

Rotterdam 2010: Digital Mescaline & Urns of Film

ROTTERDAM 2010



Along with *An Affair at Akitsu*, time was also the subject of David Gatten's terrific new film, commissioned by Mark McElhatten for a shop window themed program of experimental shorts in honor of filmmaker Mark LaPore. *So Sure of Nowhere Buying Times to Come* begins with a quote from Thomas Browne's *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial, or a Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk* that notes, essentially, how whatever objects we are aware of, there have existed infinitely more in the past, and that whatever we see in the light there exists much more in the darkness. From this quote what follows is a visual record and appreciation of "The Red Shop," a small store in Colorado that appears to sell antiques—old stamps, knives, watches, and similar objects. We see a limited set of goods held in praise for their pastness, and in their individualness, and their positioning as unique and historical significant, we can see the limitation which Browne speaks of. Suddenly not just all antiques but indeed all items in a shop window, all items of commerce, all items shown as having meaning and value open up behind them an unbearably large and dark void of all things these objects are not, that they fail to speak to, and that we'll never know.

From such meditations on the material world, a move to the synthetic—back to the digital, as a great number of films at Rotterdam seem to be doing—might have seemed a relief, if that synthetic world wasn't Billy Roisz's ocular blitzkrieg tour-de-force *Close Your Eyes*. Inspired by Henri Michaux's records of his experiments with mescaline, Roisz' video is a rhythmic, patterned series of colored and black and white animated segments of pristine digital artificating and other forms of video distortion captured, dissected, and re-framed as the kind of sensory nightmare parents in the 50s probably thought would beset their children if they sat too close to the radiation of the TV. Its aesthetic is difficult to describe, but in a festival where most of the experimental shorts seen were meditative even in their activity (the musician Machinefabriek, who composed music to go with a series of films by Jim Jennings, talked about bringing out the "hypnotic" undercurrents in Jennings' "hectic" films), it was thrilling to see something as aggressive as Roisz's video, which dares you not to close your eyes against its vision, but to close your eyes to *see more like it*.