

movie JOURNAL



by Jonas Mekas

The Festival of Women's Films opened and is going strong at the Fifth Avenue Cinema, but I notice the festival is being largely ignored by the New York press.

I'd like to bring to your attention the various panels that are being held as part of this Festival of Women's Films. You can obtain the schedules of the panels at the festival.

Do not miss Mai Zetterling's "The Girls," a satire on the state of men and women today. Do not believe what the New York Times wrote about this film. "The Girls" is a good film, and every woman and every man in this town should see it.

The Video Festival is going at the Kitchen every evening for the rest of the month. Nobody should expect me suddenly to become a Superman and see every show at the Women's Film Festival and every show at the Video Festival, but I'll try to see as many shows as humanly possible.

June 2. At the Kitchen. Tape and live video. Allan Powell and Eric Siegel. Main problem of both shows: the sound. Abstract images do not fuse easily with organic sounds (voices). Allan Powell presented his two pieces on a set of eight monitors in black and white and one in color. Images identical on all monitors. I was wondering if nine monitors were really needed. Eric Siegel presented his pieces on six black and white monitors and two color. Again, the image identical on all; and again, I didn't see any logical need for more than one monitor.

Eric Siegel keeps playing romantic, rock, and Indian music. His images are sweetened by music. I really wanted to see his images without sound, to see what they are really like. At one point, finally, God heard my secret wish. After all, there was plenty of smoke in the room, incense burning, and the candles, to bring God closer to us — so close,

indeed, that I almost choked on all that smoke and came close to seeing God in Person. Anyway, God came into the room and got so angry with Siegel for not giving enough trust and honor to his images, for peppering them all up with music, that He (God) cut Siegel's sound off, and the images were then silent, by themselves, making their own music. But then the creator (Siegel) spoke through the mike, apologizing for his tape running out, and cut the image off. That was the end of that.

Siegel's (and, to a lesser degree, Powell's) problem (and I'm going to see much more of this at the Kitchen this month) is that he is repeating the mistakes of the film-makers of the '30s—Fischinger, McLaren, Disney, and all those who tried to synchronize music to images or images to music. It all ended in disaster every time, and so do Siegel's efforts. The only times it worked for me were when the sound system, for one reason or another failed and distorted the sound, and when Tchaikovsky became just another electronic noise.

About the color. There was plenty of color, particularly in Siegel's work. But the paradox in Siegel, and much of what I have seen of color video work on other occasions, is that there is no color video yet. All video works are based on pulsations, vibrations, rhythmical changes—but not on color. You don't see color in video, although it's one of its essential properties. Oh, how I long to see plain, plain color on these monitors, unbroken by any cute, sentimental, and corny pulsations and vibrations! I guess the idea is if you show a picture and throw light pulsations on it, oh, boy it will turn immediately into a mystical experience. Siegel did plenty of this in his "mystical" piece, "Yantra-Mantra," during which a salesman's voice monotonously droned about mysticism, soul, and Great Things. It all made me long for the classical period of the "psychedelic" and mystic light shows. Seven years ago, for example, Richard Aldcroft's shows on St. Mark's Place were straight, unpretentious, and beautiful.

"Just relax," said the voice at the Kitchen before the "Yantra-Mantra" show. Just relax and watch, I hate this "relax" fad. When I see something beautiful, when I am listening to good music or seeing a good painting or movie, I don't relax; I do just the opposite. Good works of art increase my intensity and energy, I sit almost on the edge of my chair (that's why they sit on the floor now, the "relax" generation). I become like an instrument through which the movie or the painting can really sound, and I sound through and with it. When I relax, I sleep.

Art experience for me is life at its most intense, its most awake. When one has something me-

diocre, of course, it helps to flood the room with smokes, incense of any kind, and place everybody in sleeping position, so that now you see it, now you don't. But even when I look at art, I want my air clean, my lungs perfect, my body awake, my mind awake. I must pay that much respect to the artist and his work.

I looked at the place, and I saw people lying on the floor, on cushions, all over the place, the air thick with incense, and the eight monitors blinking euphorically; and I thought, yes, this is what they must mean when they say that art is the opium of the people. Here was a Video Opium den. Even when Abbie Hoffman was actually snoring, after Nixon's speech, on the "Free Time" show, the tv was more awake than what I saw at the Kitchen.

Robert Cordier was sitting at the Kitchen bar, drinking beer. "What a pity," he said, "that video never had its silent period." He is damn right. I could only add: What a pity video never had its Warhol to stop all that unnecessary and artsy bustle on those monitors.