

The Festival Salutes Cinematheque Ontario's 10th Anniversary

One of the most enriching features of Cinematheque Ontario's programming over the past decade has been its emphasis on guest artist presentations. Many avant-garde filmmakers have presented their films and shared their thoughts on the art of filmmaking. It is in celebration of this important tradition that we shine the spotlight on a rare talent, Robert Beavers, whose work has been seen in its completed form only recently in a limited number of international festivals and art galleries.

The films of Robert Beavers are exceptional for their visual beauty, aural texture, depth of emotional expression and poetic sensibility. Born in 1949 in Brookline, Massachusetts, Beavers began to make films in the mid-sixties in New York City. By the end of that decade, he had relocated to Europe with fellow American filmmaker Gregory J. Markopoulos, who would be his lifelong companion until Markopoulos's death in 1992. The majority of Beavers' films were shot in the seventies and eighties in Italy, Switzerland and Greece. Between 1994 and 1998, the artist involved himself in recording and editing new soundtracks for his 18-film cycle entitled *My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure*, of which the films in this retrospective are a part.

Beavers' personal films occupy a noble place within the history of avant-garde film, positioned at the intersection of structural and lyrical filmmaking traditions. Exuding a sense of joy for the filmic medium, they seem to embody the ideals of the high Renaissance in their fascination with perception (both visual and aural), psychology, literature, the natural world, architectural construction, musical phrasing, and aesthetic beauty. Perhaps this work's greatest achievement is that it appears continually fresh, as timeless art should, both to the newcomer and to the fortunate viewer able to savour the richness of these films time and again.

Robert Beavers recently received the Experimental Film Award from the National Society of Film Critics for his outstanding contribution to the field of avant-garde cinema and for his activities in restoring and preserving the films of Gregory J. Markopoulos.

— Susan Oxtoby

Cinematheque Ontario wishes to thank Philippe-Alain Michaud and Pascale Raynaud, The Louvre Auditorium, Paris; John E. Allen, Cinema Arts Inc., Angles, Pennsylvania, and Robert Beavers, Zurich, for their kind assistance with this series. David Sterritt, film critic of The Christian Science Monitor and chairman of the New York Film Critics' Circle, will lead the post-screening discussions.



From the Notebook of...

Director/Cinematographer/Editor: Robert Beavers

## From the Notebook of...

USA, 1971/98

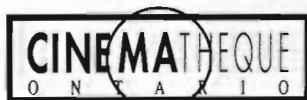
48 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 16mm

## The Painting

USA, 1972/99

12 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 16mm

Presented by



A DIVISION OF THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL GROUP

*From the Notebook of...* is perhaps Robert Beavers' most masterful work of structural harmony, binary oppositions, and self-reflexive form. The title refers to Leonardo da Vinci's notebook (Beavers intentionally filmed in Florence, as an homage to the great Italian Renaissance artist) and to the filmmaker's own written observations on filmmaking techniques which appear on screen as journal entries. Seated at a desk in front of a window, the filmmaker's view on the world is mediated by a careful sequencing of moving mattes, which split the screen vertically, giving the effect of a page turning in a book. Further self-reflexive elements include the depiction of a Bolex camera and its related sounds, colour filters, and different matte shapes. Gloriously shot and edited, *From the Notebook of...* is simultaneously introspective and engaged in understanding the world. Emblematic images include that of a dove being set free, the lush green leaf of a plant, and male models shown both nude and clothed. *The Painting* uses masking and rack focus techniques to disclose portions of "The Martyrdom of Saint Hippolytus," a Renaissance painting depicting a scene of execution. Images and isolated sounds charged with personal meaning are intercut, offering the viewer a revealing self-portrait of the artist as a young man.

The Festival Salutes Cinematheque Ontario's 10th Anniversary



Ruskin

**Amor**

USA, 1980

14 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 16mm

**Ruskin**

USA, 1974/98

39 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 35mm

**Work Done**

USA, 1972/99

22 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 16mm

Director/Cinematographer/Editor: **Robert Beavers**

*Amor* uses themes of cutting and sewing as metaphors. Cloth is cut and fabric is sewn; shrubs are trimmed and hedges form majestic garden archways; and a male figure claps his hands as if to signal a sync cue on which there is a visual cut. Central to this short work are the complex emotions surrounding love, separation, and the metonymic twinning of objects, including that of edited image and sutured sound. *Ruskin* is a meditative journey which, like many of Beavers' films, finds "the present in the past and the past in the present" (Beavers). *Ruskin* foregrounds Beavers' love of literature, architecture and landscape. (The filmmaker's hand rests on a volume of John Ruskin's "The Stones of Venice" and much of the film is shot in the environs of Venice, London and the Swiss Alps.) Elegant cinematography and innovative sound construction – Beavers' films are as beautiful to listen to as they are to see – build the foundation of this ode to an earlier era. Similarly, *Work Done* transports the viewer to a variety of times and places. Old-world customs (ice blocks used for refrigeration, the ancient craft of book binding, and the preparation of pig's blood pancakes) are juxtaposed with contemporary urban scenes. Colour filters heighten the contrast between the natural and man-made worlds.



Wingseed

**Sotiros**

USA, 1977/96

25 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 35mm

**Wingseed**

USA, 1985

15 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 16mm

**The Stoas**

USA, 1991-1997

24 minutes ■ Colour, sound, 16mm

Director/Cinematographer/Editor: **Robert Beavers**

Print source for all films in Spotlight:

**Temenos Archive**  
c/o Robert Beavers, Rebhusstrasse 25,  
CH-8126 Zumikon, Switzerland.  
T/F (41-1) 401-2060

These three films, all shot in Greece, centre on expressions of homoerotic love. *Sotiros* plays with narrative film devices (such as intertitle cards) while remaining a highly metaphorical, non-narrative "dialogue" between two male lovers, revealed largely through the luminous depiction of everyday objects in their shared world. A colour palette of pastels and golden hues and the strains of Alban Berg's opera "Wozzeck" in the film's final moments enrich the emotional character of *Sotiros*. Beavers' remarkable use of natural lighting and his exceptional eye for composition distinguish this rare work. *Wingseed* is a fanciful foray into an idyllic realm. A soundscape of goats' bells and pan flutes connects a character's state of reverie with the pastoral setting and sounds of a summery Greek hillside. Beavers' expressive camerawork dazzles the screen, drawing comparisons between the beauty of nature and the male form. It's hard not to read *The Stoas* – a montage film set in both the deserted old industrial arcades (*stoas*) of Athens during siesta and the refreshing waters of a bountiful river – as Beavers' expression of mourning for Markopoulos. A recurring shot of the filmmaker's hands held outstretched, as if holding something that is not there, is the only direct human element in the film. *The Stoas* offers a quiet return to nature.

Presented by



A DIVISION OF THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL GROUP