

By Tom McSorley

Strands

Directed by Su Rynard.
Written by Tricia Fish and Shelley Eriksen.
Canadian Film Centre, 1997. 21 min. 16mm.

When the rather repressed and proper genetic researcher Helen Critteck (Stephanie Morgenstern) decides to do the unthinkable and clone herself, she begins with a strand of hair. From under this single strand soon appears Helen's extraordinary creation (Lisa Ryder), a towering beauty of potency, desire and, ultimately, danger to Helen's career. This timely drama about the politics of cloning dives into the troubled heart of contemporary science, asking questions about the nature of a world bent on replicating itself artificially. Merging creation myths with a technological skepticism à la Mary Shelley (she of *Frankenstein* fame) and others, *Strands* is a film concerned with the power of science and the science of power. In general, it is successful in its pursuits. One limitation of the script, however, is that it does not venture much beyond the conventional cautionary structure of Western narratives about the overreacher: Adam, Eve, Prometheus, Bluebeard, Macbeth, Dr. Frankenstein, et al. That aside, Rynard's is a stylistically assured, crisply directed short drama from a filmmaker of considerable intelligence and stylistical range. ■

Before It Blows

Written and directed by Patricia Gruben.
Neoma Films, 1997. 8 min. 16mm.

One of Canada's most imaginative experimental filmmakers (her other acclaimed films include *Sifted Evidence*, *Low Visibility*, *Ley Lines*) returns with a concise, amusing and telling examination of how we look and how we think. As the camera remains fixed in its gaze at the impending gush of the Old Faithful geyser, voices off-screen express impatience, expectation, uncertainty and awe at the power of nature unleashed before them. It is a clever conceit, revealing just how restless North Americans are: we can't wait for anything! A deceptively simple short film, *Before It Blows* suggests vast thematic outlines which explore human relationships, cultural conceptions of time and, as always in Gruben's work, the very foundations of our tenuous knowledge of the world and of ourselves. ■

Charlie's Prospect

Written and directed by Ariella Pahlke.
Centre For Art Tapes, 1997. 10 min. Video.

Described as a "fable set in Lower Prospect, N.S.," this elegant and accomplished short drama concerns folk artist Charlie Norris (an actual resident of Lower Prospect but here portrayed effectively by Elmer MacDonald), an elderly man from this small fishing village who is painstakingly reproducing it as a miniature wooden model. One rainy afternoon, a man from away arrives to try to purchase the model. Will Charlie sell? At what price? Rendered virtually without dialogue, with a marvellous and haunting choral composition by Nova Scotian composer David Creese, *Charlie's Prospect* wrestles with questions of region, appropriation, the passage of time and the importance of



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community. Although this is not Pahlke's first work—since 1993 she has produced several playful, genre-twisting videos—it does reveal the increasing breadth of her sensibility, and an impressive new formal authority. It also announces a talent worth watching in future. ■

White Cloud, Blue Mountain

Written and Directed by Keith Behrman.
Flying Rhino Pictures, 1997. 30 min. 35mm.

Rigorously composed and occasionally startling in the quiet power of its images, *White Cloud, Blue Mountain* is the story of James, a man returning home in winter to visit his dying father. As he and his wife and young son settle in, the miscommunication that hangs like a shroud over the family soon darkens this final reunion. Indeed, the last conversation James and his ailing father have is one of the most aching, authentic and terrifyingly banal exchanges between father and son this side of Harold Pinter or August Strindberg. While it may be correctly accused of being too derivative of Tarkovsky or Bergman, Behrman's film is also a memorable and moving meditation on the disenchantments of patriarchy, the search for modes of life and death, and the poetics of presence and absence. ■