Eternity in the ephemeral

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A visual music

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In the mid 1980s Helga Fanderl, who studied romance, languages and poetry, decided to create her own kind of poetry. The visual poetry she created was a reaction to the realisation that there was already so much wonderful poetry that Helga could not match up.

Known for her body of work in Super 8 film, Helga has since created over 1,000 films on various subjects. Her work is presented in spaces including Deutsches Filmmuseum, Frankfurt; Arsenal, Berlin; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; Goethe House, New York; Kino im Museum Ludwig, Köln; New York Film Festival; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. “I discovered Super 8 as an artistic medium through a workshop an artist friend asked me to participate in. Quite soon, I was really fascinated. The Super 8 camera as opposed to the 16 mm camera is quite small, I can take it with me wherever I go. This means I don’t have to plan, but I can discover and react. I could really forget about technique, I didn’t have to handle light or change objectives. It became an extension of my body. I could simply forget about the rest and concentrate on capturing what I was really interested in,” recalls Helga, who was in the city to present her work in the Film Festival Experimenta 2015, the 9th International Biennial for Moving Image Art in India at the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan.

“I think my love for poetry has shaped me to a large extent, my films are small, they are not epic. The sound or the music of language becomes
visual music. There is a sense of rhythm, of density. It is about capturing the moment and opening up a particular experience, without having to explain everything. It is more or less what poets do, they are very aware of the way they say something.”

Helga is known for her specific style of filmmaking, through in-camera editing and no-post production, or even sound. “Filmmaking means you make shots, develop them, then select and compose by montage. My first experience with montage was difficult because in super 8 the image is too tiny to make a precise cut, editing is almost impossible.

So I started to concentrate on in-camera editing. As a viewer when you are watching my films, you participate in my communion with what is in front of my camera and what I am doing with it. This means you follow not only why I choose the frame but the rhythm because I am interested in capturing rhythms that I discover in the outside world in front of the camera. I work consciously to create a rhythm in correspondence to the subject matter,” she explains likening her gestures to the spiritual technique of calligraphy.

She then composes her films into programs, specifically curated for each screening and projects them using material available in the gallery, onto 16 mm blowups to create a pure cinematic experience.

“I then try to create an overall program with the intention that on the one hand, the audience can understand and follow how I work because it’s not the usual way of presenting films while also creating their own ideas with pre associations or contrasts with different kinds of rhythms. Since the films are short and I show many of them, the audience has to follow the streams of images. The sound in my films comes from the mechanical sound of the projector because my films are neither about illusion nor reality. They create a cinematic reality in the space, you are always aware of the medium.”

Her objective is to explore the world, full of rhythms, movements, and patterns with open eyes and an open mind and transform that experience into a good piece of film.

“I want to make visible something of everyday life which is usually not seen, but is worthwhile to.”

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