



Images Festival

Expanding cinema since 1988

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imagesfestival.com



Expanding Moving Pictures

Essay by Andrew James Paterson



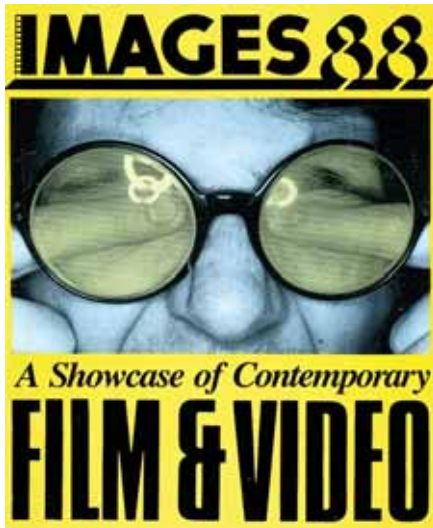
In honour of our 25th anniversary we invited Toronto's renowned video artist, writer and performer Andrew James Paterson to write an essay on the occasion of Images' first quarter century. Paterson is one of the most insightful, critical and adroit people we know and not least of which he's been an engaged audience member at Images each and every year since 1988. Thanks Andy for your time and reflections, they are illuminating to say the least. Special thanks to cheyanne turions for the editorial work.

I have decided Bo Diddley was wrong. One can judge a book by its cover. I look at the covers of the Images Festival catalogues over its 25 year trajectory and the shifts are spelled out with (almost) crystal clarity.

In 1988, the catalogue cover announced "IMAGES 88: A Showcase of Contemporary FILM & VIDEO." "Film" has one fewer letter than "video" but make no mistake: film and video carried equal weight. Balance is everything, as both politicians and accountants insist. The Images Festival may have been filling a gap left by the non-continuation of the New Works Video Show of 1984 and 1986, but that showcase had been strictly for video.¹ Another precedent was Canadian Images, which had been held in Peterborough, and organized by the estimable Su Ditta.

For the Images Festival, film and video were to be screened parallel to one another as they never really had been previously in Toronto and, arguably, across Canada and, even, internationally.

Founding board member Marc Glassman's introduction in the Images 88 catalogue emphasized that "the evolutions of film and video art in Canada have progressed along separate paths. This has created a formal 'two solitudes' which we expect to help bridge."² The expression, "two solitudes," has certainly been problematic in context of Canadian identity-formation, and not only because it erases the First Nations. So, mustn't there be a predecessor to both film and video, something that predates their separation? Well, yes. There are moving images. This festival's moniker is "Images" after all, and in addition to both film and video formats, there are non-camera animations, there are daguerreotypes, and there are still images that actually possess motion if one commits to serious looking. The personnel comprising the Images Festival's inaugural board of directors reflected this fresh dialogue between the two solitudes (or materials) that the festival wished to engage.³ Above all, Images wanted to screen film and video works in the same programs so that similarities and differences between the media would reveal themselves to discerning and casual viewers alike.



1988



1997



2002

This commitment made the assumption that there was a community, or shared set of concerns, among local, national and international media-art practitioners.

The phrase, “two solitudes,” when applied to film and video, implies an other that is not necessarily a solitude. One possible other is television, which of course has its own trajectories in regard to film and video. For many committed filmmakers, video is bad television. For many non-experimentalists, film eventually becomes television. The Images Festival has its own history of both courting and evading television. Expanding the festival’s audience has always been an ambition, but such intentions have existed in relation to a commitment to program what is experimental, what is cutting-edge and what cannot be seen elsewhere. For many experimental practitioners, television is this somewhere else and should be avoided, evaded or simply ignored.

For the next five years, from 1989–1993, the catalogue covers read like this: “Northern Visions presents IMAGES.” “Northern Visions” sounds rather Canadian, n’est-ce pas? The inaugural showcase of 1988, with its all-Canadian list of participants, was now a festival that was local, national and moderately international. And yet, the festival was local, national and moderately international. The 1989 festival expanded to five days (up to six in 1990) and an annual artist’s spotlight was instituted.⁴ In 1989, the filmmaker Annette Mangaard, who had been an inaugural board member, became the Executive Director, working closely with the board and invited programmers. Over the next six years, there was a revolving door of Executive Directors. In 1994, the Images Festival was “A Northern Visions Presentation,” which is a slightly different wording of the previous five years worth of catalogue covers. Film and video still carried equal weight in the equation, but other balances emerged as intrinsic to the festivals very *raison d’être*:

“A lot was happening in the larger community...the Euclid initiative, community discourse around issues of identity, race, queer issues, ethnicity, [it was] vibrant.”⁵ Images had a mandate to include and satisfy. But among the festival’s board and staff, and among a larger community of producers, there was a tension as to whether the festival was a venue for experimental work or one for work addressing identity and difference. What might be considered problematic was an assumption that these concerns were oppositional. Nevertheless, these anxieties paralleled debates occurring in artist-run centres, galleries, funding agencies and in the broader art community.

Early on, Images made a decision to be a Canadian festival rather than Toronto-centric. From 1989–94, the catalogues were bilingual. Efforts were made to program a considerable variety of work from Québec, and fruitful connections were made among independent production centres across Canada and with other festivals such as In Visible Colours out of Vancouver. Programming Coordinator b.h. yael strongly felt “it necessary and important to bring this work into the festival.”⁶

Between 1988 and 1989, Images shifted from being a showcase to a full-fledged festival. Festivals require many ingredients to create the necessary ambiance. From 1989–93, the Images Festival was held primarily at the Euclid Theatre, which had been designated by the broadly-defined moving images community as a venue for their programming. The Euclid was used by the burgeoning queer film and video festival Inside/Out, by Desh Pardesh South Asian arts festival, and indeed it was used throughout the years for premieres and screenings. But the Euclid was neither an economically viable theatre nor was it a social space – it did not function in the mode of repertory and experimental cinemas with their cafes before and after the main event. When the Euclid became the Metropolitan in 1993, it could still



2008



2010

“I look at the covers of the Images Festival catalogues over its 25 year trajectory and the shifts are spelled out with (almost) crystal clarity.”

be rented, but it wasn't always available. In 1994, the Images Festival alternated between Jackman Hall at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the John Spotton Theatre at the National Film Board. Alternating venues are not good for festival ambiance. The Metropolitan was used in 1995 and 1996, but it seemed like a rental. Additionally, there were notable discrepancies between the curated programs and those culled from the open call. There were a lot of empty seats.

In 1995, “Northern Visions” exited from the cover’s linguistics, but the festival retained its familiarity. But in 1997 – the festival’s 10th year – the timbre changed. The catalogue didn’t look all that different from its predecessors, except that it announced the festival’s anniversary and a new location for the year’s events at the Factory Theatre Lab. Coincidentally, this had been the physical location of the inaugural Images Festival, and it proved to be an energetic social space.⁷ Executive Director, Deirdre Logue, was working with fresh young programmers, Stefan St. Laurent and Sarah Lightbody, who were curating programs and augmenting the annual open call with invitational initiatives. However, these were still programmers and not yet Artistic Directors – they were not responsible for the festival’s overall mandate and direction.

The 1997 festival seemed bigger than previous editions. The publicist called everything “film” although the programs were certainly mixed in their source materials. The Celebrating Toronto program, which had been an opening night fixture between 1992 to 1995, was relocated into the body of the festival: Logue’s and her programmers’ intention was to mix the local with the international, although there was still a Home Brew program highlighting Toronto-based artists.⁸ For the first time, Images presented film and video installations throughout the city. The festival entered into collaboration with public galleries and artist-run centres to present these works. This cross-dialogue with

what could be generalized as a visual arts community became a blueprint for all Images Festivals since: “We focused on experimental media art (a new term then), but we also became more aware of the academic and theoretical community in the visual arts.”⁹

St. Laurent made it plain to Logue, as well as to his co-programmer, that he was “not interested in following quotas for the simple reason that [his] programming was already diverse, and [he] just wanted to follow [his] gut.”¹⁰ By this point in time, there had been an explosion of other film and video festivals in Toronto, community-focused and otherwise, and Images was no longer the prime destination for every media artist or practitioner. According to Lightbody, there was a need to encourage international submissions as well as those from Canada: “One problem I remember was collisions with Hot Docs (which would only program Canadian premieres) as well as artists holding out for [inclusion in the] Toronto International Film Festival. Images wanted to provide an alternative venue but was struggling with identity issues. Some felt this was the reason for the low number of submissions and that Images needed to redefine itself in some way.”¹¹

This new emphasis on artistic merit and away from identity or community-based work seemed for many to be a code for Eurocentric apoliticality: “This shift from identity politics programming to a focus on art upset some people because it left out many local artists, both on screen and in the seats.” [12] Over the years, Images has become more international in its focus, but the festival has always depended on the exhibition and presence of Toronto-based artists and their friends, and this in an ongoing conundrum for the festival. I personally recall being alienated by aspects of the 1997 festival – by the publicist’s insensitivity to medium and by what seemed a diminished emphasis on socially engaged works.¹³ But changes were necessary for the festival to survive.



Michèle Stanley, Roberto Ariganello, Chris Gehman



Marc Glassman, Peter Lynch



Deirdre Logue

In 1998 and 1999, the festival used the Music Gallery, then located in the downtown core, for its screenings. There were still programs whose aesthetics did not always mesh seamlessly. However, there were more gallery installations that year, like Steve McQueen channeling Buster Keaton in *Deadpan* (1997) at A Space, and a big international screening at the much larger Royal Cinema of Matthew Barney's nearly operatic *Cremaster 5* (1997). For this event, the Royal was full to capacity with festival-goers, who were joined by visual artists not usually interested in time-based art. The 1998 festival also accommodated Johan Grimonprez's *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), an hour-long montage that had been a sensation at the 1997 documenta in Kassel, Germany. The 1999 festival hosted a program of works by international art star Pipilotti Rist. There were still specifically hometown programs, but not on opening nights. The Images Festival was beginning to split its atoms.

Y2K came and nothing apocalyptic happened, but the Images Festival again shifted gears in 2000. The festival relocated its screening and social centre to the Innis College Cinema at the University of Toronto. That year's festival featured artist-cum-activist Mike Hoolboom as its first Artistic Director – Hoolboom had proposed that Images "create an AD position so that programming would move from being done by a committee process to being done by someone with a coherent overall vision of the programming."¹⁴ Hoolboom also advocated for jettisoning the open call for submissions, but Images never followed through on this suggestion.¹⁵ The festival still views all works received through the open call and the process as intrinsic to the festival's shape. However, the relative influence of the open call seems to vary from year to year. In 2000, the Home Brew program was no longer (instead, Toronto-based artists were generously scattered throughout the festival's programming); there was a spotlight on veteran local filmmaker Barbara Sternberg; a Public Access conference with the very 21st century title

Honey Your Digitalia is Showing (A Symposium on the Culture of Time and the Everyday) was held in tandem with the festival; and the installations continued to assume prominence (some at the festival's main venue and others scattered around the city at artist-run centres and public galleries).¹⁶ Some film and video goers (I almost said film-goers!) took in the installations and some did not. Live Images – a slate of performative presentations – began to assert themselves within the festival's programming.

In 2001, the film and video programs, as well as Live Images, predominantly retained the Innis Town Hall as their location, and the installation program, which was now called Wide, again involved many galleries around the city, far from the screens.¹⁷ The Images Festival's new AD, Chris Gehman, "worked with a small advisory group to look at new media and installation works, and realized we had to hire an installation coordinator to deal with the logistics and coordination of the materials and installation."¹⁸

In 2002, the catalogue cover proclaimed the festival to be "independent," followed underneath by, "film, video, new media, performance and installation." Did these five time-based practices now all carry equal weight within the festival's programming? Was the idea of two solitudes, like other concepts such as separate-but-equal or sovereignty-association, now a thing of the past? Was the new catalogue cover blurb acknowledging reality? Or should it have read, "independent film, video and all the others"? Well, not really. The festival's commitment to these other media often sees moving images as an integral to them, so that performances, say, utilize film in some way. In 2002, the gallery and not-on-screen component of the Images Festival was titled Flow, as in fluid, or going with the flow. Flow took up eight pages of the catalogue, with listings of artists involved in different exhibitions and presentations and brief event descriptions. This would change in 2005.



Harun Farocki



Takashi Ishida

“In 2002, the gallery and not-on-screen component of the Images Festival was titled Flow, as in fluid, or going with the flow”

In 2005, “independent” was dropped but the five disciplines remained. Was this also an acknowledgment of an unspoken reality? What does “independent” signify? Outside of corporate sponsorship and patronage? Outside of arts council (read: governmental) patronage? Does “independent” refer to both hands-on auteur practices, but also works involving found footage which often problematizes notions of exact authorship? “Independent” can be one of those usefully indefinable words, not unlike “experimental.” Or, it can be rather meaningless.

Inside of the 2005 catalogue, the installation component of the festival was named Off Screen and its listings appeared prior to the On Screen information. “Prior” is a root of “priority.” Is this therefore, too, a signal? Catalogues are not always as linear as they appear to be. Is this indicative of another two solitudes, now that film and video have become so integrated over the festival’s history? Well, yes and no. People visiting the galleries may or may not associate installations with the Images Festival, despite the prerequisite signage. I am a person who likes to invest myself in the presentation of moving images, and that refers to both those off screen (spatial) and those on screen (theatrical or temporal). But I don’t have a sense that the audiences for the On Screen programs also tour the Off Screen exhibitions, or vice versa. I think there are many different factors involved, like attention spans, time commitments, preferences for stationary or ambulatory art forms, et cetera.¹⁹ It is also notable that in 2005 and 2006, Images presented international Super 8 programs in relatively social locations (Cameron House Tavern the first year, and CineCycle the second). In 2006, the festival moved downtown, west of Innis Town Hall, and held its On Screen programs in the Workman Arts Theatre, which was located in the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and conveniently near to a burgeoning gallery district hosting many of the Off Screen installations.

However, to complicate matters with regards to such binaries, the Live Images component of the festival has been burgeoning for at least a decade now, and up until 2008 the Live Images programs were positioned between the On Screen and Off Screen programs in the catalogue. (In 2009, Live Images and On Screen were combined, or montaged, within the catalogue.) The Live Images presentations often involved music or theatre or dance, and are frequently held in larger venues.²⁰ The Wavelength music series has been a recurring co-presenter of Live Images events that cater to, and are marketed toward, cross-fertilizing audiences.

In 2007 – the festival’s 20th edition – the catalogue promised “the art of the moving image,” which acknowledges an as broad as possible gamut of moving images available for appreciation and contemplation. Between 2008 and 2010, the catalogues described the Images Festival as “showcasing contemporary moving image culture.” So the noun (and the verb) “showcase” returns, but only as the faintest ghost of the inaugural 1988 festival. “Showcase” is now sort of synonymous with an umbrella (or perhaps a rhizome?): the Images Festival has become a host umbrella, protecting or sheltering a coterie of sub-cultures within a non-homogenous but seemingly interconnected moving image culture. Analogue film is thus under the same umbrella as web-art, moving-image/dance presentations, music-video crossovers and more fellow travelers. For some time, the festival has hosted panels and artists’ talks presented in the catalogue under the heading Talk to the Pie. Pies are indeed served and consumed. But how much do the pies actually talk to each other? Is there really much of a dialogue between the gallery and screen artists, and should there be expected to be one?

I think of the 2009 Images Festival, with its theme of the Print Generation (in homage to the eponymous 1973 structuralist film by J.J. Murphy).²¹



Frances Leeming

This motif anticipated the festival's hosting of the International Experimental Media Art Congress in 2010. This conference took place two decades after the storied International Experimental Film Congress of 1989, which was also held in Toronto.²² Two decades later, the conversations around prints and printing are very different. What does get printed (and how)? Do media-art works need to be printed? And what becomes of prints? Do they degenerate frame by frame (as does the original film within Murphy's work)? How, in fact, are they preserved, restored and maintained? Where are film and filmic concerns in relation to this behemoth umbrella called media art? Two of the Live Images performances in 2009 referred to the film-about-film (or video-about-video) reflexivity running through many of the On Screen works, countering if not exactly contradicting, the programming emphasis on both filmic and non-filmic materialism. Ben Coonley applied materialist theory to web art in his online work *Seven Video Responses to Constant Dullaart's "YouTube as Subject"* (2008), while Cory Arcangel and Hanne Mugaas lectured on art history according to the web in their performance *Art Since 1960 (According to the Internet)*. The Images Festival's large umbrella hosts the non-print generation as well. It must or else become obsolescent.

As Images turns 25, the festival hosts many strains of what is now categorized as media art. But has it surpassed or transcended the initial two solitudes? Will it ever? Or is this even a realistic objective? I am an artist and observer of moving images, and I don't understand why some viewers might appreciate on-screen works and not off-screen works, or vice versa. Perhaps there are seasonal factors, as well as temporal or spatial, at play here.²³ But off screen, on screen and other practices are still moving pictures — they are images that demand to be reflected, refracted, contracted, dissected and certainly expanded.

I notice that the byline for the 25th Images Festival describes the festival as "expanding cinema." There is an obvious reference here to

expanded cinema, which of course evokes mind-expansion and Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Expo 67, utopia, et cetera. Expanding cinema means projecting beyond or outside of traditional cinematic parameters and apparatuses. Does it also connote beyond materials? If so, the ultimate paradox of expanded cinema is that cinematic apparatuses and boundaries have been so thoroughly transcended that cinema is now an endangered medium or species. Or, is "cinema" a unifying, totalizing word for moving images? Surely not all moving pictures are "film"? Language evaluation and word-counting was a prime component of the 2010 Congress.²⁴ Bring out the flow charts and concrete poems, but don't forget to watch the moving pictures. Believe me, when they're good those pictures certainly move in mysterious ways.

— Andrew James Paterson

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Andrew James Paterson is a Toronto-based inter-media artist working with video, film, performance, text, writing, language and music. Since 1977, his works have been presented and screened locally, nationally and internationally. He currently works as the coordinator for the 8 Fest Small-Gauge Film Festival, and has managed to attend at least portions of every single Images Festival since the festival's inception in 1988.

Notes

- 1 The New Works Show was initiated by video artists Randy Gledhill and Rodney Werden in 1984. After the second edition, I don't know exactly why there wasn't a third. Perhaps the two organizers thought they had made their point?
- 2 Marc Glassman, "Introduction: A New Showcase," 1988 Images catalogue, page 2.
- 3 The inaugural festival's Board of Directors consisted of Richard Fung, Marc Glassman, Annette Mangaard, Janine Marchessault, Paulette Phillips, Kim Tomczak and Ross Turnbull.
- 4 For every edition of the Images festival since, there has been a spotlighted artist, with the exception of the 20th Anniversary edition in 2007. In that year's festival, there was a symposium series called MOMENTUM and the online iPod program Then and Now, which offered ten seminal Canadian video-art works on the "download for any and every possible screen" (2007 Images catalogue, page 29).
- 5 b.h. yael, e-mail correspondence, 13 January 2012. The Euclid initiative refers to the Euclid Theatre at Euclid and College Streets, which many alternative film and video artists, and organizations, attempted to establish as a venue for their programming.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 The Factory Theatre Lab was only available for non-theatrical programming that one year, 1997.
- 8 In 1996, the all-Canadian opening night program was titled Spring Fever.
- 9 Deirdre Logue, e-mail correspondence, 28 January 2012.
- 10 Stefan St. Laurent, e-mail correspondence, 02 December 2011.
- 11 Sarah Lightbody, e-mail correspondence, 04 January 2012.
- 12 Deirdre Logue, e-mail correspondence, 28 January 2012.
- 13 Other festivals around that time began to publicize their programming as "film" even when the source or exhibition material wasn't. It seemed to me that "film" was a cinematic or theatrical term, and "video" a gallery term, regardless of the actual materials involved. Perhaps "film" meant on screen and "video" off screen? See Peggy Gale, "All These Years: Artists' Video in Toronto," *Explosion In The Movie Machine*, 2012. Also, in 1997, there was a three-program spotlight on seminal video-artist Vera Frenkel, which countered the relative absence of social or essayist film and video that year (although it had originally been intended to be screened a couple years earlier).
- 14 Chris Gehman, e-mail correspondence, 22 December 2011.
- 15 "The open call requires, owing to usual limited time real-estate, that many will be turned down, and it is from this growing pool of rejections that the fest expects to draw its audience... [Images] argued, with typical reverse logic, that an open call was democratic when of course it is the reverse... If the open call were abandoned, the AD would be undertaking studio visits with local, national and international artists, and hopefully not restricting his or her research to established or known artists. The AD would be part of a network of local, national and international parallel practitioners and would be inviting artists to exhibit at the Images Festival." Mike Hoolboom, e-mail correspondence, 21 January 2012. This, of course, parallels the conundrums faced by parallel galleries and other arts organizations. Are seemingly open structures actually constricting or restrictive? Or does the occasional wonderful left-field submission from an unknown artist justify the annoying volume of either inappropriate or mediocre submissions?
- 16 This abandonment of the Toronto programs might have been influenced by the advent of Pleasure Dome's annual New Works show for Toronto artists. The Pleasure Dome screening has blossomed into a one-night mini-festival, albeit without the international context.
- 17 Wide was augmented by a series of storefront installations called Window Shopping, which were curated by R.M. Vaughan. They intended to surprise window shoppers and curious strollers, and this series was scattered throughout the city, from Church Street to mid-west College and Dundas Streets, in small windows belonging to small businesses. Some pedestrians stopped and looked, and some just walked on by.
- 18 Chris Gehman, e-mail correspondence, 22 December 2011.
- 19 I use "ambulatory" in a manner parallel to how it was used by curator/panelist Christopher Eamon during his presentation at the 2010 International Experimental Media Congress in Toronto (coincident with the 23rd Images Festival). I find the term literally humorous but accurate – Eamon was referring to art that must be appreciated while walking or otherwise mobile and, thus, offers a multiplicity of perspective points. See also Christopher Eamon, "The Cinematographic in Museum Spaces," *PUBLIC 44*, page 70–72, 2012. Michael Snow also uses the term to refer to an ambulatory audience in "On Medium Specificity," *PUBLIC 44*, page 50, 2012.
- 20 Due to renovations, the Workman Arts theatre relocated further west in 2010, to Dufferin Street, just north of Dundas. The Images Festival has also frequently held On Screen presentations at Jackman Hall at the Art Gallery of Ontario, which for years had been the home of Cinematheque Ontario.
- 21 "This year, we've decided to foreground those undercurrents [of common ideas] by 'naming' the 22nd edition of the Images Festival 'Print Generation'" Pablo de Ocampo, "Introduction," 2009 Images catalogue, page 17.
- 22 The 1989 Congress was held at Innis Town Hall. In 1989, a conference devoted to experimental film may have been challenged on various grounds related to inclusion and definition of the word "experimental," but in 2010 a strictly film-centered title would have been either ludicrous or a bold analogue statement, except perhaps as conference about film maintenance, restoration and preservation. Thus, the "film" of the original Congress became "media" in 2010.
- 23 The Images Festival has been criticized by some academics, who are also artists, for its April scheduling (in place since 1992), which coincides with examinations and marking, and thus prevents them and also students from committing much time to the festival, if attending it at all.
- 24 See Christina Battle, *Words at Issue*, a series of five concrete poems graphically detailing the frequency of keywords at the 2010 International Experimental Media Congress, *PUBLIC 44*, 2012.