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Friday, November 4

8 pm — Bruce Conner

Not counting Dorothy of Oz, the state of Kansas' most striking contributions to the art of film are, arguably: Buster Keaton, Louise Brooks and Bruce Conner. The last-named and youngest member of this perhaps unlikely trio has, however, long since transplanted himself to far less level terrain. It was here in San Francisco that he completed his first film — laconically titled *A MOVIE* — in 1958, and it was here, in that same year, that he founded the "Camera Obscura Film Society". And it has continued to be here in the Bay Area that he has produced, over the past twenty-five years, a remarkable body of work, as painter, printmaker, sculptor and collagist — but above all as filmmaker.

Though he has modestly declined our customary honorific, "A Tribute to . . .", it seems entirely appropriate that we inaugurate this year's Bay Area Filmmakers Showcase by gathering in front of the Castro's enormous screen and simply having Bruce Conner on hand to *show his case*.

That phrase risks confusion, however, for it may evoke the sample case of the traveling salesman. Unlike the shyster trotting out his shiny *new* wares in the hope of *selling us* something, Bruce Conner traffics in material which is almost always old and familiar. He can't be trying to sell it to us since it's quite clear that we already own most of it. His stock-in-trade, in fact, is nothing else than images out of our collective audio-visual junkyard, whether half-remembered stock footage from documentaries, cartoons and commercials — or the unforgettable frames of Jack Kennedy trapped in a motorcade in Dallas. We may be shown the "countdown" numbers from the start of a reel of film (material we usually only get to see when the projectionist has goofed) — or the "countdown" may instead be of those numbers which culminate in an atomic explosion (material whose connection to a projected goof is somewhat more ominous).

To all of this "found" material — much of it so familiar we've never really seen it before — Bruce Conner brings his unique combination of lyricism, subtlety and mordant humor: qualities found all too rarely in films of any sort. —P.S.

Film Makers' Showcase

1983

The filmmaker will introduce the program, which includes:

TEN SECOND FILM

Ten one-second strips of countdown leader. Commissioned by the New York Film Festival, who nonetheless decided this fundamental herald of motion picture exhibition was too risky to be submitted to their public. (1965, silent; 10 sec)



MONGOLOID

"A documentary film exploring the way in which a determined man overcame a basic mental defect and became a useful member of our society. Insightful editing techniques reveal the dreams, ideals and problems that face a large segment of the American male population. Educational." —Bruce Conner (1978; 3:30 min) Music by Devo

AMERICA IS WAITING

David Byrne and Brian Eno had long admired Conner's films; they asked the filmmaker to do a work inspired by cuts from their latest record. *AMERICA IS WAITING* assembles images of radar, flash-frames, pledgings of allegiance, deodorant commercials and explosions to examine the ironies of power, patriotism and paranoia. (1981; 3:30 min) Music by David Byrne and Brian Eno

A MOVIE

Found footage, focus leader and black frames, set to Respighi's "Pines of Rome". "I saw a movie called *DUCK SOUP* that the Marx Brothers were in. There's a war going on, and Groucho tells Harpo that we need help, and he runs out and puts a 'Help Wanted' sign on the front of the building. Then you start seeing all these tanks, and airplanes, and soldiers, and porpoises, and giraffes — I don't know — all sorts of creatures and things rushing to help them, I saw that when I was about 13, and after that I started thinking about all the things I could stick together in a sequence like that: elephants running, trains blowing up, cars going, cars crashing, and so on and so forth." —B.C. (1958; 12 min)

REPORT

A response to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. (1963-67; 13 min)

TAKE THE 5:10 DREAMLAND

What Anthony Reveaux describes as "one of Conner's most accomplished and exquisite works" came into being when Patrick Gleeson presented the filmmaker with the tape of a composition he had created as a gift for him. "The first time I heard the music I started envisioning some of the same images that I have been running through the Moviscop viewer for years and years. As soon as the music was over I described the images: the girl's face, the man, the water . . . Afterward Patrick timed the music and announced: 'It's five minutes and ten seconds. Take the 5:10 to Dreamland!' " —B.C. (1976; 5:10 min) Music by Patrick Gleeson

VALE TRISTE

"Nostalgic recreation of dreamland Kansas, 1947 in toto . . . 'Valse Triste' was the theme music for a radio serial, 'I Love a Mystery'. I wasn't supposed to stay up past ten o'clock. I would have to sneak out of bed to listen to it and hear it begin with the sound of a train off in the distance." —B.C. (1977; 5 min) Music by Sibelius

(INTERMISSION)

CROSSROADS

"At 36 minutes, *CROSSROADS* is Conner's *GONE WITH THE WIND*. The first underwater atomic bomb test at Bikini Atoll on July 25th, 1946 was recorded by over five hundred camera 'eyes' in boats, in planes and on land. . . . With his obsessive persistence, Conner ventured into the labyrinth of the National Archives in Washington, D.C., where much of that generation-old footage had been filed as 'classified'. He was determined to re-choreograph one of our biggest 'performances' into an artifact for re-appraisal. The first section of *CROSSROADS* is 12 minutes of successive views of the detonation, with a reverberating score by Patrick Gleeson performed on the Moog synthesizer. . . . The last 24 minutes with Terry Riley's numbing, translucent missa solennis evokes a funereal majesty in slow motion." —Anthony Reveaux (1976; 36 min; 35 mm) Music by Patrick Gleeson and Terry Riley