

# EMPAC



## ON SCREEN/SOUND: NO. 04

**WED** / SEP 30, 7:00 PM

FILM / VIDEO

*Plastic Haircut*

Robert Nelson

*L'Inhumaine*

Marcel L'Herbier

## ON SCREEN/SOUND: NO. 04

SEP 23, 7:00 PM

### **Plastic Haircut** (1963)

Robert Nelson

### **L'Inhumaine** (1924)

Marcel L'Herbier / Original Music (lost): Darius Milhaud / New Score: Aidje Tafial

The fourth screening in the *On Screen/Sound* film series brings together painting, architecture, fashion, dance, and music for an evening of modernist and surreal cinema.

In **Robert Nelson's** 1963 short film *Plastic Haircut*, two actors perform absurd actions in sets composed of geometric shapes, followed by two experts who attempt to explain what it all means. The audio track features sound by American composer **Steve Reich**, his earliest complete electronic piece.

The 1924 ultramodernist masterpiece *L'Inhumaine* (“the inhuman woman”) was considered by its director, **Marcel L'Herbier**, to be “a fairy story of modern decorative art.” Using “experimental” camera techniques and hallucinatory imagery, with sets by Fernand Léger, and costumes by Paul Poiret, *L'Inhumaine* tells the story of the life, death, and rebirth of a cold-hearted opera singer who learns to love. The musical score, originally by French composer Darius Milhaud, was lost to time—but has been reimagined by **Aidje Tafial**. Recently restored in its original tints by the French Cinémathèque and Lobster Films, this new print and soundtrack was premiered this year at Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

## FILM NOTES:

### **Plastic Haircut**

Robert Nelson

1965, 15:00 min, 16mm, b/w, sound

*Courtesy of Canyon Films*

Robert Nelson perhaps best sums up his 1963 film *Plastic Haircut* as follows: “None of us knew anything about making movies at that time, but we all knew about art (namely, that it had something to do with having a good time).”

True to the cause, the majority of the films Nelson made in the 1960s were with his friends—painters from the Art Institute, founders of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the composer Steve Reich, and other key figures in the West Coast post-Beat scene. Humorous and purposefully abstract, *Plastic Haircut* takes inspiration from the Dada artistic movement where the actions are all absurd and the world is a combination of strange symbols and graphical forms.

The score for *Plastic Haircut* is an early work by iconic composer Steve Reich. Best known for his minimalist works of the 1970s, the sound here is more John Cage than typical Reich—a collaged combination that evokes a listener searching through radio stations, eventually settling upon an interview about a film that may or may not be related to the present experience.



## L'Inhumaine (The Inhumane Woman)

Marcel L'Herbier

1924, 135 min. b/w with colored tints

Courtesy of Lobster Films, Paris



Marcel L'Herbier's 1924 silent film *L'Inhumaine* is considered by modern scholars to be an iconic work of the 1920s French avant-garde era. That is fortunate, because it was conceived to be precisely such a film. At a time when cinema was being referred to as the “ultimate art,” L'Herbier was determined to exceed all expectations and “combine everything that had come before” into one work. Described as “a fairy story of modern decorative art,” *L'Inhumaine's* Cubist-inspired look was designed by a “who's who” of the talent present in Paris—Fernand Léger, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Rene Clair, Claude Autant-Lara, and Alberto Cavalcanti.

The theater scene demands special mention. A logistical marvel, it called for a cast of 2,000 and included (if rumors are true) Pablo Picasso, Erik Satie, Man Ray, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and the prince of Monaco. The scene was shot with 10 cameras and used a pre-filming performance by American pianist (and self-proclaimed Bad Boy of Music) George Antheil to whip the audience into a frenzy.

Unfortunately, *L'Inhumaine* was a commercial and critical failure, seen as a vanity showcase and monument to excess. As was typical of Parisian audiences of the time, fist-fights ensued. One of the actors recalls:

“At each screening, spectators insulted each other, and there were as many frenzied partisans of the film as there were furious opponents. It was amid genuine uproar that, at every performance, there passed across the screen the multicoloured and syncopated images with which the film ends. Women, with hats askew, demanded their money back; men, with their faces screwed up, tumbled out on to the pavement where sometimes fist-fights continued.”

### A NOTE ABOUT THIS RESTORATION AND THE SCORE:

Restorations of *L'Inhumaine* were done in 1972 and 1986. The current version, which premiered in March 2015, built upon the 1986 restoration along with original negatives from the French Film Archives and was transferred into 4K with the “original color tints” present for the first time since 1924.

Originally, the music to *L'Inhumaine* was an orchestral score by the French modernist master Darius Milhaud. Unfortunately the vast majority of the score did not survive (it has been suggested that the material made its way into Milhaud's 1930 *Percussion Concerto*). This version is a new score by Aidje Tafal, with two scenes “inspired” by the remaining fragments of the Milhaud original.

## ON SCREEN/SOUND

This year-long film series takes a close look at—and listen to—the way filmmakers have employed the sonic dimension of their form to complement, challenge, and reconsider our experience of the moving image.

Presenting cinematic performance, artists' moving image, and Hollywood feature films, each *On Screen/Sound* program delves into the relationship between movie sound and image tracks, highlighting some radical examples of the aesthetic power and technical potential of sound in cinema. From musical theater to the music video, experimental shorts to industrially produced features, the series explores the affective and technical relationship between sound and image through the art of Foley, experimental music, found footage, soundtrack imaging, synched, multi-channel, and non-diegetic sound.

**ON SCREEN/SOUND** IS CO-CURATED BY EMPAC'S VICTORIA BROOKS, CURATOR OF TIME BASED VISUAL ART, AND ARGEO ASCANI, CURATOR OF MUSIC.

### ON SCREEN/SOUND #5 WED / OCT 28, 7:00 PM

The fifth screening in *On Screen/Sound* grapples with ideas of the real, acted, and reenacted as intertwined in both image and music.

*Hilvarenbeek* / Jimmy Joe Roche and Dan Deacon

*Mishima: A Life in Four Parts* / Paul Schrader / Music: Philip Glass



Hilvarenbeek  
*Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*

### ON SCREEN/SOUND #6 WED / NOV 04, 7:00 PM

The sixth screening in the series *On Screen/Sound* features two works composed exclusively using light: Lis Rhodes' *Light Music* and Henning Lohner and John Cage's *One<sup>11</sup>* and *103*.

*Light Music* / Lis Rhodes

*One<sup>11</sup>* and *103* / Henning Lohner and John Cage



Light Music  
*One<sup>11</sup>* and *103*

### ON SCREEN/SOUND #7 WED / NOV 18, 7:00 PM

The seventh screening in the *On Screen/Sound* series examines the influence of Foley and sound effects on moving image.

*Hacked Circuit* / Deborah Stratman

*Yozakura Quartet: Hana no Uta No.7* / Kou Matsuo

*Blow Out* / Brian de Palma



Yozakura Quartet: Hana  
No Uta No. 7  
*Hacked Circuit*  
*Blow Out*

### ON SCREEN/SOUND #8 WED / DEC 02, 7:00 PM

Introduced by London-based artist Cally Spooner, the final fall event for the *On Screen/Sound* series presents an evening exploring the specificities of transforming the musical from theater to screen.

*And You Were Wonderful, On Stage* / Cally Spooner

*Gold Diggers of 1933* / Mervyn Le Roy



And You Were Wonderful,  
On Stage  
*Gold Diggers of 1933*

# STAFF

Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies  
Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer  
Argeo Ascani / Curator, Music  
David Bebb / Senior Systems Administrator  
Peter Bellamy / Senior Systems Programmer  
Michael Bello / Video Engineer  
Victoria Brooks / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts  
Eric Brucker / Lead Video Engineer  
Michele Cassaro / Guest Services Coordinator  
John Cook / Box Office Manager  
Roxanne De Hamel / Web Developer  
David DeLaRosa / Production Technician  
Zhenelle Falk / Artist Services Administrator  
William Fritz / Master Carpenter  
Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations  
Johannes Goebel / Director  
Ian Hamelin / Project Manager  
Katie Hammon / Administrative Specialist  
Ryan Jenkins / Senior Event Technician  
Shannon Johnson / Design Director  
Eileen Krywinski / Graphic Designer  
Carl Lewandowski / Production Technician  
Eric Chi-Yeh Lin / Lead Stage Technician  
Stephen McLaughlin / Senior Event Technician  
Josh Potter / Marketing and Communications Manager  
Alena Samoray / Event Technician  
Candice Sherman / Business Coordinator  
Avery Stempel / Front of House Manager  
Kim Strosahl / Production Coordinator  
Jeffrey Svatek / Audio Engineer  
Dan Swalec / Master Electrician  
Todd Vos / Lead Audio Engineer  
Michael Wells / Production Technician



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