

JJ Villard's
Son of Satan

MoMA's Tomorrowland Looks Back in Wonder

A Manhattan trip through the student films of CalArts offers an inspiring retrospective of work from the early days of some of today's greatest animation artists.

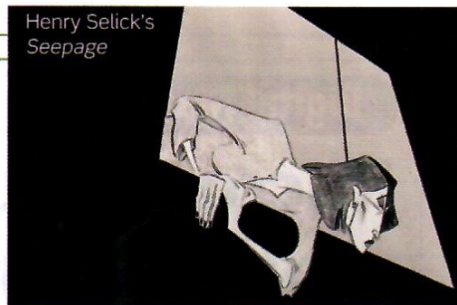
by Jake Friedman

If you find yourself in Manhattan this summer (through August 13), be sure to visit the Museum of Modern Art and its running tribute of CalArts student films, dubbed *Tomorrowland*. Only there can you see narrative and experimental student films from the past 30 years by now-famous artists and directors from Disney, Pixar, DreamWorks, *The Simpsons* and pretty much everywhere else.

The California Institute of the Arts and its famous animation school had a track record strong enough to catch the eye of MoMA Film & Media curator Josh Siegel, who previously organized animation shows of works by New York's own John Canemaker, R. O. Blechman and Tissa David. Says Siegel, "I started glancing at the resumes of various filmmakers I was interested in and noticed that what they shared was the fact that they graduated from CalArts."

Siegel took more than two years to sift through more than 1,400 student films be-

fore compiling *Tomorrowland*, a series of programs of live-action and animated films from CalArts since its founding. "I like to see the first stirrings of talent," says Siegel. "There's an energy and rawness that a lot of young filmmakers have, an ambitiousness, a resourcefulness and willing-

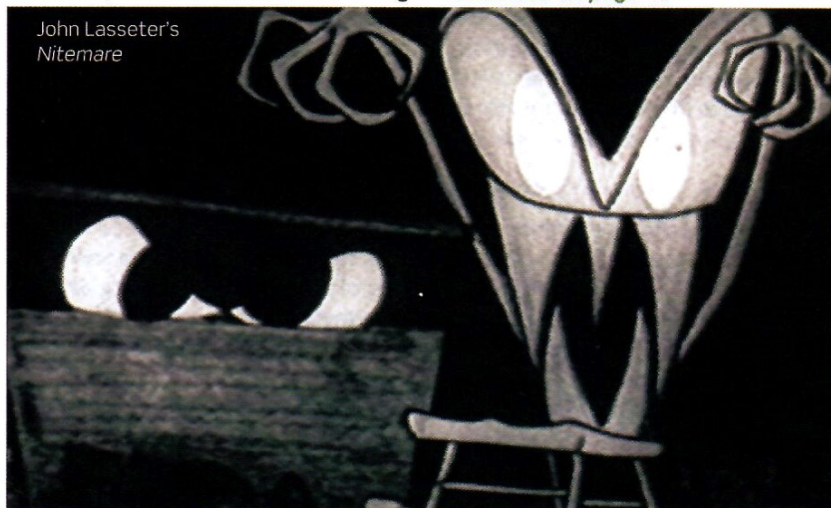
Henry Selick's
Seepage

ness to try new things. One of the things that interests me about CalArts, particularly in animation, is that a lot of the techniques that they used were of their own devising. For instance, David Wilson rigged his own optical printers and developed his own hologram sculptures. Naomi Uman, used nail polish remover. Lyndon Barrois used gum wrappers."

What's perhaps most impressive about these films is the lack of time the students had in their schedule to produce them. According to Frank Terry, 10-year director of the character animation program of CalArts, "All of the student work done is short order here in the department, shoe-horned with their regular academic requirements. It's a full load for them, and subsequently, the outstanding films in my mind are the ones finished."

For their limitations, these films show an incredible variety of content and style. John Lasseter's 1979 film *Nitemare* displays a love of traditionally drawn squash-and-stretch animation. Craig McCracken's 1992 piece *Whoopass Stew!* can easily be viewed as the inspiration for *The Powerpuff Girls*. Experimental films of the 1970s by the likes of Kathy Rose, Dennis Pies and

continued on page 46

John Lasseter's
Nitemare

Lyndon Barrois'
They Were the First to Ride



Opportunities
continued from page 44

the late Adam Beckett are enchanting trips through abstract dreams, complete with astounding musical tracks that make them all the more engaging.

Siegel says that this respect for music and the other arts was widespread at CalArts, a result of the isolation of the Valencia campus. "A number of the filmmakers certainly were interested in what was going on at other parts of the school, the

music program, the dance program, the acting program. They were not exclusive in separate fiefdoms, so there are a number of collaborations. It really was a true campus and a testing ground for fresh ideas and experimentation."

One such student was Leon Joosen, who started at CalArts in 1980 before animating for Disney and most recently directing the animation for the two

Scooby-Doo movies. He remembers an overbearing traditional ideal within the animation department headed by Disney's own Jack Hannah. "The best thing about that program was the fact that it was so conservative and stodgy," says Joosen. "You'd think that would be stifling, but every time you stamp down conservatively in one area, it has to burst out somewhere else. We had to have our storyboards approved by our instructors, so you had to do a fake storyboard and then go do what you

wanted to do. The fact that you had to be creative behind their backs made it that much more creative. So you get people like Gary Conrad [director of *The Fairly OddParents*] doing a film like *Friday the 13th* but making it about Santa Claus and calling it *December the 24th*."

Joosen, Conrad and future *Lilo and Stitch* director Chris Sanders collaborated at CalArts to produce the highly praised *Toby* in 1984. It's a film about a badly drawn boy and several other different types of iconic cartoon characters, "in an institute that represents CalArts," says Joosen. "It was an outlandish school with a conservative group of traditional animators within it. *Toby* is character animation put in a school of the animation obscure. He tries to fit in, but he thinks he's too good for everybody. The film resonates with CalArts crowds because it so closely represents everything we go through at that school." ■

Jake Friedman is a New York-based animator. You can visit him at www.jakefriedman.net.

For more info about the *Tomorrowland* exhibit visit <http://fv.calarts.edu/main/moma.html>