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All sorts of bodies focus of film series

There will be plenty of bodies, clothed and unclothed, fragmented and whole, to look at during the Body In Film series at the Art Gallery of Ontario and at Innis College.

But the series, which starts today and runs to Nov. 16, does not take its name from people once positioned in front of the camera, but from those behind it.

The films in the series are by avant-garde filmmakers working from a very personal perspective: "From a camera rooted in the flesh," says curator Bruce Elder.

He likens the making of such films to the writing of poetry. "There have been some avant-garde filmmakers interested in cinema's transgressive aspirations, who were interested in cinema because it's a field that allowed them to defy social norms.

However, the larger number of strong filmmakers who have given us imagery of the body have been interested in it as a source of revelation of the sacred."

Sometimes the transgressive and the sacred coincide, as they did during the production of *Window Water Baby Moving*, by Stan Brakhage, about the birth of his first child and the emotions he and his wife experienced at that time.

The film was seized as obscene by the lab.

Brakhage was only able to recover his footage after his doctor wrote a letter saying the movie was made for medical research.

The films in the series were produced over the last three decades and are almost all American.

"One reason I wanted to put this series together is the lack of interest in the body by Canadian filmmakers," says Elder.

Canada has produced some of the greatest-avant garde filmmakers in the world, such as Michael Snow, but, says Elder, Snow's work is very "discorporate," his camera has "a disembodied eye."

The body stands for nature, says Elder. As our relationship with nature declines and our involvement with technology increases, a dislocation occurs. The Americans have felt this disconnection from nature much more than we have.

The attempt by artists to reconnect with the body is really an attempt to reconnect with nature, he says.

Over the last 30 years the fundamental aspirations of this kind of cinema have not really changed, only the styles have altered, says Elder.

"There is a cooler tone to a great deal of recent work. There isn't the same sweeping

impulsive camera style and there isn't the same anxious or energetic editing."

Two of the films being shown at the AGO on Tuesday are *In Quest Of Meat Joy* by Carolee Schneemann and Bob Giorgio, and *The Women When Sacred* by Walter Gutman.

Made in 1969, *In Quest Of Meat Joy*, has a naive Sixties sensibility. It's kept from being dated by Schneemann and Giorgio's sense of humor.

It begins with a group of scantily-clad people of both sexes groping one another (rather innocently) while rolling about a floor. The proceedings continue while more meat (plucked chickens and scaled fish) is added to the ceremony.

Eventually the participants move from communing with nature to the sensual creation of art by smearing one another with masses of body paint and happily tarring and feathering themselves with shreds of paper.

The Women When Sacred is a cinematic adoration of a pregnant woman, replete with plenty of references to the paintings and sculptures of the past. But the woman in the film is real and earthy and slightly uncomfortable with such idealized positionings.

All screenings begin at 7 p.m. and cost \$4. For more information, call 978-7790 or 977-0414.