

SAN FRANCISCO

CINEMATHEQUE

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
Sunday, February 25, 2007 – 7:30 p.m.

STARTING IN SAN FRANCISCO / GOING ON

Joshua Kanies and Matthew Swiezynski in person

For more than a decade, now, it has been a particular treat for me to have been in touch with hundreds of San Francisco Art Institute students, many of whose works, ideas, intelligence, and energy have provided me with energy of my own to go on with my personal adventures in the world of art. After graduating into the real world, so to speak, many of these young artists have continued to develop materials and ideas they began to work with during their school years. They blossomed at the Art Institute and have bloomed even more fully as they have engaged with their post-school, professional activities.

The five artists whose work you see tonight are particularly fine examples of what I have just described. All have pushed the boundaries of their education, all are committed energetically to their creative pursuits, and all have made work I greatly admire. It is a credit to them, as well as to our school, that what they do is as different, one from the other, as it is. I'm not sure I can easily recognize an Art Institute style in the work being shown tonight. If there is such a thing beyond seriousness of intent, however, it might have to do with certain traditions in arts practice: the tradition of exploration and going on into what is, for them, at least, new territory; the tradition of dealing intimately with the materials of their media; the tradition of taking chances, even if that means they might fail; the tradition of exploring personal, poetic visions, and the tradition of shooting for the stars rather than aiming to be stars.

Collectively among these works, there is a considerable sense of their makers acting as observers who record and examine what they see, finally offering their discoveries to their viewers in the closed forms we experience here. I'm not certain that this counts as an Art Institute thing; more likely, it is a result of my own interests as well as the curatorial concerns I have had in putting the present show together. I hope that this presentation has about it a sense of these artists' diverse views coupled with some sort of unity of concerns. As much as anything, I suppose this latter results from a sort of unspoken and unofficial collaboration between me and these splendid artists, all of whom I congratulate for what they have achieved and all of whom I thank for their ongoing collegiality.

- Charles Boone

Christina Battle

b. 1975 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. SFAI MFA 2005

hysteria (2006), 35mm, sound, b/w; *traveling thru with eyes closed tight (Map #2 – January 03 through January 06)* (2006), 35mm, color, sound; *the distance between here and there* (2005), 16mm, color, sound; *behind the walls and under the stairs* (2006), 35mm, color, sound

The many layers of Christina Battle's art begin with the materials themselves with which she works. Her films have about them a high level of tactility, of haptic doing and thinking, for the simple reason that they are very much the products of her own hands. Sure, she employs technology in various ways, but surprisingly little comes between techniques Battle employs – hand processing, color toning, and so on – but the concepts behind her work and the messages she seeks to convey – be they abstract/visceral (*the distance between here and there*) or political (*hysteria*) – are, in her view, the most salient features of her films. *hysteria* is, in fact, the starting point of a fresh direction in her work. Although concrete imagery has often played a role in what she does, the social commentary suggested by this film is new. A sort of story-telling attitude is there, but unlike usual sorts of narrative or documentary, it is markedly non-linear; we are offered suggestions rather than a plot or facts.

Christina Battle currently teaches at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto

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Matthew Swiezynski

b. 1974 in Winchester, Massachusetts. SFAI MFA 2001

Rue Vaugirard (2003), video, color, sound; *L'amour physique*, abridged version (2006), video, color, sound

Matthew Swiezynski's work is an ongoing, metaphoric look at some of the micro aspects of our world: of viewing, of time, and of color, to name but three. Through techniques he has explored for a number of years, he creates (or, maybe, discovers) abstract images that are based in reality, joining them, finally, with sonic material meant to heighten their sense of abstraction. To this, he says, he adds a bit of melancholia. Darker states of meaning are clearly implied in this work and it is through the pacing and duration of its sequences, among other techniques, that viewers might gain a clear sense of this darkness. One may even perceive a vein of religious sub-stratum in what he creates. The limitation of his palette to dark, or highly contrasting colors also heightens the palpable sense of melancholy in these works. These works appear to be monochromatic, but not quite. Pacing and duration are important considerations for Swiezynski. Perhaps his works approach boredom. But in Cage's formulation, if you are bored with something, engage with it again. If you are still bored with it, engage with it further. And so on. Swiezynski's work may require a degree of patience, but I always come away from it with a deep sense of having experienced something about time and vision I had never witnessed before. The longer of tonight's two works is an abbreviated version of a half-hour work.

Matthew Swiezynski lives in the Bay Area

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Taeko Horigome
b. 1976 in Saku, Nagano, Japan. SFAI MFA 2005

In the screening room: *Facing the Dragon* (2004), originally shot on Super 8mm film, transferred to digital media, color, sound; *Letting it Go* (2004), Super 8mm, color, sound

In the lobby on monitors: *Coffee* (2002), originally 16mm b/w, transferred to digital media, silent; *Egg* (2004), originally 16mm b/w, transferred to digital media, silent

The two installation pieces presented in the foyer are very brief loops of short actions: *Coffee* is thirty-eight seconds in duration, *Egg*, thirty seconds. Of particular interest to me is that watching the repeated events depicted therein causes the actual actions they portray to cease, pretty much, being recognizable acts. After a while, and looked at long enough, they simply become shapes moving through time. The leap from these earlier works to *Facing the Dragon* is great indeed, yet what one sees in this later work is not unrelated. The *Dragon* camera (Super 8mm) was set to shoot one frame every twenty seconds over a period of five hours. The speed of the resulting footage was then reduced by thirty percent, resulting in a squeezing of time and of randomly repeated actions – albeit, unlike the staged, repeated actions of *Egg* and *Coffee*, completely natural and unplanned – that adds up, in only a bit more than three minutes, to a colossal explosion of compressed energy. *Letting it Go* was a breakthrough work for Horigome. During a trip to Vietnam in 2004, she decided that she would relinquish the tight control of the methodology to which she was accustomed. At an orphanage in Hoi An, she simply gave her camera to the children there and, without any sort of explanation, let them do with it whatever they wished. What we see in this film are the unedited results of this project. This radical strategy was her attempt to be in touch with spontaneous and instinctual humanity. It worked.

Taeko Horigome currently lives in New York where she is pursuing further graduate study at the Pratt Institute

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Minyong Jang
b. 1968 in Seoul, Korea. SFAI MFA 2002

The Dark Room (2001), 16mm, color, silent; *The Moment* (2002), 16mm b/w, silent; *The Breath* (2007), 16mm, color, silent

Through the acts of very close looking and capturing on film, Minyong jang relishes the discovery of all manner of perhaps otherwise unnoticed visual poetry. His films are also significantly about the advantageous juxtaposition of one image with another, the resulting one-plus-one adding up to considerably more than two. Take, for example, the clear sense of closure at the conclusion of *The Breath*, his just-completed film. All of the shots until just before the end result from the camera having been hand-held and pretty much always in motion. Jang seems to be saying, “Let’s just explore this small bit of nature and see what we discover.” At the end of the film, however, all motion stops. The highly abstract images from the now tripod-mounted camera, along with Jang’s precise editing, tell us without fanfare that the end is at hand. He thus subtly creates what musicians call a perfect-authentic cadence, the ultimate sense of closure. All of his work

is about the unique kind of silence that film viewing sometimes engenders. What we are offered in these works is not just silence in the usual sense, but rather, the opportunity to experience the kind of concentrated absence of sound that lets our minds flow into their own silent and/or sonic realms. Notable, as well, in Jang's films is his sense of shape and color. In *The Breath* there seems to be infinite variety in the bamboo's green coupled with the changes of light on the various days he was shooting. Bamboo's verticality is used significantly as a motif in this film. Only once does the maker turn the stalks on their sides, thus emphasizing what is natural about the way they grow, and it is exactly at this point that he let us see leaves and branches that naturally grow more or less horizontally, or at least not absolutely straight up. This is a marvelous moment of visual acuity coupled with structural thinking.

Minyong Jang lives in Seoul, where he is Assistant Professor in the Division of Theater and Film at Seokyeong University. He is currently completing his Ph.D.

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Joshua Kanies

b. 1978 in Harvard, Illinois. SFAI MFA 2006

The Zen of John Muir (2004), 16mm, transferred to video, b/w, silent;
Witness (2006), video, color, sound; *Chasm* (2007), video, color sound

Like Minyong Jang, Joshua Kanies looks closely at nature, but his work also considers man's relationships to it. He adopts as his own, John Muir's idea that one arrives at truths through patient observation, the result of this being Kanie's mastery of the long, seemingly unchanging shot; and I use the word "seemingly". The viewer might suspect that nothing really happens in the single, unedited view that comprises *The Zen of John Muir*, but things do happen; those clouds really are in motion. Likewise, what about the almost imperceptible movement of things in *Chasm*? Do what Muir suggests and maybe you can see these things for yourself. One discovers a marked difference between actually being in nature and seeing it framed as an art object as we do here. With these films the gaze is fixed, there are no distractions from what is important, the pace and framing of what we see are controlled. We are not told what to think, but hints are given and we get the point with little more than a nudge. Again, closure is subtly provided: That slow moving banana slug in *Witness* seems to be as clear an indication that the story is at an end – well, maybe not really to an end, since it's travels appear to be on-going, as is the story being told in this work – as the closing "Fin" of a French film.

Joshua Kanies lives in San Francisco where he works for the Film Arts Foundation

Founded by Bay Area film artists in 1961, San Francisco Cinematheque is one of the nation's premiere proponents and presenters of personal, artist-made cinema that embraces film, video, and new media. Championing both classic and contemporary cinema art that challenges mainstream media and conventional culture with alternative visions and voices, we present over fifty programs every year, many artists in person, all thought-provoking and engaging. We produce publications, maintain a public archive, and promote the art form through our website www.sfcinematheque.org. Our phone number is (415) 552-1990.