



Ann Arbor Film Fest Features Work Of Detroit Artist Joseph Bernard

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In an era when every neighborhood has its own film festival and every freshman has made a film, it's right to celebrate one of the pioneers, The Ann Arbor Film Festival, providing the finest in film fare for 52 years.

The festival, which opens Tuesday night, will stage retrospective programs looking at the works of three filmmakers, including Joseph Bernard, a Detroiter who is retired from the Fine Arts Department of the College for Creative Studies.

As Gillian Jakab writes in the Michigan Daily, Bernard started out as a painter, but worked for a decade making collage-like films in the Super 8 format, which was made for small, personal filmmaking. The films have rarely been exhibited, but eight short works will be shown on Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Michigan Theater.

"Joseph Bernard was at the Art Institute of Chicago and he was able to study with Stan Brakhage, who was a seminal experimental avant-garde filmmaker from the period when the film festival came about," festival executive director Leslie Raymond told Jakab.

According to the festival program:

Joseph Bernard, a Detroit-based artist schooled in painting, worked exclusively with Super 8mm silent films for ten years beginning in the late 1970s. He made over 100 films during this period before returning to collage painting. This program features a selection from his extensive body of film work, "film-as-film abstractions, non-narrative efforts more closely akin to absolute music."

Another filmmaker whose work will be spotlighted is Penelope Spheeris, known widely as the director of "Wayne's World." She will be featured in the Penny Stamps Speakers series, and her first "auteur" film, "The Decline of Western Civilization," will be shown Friday in two parts, at 5 p.m. and 9:15 p.m. at the Michigan Theater. The film is a cult classic on the punk rock scene of Los Angeles in the late '70s and early '80s.

Also showing is a program of her short films, including two shown originally in the AAFF in 1971 and 1973. Another of her films with a fierce cult following, the 1984 film "Suburbia," which features young punk rockers and musicians of the day (including Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers) rounds out the festival's Spheeris program.

Spheeris "has done a lot of well-known popular films," program director David Dinell said. "but she's also had this sort of parallel career as an independent filmmaker ... she has this really amazing capability of just being present with her subjects and really capturing unguarded glimpses of their lives. I think that really comes out in the third film."