

**20TH LONDON** *bfi*  
**FILM FESTIVAL**  
 29 MARCH - 12 APRIL 2006

**Sylvia's Promise**

Director: George Kuchar

USA 1962

9 mins

Love comes in all sizes. But, the bonds of love extract a terrible price to be paid in flesh. A vow weighs heavily on the heart. Sylvia makes a promise, but can she keep it?

**Born of the Wind**

Director: Mike Kuchar

USA 1961

24 mins

'A tender and realistic story of a scientist who falls for the mummy he restored to life. 2,000 years as a mummy couldn't quench her thirst for love!' (George Kuchar)

**The Thief and the Stripper**

Director: George Kuchar

USA 1959

25 mins

An unlikely ménage à trois, doomed to end in a tornado of wanton violence.

**A Town Called Tempest**

Director: George Kuchar

USA 1963

33 mins

'What happened to that afternoon that left a town in shambles, its people in search of God?' (George Kuchar)

**Shorts**

**Kuchar Brothers 1**

Fri 31 March 18.30 NFT3

**Torn and Twisted**

Fri 31 March 20.40 NFT3

**Breakdowns, Break Ups & Sexual Confusion**

Sat 1 April 14.10 NFT1; Sun 2 April 16.00 NFT2

**Oh How We Laughed...**

Sat 1 April 16.00 NFT2

**Troubled Teens**

Sat 1 April 16.10 NFT1; Sun 2 April 15.50 NFT1

**Outlaws and Pranksters**

Sat 1 April 20.30 NFT3

**Time in Small Pieces**

Sun 2 April 14.00 NFT3

**Flights of Fantasy**

Sun 2 April 14.15 NFT1; Tue 4 April 16.00 NFT2

**Kuchar Brothers 2**

Sun 2 April 16.15 NFT3

**How the West Was Won**

Mon 3 April 18.30 NFT3

**Dividing Lines: Race, Sexuality & the Church**

Wed 5 April 20.30 NFT3

In Lust We Trust: 8mm Films by the Kuchar Brothers

**Kuchar Brothers 1**

These days, Mike Kuchar's movies rarely cost more than \$100 to make. Along with his twin brother, George, he's something of a legend in certain circles, often mentioned in the same breath with John Waters, Jack Smith and Paul Morrissey. The San Francisco-based Kuchars, however, largely remain happily obscure. Few realize the momentous influence their lurid high-camp aesthetic has had on making irony and trash culture our *lingua franca*.

The Kuchars' movies take all the sordid subtexts of Hollywood films and bring them right to the surface, revelling in grotesquerie, sci-fi lunacy and beefy homoeroticism. At the same time, there's often a real depth beneath the sleaze.

Though each has a separate body of work, the twins share all their equipment and collaborated on their early films. Their apparently symbiotic relationship has added much to their mystique. 'When we first started, we would work on a picture together, taking turns shooting sequences,' says Mike Kuchar, the older of the 56-year-old brothers by a few minutes. He and George were given their first camera when they were twelve, and they found that cheap 8-mm film (and, later, video) was all they needed to express themselves. Some 40 years later, their work has been shown at the New York MOMA and other highbrow venues, but their methods – and their ambitions – are essentially the same.

'When I made pictures it was always a hobby. It was like playtime for me,' says Mike. 'I started when I was a kid, and it just came naturally. I never thought of a career or wondered what these movies would do for me. What they did for me was they gave me pleasure in making them – it was an adventure.'

This, of course, is a fairly standard line, but the Kuchars' utterly unmercenary careers bear it out. Mike's indifference to commercial success may be a product of his past in New York's 1960s underground – decades ago, it seems it was still possible to be impervious to the prospect of fame. Indeed, Mike has noticed the change among younger would-be avant-garde filmmakers. 'I find sometimes in film schools there's an attitude of "I'm going to make a picture and I'm going to get famous." I don't think you should think that way. You never know what will happen, but the thing is if you get some pleasure or if it's an adventure for you, you should do it. Maybe something will happen, or maybe you'll make something great or the world will need it, you don't know. Make it because you want to make it, because it's fun for you and an exploration. Then if nothing happens with it, if you don't get picked up by Hollywood, it doesn't matter because you enjoyed making it.'

Ironically, the Kuchars' early work was often compared to that of their colleague Andy Warhol, the person who probably single-handedly made an under-the-radar career like theirs impossible to imagine today. Early on, their work was shown in the same places as Warhol's, and they'd frequent each other's films. Like Warhol, the Kuchars created their own stars, satirizing Hollywood's mythic glamour by turning their freaky friends into icons. 'I make my stars. Hollywood has its stars, and I have my stars,' says Mike. 'They're out on the street, they're in apartment buildings. Why don't we see if we can make stars out of them?'

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**Lesbians to the Rescue: Let the Tape Roll**  
 Thu 6 April 18.10 NFT3  
**From Williamsburg to Hackney**  
 Fri 7 April 20.40 NFT2  
**Queer Dis/Locations**  
 Sat 8 April 12.15 NFT3; Sun 9 April 16.15 NFT2  
**Silenced! LGBT Struggle for Human Rights around the World**  
 Sat 8 April 14.00 NFT2  
**20/20 Vision: The Incredibles**  
 Sat 8 April 15.50 NFT3  
**Brief Lives**  
 Sat 8 April 20.30 NFT3  
**The Ex-Factor**  
 Sun 9 April 14.00 NFT2; Wed 12 April 18.20 NFT1  
**Bad Object Relations**  
 Sun 9 April 20.30 NFT3; Mon 10 April 14.00 NFT1  
**Body Politic**  
 Tue 11 April 20.40 NFT2  
**Why Do Straight Boys Do Gay Boys?**  
 12 Apr 18.15 NFT2

His actors are blatantly unprofessional; in fact, Mike says he's often pleased by bad acting. 'I'm conscious of this kind of glamour that's presented in movies, that it's artificial. What's *real* is the fact that it is artificial, it's a production,' he says. 'Sometimes, if a person can't act well it makes the picture even better, it adds more drama, because here is a human being trying to be somebody else and trying to do their best but they're faltering. Looking at them makes you uncomfortable, but also makes you realize that this is a very heroic person. You know there's a human being behind the facade, and there's another drama going on amidst the written drama in the script. There's also a personal drama of people getting in front of a camera and trying to do their best, trying to give a good performance that will get them somewhere, maybe to a better production with a better pay cheque.'

The Kuchars' mocking attitude toward celebrity is much less ambivalent and obsessive than Warhol's ever was. Unlike the Kuchars, Warhol always resented Hollywood for not taking enough notice of him. 'If Hollywood asked me to make a picture, I'd make it, but I'm not frustrated that they didn't ask me,' says Mike. 'I create my own special effects. I've never been frustrated, and neither has my brother – because we make pictures.'

Simone Stein, *Metro Active*, 7 June 1999

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The NFT Café is open daily from 10am to 9pm offering morning coffee and cakes, lunch and dinner.

National Film Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 8XT.  
 Box Office 020 7928 3232. [www.bfi.org.uk/nft](http://www.bfi.org.uk/nft).

The NFT bar is open from 11am to 11pm Monday to Saturday and 12 noon to 10.30pm Sundays. Enjoy riverside views, fine food and drinks.

Programme notes and credits compiled by Filmographic Services, bfi National Library.  
 Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk).



**Friday 31 March 2006, NFT 3, 18.30**

**IN LUST WE TRUST: 8MM FILMS BY THE KUCHAR BROTHERS  
PROGRAMME 1**

**SYLVIA'S PROMISE**

Dir George Kuchar/USA 1962/9 mins

'Love comes in all sizes. But the bonds of love extract a terrible price to be paid in flesh. A vow weighs heavily on the heart. Sylvia makes a promise but can she keep it?' (George Kuchar)

**BORN OF THE WIND**

Dir Mike Kuchar/USA 1962/24 mins

Donna Kerness and Bob Cowan, whose torrid off-screen romance caused a sensation in the steam room of the St. George Hotel, are teamed for the first time in this poignant film of shriveled beauty and bloodless vengeance. Mr. Cowan is a striking performer resembling a vulture with shoestrings on its head. He and the buxom Miss Kerness battle front and center in the biggest clash of the hams since Godzilla and King Kong, and it's one of the mysteries of gravity that Kerness doesn't flop on her face, she being so top-heavy.

'A tender and realistic story of a scientist who falls in love with a mummy he has restored to life ... 2,000 years as a mummy couldn't quench her thirst for love!' (George Kuchar)

**THE THIEF AND THE STRIPPER**

Dir George Kuchar/USA 1959/25 mins

Three years to complete ... It dares to lay bare the naked carcass of a generation gone mad with moral decay. Starring Tony Reynolds and Candy Newman in the film that got them married!

'An early film, depicting today's youth ... raw and brutal.' (George Kuchar)

**A TOWN CALLED TEMPEST**

Dir George Kuchar/USA 1963/33 mins

Rarely has the cinema equaled such spectacle! Seldom have movies probed so deeply in the rotten core of hypocrisy and weakness! Only the talents of Larry Leibowitz and Zelda Kaiser, his cousin from Hawaii, could make this tale of hatred and fanaticism come alive from the screen and hit you in the face with truth.

'What happened that afternoon that left a town in shambles, its people in search of God?' (George Kuchar)

## KUCHAR 8MM MANIFESTO

Yes, 8mm is a tool of defense in this society of mechanized corruption because through 8mm and its puny size we come closer to the dimension of the atom.

We in this modern world of geological dormancy are now experiencing an evolution evolving around minutenocities. We no longer think big except in the realm of nuclear bombardment, and therefore, it is not unusual to find human beings with little things. 8mm is one of those little things, but 8mm becomes enormous when light from a projector bulb illuminates to a great dimension the abnormalities of the psychotic.

In the hands of a potential pervert, this medium becomes like a sculpture of clay with a base of yeast. Sprinkle a few smatters of liquid upon the sculpture and it will blow up and expand to startling and gargantuan proportions. But, as you will see, the clay shell that envelops the overall piece of work will crack and make dirt everywhere.

The inner-beauty of the work will be revealed while at the same time the film-maker will crack and eventually suicide. Looking upon the face of one's own evil is enough to bring the sting of acid to an esophagus that has previously experienced only buttermilk.

That 8mm will become avant-garde is a contagious disease-breeder because we are all avant-garde to the point of annihilation, and only when we face the after-effects of total deformity can we then think more clearly and cry because we couldn't concentrate on moral isolation.

Who are we to ask whether 8mm will be the avant-garde of the future when only God and the Vatican know for sure? Moral issues of this nature should never be left for the filthy hands of the beatnik to twist into pretzels of degeneracy. Let the beatnik and the frustrated executive twist 8mm film into his own image and thereby give others a chance to sniff the world of narcotics and total spiritual breakdown.

Having worked with 8mm for twelve years, I have seen what it can do to a person. The creative intellect undergoes a great revolt and the bars of restraint are ripped from the casement of sanity until everything is a whirlpool of incandescent pudding. 8mm has taught me to think more clearly and to express myself in direct terms. Like my religion, I was born into 8mm because my aunt had loaned me her movie camera and then my mother bought me one for Christmas.

Now I'm going to make a 16mm picture called *Corruption of the Damned* and I'm making it in 16mm because I can't make it in 7mm. Therefore I'm going up instead of down, which has been the usual trend in my life of wanton pleasures. I enjoyed working in 8mm and I'm enjoying 16mm and if both were taken from me, I'd enjoy vegetating because a life of stagnation is one of disease and only through disease can we realize what sickness is.

**This manifesto was read by George Kuchar during the symposium "8mm: Avant-Garde of the Future?" at the Eventorium, New York City, on Friday 11 December 1964.**