

8:00

## HOLLIS FRAMPTON'S MAGELLAN CYCLE

*"In the beginning of time, light drew out matter along itself into a mass as great as the fabric of the world"—from the 11th century Latin text by Robert Grossteste, translated by HF.*

Hollis Frampton (1936-1984) is acknowledged as a giant in American avantgarde cinema, but tends to be known mainly through two (admittedly fantastic) films, *Zorns Lemma* (1970) and *Hapax Legomena I: (nostalgia)* (1971). However, his most ambitious and complex film project, *Magellan*, is generally less recognized. The omission is unfortunate. Keeping in mind that most of Frampton's remarkable writings (collected in *Circles of Confusion* (1983)) were written during the *Magellan* period, and that Frampton was engaged in many tantalizing and prophetic projects, including computer design and video work, at the time of his premature death of lung cancer, we lose much in ignoring the last 12 years of Frampton's work.

But the invisibility of *Magellan* is also understandable. The contemporary spectator who approaches the unfinished *Magellan* confronts only fragments; the 24 completed *Magellan* films released by Frampton comprise only about 8 hours out of the 36 hours planned. Moreover, Frampton intended *Magellan* to be a calendrical cycle, with specific films to be shown on each day of the year. Metaphorically modelled on Ferdinand Magellan's exploratory circumnavigation of the world, the film aspired to remarkable 'global' aesthetic, historiographic, and conceptual challenges to cinema and perception.

Frampton is generally understood, in his words, as an artist "of the modernist persuasion," not only for his aesthetics, but for his close personal association with such figures as Ezra Pound, Carl Andre, Frank Stella, and Stan Brakhage. Certainly, Frampton conceived of *Magellan* as a "utopian" artwork in the monumental tradition of James Joyce and Sergei Eisenstein; in a grant application, he hoped to realize the project as "the notion of an hypothetically totally inclusive work of film art as epistemological model for the conscious human universe." "The enterprise did not lack ambition.

However, Frampton was always ambivalent towards the Enlightenment project that drove hardcore Modernism. His playful and ironic sensibility, nurtured through his association with artists like Michael Snow, Twyla Tharp, and Joyce Wieland, is distilled in his announcement that *Magellan* was, ultimately a comedy—insofar as "comic art resolves itself in favor of its protagonist." For Frampton, "the protagonist is the spectator of the work."

Comparing *Magellan* to Tatlin's unrealized *Monument to the Third International*, Frampton said: "The Monument was not built. There are other ways to build monuments. The ways to build them are to build them immaterially, in the mind." Fittingly then, *Magellan* is an edifice whose very incompleteness invites the spectator to participate and continue its infinite construction.

-Michael Zryd

### Schedule:

The screening schedule is based on the 1978 version of Frampton's working *Magellan* Calendar and the last "work-in-progress" screening of *Magellan* organized by HF (at the Whitney Museum of American Art in January, 1980). Copies of the Calendar and of the Whitney screening program notes will be available for viewers. All films are 16mm, color, sound, 24fps unless otherwise noted. Titles in brackets refer to the *Magellan* Calendar. *Michael Zryd will personally introduce each program.*

### Program 1: The Birth of Magellan

**Cadenza I and XIV** (1977-80) 11 minutes.

A prelude to *Magellan's* universe, rife with allusions to Creation and Duchampian sexual puns: "the film about the bride in which two gentlemen, who we may presume to be bachelors, strip more or less bare a putative bride of some sort" (HF).

**Mindfall I** (1977-80) 21 minutes.

Emerges out of HF's experiments with sound and Eisenstein's "vertical montage": "if you start responding to every stimulus, then you end up as a nerve gas case, quite literally. Neurons fire at once" (HF).

**Matrix [First Dream]** (1977-79) silent, 28 minutes.

A film of multiple superimpositions, utilizing the images of *Solariumagelani* (see below) and the hexagonal images that recur throughout *Magellan*.

**Palindrome [Second Dream]** (1969) silent, 22 minutes.

An early film of HF's intended to be included in *Magellan*: "The menacing Latin palindrome IN GIRVM IMVS NOCTE ET CONSVMIMVR IGNI (By night we go (down) into a gyre/ and we are fire) serves as an epigraph to this animated film" (HF).

**Mindfall VII** (1977-80) 21 minutes.

**Noctiluca (Magellan's Toys #1)** (1974) silent, 3.5 minutes. "Designed to be shown on the second day of the *Magellan* cycle. The title (nox/luceo) means something that shines at night, i.e., the moon [...] The second day of the cycle seems to be an inventory of the knowledge, machines, and arms that Magellan—and latter-day voyagers like HF—had at the outset of his journey" (Brian Henderson).

*Total running time: 106.5 minutes.*