

The Exquisite MOVING CORPSE

60 artists make a one-hour film, one minute at a time

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Images from "The Exquisite Moving Corpse," a collaborative film playing through Dec. 10 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery.

IT'S A KIND OF FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER of a movie, but somehow, all the parts fit and work together.

This is surprising, considering that "The Exquisite Moving Corpse" was created by 60 artists, each contributing a minute of film time.

But here's the catch: each artist was ignorant of what was created before and only saw the last frame of the previous artist's one-minute movie.

It was up to each one to respond however they wished.

Jade Dellinger, director of the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, where the art film can be viewed (through Dec. 10), jokes that it's the artist's version of a chain mail letter.

"It's a one-hour long, collective, collaborative film," he says. "It's essentially 60 film/video shorts, though they are all connected," he says. "Each film is one minute long."

The project is the brainstorm of artists Chip Lord, Jack Massing and Sean Miller, who provided the first three one-minute movies of the film.



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"They got the ball rolling and invited the others," Dellinger says, "each one inviting 19 artists." (Some of those invited work in duos.)

"Chip Lord is the elder statesman in a way. He's the last surviving member of The Ant Farm. They were the group that created Cadillac Ranch." (The art installation is a row of Cadillacs buried hood-first in the dirt in Amarillo, Texas.)

Jack Massing was one half of the conceptual artists The Art Guys, and is also an artist in his own right. (He recently had a collaborative exhibit with William Wegman at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery.)

And Sean Miller is director of the John Erickson Museum of Art, a location variable museum. He is credited with reinventing the

museum as a portable object.

"One of the first exhibits I had here (at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery) was a JEMA retrospective," Dellinger says.

Artists participating in creating "The Exquisite Moving Corpse" include photographer/ painter William Wegman; Bibbe Hansen, who was in Andy Warhol's early films and is an artist in her own right; photographer Mark Seliger, who has shot portraits for Rolling Stone, Vanity Fair and various CD covers; and installation and multimedia artist Tony Oursler, who has collaborated with David Bowie and David Byrne, among others. (Dellinger calls Oursler "maybe the most famous video artist in the world.")



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Connections

Lord ends his one-minute section with a replica of Duchamp's "Bicycle Wheel" – a bicycle attached to the top of a wooden stool. So Massing, the next artist, made a film of a car tire standing in a field of grass. (Spoiler: at the end of the minute, the wind knocks it over.) Miller's film continues the tire theme, and at the end, he throws a tire onto a mountain of other tires.

That image made Chiaoza, the next artist, think of Cheerios, so her film opens with a closeup of a bowl of that breakfast cereal, which is eaten. At the end, a blue-and-white cloth napkin is used to cover a face.



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Unbeknownst to her, the previous artist had been wearing a blue-and-white checkered shirt of the same pattern.

Coincidences and recurring themes and imagery appear throughout the one-hour movie. There are tires, roosters, an eyeball traveling through pipes, fire imagery.

Wegman gives a behind-the-scenes look at how he photographs his famous Weimaraner dogs, then pans across his studio before landing on the last shot: the cover of a child's science book titled: "Tell Me Why." So the next artist, Bryan Konefsky, begins his film with a kind of instructional video on the solar system, with a sample of Annie Lennox's "Why" playing.

Watching "The Exquisite Moving Corpse" is hypnotic, and mesmerizing.

The imagery is unexpected, as it's continually changing and there are no linear plot line or characters to follow.

The effect is oddly compelling, and not as random as one might suspect.

The movie premiered at the Achivio Emily Harvey art space (curated by Dellinger) during la Biennale in Venice, Italy, in July. (Dellinger had a one-month residency at Archivio Emily Harvey.)

Now the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery is one of the first U.S. venues to show the movie, playing it on a continual loop.

The film actually had its beginnings at the gallery, Dellinger says, as Massing was an artist in residence there during the “Two Clever by Half” exhibit.

“Jack was working on it here at the Rauschenberg Gallery,” he says. “He would say to me, ‘I just got another one-minute film from an artist, come check it out.’”

So it was a no-brainer to present the film at the gallery.

“I thought it was so important and connected to us, because much of the project was developed here and edited here, we should build a site-specific situation for it,” Dellinger says.

He always changes the gallery for each new exhibit; for this one, he’s transformed it into a cozy, dark theater space, with 10 oversized beanbag-like chairs that seat two each, and benches along the walls. The movie screen is handmade, with rear projection.

The first ‘Exquisite Corpse’

The concept for the film was invented by Surrealists in 1925 as a café parlor game. Andre Breton, Yves Tanguy, Jacques Prévert and Marcel Duhamel played a word game where each would write a word on a piece of paper, then hand it to the next person. Each person would only see the previous word. The name of the game,

“Exquisite Corpse,” comes from the phrase they created when they first played the game: “le cadaver exquis boira le vin nouveau,” or, in English, “The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine.”

The Surrealists soon began playing the game with images, instead of words, creating a human figure with head, torso legs and feet.

“It was a collective thing; they loved the surprise element,” says Dellinger. “The idea that collectively, there was a third mind. You put two people together and the third thing is something that is beyond both. There was a freedom with creating these rules and working collectively.”

The game lends itself to pandemic times, he says.

“We’re living under such restrictive circumstances, we’re seeing the heads of our friend on a little Zoom screen. We imagine what their torso looks like, imagine what their feet look like. Maybe my boss is not wearing pants.

“The accordion style (lends itself to) something that surprises everyone in the end.”

Though the first one done in 1925 was a poetry project, “The Surrealists started making visual ones soon after,” Dellinger says. “In the 1940s, John Cage with Lou Harrison and Henry Cowell made exquisite corpse pieces but did it with compositional paper and created musical scores. These rules can be applied in interdisciplinary ways that are very interesting. How the Surrealists never came upon the idea of making a film is really surprising to us. This is the first exquisite corpse game that’s a time-based piece that is all about creating a film version.”

The exhibit/film appeals to various fields, so Dellinger will have it up for the entire semester.

“A lot of the classes will use this,” he says. “Creative writing (instructors) are making assignments based on this, animation and visual arts are doing assignments based on this. Drawing classes are also doing this, and the music department is talking about some exquisite corpse projects. We might have an exquisite corpse festival and allow students and faculty to participate. Everyone is excited about this project and it has captured their imaginations.”

Dellinger also plans to have a panel with Lord, Massing and Miller in November, though he doesn’t have a specific date yet.

The project, which began in March 2020, lent itself especially well to a time when people needed to be socially distanced; despite those restrictions, artists all over the world were able to collaborate.

“They were trying to find a way to connect with other artists as potential collaborators, artists who enjoy collaboration and enjoy making collective works,” Dellinger says. |

"The Exquisite Moving Corpse"

When: through Dec. 10

Where: The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, on campus of Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers

Cost: free

Information: 239-489-9313 or www.RauschenbergGallery.com

Gallery hours: Monday-Friday, Saturday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Sat. 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.