceived of the movements, but I'd never ever seen anything like it. When I was shooting, I had a kind of score, but I also improvised.

In one week, it was shot, and we got the film to the lab in Montreal, and next day or so, we went to have a look at it. It was completely new to me. I had never seen anything like it.

It could have been [different]. There was a lot involved, with the helicopter.

**LS: You rented a helicopter?**

**MS:** To get there. That was one of the most extreme risks that I've taken. Because there could have been something wrong with it—something wrong with the camera, with the helicopter.

Some parts [of the film] were better than others. Mostly, it's pretty good.

**LS: Interesting that you had no clue how it would turn out, initially. What are your favourite films?**

**MS:** It's hard to say. There are a couple of films by Paul Sharits that I like. And also by Ernie Gehr. And Ken Jacobs, Ron Rice. Stan Brakhage's *The Art of Vision*.



Brakhage was very influential in a kind of clarifying way, because I wanted to not do what he was doing.

**LS: Why did you not want to do what Stan Brakhage did? Was it your “serial rebel” thing?**

**MS:** Of his work, I thought, he’s a great filmmaker, and, in some ways, too personal and expressionist. I thought that the machine-ness of the camera ought to be stressed, not negated.

What he did was very diaristic, personal—and I think it’s great, what he did, and that was a very avant-garde thing to realize that films don’t have to be made by a crew with a 35mm camera. Stan wasn’t the only person who did that, but that’s what experimental film was founded on—that one person could do it. And Stan was definitely the leader.

Now, Stan hated *La Région Centrale*. And he didn’t like *Wavelength*, either. So, in the community of experimental filmmakers, which was small, in New York and San Francisco, [that] was known. He was a great lecturer, and in his lectures he would describe why he thought *La Région Centrale* was wrong.

**LS: What was your reaction to his critique?**

**MS:** I thought it was somewhat understandable considering what he did. What I did wasn’t an attack on him, but it was something that was somewhat opposed, in a sense.

But the wonderful thing about that one day I got a letter, a 20-page handwritten letter from him. He had just seen *La Région Centrale* and totally changed his mind. “It’s not this, it’s this, it’s this, I see what you meant by this.” And that letter was followed by another letter.

His wife was a Torontonion, and he mentioned that she had persuaded him to give it another chance. And then he changed his mind. Not only did he change his mind, but he really shared what he thought in great depth with me. Wonderful thing to do.

**LS: It’s a very generous response. Related to this story: Why has the personal not been of interest to you? Or why do you think you have held off on dealing with the personal in your art?**

**MS:** Well, it might be that the personal style is an aspect of instrumental playing in jazz. Playing jazz is much more personal and stylistic than playing classical music in general.

So it might be that, for me, that kind of personal thing was being taken care of by music. And film as something machine-made started to take on an importance in my thinking.



The Summer 2000 issue of *Canadian Art*, featuring a cover story on Michael Snow in Paris by Bart Testa.

**LS: You mention Stan Brakhage's wife was from Toronto, and I want to ask more about this city. Why did you return to Toronto from New York?**

**MS:** During the time that I was living in New York, it was here, in Toronto, that often I had many shows.

And I guess it was partly political, because Joyce kind of got involved in supporting Pierre Trudeau. And I was in so much in Canada, anyway, that we thought Canada looked interesting.

**LS: Your partner was a nationalist, or patriotic, so that was part of the package.**

**MS:** Yes, that's true.

**LS: I'm still intrigued about why you decided to stay here as a base after that time period. What ties you to this place?**



**MS:** Well, my mother is dead now, but she was alive during those years. And the family part of it was actually important—the other aunts and uncles and cousins. Which I don't see very much, but I still had a connection with them, especially with my mother. So that was one of the reasons.

Mostly just seemed like it would be to be part of something that seemed to have a more creative energy than it had when I left.

**LS: So the Toronto scene changed, too, which made it more amenable.**

**MS:** And there was some experimental film. The CFMDC [Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre] was starting, which was modelled on the New York Film-Makers' Cooperative, one of the things that Jonas did.

Toronto wasn't a competitor for New York, but it looked like it would be a pleasure to contribute to a kind of new energy.

**LS: Where in Toronto did you grow up—what area?**

**MS:** Well, in the first years of my life we moved to Montreal. My father was a civil engineer and the company he was working for asked him to move to work on something in Montreal. And there, he had an accident where he lost one eye, and eventually he became blind.

So there were a couple of years in Montreal, and then when the accident happened, we spent a year in Chicoutimi, which is where my mother came from and where I started school.

Then after that, a year in Winnipeg, which was also related to his work, and then we came back to Toronto, and lived on Belsize Drive, which is near Davisville, and then the rest of the time we lived on Roxborough Drive in Rosedale.

**LS: Nice. And was your dad able to continue being an engineer after he lost his sight?**

**MS:** Well, he did some kind of freelancing work. Some guys that had worked for him started their own company, and they had him work on making the bids for possible jobs. So he did have a little bit of work; he learned how to read braille quite fast.

So my sister and I would try to read the plans to him, and he would make notes. He did a little bit of that kind of stuff.

**LS: Interesting. I think Sarah Milroy, [writing for our website in 2012 about your AGO show that year](#), mentioned your dad's loss of vision, and the fact that sometimes people speculate that that's where your own interest in perception came from.**

**MS:** Obviously, I wasn't affected as much as he was.

He came to one of the shows that I had at the Isaacs Gallery when it was on Yonge, with his cane. And looked at the paintings like this, [a few inches away from the canvas].

My nickname was brother. Everybody called me “brother,” including my mother.

So this one time, I’ll never forget, he [looked at the painting and] said, “That’s a nice colour, brother.”

**LS: So he had some limited vision?**

**MS:** He could see the colour.

**LS: That’s a great story. Now, my sense is you always have exhibitions happening these days—that the work continues to circulate in wider spheres. What’s on the go right now?**

**MS:** There is a concert coming up which is two pianos, with [Diane Roblin](#); that’s at [Array Space](#) in Toronto in October. Recently we responded to a request from my Paris gallery, [Martine Aboucaya](#), about wanting to make a different installation of a video work of mine called *The Viewing of Six New Works*. So we spent a couple of hours making revisions and sending that to her. And that particular work, a version of it, is on exhibition right now in Ireland, at the [Butler Gallery](#) in Kilkenny. What is very gratifying is that my work continues to have an audience and the audience is growing, in a sense.

*Michael Snow will be the honoured guest at the Canadian Art Gala on the evening of September 22 at Andrew Richard Designs in Toronto. For more information, please visit [canadianart.ca/gala2016](http://canadianart.ca/gala2016). This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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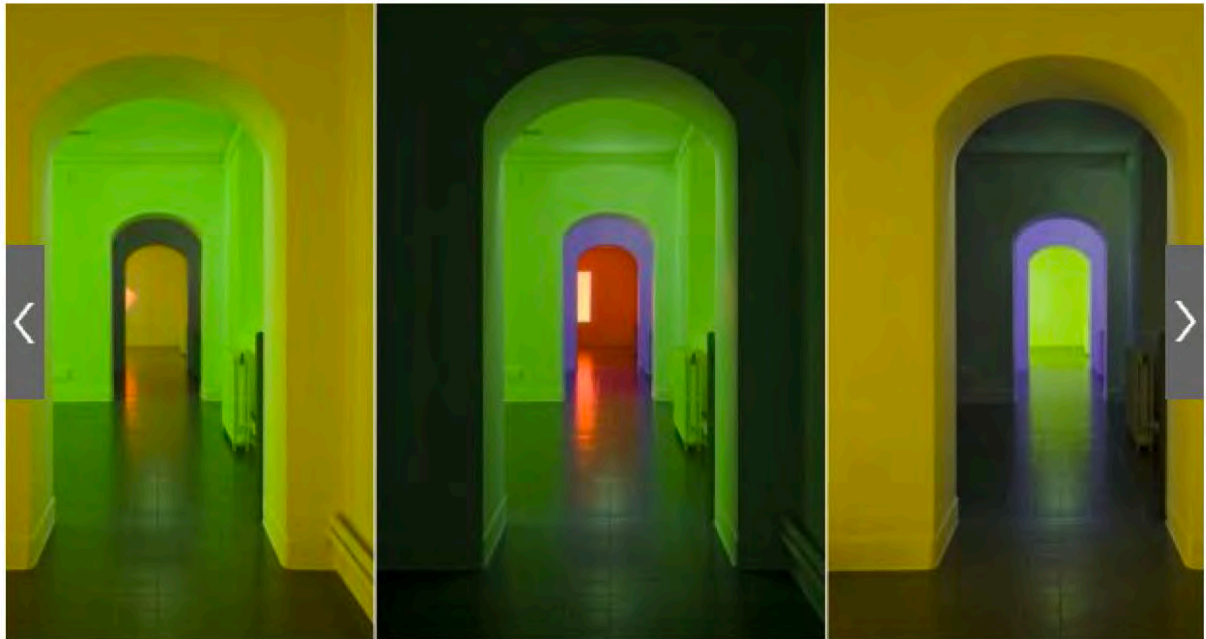


# THE IRISH TIMES

## A chance to see through Michael Snow's influential eyes

The Canadian artist sets his sights on Kilkenny

Aidan Dunne August 16, 2016



Triptych from *The Viewing of Six New Works* by Michael Snow. Copyright Michael Snow. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery and Butler Gallery. Photograph: Roland Paschoff

### **The Viewing of Six New Works – Michael Snow** Butler Gallery, The Castle, Kilkenny ★★★★★

The distinguished Canadian artist Michael Snow may not be as well known as some of his contemporaries, but he has probably been more influential in shaping the languages of contemporary art, from experimental film to sculptural installation. His impact extends further than fine art – to arthouse cinema, for example.

He is hard to categorise. You can add painting, drawing, photography and writing to film and sculpture. He also started out as a jazz musician and has never given up music.

Given all that, *The Viewing of Six New Works* is agreeably straightforward. The experience of looking and the nature of perception have consistently been at the heart of Snow's visual work. In 1967 and 1971 he produced two of the most famous experimental films ever made, *Wavelength* and *La Région Centrale*. The former, featuring several performers and set in an apartment, is composed of a series of slow zooms. Implied narrative hints, delivered in elliptical form, are never explained or concluded, but the work was a vital part of a 1960s upheaval in cinematic language.

*Wavelength* is only 45 minutes, but *La Région Centrale* is three hours, without the props of performers or narrative. Shot with a camera mounted on an elaborate, custom-made apparatus on a mountaintop in north Quebec, it is as if the film is an exercise in pure seeing: the eye is set free to roam at will, from the ground immediately below to the farthest reaches of the landscape and into the depths of the sky. Time passes, the familiar is turned on its head, becomes completely abstract – and then suddenly comprehensible again.

Fast-forward to 2012 and *The Viewing of Six New Works*. Snow is still fascinated by the nature and means of seeing. The piece, which is ideally installed in the sequence of rooms that make up the Butler Gallery, is about looking at art and looking generally. Even when examining a static object, the process of looking is itself dynamic, and Snow sets out to capture that dynamism.

Each of the six pieces is keyed to a colour and each is a changing view of a monochrome oblong, in whole or in part, scanned by a restless eye, or more accurately eyes. The forms dance and transform as the watching eyes negotiate them. The eyes are Snow's, tracked and recorded in the act of looking, in just the way that we might enter a gallery and make our way from painting to painting. Except that in the Butler the process is short-circuited or turned on its head. We end up looking at the process of looking, which is there, pinned down, on the wall.

It may sound austere and minimal, and it is, but it's also light and playful in tone. That's true of Snow's work generally. While it has generated a wealth of theoretical analysis and speculation, it stems from a certain innocence of vision on his part, an ability to ask simple questions and look for simple answers. In doing so, he manages to illuminate things we take for granted, prompting us to really think anew about seeing.

*Until October 9th, [butlergallery.com](http://butlergallery.com)*



## Michael Snow

LA VIRREINA IMAGE CENTER

La Rambla, 99

July 9–November 1

The real subject of Michael Snow's retrospective—encompassing fifty years of the Canadian artist's forays into film, sound installation, video, painting, and sculpture—is the viewer. Snow's work reveals a genuine, open-ended interest in visual perception, especially as it relates to the two-dimensional plane. There's a lot of play—with windows, projections of windows, reflection, opacity, and transparency. *Powers of Two*, 2003, features four enormous freestanding transparent photographs of a couple having sex, with the man turned away while the woman is staring, in frank absorption, at us. Circle around to the other side of the image, which everyone seems to do, and you will not be rewarded by the man's expression.

Snow makes a clear distinction between video installations that are meant to be viewed in a gallery, like paintings, and those that require a seated commitment. *Wavelength*, 1967—a groundbreaking avant-garde film upon its debut—is an example of the latter and is screened only twice a day. The film is composed of a continuous forty-five-minute zoom shot that moves us from one end of a loft to a point on the opposing wall; people come in and out, day becomes night, there are sudden flashes of color, a death. But mostly it is a film of an empty room, or, more accurately, of how we perceive it. Through the slow, relentless tightening of the visual field, the work shows us how vision is impressionistic and multilayered, affected by emotional states, memories, and split-second sensory reactions.



Michael Snow, *Powers of Two*, 2003, four photographic transparencies, 16 x 8.5'.

— Jessica Lott

# THE VILLAGER

Buhmann on Art: Michael Snow

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March 19, 2015 | Filed under: Arts | Posted by: The Villager



“That/Cela/Dat” (1999 | DVD projection | 60 min. | loop.).

BY STEPHANIE BUHMANN (stephaniebuhmann.com) | Though Michael Snow’s oeuvre is multidisciplinary — including painting, sculpture, video, film, sound, photography, holography, drawing, writing and music — his contemplation remains the same. He is focused on exploring the nature of perception, consciousness, language and temporality.



“Times” (1979 photograph | 74 1/4 x 77 1/8 inches | 73 3/4 x 76 3/4 x 2 1/4 inches | Artist proof | Edition 2 of 2, with 1 artist proof). ©Michael Snow. PHOTOS Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery



Snow has received honorary degrees from the University of Toronto (1999), the University of Victoria (1997) and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (1990), among others, as well as many prestigious awards, such as the Guggenheim Fellowship (1972) and the Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres, France (1995, 2011).

While considered a leading experimental filmmaker, having inspired the Structural Film movement with his groundbreaking 1967 film "Wavelength," for example, Snow has also been active as a professional musician since the 1950s. He has played piano and other instruments with various ensembles, but most often in free improvisation with the Canadian Creative Music Collective, Toronto.



Installation view, "Michael Snow: A Group Show."

Along these lines, one can expect an exhibition that is multi-faceted and hard to pigeonhole, reflecting the artist's various interests and substantial expertise.

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# ARTFORUM

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# Michael Snow

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

J. Hoberman

**A HUMBLE, RELENTLESS**, more or less continuous zoom shot taking forty-five minutes to traverse a Canal Street loft into a photograph pasted on the far wall, Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) provided twentieth-century cinema with a definitive metaphor for itself as temporal projection—and also burdened Snow with an unrepeatable masterpiece.

That the artist has a reputation as a painter, a sculptor, a musician, a video maker, and, mainly, a filmmaker gives "Michael Snow: Photo-Centric" a polemical thrust. At the very least, this highly concentrated exhibition supports the Bazinian assertion that modern art is essentially a reaction to photography ("manifestly the most important event in the history of the visual arts"). More specifically, the show suggests that Snow's own strategies, regardless of medium, have been determined by his understanding of the photographic process.

Fashioned two years after *Wavelength*, the Polaroid self-portrait *Authorization*, 1969, is as perfect in its modest way as Snow's perversely static motion picture: The artist made a rectangle of adhesive tape on a mirror and photographed himself within that frame, then pasted the photo in one corner of the taped rectangle and repeated the process until the photographs effaced his reflection. The subject of the work is the procedure via which Snow arrived at finished object; the author's "signature" is inscribed as his gradually disappearing image. Snow has his predilections—a prurient fondness for female nudes and elegantly deranged grids—but his pieces are autobiographical in a highly specific way, typically concerned with the conditions of the work's own making.

"Photo-Centric" is thematic rather than chronological, and much of the work dates from the early '70s. Two big ideas dominate: the paradox inherent in the representation of volume in a two-dimensional field, and its opposite—the insistence that a photograph is also a thing. (Snow calls his photos "events-that-become-objects.") The photographic pieces are sculptural. For instance, the assemblage of sixteen photos of various materials squeezed flat beneath Plexiglas plates that constitutes *Press*, 1969, is itself squeezed beneath a Plexiglas plate held in place by four large clamps, further enriching the pun.

Curated by Adelina Vlas, the show encompasses a half century of work, beginning with *Four to Five*, 1962, sixteen photographs of Snow's early trademark, a life-size silhouette called the "Walking Woman," positioned in various Toronto locations where it alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) functions as a chunk of negative or positive space. One of the most recent pieces, *Paris de jugement Le and/or State of the Arts*, 2003, is not dissimilar: This near-full-scale photograph of three naked women, backs to the camera and tan lines flaunted, up against a reproduction of Cézanne's *Large Bathers* (from the PMA's collection, as it happens) stages a competition for attention in the enforced democracy of the two-dimensional picture plane.

At first glance, Snow's work looks formalist, but the basis is usually conceptual. (His motto might be William Carlos Williams's "No ideas but in things.") At the same time, his strongest pieces are perceptual. What you see is what you get. Like his sculptures (mainly simple, aggressively artless forms that are in some way interactive), Snow's photographs can demand a physical shift in the viewer's position. *Crouch, Leap, Land*, 1970, requires one to scrunch down under three suspended Perspex plates, thereby approximating the camera's position as one peers up voyeuristically at three photographs of a nude woman's leap that were themselves taken from beneath transparent flooring. It's all a matter of perspective. The floor piece *In Medias Res*, 1998, is a photograph of a Persian carpet, as well as a bird's-eye view of an escaped parrot in flight.

Many of the works in "Photo-Centric" consider what happens when something is photographed—or painted and then photographed, or vice versa. A pair of timed cameras face off in *Line Drawing with Synapse*, 2003.

The exhibition's first big image is *Times*, 1979, an enlarged photo of a painting of a square; here the oblique camera angle suggests that the canvas is slightly rhomboid, provoking a subtle geometric disorientation.

Around the time he was working on *Wavelength*, Snow noted that "when you narrow down your range and are looking through just that narrow aperture of the [camera] lens, the intensity of what you see is so much greater." The purest—or most primitive—example of this may be his 1982 *Seated Sculpture*, fashioned from several shaped steel plates: The viewer ducks inside to sit and contemplate a flat, black, rectangular void about seven feet away.

## Snow's strongest pieces are perceptual. What you see is what you get.

It is a viewing device for induced tunnel vision or perhaps the cinema of negative space à la *The Flintstones*.

Eschewing as it approximates the cinematographic apparatus, *Seated Sculpture* is not included in "Photo-Centric." (Neither is Snow's 1975 book-object *Cover to Cover*, a portable static "movie" in which two cameras document the artist going about his daily routine from the front and behind or from opposite sides). But *Digest*, 1970, provides an even more dramatic and hands-on instance of cinema by others means. Snow filled a metal basin with various objects, periodically pouring liquid polyester over the assemblage and photographically documenting the process; twenty-three of these photos were then laminated and left in a pile for viewers to look through, and in so doing enact a virtual excavation of the basin. The effect is that of a reverse-motion time-lapse movie made material.

"Photo-Centric" itself leaves the impression that Snow, now eighty-four, wakes up every morning pondering the paradox of two-dimensional representation. Another artist might have gotten an entire gallery show—even a career—out of variations on nearly any one of these pieces. It's confounding that none of New York's major museums has yet given Snow a full-fledged retrospective. □

"Michael Snow: Photo-Centric" is on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through April 27.

J. HOBERMAN'S FILM *AFTER FILM: OR, WHAT BECAME OF 21ST CENTURY CINEMA?* IS RECENTLY OUT IN PAPERBACK FROM VERSO.



From left: Michael Snow, *Press*, 1969, gelatin silver prints, Plexiglas, polyester resin, metal, wood, 72 x 72 x 10". Michael Snow, *Digest* (detail), 1970, twenty-three laminated C-prints, aluminum container, plastic; photographs each 16 x 14"; container 7 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 10 1/2". View of "Michael Snow: Photo-Centric," 2014. Foreground: *In Medias Res*, 1998. Background, from left: *Paris de jugement Le and/or State of the Arts*, 2003; *Multiplication Table*, 1977; *Waiting Room*, 1978; *Digest*, 1970. Photo: Constance Mensh.





# BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

## MICHAEL SNOW *A Group Show*

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | FEBRUARY 27 – APRIL 4, 2015

BY CHLOE WILCOX

In the exhibition *A Group Show* at Jack Shainman Gallery, Michael Snow shows and tells us, repeatedly, how and with what his art is made. Now this might make you think about formalism and the dramatics of the Greenbergian yesteryear, the artist drawing attention to the ontological identity of his medium(s), renouncing pictorial depth, etc. Maybe this makes you yawn. But the six artworks, spanning from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, that comprise this compact but bright exhibition don't. Snow, whose work only flirts with formalism, is, in fact, all about illusion—the illusory blending of virtual and real, representation and represented. His art brings together these categories—at once juxtaposing and collapsing them—in the process, laying bare the artifice of art and making a loving and lovely joke of it.

The first artwork you encounter in the gallery's front room is "VUEUV" (1998), a photograph of a naked woman standing on a stage against a curtain printed on a free-hanging sheer cloth. She stands (floats) with her back to her viewer, her butt cocked in a coy contrapposto, long golden hair waving down her back. In the background are the vertical undulations of the drapery. This bawdy image shyly fluttering and flapping in the gallery is curious and mesmerizing.

Snow is being punny. He has given us a picture of a curtain *on* a curtain—a joke about the postmodern obsession with sign and signified, and about the supposed, yet much contested, "reality" of photographic images. He has also given us an image that is transparent and, like a negative, equally readable viewed from the

front or the back (as the palindromic title indicates). This two-way transparency punctures the age-old art fantasy rooted in Renaissance perspectival painting, namely that a picture is a window into another world. Here, the mirage—the hallucinatory vision of an oasis in the desert—is perhaps a better metaphor. The viewer looks at this photograph ready to delight in the visual pleasures of the fleshly body so gamely offered, only to confront *through* it the white gallery wall, a door frame, another visitor blinking awkwardly back from the other side.

Mounted on the wall nearby, the photograph "Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001" (2001) proffers its own slew of photography jokes. The pictured couple's doggedly frozen poses, in spite of the mayhem that unfurls around them—flying rolls, surging wine—point to the contrivances that lie behind the photographic images. Snow seems to make a sly allusion to Cartier-Bresson's famous "decisive moment"—the split second, caught by a lucky camera, when there is a perfect confluence of "significant action" and optimal formal arrangement—but with one crucial difference: here, the "decisive moment" has not materialized spontaneously, like some readymade tableau. Rather, it is the camera's flash that generates the pandemonium that is the subject of this photograph; this havoc is just as construed as the portrait it interrupts.

A video piece, "That/Cela/Dat" (2000), projected in the gallery's back room provides a welcome immersive experience after the slight sparseness of the front room. The video—a projection flanked by two standard-issue square video monitors displaying the same text, word by word, in English, French, and Dutch—deals

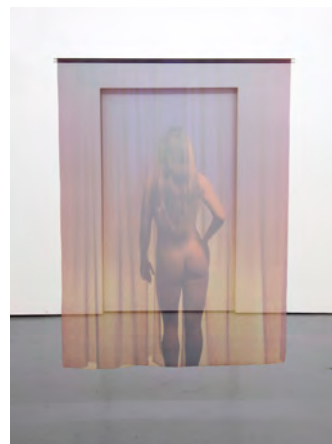


Michael Snow, "Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001" (2001). Laminated color photo on aluminum 48×72". Edition 1 of 2, with 1 Artist Proof. Courtesy of Jack Shainman.

most obviously with the conceptual themes of the show, flashing phrases like "This is electric light projected on this," or "Some of you are not looking at this. That's okay. Some are. Thanks!" that explicitly reference the work's (im)materiality, status as an artwork, and relationship as such to its viewers.

But these artworks are not only about the black chasm of theory. They are also about aesthetics and humor, and in these realms Snow does not fail to impress with his characteristic palette of bright secondary and tertiary colors—shades of pale pinks and blues, chrome green, ochre, violet, fulvous yellow—and cheeky compositions. Who can't smile at the happily deranged expressions plastered on the faces of the portrait-sitters in "Flash! 20:49 15/6/2001"? Or at the idea of a photograph of an abstract painting hanging in a gallery, hanging in a gallery ("Times")? Or at the fact that you are observing someone observe you observe a butt?

Sitting alone in the dark room watching the video, I felt moved and pleased by the sweetly awkward syntax Snow employs: "Also, there are many other interesting works in this exhibition. This is just one of many. It is kind of special, though." A distinct voice, mischievous and friendly, emerges in the cadence and stilted



Michael Snow, "VUEUV" (1998). Color photo on cloth on plastic tube, 68×51". Courtesy of Jack Shainman.

choice of the words (Snow carefully timed each word's appearance and duration on the screen). Snow tells us what this work is literally (pixelated light, words strung together by an artist), but he shows us something else too. "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" wrote wry René. "Ceci n'est pas, évidemment, une pipe," says an even wryer Snow in this video. This is not, *obviously*, a pipe. With the addition of a single word, Snow suggests the opposite of Magritte's famous statement. Rather than undermine the idea of pictorial realism, he implies that the image of the pipe *is* in fact a pipe. The sign is the same as the referent. Art is what it is made of—paint on a canvas, light on a wall, light captured on film—but it is also many other things too: emotion, beauty, the thing it represents, specialness. ☺

APRIL 2015

ARTSEEN

61



# The New York Times

ART REVIEW

## Multiple Exposures, Looking Both Ways

Michael Snow's Photographs and Other Works in Philadelphia

By KAREN ROSENBERG

Published: February 6, 2014

PHILADELPHIA — In Michael Snow's 45-minute film [“Wavelength”](#) (1967), the camera gradually zooms in on a wall in his studio. “Wavelength” is a classic of experimental cinema, but it ends with a photograph and might, in a way, be one. That interpretation is encouraged, at any rate, by “Michael Snow: Photo-Centric,” an engaging survey of his photography at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

“Wavelength” has been much celebrated, along with other films by this Canadian artist, like [“La Region Centrale”](#) (1971), in which a camera attached to a robotic arm captures sweeping, alien views of the Quebec mountains. But Mr. Snow is a bit of a polymath; he also paints, sculpts, performs as a jazz pianist and assembles photo installations that are as rigorously structural as his films but are also, surprisingly, quite playful.



He hasn't had a museum show of his photography since 1976, when the Museum of Modern Art gave him a small “Projects” [exhibition](#). [“Michael Snow: Photo-Centric”](#) gives us a long overdue look at his work in the medium — starting with projects from the 1960s that overlap with film and performance and continuing to supersize staged color prints that reflect photo trends of the early 2000s.

**Michael Snow: Photo-Centric**, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, includes “Handed to Eyes,” (1983), which blurs the lines separating photography, painting and sculpture. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Many works are very much of their time, conversant with conceptual photographs and video art by Bruce Nauman, John Baldessari and others, but a few look shockingly current. Mr. Snow's 1983 print "Handed to Eyes," for instance, could be mistaken for something in MoMA's New Photography series; it's a tint-painted picture of abstract blobs of clay that confuses photography, painting and sculpture.

"I have added the camera and its products to the traditional tools of the painter/sculptor," he wrote in an essay reprinted in the catalog. "My photographic works are an art of the studio, not of daily life."

Statements like these make this exhibition a nice complement to MoMA's [current show](#) "A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio" (reviewed in this section) and to the International Center of Photography's ["What Is a Photograph?"](#) But the Snow show, organized by the Philadelphia museum's assistant curator of modern and contemporary art, Adelina Vlas, also has plenty to offer fans of his films, beyond the scheduled screenings. The piece "Atlantic," for instance, might be thought of as an extension of "Wavelength"; it encases a photograph of the ocean, similar to one at the end of the film, within a gridded metal frame that makes the waves appear to bob and weave as viewers walk by.

Mr. Snow's approach to photography is both heady and physical, a rare combination. For every work that needs to be teased out in the brain or eye or both, like the light-distorted grid of "Glares," there's one that requires some action.

For ["Crouch, Leap, Land" \(1970\)](#), visitors must squat beneath the artwork to see the three serial photos of a jumping nude (shot through a Plexiglas floor from a similarly low vantage point). The photographs are displayed horizontally, parallel to the gallery floor. And for "Digest," viewers can don cotton gloves and flip through a stack of laminated photographs that represent cross-sections of a related sculpture. (This process is a lot more interesting than it sounds.)

Throughout, they are reminded of the distortion that's latent in all photographs. For one of the show's earliest works, ["Press" \(1969\)](#), Mr. Snow sandwiched foods and other objects between metal and plexiglass and took pictures; fish guts ooze and spaghetti sauce splatters, parodying the compression of objects in the camera's field.

In "Times" (1979), meanwhile, he plays with the mistaken impression of scale that can result from the enlargement and cropping of photographs. The image appears to show a large-scale abstract painting hanging on the wall of a gallery, but the extra-wide floorboards in the picture reveal that the art, and its wall label, are actually dollhouse-size objects captured in close-up.

Mr. Snow's didacticism can grate, as can his pun-happy titles. (A blown-up photograph of a drawing of a table is titled "Multiplication Table.")

And his most recent works, staged tableaux, deploy the figure to tacky effect; "Judgment of Paris" (2003), which pits three nudes with visible tan lines against Cézanne's "The Large Bathers," looks less at home at the Philadelphia Museum (owner of the [Cézanne](#)) than it would at Art Basel Miami Beach.



The mural-size transparency “Powers of Two,” from the same year, is a bit better; offering multiple, voyeuristic perspectives on a couple in a bedroom, it recalls both Jeff Wall’s backlit photographs and Eric Fischl’s canvases. Curatorial comparisons to Manet and Velázquez, however, are a stretch.

And although the early works are strong overall, a few feel derivative. “Authorization” (1969) seems clearly modeled on William Anastasi’s 1967 “[Nine Polaroid Portraits in a Mirror](#),” even though Mr. Snow embellishes the photo-within-a-photo conceit by including an actual mirror as the support.

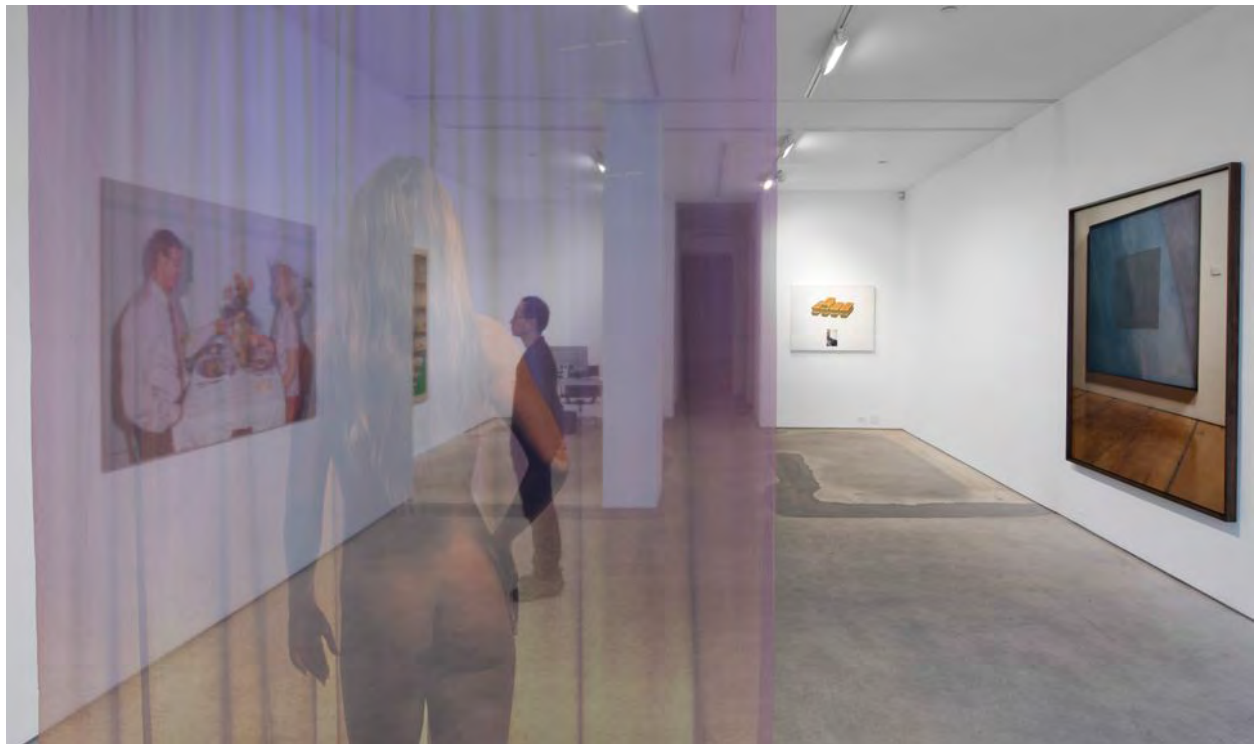
The show makes you wonder, though, why Mr. Snow’s photography isn’t as well known as his films. It exemplifies the restless experimentalism of the 1970s as much as anything by, say, Robert Smithson or Dan Graham. And, like “Wavelength,” it cuts right to the essence of the medium.

“Michael Snow: Photo-Centric” ends April 21 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2600 Benjamin Franklin Parkway; 215-763-8100, [philamuseum.org](http://philamuseum.org).

A version of this review appears in print on February 7, 2014, on page C26 of the New York edition with the headline: Multiple Exposures, Looking Both Ways.

## Different Ways of Looking: Michael Snow's "A Group Show"

BY CRAIG HUBERT | MARCH 12, 2015



Installation view of Michael Snow's "A Group Show" at Jack Shainman Gallery.  
(©Michael Snow, Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

[“A Group Show,”](#) Michael Snow’s cheekily-titled solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea (through April 4), continues the work that went into the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s “Photo-Centric” show a year ago, the 85-year-old Canadian artist explained in a recent conversation. Snow is known primarily for his experimental films, most notably the 45-minute zoom across a Canal Street loft called [“Wavelength”](#) (1967). His show in Philadelphia highlighted his expansive body of photographic work, much of which had not been seen in the United States in over four decades (the last exhibition of his photo work in the United States was at the Museum of Modern Art in 1976).



Many of the pieces in “A Group Show” are newer and polymorphous, collapsing photography with painting and sculpture into a single work. “VUE3UV” (1998) features an image of a nude woman from behind staring out a curtained window. The photograph is printed on cloth and drapes from the ceiling, mimicking a curtain, and evokes Snow’s earliest “Walking Woman” series. But its sculptural qualities also reveal its photographic foundations. “It’s a sensual thing of the transparency, the true two-dimensionality of a photo,” Snow said after remarking that that piece resembled a photo print hanging to dry. “This work makes you experience the actual nature of a photograph, in that it’s almost not there.”

The nature of photography is something Snow returned to many times during our conversation. “Flash!” (2001), the most traditional piece in the exhibition, features a couple sitting down for a meal that has been upended by a gust of wind that appears to be emanating from the camera itself. “I noticed the kind of aggressive quality of flash photography, for example Weegee’s photos,” Snow said, and recreated the disruption by simultaneously blasting the subjects with a wind machine and a camera flash. “It’s the essence of what happens with flash photography,” Snow said, “the instant that it takes what it takes.”

“Flash!” is also very funny, a quality that extends through all of the work in “A Group Show” but is not often mentioned when talking about Snow. “Over the Sofa” (1992-96) is “a play on the potential value of art,” Snow said, featuring a photograph of a couch attached to the bottom of a canvas, a pile of gold bricks painted above the image. “It’s not exactly belittling, but it just means almost anything can be put over the sofa,” he said, chuckling. “It could even be this painting of gold bricks.”

But beyond the punny title, the piece, with its multiple layers of pictorial information, realigns our ways of looking at images. I was struck by the recurrence, when looking at his photographic work, of cinematic motifs. When I mentioned, while looking at “Times” (1979), a photograph of a painting inside a gallery, a connection to his film “Wavelength,” he reluctantly agreed that the piece had the quality of a zoom, but stressed no direct

connection to his previous work. “Fish Story” (1979), with its gradually enlarged images of a speckled trout — which Snow caught himself near his cabin in Newfoundland and, he said with a grin, ended up eating — also simulates a zoom or even a film strip.

In the back of the gallery is the enticing “That/Cela/Dat” (1999), which features no images at all. Projected on three screens — two small monitors to the side of a larger projection in the middle — is the story of the work we’re sitting in front of, told in three different languages, in white text on black backgrounds, simultaneously. A literal sequel to “So Is This” (1982), Snow was interested in the dialogue a piece has with the spectator, and the echoes the three languages created when presented side-by-side. It’s also funnier the longer you stick with it, the words, when not explaining the origin of the work, promising the viewer that it won’t embarrass them, ensuring that it will continue to be there if they leave the room, and even beginning to question its own existence, at one point asking: “Wouldn’t a book be better?”

Following our conversation about his work, we began talking about jazz. Snow is an avid piano player, and has been playing in jazz bands since he was a teenager. When he originally came to New York in 1962 — he lived there for approximately a decade — he said that he straddled three different worlds: music, film, and jazz. When I asked about a possible relationship between his music and visual art, he was resistant. “I played every night, after spending all day at the studio making art work,” he said about his time in New York. “But they didn’t really have any connection. It was just that the same guy did them.”



Tuesday, February 3, 2015  
11:32 AM EST

## MOVIES

Entertainment / Movies

### 'What you see is what you get' with Michael Snow program at Lightbox

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The Michael Snow exhibit at TIFF Bell Lightbox opens with his film *Wavelength*.

By: [Peter Goddard](#) Visual Arts, Published on Fri Jan 30 2015

It seems rarely a year or two goes by without a Michael Snow exhibition somewhere on the planet. And two questions inevitably crop up: What's the exhibition about exactly? And which Michael Snow will show up, the filmmaker, video provocateur, the installation master or who-knows-what-else?

Starting Jan. 31 TIFF is programming WYSIWYG The Films of Michael Snow — “what you see is what you get” — that is on its surface a year-long retrospective of Michael Snow film-work, his early calling card on the international art scene.

But things are rarely this cut-and-dried. Solo Snow at the Galerie de L'UQAM in Montreal a few years back underlined how difficult it was in dealing with the multi-faceted nature of the artist's practice. Nevertheless Barcelona's Palau de la Virreina will show the artist in full, glorious multi-practice form with Michael Snow: Sequences: A Retrospective starting in July. (I almost forgot to note Michael Snow: Photo-Centric at the Philadelphia Museum of Art last spring surveyed mostly of Snow and photography while buying three works in the process.)

All this makes him seem like The Shadow of the avant-garde, not seemingly really there while everywhere at once. The artist's own clarity of thought — in conversation or in writing he makes everything sound so reasonable, even obvious — coupled with the irresistible ambiguity of the work itself make the indefatigable 86-year-old more sought-after than ever.

And WYSIWYG may produce an unexpected breakthrough. Curated by Chris Kennedy, the series — wrapping up in December with A to Z, Snow's first film made in 1956 made while working in Toronto with Beatles' Yellow Submarine director, George Dunning — leaves audiences a clearer understanding of the degree to which Snow's work flows from his musical thinking, practice and gnarly pride of being a musician first and mostly

foremost.

“I have been playing actively since 1948,” he tells me with a finality to settle the question once and for all.

(Speaking of pride: The artist’s recent \$950,000 statement of claim against Lightbox development partners, stemming from the cancellation of a proposed piece of public art, has been settled to his satisfaction, Snow says.

“We’ve come to an appropriate and satisfactory resolution,” says Neall Haggart, Daniels Corp. executive vice-president.)

WYSIWYG opens with *Wavelength* (1967) paired with Snow in Vienna, a 2012 jazz-inflected muscular Snow solo piano performance directed by Laurie Kwasnik. It must be considered as one of the greatest concert films in Canadian music history. Snow declined TIFF’s wish that he also perform live before the Jan. 31 screening.

“I’m very proud of it musically,” Snow told me.

Two more musical-channeling films follow on Feb. 21: *New York Eye and Ear Control*, (1964) the defining “Walking Woman” film, with its free-jazz score and Reverberlin, (2006), charting his work with the CCMC music collective in a near-hallucinogenic visual/music counterpoint. *La Région Centrale* (1971), showing April 23, is a landscape painted by musically directed motion: the remote controlled camera recording a patch of hard scramble Québec landscape, was activated by electronic impulses sine waves, the wavelengths of pure sound.

Timing is also a factor working for WYSIWYG. In its time, *Wavelength* was seen as a one-off perceptual dazzler, the “Birth of a Nation of Underground films.” But revisiting a larger spectrum of his work shows how deeply Snow’s work has entered the consciousness and practices of several generations of artists now active. Snow’s tropes and tricks — the deliberately klutzy-looking digital edition in *Corpus Collasum*, (2002, no screening date yet) — have now taken on a historical resonance.

“That kind of cheesy digital stuff is what kids are now doing, that letting it look like it was a mistake,” says Kennedy.

“I’m a filmmaker myself. And while watching Michael’s work again for the retrospective I kept seeing things in them that made me think, ‘oh, yeah, that’s where I got my idea from.’

“Whether you like it or not he has done things you have to contend with. His films represent the subconscious of experimental filmmaking.”

WYSIWYG: The Films of Michael Snow is a year-long series starting Jan. 31 at TIFF Bell Lightbox. Peter Goddard is a freelance writer and former Star movie critic. He can be reached at [peter\\_g1@sympatico.ca](mailto:peter_g1@sympatico.ca)



## PREVIEWS

From left: Christopher Williams, *Bergische Bauernscheune, Junkersholz, Leichlingen, September 29th, 2009*, inkjet print, 17 x 21½". Michael Snow, *Authorization, 1969*, Polaroid Type 55 prints, adhesive tape, mirror in metal frame, 21½ x 17½".



## PHILADELPHIA

**"MICHAEL SNOW: PHOTO-CENTRIC"**

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART • February 1–April 27 • Curated by Adelina Vlas • In *Authorization, 1969*, Michael Snow transformed the seemingly static, two-dimensional photographic medium into something both sculptural and performative: Shooting his own reflection with a tripod-mounted camera, he then pasted the resulting self-portrait onto the mirror's surface, repeated the process four more times, and exhibited the collaged result. That same year, in *One Second in Montreal*, Snow took a different tack, producing a motion picture using only a series of still images of snowy landscapes. Both works showcase the Canadian artist's eccentric approach to photography, a medium fundamental to his entire oeuvre and the focus of this survey at the Philadelphia Museum (the first exhibition to specifically address this element of his practice since "Projects: Michael Snow—Photographs" at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1976). Curator Adelina Vlas will bring together some thirty pieces made between 1962 and 2003 in which Snow diffracts photography across painting, sculpture, film, and music.

—Branden W. Joseph

**"RUFFNECK CONSTRUCTIVISTS"**

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART • February 12–August 17 • Curated by Kara Walker • In 2006, Kara Walker made her curatorial debut at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with her post-Katrina exhibition "After the Deluge." Her sophomore effort's mash-up title, "Ruffneck Constructivists," conjoins the ethos of Russia's revolutionary avant-garde with MC Lyte's early-1990s track. Walker will go beyond her authorial interest in the psychosexual phantasms of American cultural history in selecting more than thirty recent works by artists from the US, Eastern Europe, and South Africa: Dineo Bopape, Kendell Geers, Arthur Jafa, Kahlil Joseph, Jennie C. Jones, Deana Lawson, Rodney McMillian, William Pope.L, Tim Portlock, Lior Shvil, and Szymon Tomsia. Muscularly responding to ideas of space, policing, and anti-sociality, the show will emphasize works in sculpture, installation, video, and photography, and will include a full roster of performances, talks, and screenings. The catalogue is designed by artist A. K. Burns, with original texts by Walker and architectural theorist Craig Wilkins.

—Thomas J. Lax

## CHICAGO

**WILLIAM J. O'BRIEN**

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART • January 25–May 18 • Curated by Naomi Beckwith • William J. O'Brien's feverish material explorations regularly succumb to restrained, taxonomical displays when entering the public arena. At Chicago's Renaissance Society in 2011, O'Brien installed a tiered arrangement of modestly scaled ceramic objects. Last winter, he hung grids of felt compositions and framed oil pastel and inkwash works on paper at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York. For this survey exhibition at the MCA, to be complemented by the first major catalogue devoted to the artist's work, roughly one hundred of O'Brien's abundant artifacts will be "organized like a poem," with stanza-like groupings convening disparate objects including textiles, paintings, colored-pencil abstractions, ceramics, and glitter-coated assemblages. One of the show's earlier pieces is a 2008 line drawing that depicts a nude clown with a conspicuous erection, riding a camel-like circus animal—an allegorical figure that, in its Calder-esque clarity and simplicity of means, should stand out as an anomaly in O'Brien's vast field of work shaped by intuitive, romantic energies.

—Michelle Grabner

**"CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS: THE PRODUCTION LINE OF HAPPINESS"**

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO • January 24–May 18 • Curated by Matthew S. Witkovsky, Mark Godfrey, and Roxana Marcoci • Conceptual artist Christopher Williams's first museum retrospective, featuring his trademark photographs, films, and videos from the last thirty-five years, is sure to be a nontraditional survey: Williams has conceived all three incarnations of this traveling exhibition as works in their own right, each fitted with site-specific interventions that will reflect on the architecture of that venue. An extensive publication—more artists' book than catalogue—accompanies the project, containing essays by Godfrey, Marcoci, and Witkovsky along with a wide selection of source material: lists, budgets, contracts, and manifestos authored by Daniel Buren, Morgan Fisher, and Scritti Politti, among many others. Characteristic of all Williams's output, this book analyzes the parameters and conditions of its own production. *Travels to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Aug. 2–Nov. 2; Whitechapel Gallery, London, Apr.–June 2015.*

—Willem de Rooij



## MODERN ART NOTES

Art-focused Journalism by Tyler Green

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January 30, 2014

### The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Michael Snow

The Modern Art Notes Podcast is the title of this podcast. The rest of this podcast will sound just like this. This podcast will consist of single words presented one after another to construct sentences and hopefully (this is where you come in) to convey meanings. This, as they say, is the signifier. This podcast will be about one hour long. Does that seem like a frightening prospect? Well, look at it this way: how do you know this isn't lying? Perhaps after a while this word after word system will change into something else. Well, take this's word for it. This is the way it's going to be.

New paragraph. Most of this podcast was taped on Tuesday but for various reasons could not be downloaded until now. Thanks to the Philadelphia Museum of Art for its assistance in placing these words on this screen. Some of the following considerations and decisions preceded the production of this podcast: On February 1, the Philadelphia Museum of Art will open an Adelina Vlas-curated exhibition of Michael Snow's photographic works titled This is the title of my exhibition. Since this is not her exhibition and the "this" in her title is not the title of this exhibition and hence the producer (Tyler Green) of this podcast decided to retain this title and to include the foregoing reference to issue in this podcast. This is still the title of this podcast. So is this. Paprika Mariposa recently gave the producer an animated GIF she made of the word this. This is not that. This is not a script. Warning: This podcast may be especially unsatisfying for those who dislike having others listen over their shoulders.

Next there have been several films or podcasts that concentrate on texts, for example, Bad at Sports, No Challenges Remaining, Hang Up and Listen!, Radiolab and The Moth have made excellent use of podcasts. The producer would have liked to have been first but it's too late. Priority is energy. In some respects, this is first. Obviously this is not the first time that this has



been used for the first time. This belongs to everybody! This means this, you think this, we see this, they use this, this is a universe! So what is important is not this, but how this is used.

New paragraph: Some of the more cultivated members of the audience may regret the lack of in-depth semiological analysis in this podcast and note that the vocabulary used is quite basic. This is in line with the producer's attempt to not talk over the heads of people and not cater to a small but vocal intellectual element in our society. Why make podcasts that only a few people will see? Is there anybody listening to this right now? The producer didn't intend his other texts for a small elite, he just did what he thought was right at the time. Perhaps this will be more popular. This is kind of intimate isn't it? It's just between it and you. But maybe this isn't the right time for this. Perhaps with the end of the world imminent, as usual, people want to hear about a new way out. Whoops! Perhaps this shouldn't have mentioned a "way Out"! Stick with it. Just think of this as entertainment. It's not all going to be such heavy going. Some parts are going to be just plain fun! Remember that old saying: "Sticks and stones may... etc." There'll be not one word about El Salvador, no mention of Trudeau and political commitment whatsoever. So relax and enjoy yourself.

Sixth paragraph. Yes of course there will be a French version. At the moment the producer cannot afford to do this but he is planning to apply to the Quebec Minister of Culture for assistance. Just for now though: en Francais le titre de ce film sera: ceci est le titre de ce podcast. Ça fait penser l'auteur au tableau bien connu de Magritte. Ceci n'est pas une pipe. C'est vrai ici aussi. L'auteur aime beaucoup le mot "ceci." Back to English. If you don't read French you should learn. Canada is a bilingual country.

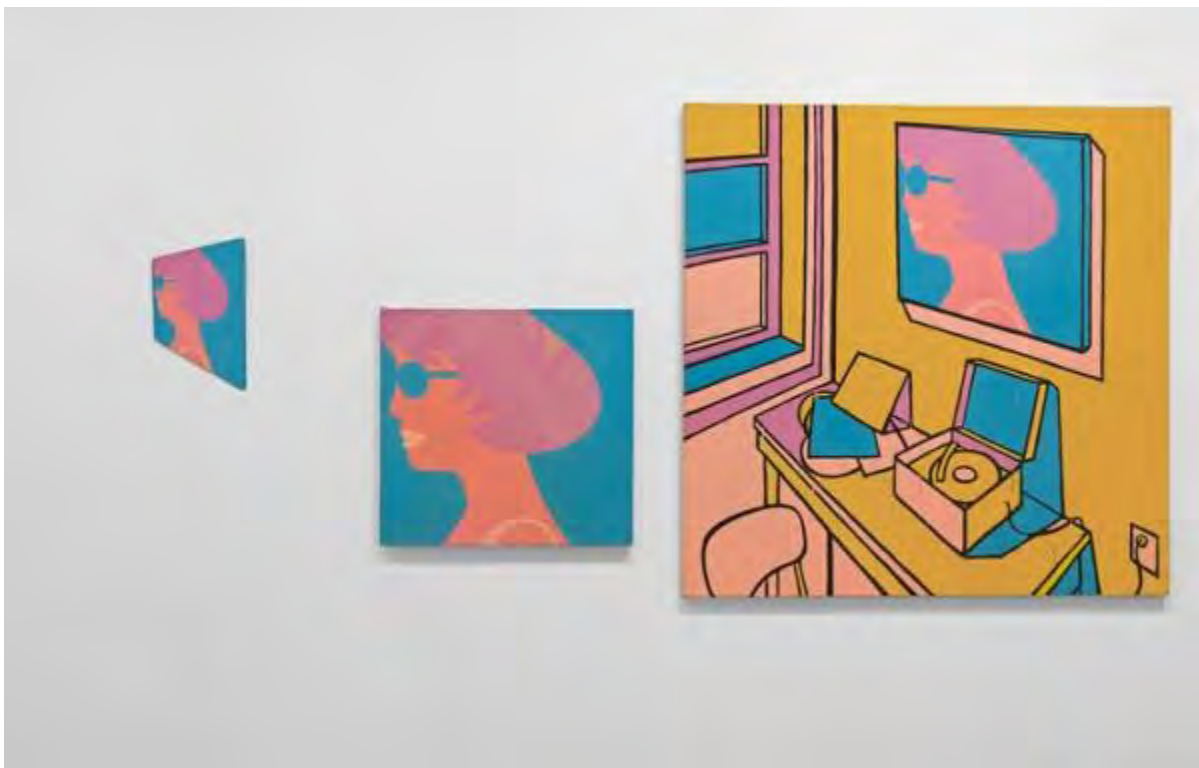
Fifth paragraph: Now back to this podcast. You can download it directly to your PC/mobile device. Listen on SoundCloud. Subscribe to this at iTunes, SoundCloud, Stitcher or via RSS. Stream this at MANPodcast.com.

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For images of art discussed on this, click through to the jump. For a list of Philadelphia Museum of Art programs and screenings associated with the exhibition, see this page.

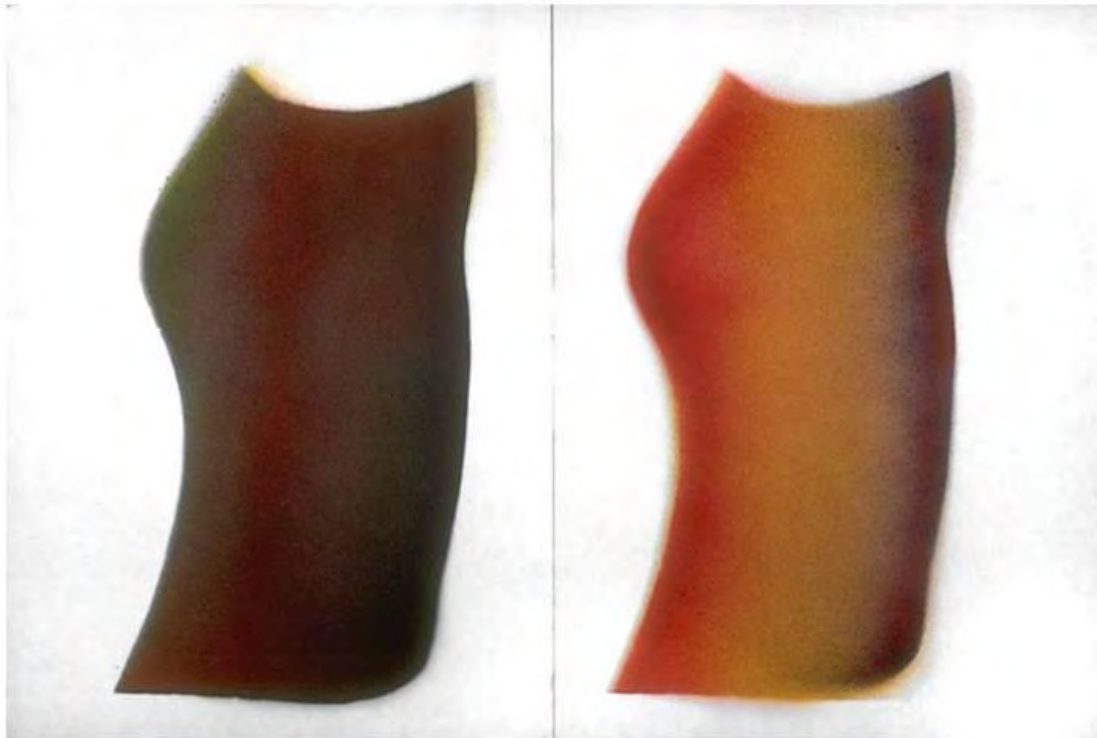


Michael Snow, *Four to Five*, 1969/1991. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Michael Snow, *Hawaii*, 1964. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

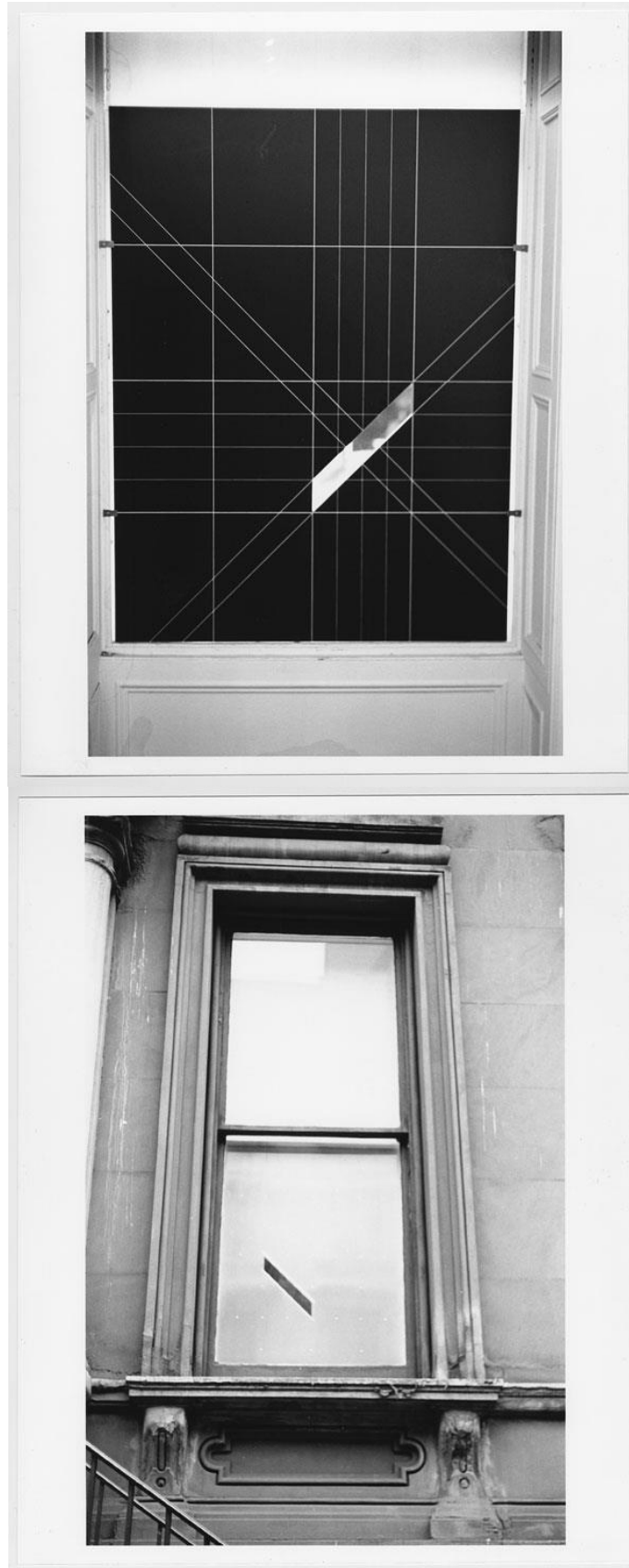




Michael Snow, *Two Skirts*, 1964. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Michael Snow, *Blind*, 1968. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Michael Snow, *Sight*, 1968. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

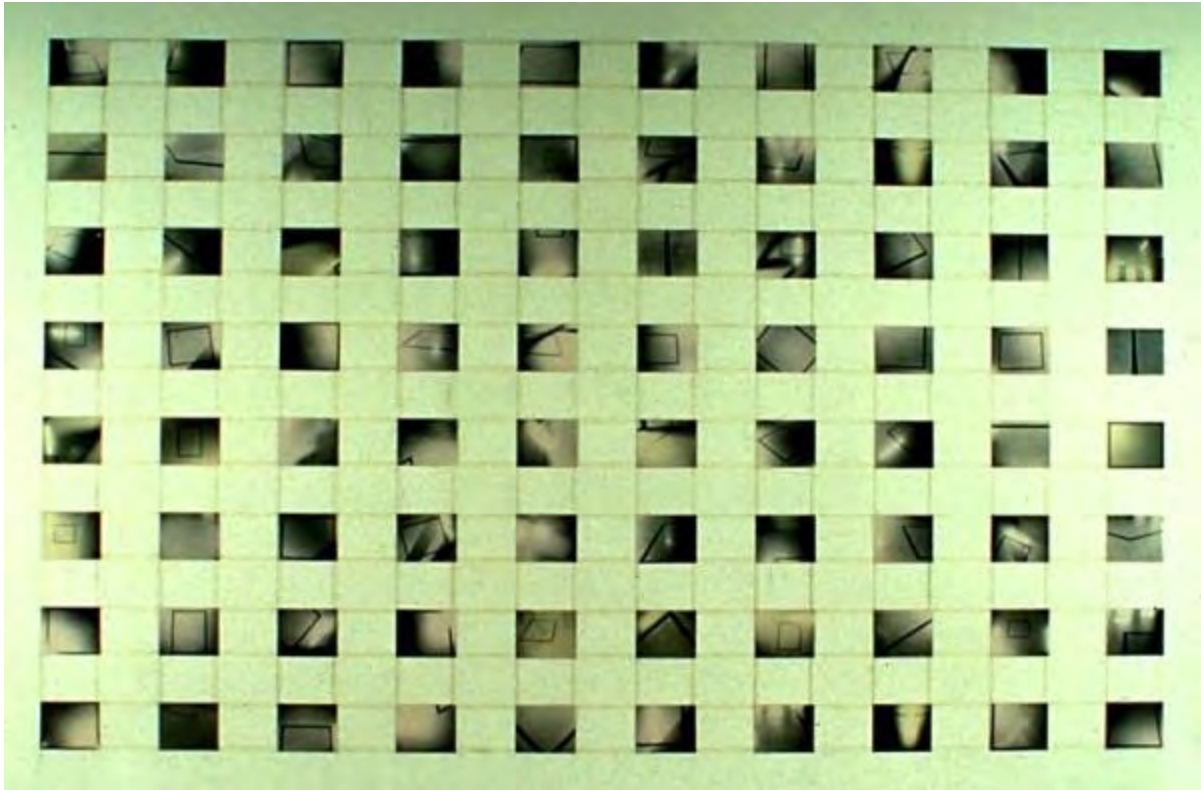




John Singer Sargent, *Venetian Interior*, ca. 1880-82. Collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.



Michael Snow, *Atlantic*, 1967. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

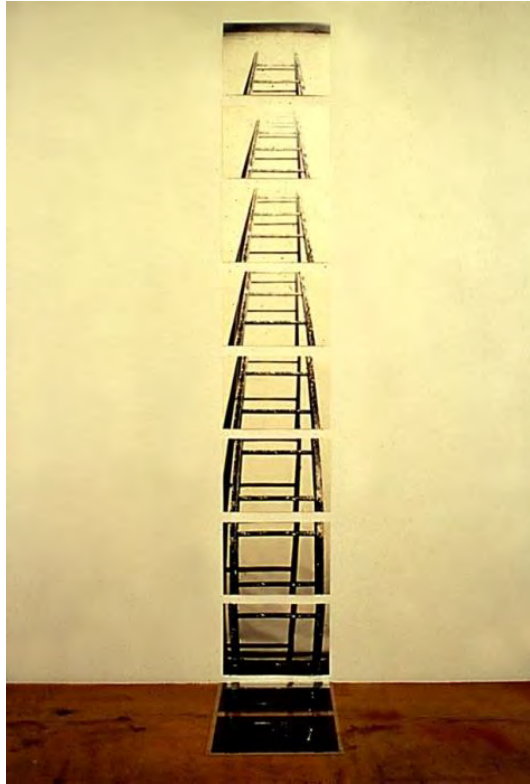


Michael Snow, *8 x 10*, 1969. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Michael Snow, *Crouch, Leap, Land*, 1970. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

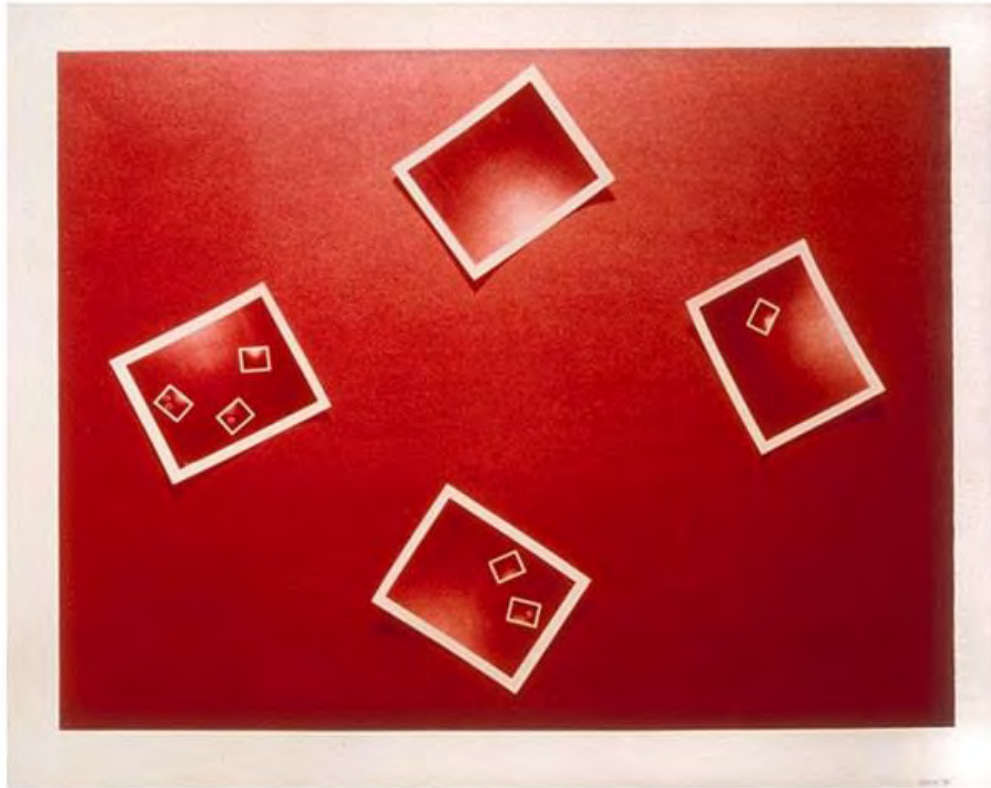




Michael Snow, *Of a Ladder*, 1971/1999. Collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.



Michael Snow, *Glare*, 1973.

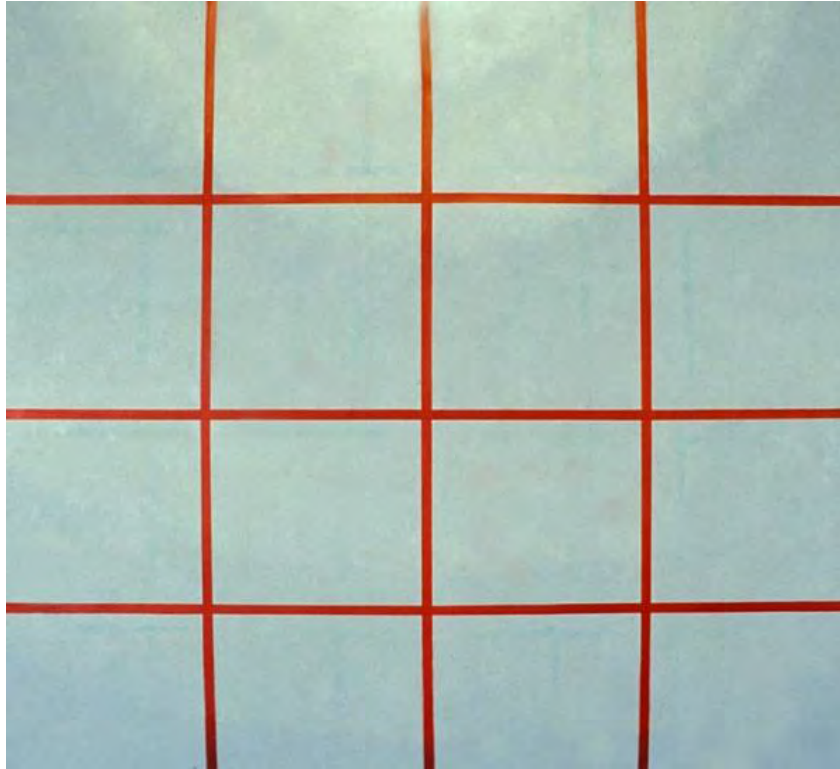


Michael Snow, *Red 5*, 1974. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.





Michael Snow, *The Squerr (Ch'art)*, 1978. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Michael Snow, *Immediate Delivery*, 1998. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Michael Snow, *Powers of Two*, 2003.

Links to videos/films:

- *Wavelength* (1967);
- [Back and Forth], (1969);
- *La Region Centrale* (excerpt) (1971);
- Solar Breath (excerpt) (2002).

Many other works of Snow's are available on "Digital Snow," which was created by The Daniel Langlois Foundation: Main/entrance page, table of contents, including:

- *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (excerpt), 1974
- *Egg*, 1985.



## MEDIA STUDY

## MICHAEL SNOW

I'M PROUD of (most of) what I've done in the past, but, apparently unable to learn from the past, I continue to make works in soon-to-be-obsolete media.

Some of the paintings and sculptures I have made since 1956 require medical attention, but many of my "technological" works are in the emergency ward. They were produced in media that are disappearing or have disappeared: 35-mm, 16-mm, Super 8, and 8-mm film; 35-mm slides; quarter-inch audio tape and cassettes; LPs; several breeds of video ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ",  $\frac{3}{4}$ ", DigiBeta, etc.). I have made color and black-and-white photo works on many different grounds; I've even made holograms. And since I've always been somewhat of a purist about medium specificity, chameleoning a work that originally was a particular utilization of the qualities or possibilities of a given medium into a replacement medium is painful. Help!

Two 35-mm-slide-carousel works of 1970, *Sink* and *Slidelength*, were acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 2012. These works are not "just images" (if that were possible); rather, attention is directed to the automatic carousel, the one-after-another presentation of the images that are visibly produced by white light passing through each transparency. But slides are obsolete, and MoMA has understandably urged me to propose ways to make these pieces endure. To attempt to guarantee a future for them, I've managed to have several sets of the slides made by the last remaining lab in Toronto that can make duplicates. For basic preservation I have had digital scans made of each slide. Finally, I propose to stage the two works and shoot an HD-video documentation that could be used in the future when all the slides have finally faded. These new manifestations would have to be labeled as "documentation" or "depictions" of the original works. Ouch! □



Michael Snow, *Sink* (detail), 1970, C-print, eighty 35-mm color slides in timed carousel projector, dimensions variable.

VISUAL ARTS

# Michael Snow's object lessons

JAMES ADAMS

The Globe and Mail

Published Tuesday, July 17, 2012, 5:57 PM EDT



Except perhaps for their children's departments, art galleries tend to be "look-but-don't-touch" zones for patrons.

So it's a bit of surprise to attend Objects of Vision at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and be invited, encouraged even, to crawl under, walk through, sit on, peer into and touch some of the 14 artifacts on display. The show, opening Wednesday and running through early December, collects what its creator Michael Snow calls "a family of things" – "abstract-form sculptures" created at various points in his illustrious, multifaceted 60-year career (from, more precisely, the late 1950s, late 60s and early 80s) but never exhibited together until now.

At 83 the grand old man of Canadian contemporary art and, with Jeff Wall, perhaps the best known Canadian artist internationally, Snow confessed in a brief interview Tuesday that he actually conceived Objects of Vision at least 20 years ago. The 14 works "are each very individual in their way," he observed, "but they also have these aesthetic connections" in that "they're all directors of attention; each work, in effect, tells you what to look at."



*Core*, from 1982-84, for instance, is a large thimble or obelisk of unglazed clay, 200 centimetres tall, “whose shape says how it should be seen; you have to go around it.” At the same time, the ever-playful Snow has made it so high that the viewer can’t see the core of *Core*. By contrast, *Transformer*, a long lance of varnished wood, made from a tree that Snow felled near the cabin in Newfoundland he’s owned for 30 years and cosseted in a cardboard jacket horizontally suspended from the ceiling by a rope, directs the eye cross-wise, forward and backward, from shaft to point, and up and down, from ceiling to lance.

What gave Snow and the AGO’s assistant curator of Canadian art Georgiana Uhlyarik the opportunity to pull these elements together was Snow’s winning last year of the Gershon Iskowitz Prize. Established in 1986 to honour a mature artist for his or her “significant contribution to Canadian visual arts,” the Iskowitz comes not only with a \$50,000 cash prize but also the chance to present a solo show at the AGO. *Voila* Objects of Vision.

Tight, beautifully installed, thought-provoking, elegant, Objects of Vision could, of course, easily be the title of any other Snow showcase of other aspects of his protean and prolific output as painter, filmmaker, drawer, photographer, videographer, even musician. Indeed, not for nothing is this native Torontonians who, lest we forget, at age 47 became the first Canadian ever to have a solo show at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, often called “the original multimedia artist.”

“Confident” is a word often used to describe Snow or at least the seeming ease whereby he gives himself permission to try his hand at this or that without inviting complaints of dilettantism. But it’s not necessarily a term Snow applies to himself. Yes, he admitted, “I think I’ve mostly won” in terms of accomplishing and presenting what he’s set his attentions on over the decades. “But I always do things to see whether they do what they should do. They have to exist. They’re not strictly speaking concepts or ideas . . . For me, the idea, the planning, the approach and all that are not really a complete prediction of what the final experience will be. You can’t easily know what a work is going to do without having the work.”

He said he recently received a request for permission to reproduce one in a series of paintings he did sometime in the 1980s in an upcoming book on Canadian painting. Funny thing is, “it’s one painting I’ve been thinking I might try to paint over. Every once in a while, I think maybe I could have done something better and I might give it another try. So maybe I will with this one [it’s in his personal collection] but,” he chuckled, “not right now.”

Objects of Vision, or How to Look at Things *is at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto through Dec. 9.*

# ARTFORUM

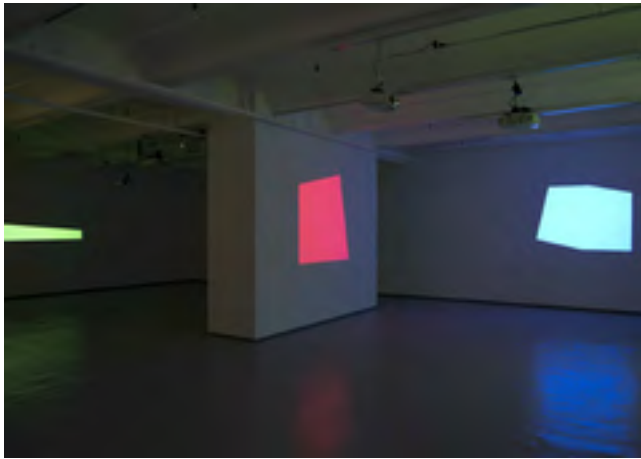
JANUARY 2012

## Michael Snow

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

513 West 20th Street

January 7–February 11



**Michael Snow, *The Viewing of Six New Works*, 2012**, seven looped video projections. Installation view. Michael Snow's latest exhibition finds the artist on familiar thematic terrain, playing with abstraction and perception through shifting, tautological strategies. *La Ferme* (The Farm), 1998, is a photo-based work depicting eleven successive frames of 16-mm film cut apart, blown up, and horizontally arrayed. As in the final moments of Snow's seminal *Wavelength*, 1967, the moving image becomes still. Film reverts to its structural components, the vertical vector of the filmstrip recomposed along the horizontal axis of the spectator, her left-to-right gaze recapitulating the camera's. Snow's nearly twenty-three-minute looped video *In the Way*, 2011, proves similarly literal. A series of continually panning tracking shots of the ground, shot from above and projected onto the floor, the work invites the viewer to realize its title, as the footprints clouding its surface make clear.

Snow's most recent installation, titled, with typical self-referentiality, *The Viewing of Six New Works*, 2012, furnishes the show's conceptual highlight. Seven projectors cast monochrome geometries onto seven whitewashed walls, each figure a stand-in for a wall-mounted piece. Stretching, rotating, and contorting in motions more organic than mechanical, the forms variously sweep and crawl across the wall, cropped by unseen frames and marked by subtle inflections. Now rectangle, now trapezoid, now rhombus, these endlessly evolving shapes mimic the act of viewing: the scans of the eye, pivots of the neck, and twists of the torso that make up the so-called art of looking at art, here performed using an interactive technology named TouchDesigner. Moving nonsynchronously, the figures, hypothetically whole yet visible only as fragments, affirm the avant-garde insight that objects are not as they are, but as they are seen. Never manifest in full, they preclude gestalt sensations—those all-at-once comprehensions of form championed by Snow's peer Robert Morris in his "Notes on Sculpture." The frame, here as in so much of Snow's work, trumps all.

— Courtney Fiske



## The Lookout: A Weekly Guide to Shows You Won't Want to Miss

by AiA Staff

With an ever-growing number of galleries scattered around New York, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Where to begin? Here at *A.i.A.*, we are always on the hunt for thought-provoking, clever and memorable shows that stand out in a crowded field. Below is a selection of shows our team of editors can't stop talking about.

This week we check out Thomas Scheibitz's blocky, collage-inspired compositions at Tanya Bonakdar, wander among Ross Knight's elegantly spare sculptures at Team, and discover Japanese model/curator Mie through the eyes of 35 artists, in a group portrait show at Freight + Volume.



View of Michael Snow's exhibition "In the Way," 2012. Courtesy Jack Shainman.

[...]

### Michael Snow at Jack Shainman, through Feb. 11

Michael Snow's show "In the Way" explores the art of looking at art. His recent and not-so-recent efforts here include a colorful light-projection installation of shifting rectangles that questions the way we perceive two-dimensional artworks. Meanwhile, a floor projection piece and an eerie holographic work overturn, in a rather disquieting way, some fundamental notions of three-dimensional space.

"The Lookout" is compiled by *A.i.A.* associate editor Leigh Anne Miller.

## AGO's multi-decade love affair with Michael Snow continues with awarding of \$40,000 Gershon Iskowitz Prize

By Timothy Lem-Smith

June 8, 2011



Arguably Snow's most visited creation, Flight Stop soars above oft-oblivious Eaton Centre patrons (Image: Ronnie Yip from the Torontolife.com Flickr pool)

On Monday, the **AGO** announced that **Michael Snow**, the multit talented Toronto-born artist, has won the 2011 Gershon Iskowitz prize for his contribution to the visual arts in Canada. He's the first artist to win the prize since its booty was bulked up by \$15,000 to a hefty \$40,000 in early 2011.

Snow's victory will hardly come as a shocker to anyone who's seen the 82 works already housed at the AGO, such as his iconic metallic silhouettes in the second-floor atrium. It seems the gallery kind of has a thing for Snow. In 1994 the AGO showed a number of installations as part of a major retrospective called The Michael Snow Project. The same year, they published a grand total of four books about his work.

Besides his AGO appearances, Snow has spent his eight-decade career decorating Hogtown with loads of notable pieces, from the jeering golden fans leaning out of the top of the Rogers Centre to Flight Stop, those oft-overlooked wooden geese that soar above oblivious Eaton Centre shoppers.

The AGO-Snow love affair will continue, as the prize now includes (yet) another exhibit, coming to a gallery near you some time next year. We'll be there.



## Snow Days

BY JASON ANDERSON 01.26.10



Left: Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967, still from a color film in 16 mm, 45 minutes. Right: Michael Snow, *Flightstop*, 1979. Installation view, Eaton Centre, Toronto. Photo: Tourism Toronto

**IT CAN SOMETIMES FEEL** like Toronto is Michael Snow's city, and the rest of us are merely living in it. No other contemporary Canadian artist has made such a thumbprint on the civic landscape, whether through the many iterations of his "Walking Women," the fiberglass Canada geese suspended within the Eaton Centre, or the gargoyle-like fans spilling off the walls of the Rogers Centre. He reached his peak of ubiquity with "The Michael Snow Project," a multigallery exhibition in 1994. By that time, he'd even been forgiven for spending his most prolific years (1963–72) living with his late wife Joyce Wieland in New York. Like so many other peripatetic Canucks before him, he's been thoroughly reclaimed and repatriated.

And like so many artists who find themselves enshrined in their own time, the ever-industrious eighty-one-year-old has remained better known to the hometown crowd for popular public pieces than for the unrulier work that he continues to make. The fact that most of the seven projected works in "Recent Snow"—his first exhibition at the Power Plant since "The Michael Snow Project"—have never before been publicly screened in Toronto may come as a surprise. Then again, Snow's film and video works—always a cornerstone of a practice that also includes painting, sculpture, and music—long ago earned a reputation for being more admirable than accessible. Surely only the hardest moviegoers would endure the 45-minute-long zoom in his landmark *Wavelength* (1966) or the 266-minute runtime of *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young)* by Wilma Schoen (1970–74).

Yet the new and old Snow works now filling spaces in the city readily dispel that idea. One of the projections at the Power Plant, *The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets* (2009), consists of a real-time shot of an intersection outside the gallery projected onto, and fractured by, a staggered series of rectangles, creating a sort of cubist movie screen. In *Piano Sculpture* (2009), Snow creates a piano quartet with himself playing all four parts in shots projected onto each of the walls. And in the equally jazzy though speechless *That/Cela/Dat* (1999), he fills three screens with texts in English, French, and Flemish that may be roughly identical in meaning but whose contents nevertheless refuse to stay in sync. Like the other works at the Power Plant, it's remarkable for its ingenuity and playfulness, and Snow is once again delighted to confound received notions about word and image, meaning and reception.

In the coming weeks, other venues are presenting rare screenings of earlier works. TIFF Cinematheque offers the most monumental of the lot when *La Région centrale* (1971) plays January 28. Filmed over five days on a mountain peak in northern Quebec with a specially designed 16-mm camera that turns in almost every direction, the resulting three-hour work is less a serene study in landscape than an audacious exercise in disorientation. As he would do throughout his career, Snow reinvests the old business of watching moving images on a screen with an even older sense of awe and wonder.