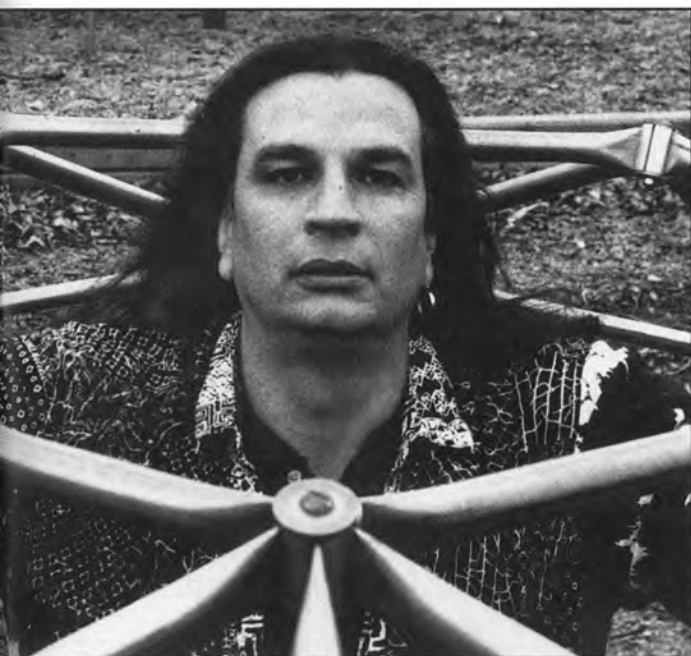


Carl Brown's business card does not say filmmaker or even experimental filmmaker. It reads "visual alchemist." Brown chemically treats the film's surface even as he is developing it—a literal and physical deconstruction of the image—and mixes his own toners to create brilliantly vibrant colours which are meticulously added to the image. This is a technique that Carl has mastered over 15 years. It may seem that such a labour-intensive process would dominate the film, becoming its focal point, but Carl is not manipulating the film's surface as a means unto itself. He is stripping away the representational properties of the image in order to rebuild it according to a more abstract truth already present within the image—a truth based on either visceral qualities or emotional realities. From the moment the image is developed, through to the editing process, this is the principle upon which the film is constructed. Carl's technique does not obscure the image presented but reveals another layer of truth inherent within it. The representational and abstract are placed together, forced to interact and collide, the presence of one informing our view of the other. And where else but in the traditional documentary does the argument for the representational nature of the photographic image reside?

**CARL BROWN mixes his own toners to create brilliantly vibrant colours which are meticulously added to the image.**



In his latest film, *Brownsnow*, Carl not only takes up this issue, he challenges the documentary tradition. The notion of objectivity is blown apart, revealing the subjective point of view existing beyond the facade of a presentation of facts. *Brownsnow* focuses on the career of artist Michael Snow. It was shot during the Michael Snow Project, a city-wide retrospective held in Toronto from March to June in 1994. Carl, with the help of Philip Hoffman and Barbara Sternberg, filmed the various art works on display and conducted interviews with experts, friends and the artist himself.

Interviews are pretty standard fare in a documentary, but the formality we have come to associate with them is absent in this film, even subverted. There are no talking heads; the academic is not sitting in front of a wall of books; the curator is not in his office or standing in the gallery. In fact, the cues that we normally find when viewing an individual in a particular setting have been removed. Everyone interviewed has been filmed in an outdoor setting, a natural world which is contrasted with the sophisticated world of ideas. Often sound and image are disjointed. What we hear is familiar but what we see is distinctly unconventional. Not only does each person appear out of context, in a visual sense, but the environment that they do appear in has been abstracted by the swirl of colour and texture around them. Even though the same technique has been used to alter the images, the effect is different each time. Out of the clash of sound and images comes the sense that we are watching an individual's point of view.

In *Brownsnow*, the act of filming reveals a shift from the norm expected from a documentary. I found one sequence particularly revealing. Philip Hoffman shot Snow's photographic series for the Group of Seven's paintings on display, entitled *Plus Tard*. Each photograph depicts the way an individual may view a group of paintings exhibited in a gallery.



**BROWNSNOW is a presentation of how Carl Brown sees and reacts to Michael Snow's art.**

Hoffman's camera takes this suggested movement and exaggerates it. With a vibrating motion that practically animates each photograph, the camera moves across each one to the next, replicating the continuum suggested in the installation of the piece itself. Hoffman's camera does not record the series on display—it interacts with it; the movement is not imposed upon the piece, but demanded by it.

*Brownsnow* is a presentation of how Carl Brown sees and reacts to Michael Snow's art. When the film begins, Carl's technique is subtle, allowing us to see the art and the people in a more representational manner; but as the film progresses, the manipulation of the surface of the image is increasingly more aggressive. In the end, we are not presented with the standard textbook version of Snow's career. We are given Brown's point of view, one that is undeniably true in its own right. ■