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Fill thy crack with whiteness, Kuchar, George,

Weather diary no. 3, Kuchar, George,



George Kuchar, right, gets his due in film tribute.

An American Treasure

SF Film Festival Honors an Unsung Filmmaker

by Warren Sonbert

George Kuchar is an American treasure — perhaps our greatest most unsung filmmaker. Working for over 30 years in 16 mm, regular 8 mm and now predominantly video, he has produced a body of work hilarious in its vision yet with disturbing and fiendish glints of a shifting turmoil beneath the surface that raises the material beyond the merely comic.

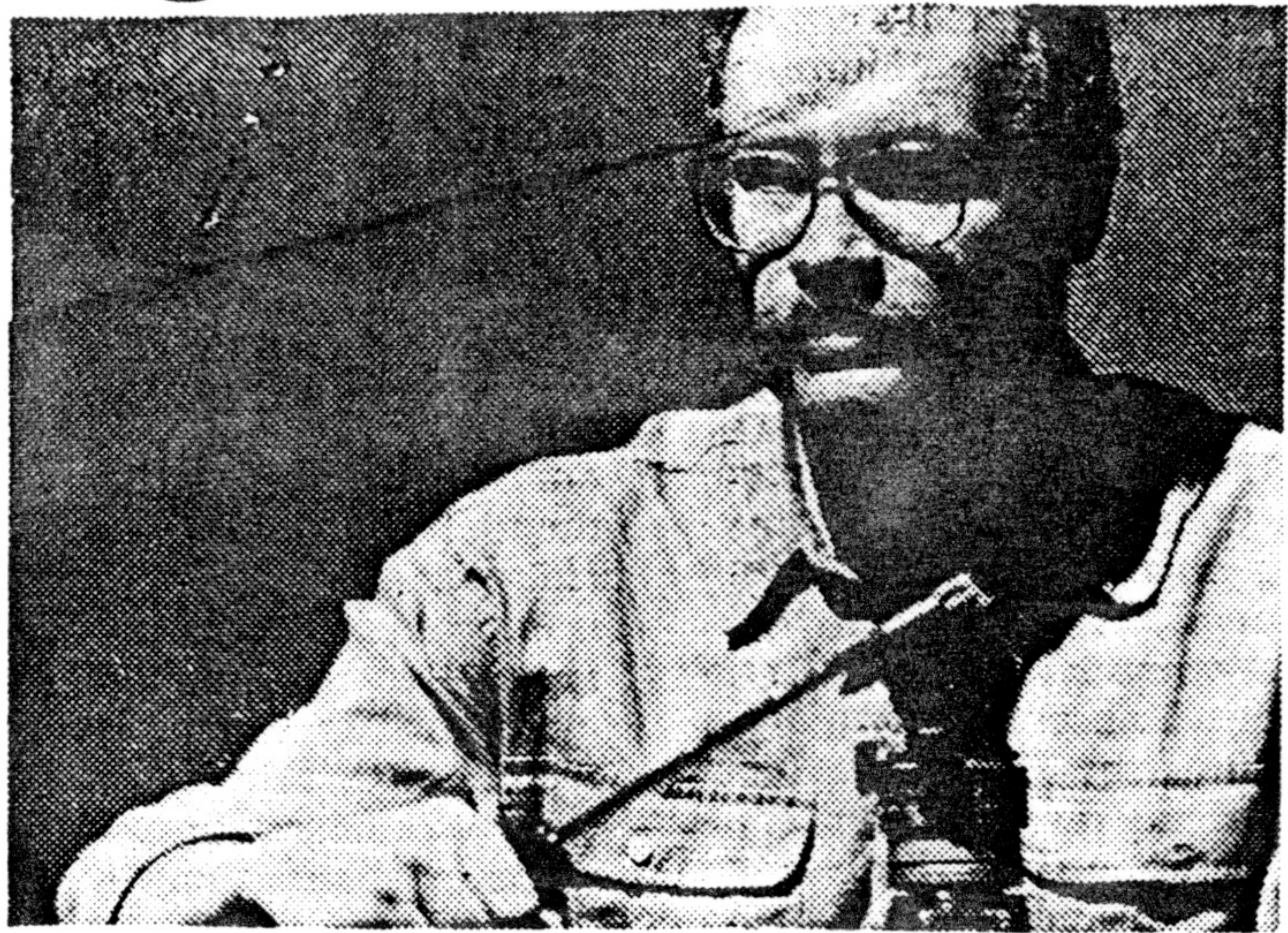
To say that filmmakers as diverse as David Lynch and
Second of Two Sections

John Waters are indebted to Kuchar's pioneering efforts would be an insult to George: He is a towering icon, *sui generis*. He pulls off masterpieces on a shoestring.

The 1991 San Francisco Film Festival is honoring this unique artist with a five-program retrospective at the Kabuki (programs 1, 2, 4 and 5) and the Pacific Film Archive (program 3). Anyone interested in film, in gay culture and a class act should sample one and all. Kuchar sends up cinema, all the while reinvigorating it.

The initial outing (April 27, 7:15 p.m.) is highlighted by recent video premieres. *Weather Diary No. 3* (1988) is a strange and haunting vision of the artist as obsessional sexual outlaw. The McGuffins here are UFOs and climactic upheavals that have preyed on the filmmaker's mind as much as he would like to prey on comely underage boys. The entirely hand-held camcorder is gingerly aimed at a group of teen lads on the playing field then cuts (the camera re-

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Filmmaker George Kuchar

(Photo: Rick Gerharter)

Kuchar

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versed yet still gripped by the cineaste) to George as hero licking his lips and hissing and moaning come hither advances. Here and elsewhere, Kuchar performs a nifty balancing act between desperate comedy and an uncanny portrait of devastating loneliness.

Like Sirk on Ecstasy

Leaping on to the second slot (April 28, 9 p.m.) to the more than full-length feature of *The Devil's Cleavage*

(1973) starring George's lover, the late Curt McDowell. This uproarious romp through the fleshpot dumps of San Francisco is a relentless exploration of sin, greed, lust and various inviting body parts — like Douglas Sirk on Ecstasy.

The PFA people (April 30, 7:30 p.m.) are treated to early and late masterpieces including the evocative and deceptively penetrating *Eclipse of the Sun Virgin* (1967) — probably the most highly sustained of all the East Coast works. The pacing is seriously measured, though not shy either of fitfully undercutting

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any prolonged Antonionian sobriety. A face at a screen framed by flapping cellophane sums up the work's pulls of arty pictorialism, zany visual invention and kitschy abandon.

This program also features the early magic of *Tootsies in Autumn*, a joint project with twin brother Mike back in 1963.

Here one can trace the buds of filmic ingenuity; Kuchar's camera is always alive to the moment — he frames and moves with the action to reveal and measure, not to control or pound. If you're curious about the forerunner of *Pink Flamingos* and its ilk, here's your chance.

The Nocturnal Immaculation (1980) compounds the Sirkian aesthetic of pushing melodrama to the hilt — supporting the givens of the

George Kuchar sends up cinema, all the while reinvigorating it.

genre at the same time as criticizing them. This is a choice, dark, hefty entry: Bleak, fanatical and bleary. It's hothouse expressionism like Schoenberg's *Erwartung* fried. '50s Cleo Moore sleaziness comes home to roost here with the film's host of masturbatory fondlings. This total program may be the strongest of all the bids; so it's over the bridge to Berkeley we go!

Warping Pupils' Minds

Set No. 4 is entitled "An Appendix of Academic Atrocities" (May 6, 4 p.m.), and it's devoted to a round of Kuchar's work with students of the San Francisco Art Institute over the period 1977-1988. On the basis of *Summer of No Return* from this latter year this bill is most

likely the mildest in artistic stature and is more a record of the filmmaker's endearing guidance and tutorial grace in warping his pupils' minds and developing future moral and aesthetic depravities.

The final group (May 6, 7 p.m.) runs the gamut from the early classic *Mosholu Holiday* (1966) to the recent, pungently titled video, *Fill Thy Crack with Whiteness* (1989). This is also the longest program, weighing in at 2½ hours of heavy crisscrossing pandemonium. *Cattle Mutilations* (1983) is a comparatively austere probe into sci-fi mayhem and may come closest to Kuchar's take on a documentary — albeit within a fractured framework. *Mosholu* represents an exquisite silliness exemplified best by the inclusion of the *Lucia* sextet as if sung by Oz's Lollipop Kids.

Beside Kuchar's brand of inspired cinematics and fervid lunacy the rest of movies seem anemic and tepid, constipated and timid. Kuchar liberated film to express what the singular artist would want to see up there flickering across the screen — a brilliant vision of how to frame and shape the world with humor, substance and bravura. *360*

Editor's note: Tickets for film festival screenings are available in advance at the Kabuki Theatre. For more information, phone 931-3456. ▼

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