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Collective Premieres

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George Kuchar

Collective for Living Cinema
52 White St.
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Film programming at the Collective For Living Cinema has been consistently interesting all season. Their programs include established filmmakers of the New American Cinema, younger filmmakers, and seldom shown Hollywood and European commercial movies. Most important — the range of work screened, within each of these areas, has widened greatly.

This past week the Collective presented the New York premiere of four recent films by George Kuchar. *Back to Nature* is Kuchar's first attempt to use material from European commercial, anti-narrative films ("un film de George Kuchar"). *La Casa de Chorizo* (made with his students at the San Francisco Art Institute) has some brilliant and very funny moments such as: the hero showering in a Christmas tinsel rain forest waterfall or the flying goldfish in the variety show underwater ballet sequence.

I'd like to see *A Reason to Live* again. I suspect it may be very good, but part of the problem in programming Kuchar films is that by the last film of the evening you've laughed too much and you get dulled and can't separate your own dullness from the film.

But I have no reservations about *I, An Actress*, which easily stands up to George's other two major 16mm films, *Hold Me While I'm Naked* and *The Devil's*

Cleavage.

Formally, it is his tightest, most spare film yet. Taking place within one room, with only two actors, Kuchar himself plays a director coaching a young actress in a love scene with a precariously constructed dummy. Actually, there is a third performer. That is the camera itself which weaves in and out of focus throughout the scene while gradually widening and pulling back its angle of vision. These days, Kuchar is involved in a complex exploration of lighting and in *I, An Actress* he extends the soft-focused, scrimmed effects used by Hollywood on female stars of the thirties and forties to plain out-of-focus, thus raising the question of camera presence in a more sustained way than he has previously.

The film is probably as profound a study of appearance and performance as is Genet's *The Maids*. The title is ambiguous because there are actually two actresses in the film. One is the young woman who is being coached. The second is Kuchar himself who demonstrates all her lines and actions for her and who performs the actress right off the screen. George's performance is more interesting, not only because he is a more skilled and subtle performer (actually he's one of the best actors I've seen) but because he has a more complicated task. He must perform as a woman; he must make everything about himself a performance of something else, while the other performer is limited by her own existing and unexamined woman-ness and can only perform a specific character or action.

It goes without saying that the film is hysterically and painfully funny. ●