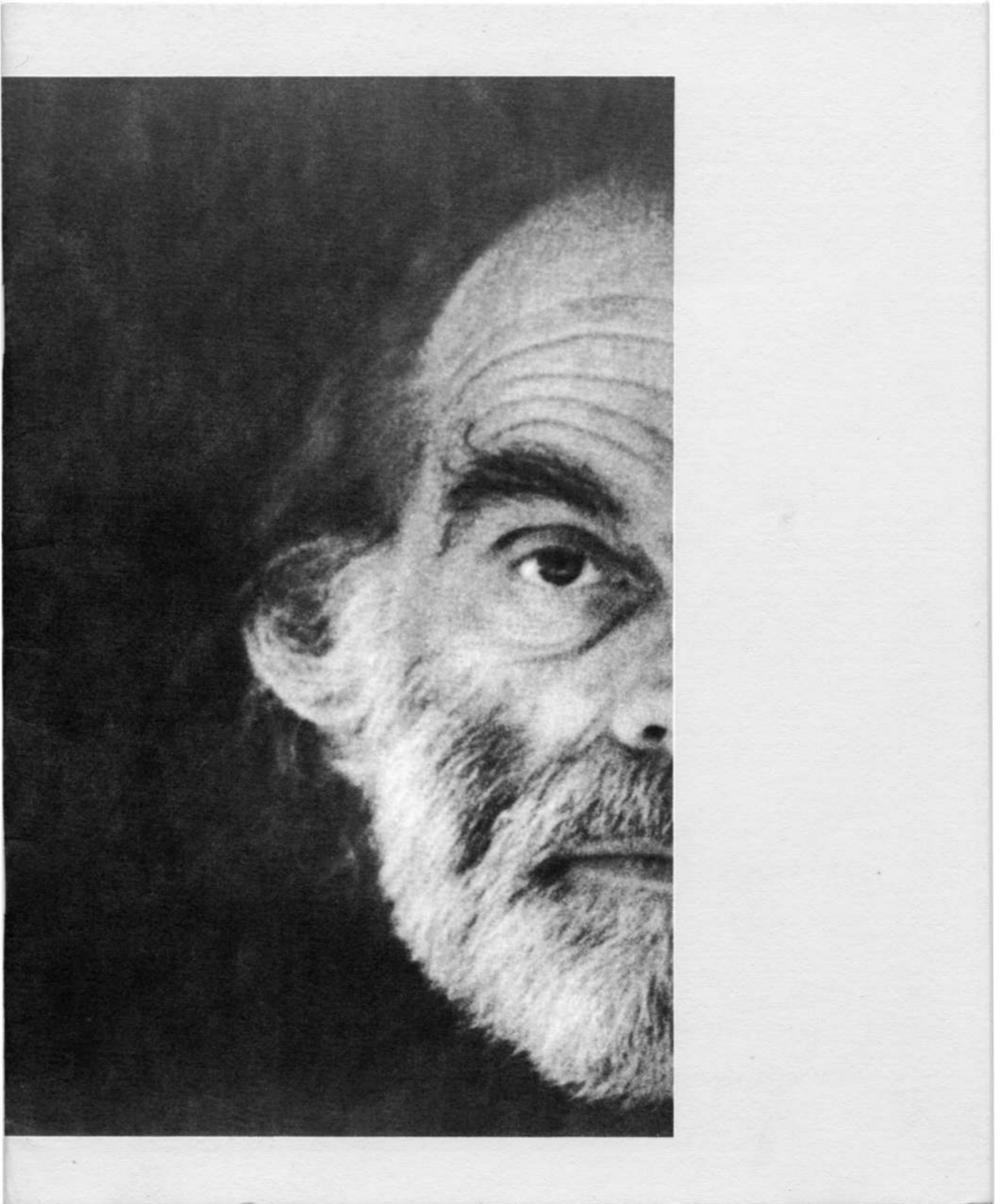


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*James Broughton*

A RETROSPECTIVE  
MARCH 7-14, 1983  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Sponsored by Pasadena Filmforum

## JAMES BROUGHTON: A RETROSPECTIVE

March 7

*The Portrait Evening*: the Poet seen and explored/observed by others (Singer and Luther) and by himself observing his own inner world.

March 9

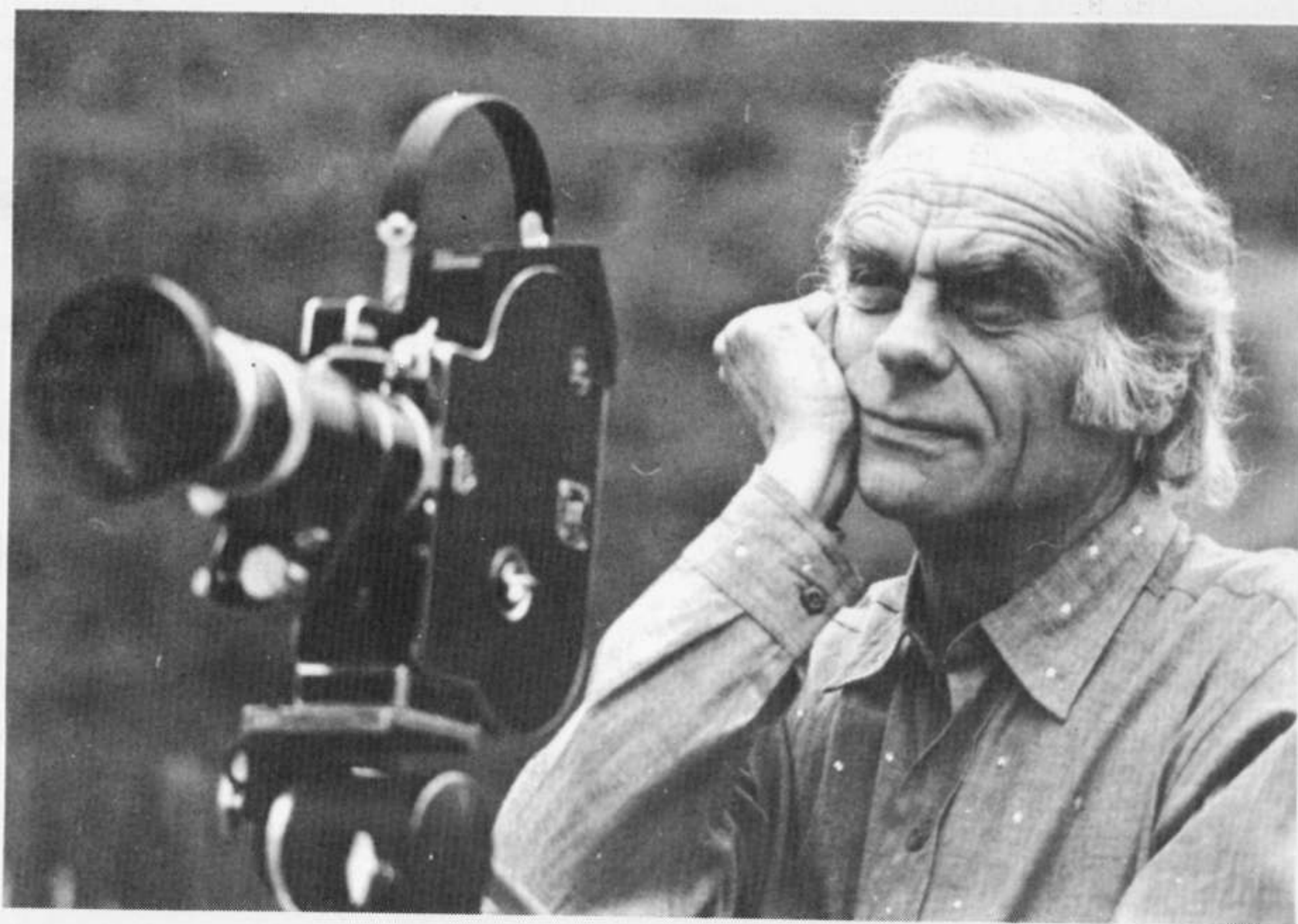
*The Singing and Sculpting Evening*: a poet's 'musical comedy' (*The Pleasure Garden*), a cantata of the body (*The Golden Positions*), invoking statues living and dead, plus a tribute to the universal song of the It.

March 13

*Poetry Night*: the poet lets down his hair and his pants, and tells all — everything that could not get into the films. Readings from *A Long Undressing*, *Graffiti for the Johns of Heaven*, and a forthcoming book of *Ecstasies*.

March 14

*Visions of the world's folly and fantasy*: from childhood to old age as seen through the poet's own life. *Mother's Day to Testament*, and beyond — to the shores of *Eden*.



Each year the muse of light inscribes yet another line in the poem she is writing in the face of the poet. That poem has now grown to seventy lines — a good healthy length. Too long for a sestina or a sonnet, an ode perhaps. An ode for any odd occasion one could imagine. An ode to life and light, it is one of my favorite poems, and for all its ironies and turns of phrase is a poem of exaltation, a poem of joy and seems to grow fresher and more vital with each new line.

For James Broughton IS the poet of light. He is also a philosopher and a politician who believes in "ecstasies for everybody." He is an educator who leads us out of the darkness of our petty selves into the divine light of our bodies. In his presence one learns the ways of the courageous: to surrender to the will of the muses, to follow completely one's own ecstatic nature in the spirit of unhindered Eros, delighting in the eternal moment. James Broughton has given us much and with love.

— Carmen Vigil

I have by nature a predilection for 'group statements': the use of a multiplicity of persons to embody my themes (as in *Mother's Day*, *The Bed*, *The Golden Positions*, *The Pleasure Garden*, etc.). Seldom have I focused on a single character's progress, except in short comedies like *Loony Tom* and *Adventures of Jimmy*. This must be because of my innate desire to present some kind of total view, a microcosm of life's variety, a vision of humanity as a comedy of agreeable evils.

Furthermore it has been a vision that insisted on redemption by love. I have always believed it essential to view all humans as lovable in order to transform their humanity into lovableness. The argument of all my works has been the absolute necessity of love:

"Love will come tooting  
only if free . . .

"It's twice the pleasure  
to come together  
and make a pleasure for two . . .

"Totally in toto wholly altogether . . .

"the beds are laid out for love . . .

"We must love one another  
or die . . ."

In earlier works I saw the need for love as an archetype only of the conjunction of opposites. But as the century has perilously unfolded, the urgency for men to embrace one another with understanding and trust has dominated my concerns. I envision now the hope of what I have called the Impossible Dance of the Sames.

I firmly believe in Incitements, Delightments, Enlightenments, and Liberation Machines. I have always hoped that cinema could be a great Liberation Machine.

— James Broughton

## PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS JAMES BROUGHTON

*Portrait of the Poet as James Broughton, Part One* (1974-80, 40 minutes, color/sound). Directed by John Luther.

John Luther's films are considered among the most visually dazzling in the independent cinema. He claims to be most directly inspired by the aural and visual precision of Peter Kubelka's films and the sensual ecstasy of the work of Kenneth Anger. Luther has won numerous awards for his films; *Portrait of the Poet as James Broughton* was begun in 1974 with grant assistance from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Formerly chairman of the Film Department at the Chicago Art Institute, he now teaches film there, specializing in the aesthetics and practice of film sound.

"Many years teaching (transplanted to Chicago), false starts, many unfinished films. At last a single Theme, that of the Poet and his Muse, emerged — a strong enough quest to engage the maker anywhere, one which once begun must be pursued as far as the Goddess will permit. Like *Filmpiece For Sunshine*, this film was begun as a portrait of a friend, and was intended to be made quickly and simply, but grew under the inspiration of its true subject, the Muse, into a labor of many years.

Part One, six years in the making, is now completed. It is a self-contained film, but will reveal deeper meanings when Part Two (an equal labor) is completed. It is too new a film for me to attempt to say more on it at this time, or even properly to thank my mentor, James Broughton, poet and filmmaker, for lending his image, voice, and poetry to this particularly haunted vision. I know only that this work is an homage to that begun in cinema by Jean Cocteau in his famous trilogy and that, through James, I have become his successor, however unworthy, to continue the work.

This film is the first that I have completed which has a soundtrack wholly my own, composed of voices and natural sounds which I recorded, edited, and tape-altered myself. Besides that, my former use of lab-printed and in-camera superimposition to create complex images has been augmented by extensive optical printing. I was forced to build my own printer from surplus parts and to learn how to use it before I could make this film. Perhaps that is why it took so long." — John Luther

"From San Francisco's mists rises the clear voice of James Broughton, who appears here (through metaphor and montage) as the archetypal Poet — trolling magic which is as quick as a rattlesnake and sure as a snail. We bask with James in the sunlight of poetry completed, and we are sealed with him in the plunge to the depths of poetry-in-progress. The voice of the Muse draws us down to deep fire, to the magical light-ness we call Poetry." — Edward Kuntzmann

## DREAMWOOD

*Dreamwood* (1972, 45 minutes, color/sound). Written and directed by James Broughton. Camera: John Schofill and Fred Padula. Editing: James Broughton and Kermit Sheets. Sound: Jerry Mueller. Music: Morton Subotnik. Cast: Henry Taylor and Margo St. James.

"Somewhere (at the center of the world) there is an island called Animandra, or the Kingdom of Her. And somewhere in the wilds of Animandra there is a magic wood known as Broceliande, the Perilous Forest. Within this labyrinthine grove the dreamwood mysteries take place, the tests, the encounters, the rites of the Goddess in her many forms. Only a hero dares risk his life by entering this realm of the feminine powers. And most heroic is the poet, perhaps, guided as he is (and taunted) by that blessed damozel, his muse, whose name is Alchemina. Ordinary men remain safely outside in the dry meadows of their masculine games. But to the man who conquers his fear, persists in his quest and wins her favor, the Goddess of Dreamwood will reveal her greatest secret." — James Broughton

"*Dreamwood* alludes to several myths — Hippolytus, Apollo, Sisyphus, and Narcissus are seen passing in the background of different scenes, but these allusions become witty intrusions into the otherwise thoroughly personalized vision . . . No single film in the whole of the American avant-garde comes as close as this one to the source of the trance film, Cocteau's *Le Sang d'Un Poet*." — P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*

## TOGETHER

*Together* (1976, 3 minutes, b&w/sound). Photography: Joel Singer. Poem: James Broughton.

Born in Montreal, Canada, Joel Singer received his Master's degree in filmmaking at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1976. In the ensuing years he has acquired an international reputation as a major American independent filmmaker and his works have been awarded prizes at numerous festivals. Since 1976 Singer has collaborated on several film projects with James Broughton.

"Broughton's recent film *Together* is a precise icon of the strife and the final union of the dualities contained in the self: all the attractions and repulsions, the intricacies of self-love and self-hate, the fluxions of his real/unreal, male/female self. The final image, Broughton as silvery as his angel, gains repose not through extinction or repression of contraries but, it seems, through their acceptance and embrace." — Robert Lipman

## LOONY TOM

*Loony Tom* (1951, 11 minutes, b&w/sound). Written, directed and photographed by James Broughton. Music by Ralph Gilbert. Title role enacted by Kermit Sheets.

“This comedy pictures the amorous progress of a prancing, baggy-trousered, bowler-hatted, demented and blissfully happy tramp, who capers across a sunlit countryside making immediate and outrageous love to every woman he encounters. He disrupts an artist’s idyll, cuddles a country wife, chases a bevy of milkmaids, lays a stern widow on the floor, and blithely goes singing on his way.

The style is derived from silent slapstick comedies, with pantomimic rhythms, hectic situations, and exaggerated postures. But the theme celebrates something lyrical and vital: it is an impudent testimony to the liberating spirit of Pan and the pleasures of being alive.” — James Broughton

## THE PLEASURE GARDEN

*The Pleasure Garden* (1953, 38 minutes, b&w/sound). Written and directed by James Broughton. Assistant Director: Kermit Sheets. Photography: Walter Lassally. Music: Stanley Bate. Production Manager: Lindsay Anderson. Cast: Hattie Jacques, John Le Mesurier, Diana Maddox and Jean Anderson.

“Produced in England under the aegis of the British Film Institute, this is a comic fantasy with songs that celebrates the triumph of love and liberty over the joyless forces of restriction.

A large romantically dilapidated park lies under the yoke of a puritanical Minister of Public Behavior who is determined that none of the visitors shall enjoy themselves. The pleasure-seekers who come there are an odd lot, all lovelorn and given to acting out their daydreams: a girl who wants to be a beautiful statue, a sculptor trying to find reality in abstractions, a bird-watching widow, a pretty cyclist hoping to run down a husband, a maiden singing of her sailor at the bottom of the sea, a roving cowboy, a long distance walker with no destination, a lonely girl named Bess chaperoned by a formidable aunt.

Having made them all unhappier than they already were, the funereal Minister then tries to expel the idlers and turn the garden into a cemetery. However, a portly and waggish fairy godmother named Dr. Mary Albion comes to their rescue with some impish magical tricks and thereby launches a full rebellion against all killjoys and unites the lost lovers.” — James Broughton

“Loony Tom reappears in *The Pleasure Garden* as Sam from Californiay who is ‘lookin for a gal as sweet as Mom.’ Irresistible Mother! Others too are searching for someone to love as they roam through a vast park weedy and rank with neglect. Love, equally neglected, is off the track. The villains here stand clear: they dress in black, ride in a hearse, arrest couples. These melancholic scoundrels are opposed by a fairy godmother and her magic shawl which grants each lover’s wish. The mortician’s party captures the dangerous shawl and separates the couples, but after a tug of war between the two sides the shawl is regained and the garden returns to the pleasures of its visitors. All this is light, funny, straightforward mummery. But comedy is profound, for it is the personified drama of the cycle of seasons: the story of the temporary victory and threatening rule of darkness, winter, and death, and of the eventual rebirth and triumph of light in the green life of Spring. So *The Pleasure Garden* should be shown at festivals of the vernal equinox as part of a ritual of planting fields, to coax and celebrate in ourselves the return of light and life and love by hymning the Pleasure Guardian.” — Robert Lipman

“It’s on the side of the angels. It’s a great testimony for love.” — Allen Ginsberg



Hattie Jacques in *The Pleasure Garden*

## THE GOLDEN POSITIONS

*The Golden Positions* (1970, 32 minutes, color/b&w/sound). Written, directed, edited and narrated by James Broughton. Assistant Director: Kermit Sheets. Photography: Fred Padula. Music: Composed by Robert Hughes. Performed by the Berkeley Chamber Singers, with Miriam Abramowitch, soprano; conducted by Alden Gilchrist. Cast: Ann Halprin, James Brunot, Norma Leistiko and other members of the Dancers' Workshop.

"In *The Golden Positions* Broughton refined the format of *The Bed* by increasing the number and the variety of the tableaux, by exploiting the tension between scenes of movement and of stillness, by organizing the brief scenes into thematic movements, and above all, by giving the whole film a rigorous structure — his most rigorous and complex since *Mother's Day*. As that first film had played with the form of the family album, *The Golden Positions* imitates the Mass, opening with a Gospel reading, which the filmmaker calls 'The Lesson' in his script, describing the three essential positions of 'standing, sitting, and lying.' The film begins with a navel in close-up. 'Let us contemplate,' Broughton speaks in liturgical tone as the camera zooms back to frame the whole naked male form. In the subsequent sections, 'Anthem,' 'Creation of the Body,' 'A Short History of Art and Religion (Adam and Eve to Pieta),' 'Secular Life,' 'Domestic Eroticon,' and 'Finale: The Positions of the Gods,' Broughton playfully exhausts his repertoire of parodies of the human cycles." — P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*

"*The Golden Positions* is a rich, warm, clear statement of humanism. There is no angst, no fragmentation, no overt experimentation. It stands apart from most of the films of the past two decades by its feeling of certainty, positiveness, and completeness. And, most importantly, *The Golden Positions* gives us a deep and restful pleasure in the viewing." — Sheldon Renan

## THIS IS IT

*This Is It* (1971, 10 minutes, color/sound). Written and directed by James Broughton. Camera: David Myers. Sound: Jerry Mueller. Narration: James Broughton, George and Stefani Priest. Cast: Orion Broughton.

"*This Is It* is more concise and direct in its parody of cosmology than *The Golden Positions* had been of the Mass. Broughton's vehicle is a 'home movie' of his son, Orion, playing naked with a large red ball in a yard. The camera first isolates the ball amid grass. 'In the beginning it was already there,' Broughton says on the soundtrack, and he continues his parody cosmology with other shots of the isolated ball, withholding the introduction of the child until the voice of God proclaims, 'It needs something that looks more like Me.' *This Is It* refuses to identify the camera's perspective with the child's vision. It insists, in words and chants, on the absolute resignation of metaphysics to the present moment." — P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*

"*This Is It*, as indeed do all of Broughton's films, recalls the sensuality that we have been taught to deny and forget. It recalls us to the warm blood that once irradiated our bodies and connected us to both Earth and God." — Robert Lipman

## HIS OWN FILM HISTORY

### A Poem by the Poet Himself

A whimsical poet named James  
had dwelt in relative calm  
till he joined in a potted psalm  
and learned to play camera games.  
The pictures of his devising  
were sometimes considered surprising.

When Mother had had her day  
Adventurous Jim and Tom Loony  
at four in the afternoony  
set forth on their filmic way  
to visit such foreign lands  
as Edinburgh, Venice and Cannes.

They settled in damp London town  
and set up a garden of pleasure  
that was praised as a cinema treasure  
at some festivals of renown,  
though it piled up costly arrears  
which prevented more movies for years.

Till along came the Sixties and then  
there was production money again  
for beds and positions and It,  
for a curious Dream in the woods,  
for Kuku unlikelihoods  
and pictures that poems could fit.

Though his testament has rolled in  
and Loony has gone to his bin,  
James claims that the years still sweeten.  
He has teamed with a new humdinger  
a playmate named Joel Singer  
and together they garden in Eden.

— James Broughton

## MOTHER'S DAY

*Mother's Day* (1948, 22 minutes, b&w/sound). Written and directed by James Broughton. Assistant Director: Kermit Sheets. Photography: Frank Stauffacher. Music: Howard Brubeck.

"A capricious but unsparing souvenir of a San Francisco childhood, recollected in the nostalgic style of a cluttered family album, this film exposes the fetishes and enigmas and secret nonsense rituals of a large household dominated by a self-absorbed mother with a taste for exotic hats and stereotyped children.

Although it is a film of unhappy memories revisited, wherein adults absurdly reenact their infancy by playing as they did while growing up, the focus is upon the tyranny of the mother's misguided romanticism. She who thinks of herself as a frail Victorian miniature, but is actually voluptuous and severe in the flesh, finds no real human being acceptable to her, so that when her children have mocked her and rebelled, she is left alone in riding boots with nowhere to ride to.

But she would explain her history thus: 'Once upon a time there was a very beautiful and refined young girl who had a great many suitors. But she married the wrong one. Then she had a great many children and she did not know what to do with them either.'" — James Broughton

"Just as the birth of the divine human comes from the life-granting hand of the Great Goddess, so its death is at the hand of the same Mother. In Broughton's early film *Mother's Day*, Mother is the black Goddess, glorious in her full and blasting powers. Imperious, beautiful, narcissistic, and jealous as an evil queen in a fairy tale (that is, worthy of the most royal love, of which neither doddering Dad nor toddling Son are capable), she casts the gloomy enchantment of her mind over her children by invoking the arid word 'lovely.' This word binds them in its iron clasp, and they become bloodless, their spirits constrained and undeveloped, like the feet of a Mandarin princess, as their bodies grow. They are adult-like children, gnomish, their faces, bewildered by their separation from sensuality, are stagnant and sour with unacted desire. They seem to speak in whispers, their actions and play are strangled into stiff repetitive gestures." — Robert Lipman

## FOUR IN THE AFTERNOON

*Four in the Afternoon* (1951, 15 minutes, b&w/sound). Written, directed and photographed by James Broughton. Assistant Director: Kermit Sheets. Music: William O. Smith. Voices: Madeline Gleason, James Broughton.

"This is a film suite in four parts based upon poems in my book, *Musical Chairs* (1950). Each movement of this quartet is a variation on the theme of the quest for love, embodying forms of desire at crucial age levels from the child of 10 to the man of 40, and extending in mood from the farcical to the elegiac. Like a lyric poem each section compresses the essence of a realm of feeling into a compact moment, blending image, music, dance, and spoken verse. The movements are:

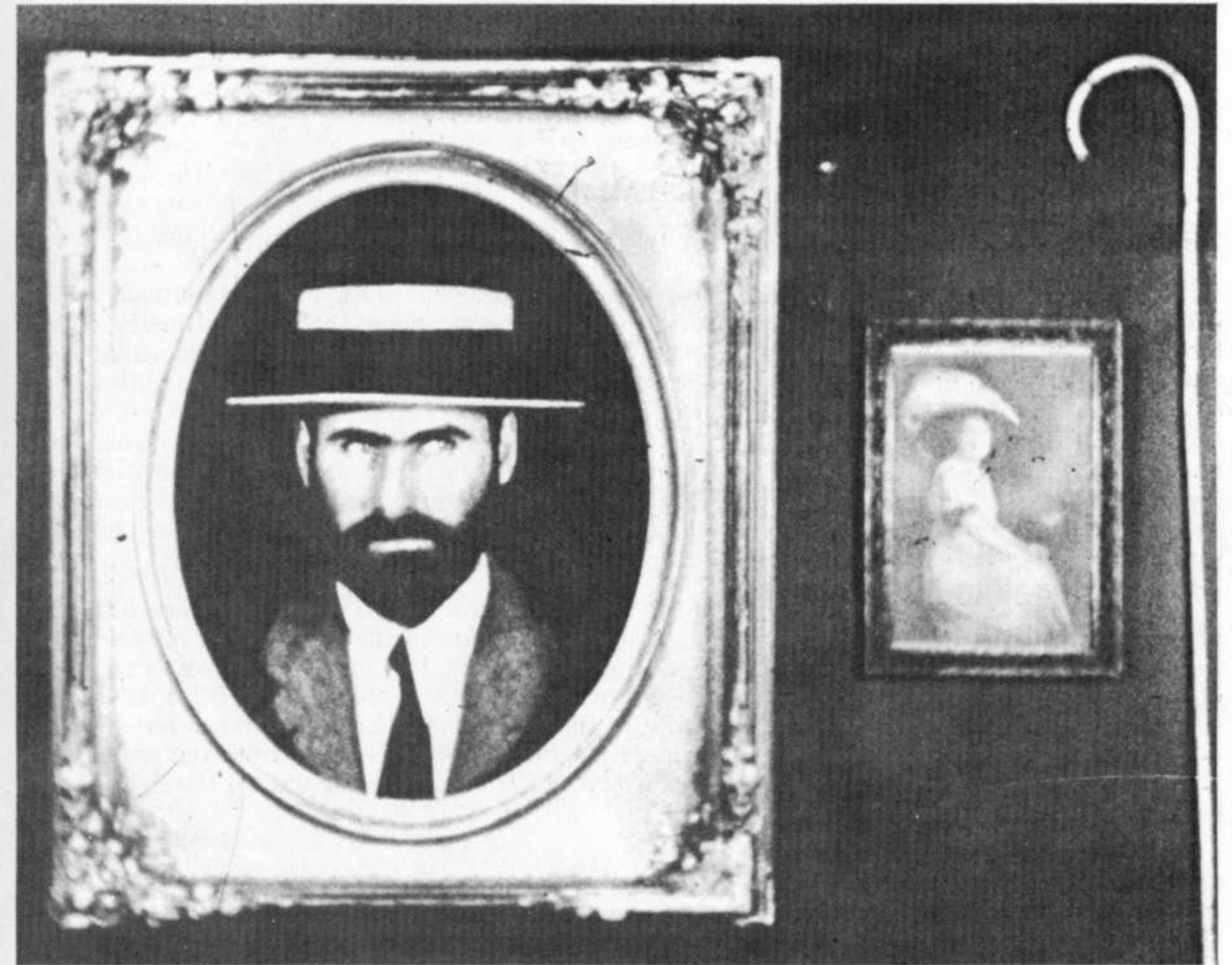
1) 'Game Little Gladys,' in which her magic skipping game conjures all the possible knights a little girl might choose for her partner.

2) 'The Gardener's Son,' in which an adolescent indulges his rapturously imprecise daydreams of clothed and unclothed goddesses.

3) 'Princess Printemps,' in which a moonstruck female is pursued by an eager male on a flirtatious romp around a huge classic ruin.

4) 'The Aging Balletomane,' in which a middle-aged man in a squalid backyard evokes visions of lost romance and youthful sprightliness." — James Broughton

"Lovely and delicious, true cinematic poetry." — Dylan Thomas



*Mother's Day*



## THE BED

*The Bed* (1968, 20 minutes, color/sound). Written and directed by James Broughton. Camera: Bill Desloge. Music: Warner Jepson. Cast: Alan Watts, Gavin Chester Arthur, Imogen Cunningham, Grover Sales, Jean Varda, Herb Beckman, Wes Wilson, Betty Fuller, John Graham, Roger Somer.

"In form *The Bed* is another picaresque romp, asking, 'What can happen to and on a bed?,' with overtones of the short cycle of man's life as opposed to the life of the human species. The first of many naked people to occupy the wandering bed represents Adam; through stop motion, Eve is born at his side. In slow motion they chase each other. Jump cuts breaking their graceful motion — this is the most balletic of his films and is very diversified in terms of its internal motions compared with his earlier works — they move off-screen, to return just before the end. Pan appears; he plays a saxophone in a tree to charm the bed. Then Broughton himself sits on the mattress in a lotus position contemplating a snake. Another man, in slow motion, leaps over the bed, with a movement that recalls Maya Deren's *Choreography for Camera* and makes explicit the debt that he had been acknowledging for years." — P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*

## TESTAMENT

*Testament* (1974, 20 minutes, color/sound). Written and directed by James Broughton.

"Inspired by a hometown invitation to commemorate his 60th birthday with a public reading, poet and filmmaker James Broughton used the occasion and this film to 'testify' to his life. *Testament* traces the poet from his origin, *put on earth a little space*, through childhood, learning to love, and life work, to his own imagined death. His expressions are the manifestation of a unique spirit that is the artist's art and life intertwined, inseparably fused. Visited by ancient numinous images, shadows, tricksters, and angels, gifted with visions, Broughton testifies to a life discovered sometimes in joy, sometimes in terror, but always welcome in a generous expense of energy. A master charm of pageantry, humor and wisdom, neither didactic nor sentimental, *Testament* addresses itself to the profound needs which art answers. Broughton's *testament* is to the eternal delight of being — *here, now, alive.*" — Freude Bartlett

"*Testament* is the summary of Broughton's own quest for the ecstatic. It is the recollection of who he has been, of the selves lost and gained as he followed the direction of his voices, of the multiple god within him who unfolded his life. I suspect that all of us at some early moment of our lives, when everything — stones, frogs, leaves, ourselves — seemed God-filled, vowed to attain sainthood. And even now we labor toward that holy goal of bringing God to birth within us, though it be only in the locked chamber of the soul where we stroke our vices. But Broughton proclaims his Godhood in front of everyone; *Testament* is the writ of the signs of the revealed god." — Robert Lipman

## THE GARDENER OF EDEN

*The Gardener of Eden* (1981, 9 minutes, color/sound). Written and narrated by James Broughton. Photography: Joel Singer.

Filmed on the paradise island of Sri Lanka, this intense poetic work celebrates the eternal dance of nature's sexuality, and sings of the lost Eden we all search for but do not expect to find. In the midst of his fertile garden, while he awaits Adam's return, God tries to keep his eye on all the flowering exuberance he has seeded. The music is performed on twin conch shells, and the central actor is in real life the most famous horticulturist in Ceylon.

"An ecstatic masterpiece!" — Stan Brakhage



*I am the old dreamer who never sleeps  
I am timekeeper of the timeless dance  
I preserve the long rhythms of the earth  
and fertilize the rounds of desire*

## JAMES BROUGHTON

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### Filmography

THE POTTED PSALM (1948) — in collaboration with Sidney Peterson  
MOTHER'S DAY (1948)  
ADVENTURES OF JIMMY (1950)  
FOUR IN THE AFTERNOON (1951)  
LOONY TOM (1951)  
THE PLEASURE GARDEN (1953)  
THE BED (1968)  
NUPTIAE (1969)  
THE GOLDEN POSITIONS (1970)  
THIS IS IT (1971)  
DREAMWOOD (1972)  
HIGH KUKUS (1973)  
TESTAMENT (1974)  
THE WATER CIRCLE (1975)  
EROGENY (1976)  
TOGETHER (1976) — in collaboration with Joel Singer  
WINDOWMOBILE (1977) — in collaboration with Joel Singer  
SONG OF THE GODBODY (1977) — in collaboration with Joel Singer  
HERMES BIRD (1979)  
THE GARDENER OF EDEN (1981) — in collaboration with Joel Singer  
SHAMAN PSALM (1981) — in collaboration with Joel Singer



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