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University Art Museum Pacific Film Archive

Press Release

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The Cool Works of Shirley Clarke at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley

A survey presenting 15 film and video works by a leader of the American avant-garde

**including the rarely-seen jazz feature,
Ornette: Made in America**

A selection of 15 film and video works by dancer, filmmaker, and videomaker Shirley Clarke will be shown on October 13, 20, 27, and 29 at the University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2625 Durant Avenue, Berkeley. One of the highlights of the series will be two rare screenings, on October 27 and 29, of Clarke's portrait of jazz great Ornette Coleman, **Ornette: Made in America**.

A leading force in the American independent and avant-garde movement, Clarke began her career in the arts as a dancer, studying with Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. Her first film, **Dance in the Sun** (1953) was made when she decided that other dance films were very poorly made. After receiving awards for several subsequent short films, including **Bridges-go-Round** (1958) and **Skyscraper** (1959), she made her first feature film, **The Connection**, in 1961. Based on a Jack Gelber play presented Off-Broadway by The Living Theatre, **The Connection** offered a searing experience, transforming the original play-within-a-play into a stylistically adventurous film about addicts waiting for their drug seller. The New York State Board of Regents refused to grant the film a commercial distribution license, on grounds of obscenity; their ruling was finally overturned by the New York State Supreme Court. **The Connection** won a Critics' Award at the 1961 Cannes Film Festival, and Shirley Clarke was selected as the Best New Director of the Year at the 1961 Locarno Film Festival.

The Cool World (1963), Clarke's second feature, was based on Warren Miller's novel about a black teenager in Harlem. **The Cool World** was shot on location, using improvisational techniques and non-professional young actors in some scenes. Like much of Clarke's work, it features unusual camera movement and editing techniques.

Portrait of Jason (1967), a moving confrontation between camera and subject, consists entirely of footage of a man talking about his life. Jason Holliday, né Aaron Paine, is a black gay prostitute whose life's ambition was to be a nightclub singer. As he tells stories, and enacts his repertoire of female impersonations, the film explores his unknowable identity, and elucidates the elements of voyeurism in documentary.

In the late 1960s, Clarke became fascinated with the freedom offered by the medium of video. PFA will screen an excerpt from her late '70s work, **Four Journeys into Mystic Time**, as well as two collaborative videos she made with Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin, **Savage/Love** (1981) and **Tongues** (1982).

A number of experimental video and fictional sequences are included in Clarke's unusual documentary, **Ornette: Made in America** (1985). As a friend of jazz artist Ornette Coleman, Clarke had begun shooting the film in the late 1960s. It includes concert footage, black-and-white video shot by Coleman during a tour in Nigeria in the 1970s, and sequences showing a lavish celebration for Coleman in his hometown of Fort Worth.

Admission to these programs is \$5.50 for one film, and \$7 for double bills. For additional information, please telephone 642-1412.

The complete series schedule is as follows:

Tuesday, October 13

7:00 pm: Dance of Life: A Program of Short Films -- **Dance in the Sun** (1953), **In Paris Parks**, (1954), **Bullfight** (1955), **A Moment in Love** (1957), and an excerpt from **Four Journeys in Mystic Time** (1978-79)

8:45 pm: **The Connection** (1961)

Tuesday, October 20

7:00 pm: **The Cool World** (1963)

9:00 pm: **Portrait of Jason** (1967)

Tuesday, October 27

7:00 pm: Video Shorts: Portraits of Collaboration -- **Savage/Love** (1981, made with Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard), **Tongues** (1982, made with Chaikin and Shepard), **Shirley Clarke** (1975-92, made by Donna Cameron in cooperation with Shirley Clarke)

8:45 pm: **Ornette: Made in America** (1985); preceded by short film, **Skyscrapers** (1959)

Thursday, October 29

9:30 pm: **Ornette: Made in America** (1985); preceded by short film, **Bridges-Go-Round** (1958)

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