



## Flesh Angels

R. Bruce Elder

Canada, 1990, 113 minutes  
Colour/16mm

Production Company: Lightworks

Co-Maker: Alexa-Frances Shaw,  
Assisted by: Alexandra Bal, Paul Nieman,  
Elizabeth Yake

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*Flesh Angels* is a continuation of Bruce Elder's multi-film series *The Book of All the Dead*, a complex and harrowing epic cycle that he has been working on since the late seventies. This work, as well as his voluminous critical writing, has earned Elder the reputation of being one of Canada's, and the world's, most important avant-garde filmmakers. Inspired by Dante, Ezra Pound, and William Blake, *The Book of All the Dead* is a contemporary exploration of the classic romantic quest for meaning and transcendence in the modern world. At well over 30 hours in length, and thoroughly infused with strands of western philosophy and film aesthetics, the cycle charts the development of human consciousness, from ordinary waking consciousness to beatific vision. Central to Elder's artistic vision is the transformational power of love in the midst of the degeneracy of the modern world. Elder's artistic credo is best summarized by Harold Blood's remarks on the poetry of Wallace Steven: Everything can be broken, should be broken....It must be broken; it must not bear having been broken; and it must seem to have been mended. At the beginning of the beatific segment, *Flesh Angels* suggests the possibility of hope, beginning with the recognition of the terrible power of love. Elder provides the viewer with a new experience of this vision by employing appropriation, allusion, quotation, and intertextual references — and in the processes interrogates his own creative powers. Elder is also in love with mathematics and computer programming. Using fractal geometry and cellular automata he has produced brilliant sequences of mesmerizing beauty and feeling that fuse notions of mathematical perfection with Dante's medieval cosmology.



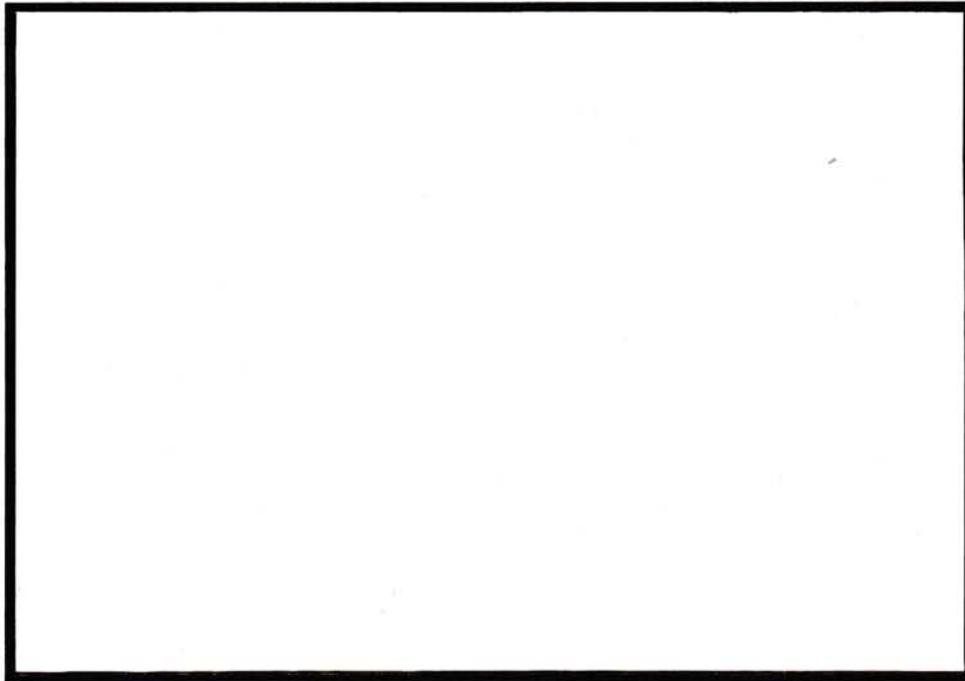
R. Bruce Elder was born in 1949 in Hawkesbury, Ontario. He studied philosophy at McMaster University and the University of Toronto, and presently teaches film at Toronto's Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.

Elder is a prolific critic, theorist, and filmmaker. Films include: *She is Away* (75), *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* (79), *1857 (Fool's Gold)* (81), *Illuminated Texts* (82), *Lamentations: A Monument for the Dead World* (86), *Consolations (Love is an Art of Time)* (88), *Flesh Angels* (90).

# Festival Press Screening, Friday, August 23

## Bruce Elder's Flesh Angels

In 1988, New York's Anthology Film Archives honoured Canadian filmmaker Bruce Elder with a complete retrospective of his work, hailing him as unquestionably the most important avant-garde filmmaker to emerge in America in the 1980's; and Anthology's legendary curator, Jonas Mekas, urged anyone with the slightest interest in film history to take in the retrospective. After seeing FLESH ANGELS, the great American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage went on radio and television to state his belief that Bruce Elder is one of the world's most important filmmakers, a declaration he has made publicly several time before. A procession of critics have declared themselves astounded by the rigour and ambition of his films and the powerful emotions they elicit.



FLESH ANGELS resumes a large multi-film cycle, called THE BOOK OF ALL THE DEAD, Elder has been working on since the late Seventies. The theme of these films was the Blakean descent from innocent paradise to experience and dread. FLESH ANGELS resumes the theme but the film also marks a major departure for Elder into a glittering high-tech style.

CONSOLATIONS (shown at the 1988 Toronto Festival), suggested some stage of synthesis. FLESH ANGELS now shows that the film was just a purgatorial step, and it is modelled consciously on Dante's DIVINE COMEDY. Sharply adjusting his approach, ELDER gives up the percussive cutting that was his previous signature in favour of sensual and luxuriant textures.

Elder associates FLESH ANGELS with De Stiljl, the Twenties art movement led by Mondrian that sought cosmological meaning in the purity of mathematics. Elder updates this using the latest image technology and exotic new computer mathematics like fractals and cellular automata rhyming these with Dante's medieval cosmology. The result is a heady blend of the high-tech and the antique and FLESH ANGELS is an extraordinarily opulent and technically advanced work that dazzles the eye. (Bart Testa)

**FLESH ANGELS is distributed by the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 67A Portland St., Toronto, Ont. Canada M5V 2M9 tel: (416) 593-1808 fax: (416) 593-8661**