

# A Filmmaker of Vision

TAKE ONE's  
Interview With

# Colin LOW, Part I

By Marc Glassman and Wyndham Wise

Colin Low naturally embodied the qualities espoused by the National Film Board's creator and philosopher. John Grierson wanted people who could do it all, from conceiving films, to making them, to managing themselves and others. In Low, he and the Board got the whole package. As a young artist from Alberta, Low served his apprenticeship as a designer and animator. To this day, he is renowned as a storyboard artist. He was directing films in his early 20s and running the animation unit well before the age of 30. His abilities made him uniquely qualified to direct the brilliant and very different documentaries, *City of Gold* and *Universe*, one an evocation through photographs of the Yukon gold rush and the other an imaginatively drawn and animated reconstruction of the galaxy. Low pushed his design and management skills even further with *Labyrinthe*, a now legendary groundbreaking multimedia exhibit at Expo 67.

Throughout his half-century career Low never lost sight of what his and the Board's filmmaking should be about: representing Canada to Canadians. While animation critics hail his *The Romance of Transportation in Canada* as an influential departure from the then-reigning Disney style, the film is a clear and funny depiction of the importance to Canada of its railroads and highways. *Corral*, Low's most poetic documentary, is remarkably precise in its description of an Albertan cowboy's taming of a wild horse. Though his films have won many awards (his filmography includes eight Oscar nominees, the most ever by a Canadian filmmaker) Colin Low usually avoids the limelight. *Take One* caught up with him in January at his home in Montreal. —**Marc Glassman**



**W**e thought it might be interesting to start by talking about how you first got to the Film Board back in 1945. Did you graduate from the Banff School of Fine Arts?

Not graduated. I had gone there on a scholarship. My teacher in high school badgered me into it. I used some of my art work I had done for her to get into the Banff school. The school only operated for a month or two during the summertime. So I went there and met two wonderful teachers, two Englishmen, Henry Glyde and Walter Phillips, who were the main teachers at the school then. They gave me a little prize at the end of the summer, a weekend of painting and sketching at the Sunshine Lodge, which was a spectacular place. Then I finished high school a year or two later.

*What kind of style were you working in at the time?*

I worked in every medium, but mainly watercolours and drawing. I was really very interested in magazine illustration and colour printing. Phillips was a wonderful printmaker. He was absolutely marvellous and he has since been recognized as a great printmaker. He was really a 19th century man and he knew all about the great English printmaking and watercolour school. Glyde had encouraged me to send my work to the National Film Board of Canada, which was looking for artists to start an animation department. Norman McLaren had a few animators going already and two of us that summer got chosen: myself, from Alberta, and Bob Verrall from Toronto. Grierson always wanted to get people from across the country.

*You were brought up on a ranch outside of Cardston, Alta., during the Dirty Thirties. Did you see any NFB films out there?*

I had seen posters done by the Film Board, wartime posters made by the graphics department. They were beautiful, very strong. I hadn't seen much film work, but afterward I realized I had seen several films from the *Canada Carries On* series in theatres. But coming from a ranch, I didn't go to the movies very much.

I thought I was going to the National Film Board to make posters and I was wondering whether I was qualified, but I figured I could try anything. I was surprised to find that the first day there I was making films. Mainly 35mm black-and-white films for *Canada Carries On* and *World In Action*. McLaren was my boss.

*What was your first impression of him?*

Very positive. He was a very pleasant guy to talk to. He was authoritative, being head of the animation department, but also he was very interested in the kind of material he was getting. I arrived in Ottawa—I was 18 at the time—in a rainstorm and I was soaked to the skin. I got on a streetcar, asked for directions, and went to the old lumber mill. I walked in wet as a duck, but Norman invited me—when I got settled in a boarding house—to come for dinner at his house. I met George Dunning and Guy Glover that night and it was a good conversation. George had incredible connections and he was a superb graphic artist, a real prodigy of a painter and draftsman. More a designer than anything. The next day Norman put me in a room with two French Canadians.

*I'm guessing one of them was René Jodoin?*

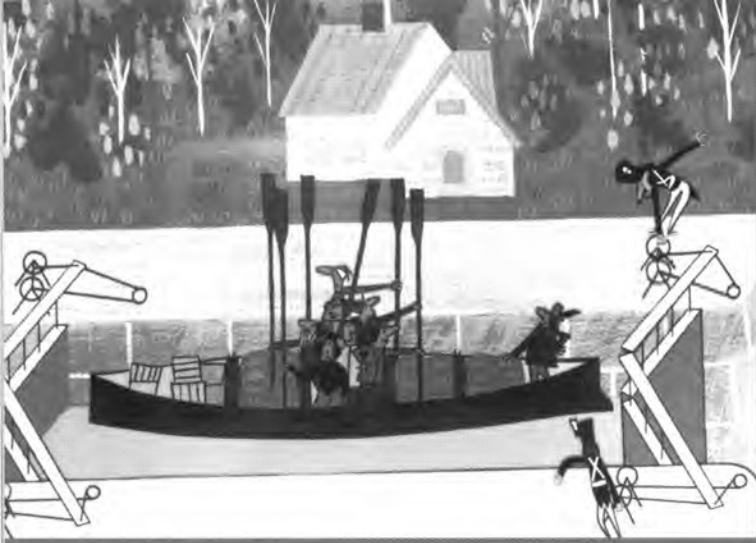
That's right, and Jean-Paul Ladouceur, who became a famous watercolourist. They had been at the Board for a few years. They spoke French continuously, but they both were bilingual and bicultural. They took me under their wing and taught me the tricks of the trade. Ladouceur was very clever and Jodoin was kind of a philosopher. All the people around me were real artists. Bob Verrall, who later became the head of the animation department, had been there for a couple of weeks or so.

*It would seem that the Board did rather well with its choices in 1945.*

Well, McLaren was a true genius. I don't know what he saw in my work, but my application letter came back instantly. I had sent a great pile of stuff. I was prolific, but I didn't think I was very good. I was very insecure about my graphic skills. I had two superb art teachers and I thought I could never emulate them. I thought I had something, but I didn't know what it was.

*Did Norman teach you? Did he take you under his wing?*

Yes. At first there weren't many instructions. The first day I was expected to produce backgrounds and titles. The first two weeks I produced a title for a *World in Action* by Stuart Legg. I had to take the artwork into him, have him criticize it, and take it back to change it, take it back to him, then take it back again and again until the paper was worked down to the other side. Then McLaren put me with Evelyn Lambart. She was very instructive and she liked kids. She had been virtually deaf until she was 21 when she got a hearing aid. She was all business and mainly she worked on maps, because her father was a famous explorer and geographer.



***The Romance of Transportation in Canada: "McLaren thought that cel animation was essentially a kind of sweatshop, mass-production line."***

She was really Norman's right hand. So I worked with Evelyn on titles, but Norman would come in and say, "Your lettering can be better than that, why don't you try this kind of lettering?" I had René and Jean-Paul on one side, and Norman and Eve on the other, then I had these seniors who already had four or five years of art training, like George Dunning and Jim McKay, who was a great cartoonist and stayed in animation all his life.

*The first film you worked on as an animator was with George Dunning, was it not?*

Yes, *Cadet Rousselle*.

*How did that come about?*

George was already working on it. Norman had commissioned a series of French-Canadian folk songs. He did some, René and Jean-Paul did some, and George had taken on "Cadet Rousselle" because of its Commedia Dell'Arte theme. He had just produced a nice little film, *Three Blind Mice*, and Bob Verrall, who went back to art school, had worked on the backgrounds. When you had two or three characters and flat puppets, you needed two or three people to animate, so George asked me to be his assistant when Bob left.

*And that was 1947?*

It was finished in 1947. We started on it in 1946.

*How did McLaren like it?*

Norman loved it. He thought it was a vindication of his ideas. Norman was anti-cel animation. There wasn't enough money to make that kind of film nor was there enough celluloid during the war. Cel animation had been tried a little bit by George and Jim, but the paint wasn't very good and the cels weren't very good. So we generally worked with flat puppets, just scraps of paper and things. This was Norman's way of doing it, and you could do it mainly by yourself. Then, because the Film Board did not have much money at the end of that fiscal year, George, Jim and I left the Board for four

months and did a film in the basement of Crawley's. Budge loaned us a camera, and we filmed at night. We did a film on Baron Munchhausen, which was not finished until years later when George went to England.

*And then he finished it by himself?*

He was able to finish it because, by then, he was head of TV Cartoons in London. George and I worked together for quite a long time at the Board, and I think we would have continued but George decided he wanted to see Europe. In retrospect, maybe by him talking about it so much, it gave me the idea to leave myself. By 1947, I was married to a French-Canadian girl from Ottawa. George went to Paris for a year, and Jean and I went to Europe for a year to travel and work.

*And then you came back to the Board?*

I came back, having been around a bit. Tom Daly had remembered me from a number of things I had done for him, such as a little film called *Time and Terrain* about Canadian geology, the first classroom film ever made at the Film Board. Tom finished the production after I left for Europe. He liked the way I had done that film, because I had storyboarded it completely, very quickly and almost singlehandedly. It was a simple film about the geological areas of Canada. Another thing that he liked was the papers I wrote on the different film studios in Europe and my trip down through Germany and into Czechoslovakia after the Communists had taken over. He thought they were scholarly. He said, "Come back to the Board because we're about to do two or three films and we need you."

*Is this when you started work on The Romance of Transportation in Canada?*

No, it was before that. It was *The Fight: Science Against Cancer*. I did the animation with Eve Lambart. The two of us were working on different sections of that. It was a big, important film because it was a coproduction with the Americans and there was American money involved. It was directed by Morten Parker and the cameraman was Grant McLean. It was



**Corral:** "The film was much more successful than anyone could have anticipated."

being shot in 35mm. Eve and I were doing it in the manner of Pavel Tchelitchew, the famous transparent artist. So I began doing chiaroscuro animation, which was Norman's principle of staggered mixes, and I combined it with linear outline. The Americans loved it. It was considered very successful at that time and it even ran in one of the theatres in Ottawa. The prime minister, Louis St. Laurent, was there for a screening.

*We would like to move on to The Romance of Transportation in Canada because it was a different style for the Board and it won the first of several Academy Award nominations for you.*

Well, I said I would like to do cel animation, and we started on *Teamwork—Past and Present*, which was a cel-animation film. It was really very difficult because we didn't have the equipment or the know-how to do it. But a half-a-dozen people learned on that film, including Wolf Koenig, who really believed in cel animation. We believed in small teams. We were flying off on McLaren's tradition of creating teams. McLaren thought that cel animation was essentially a kind of sweatshop, mass-production line, and that you would end up with studios like Disney, which could be real hell for artists; the Disney studio underpaid people, etc. A lot of Hollywood was like that, and I think a lot of the violence in Hollywood cartoons comes out of the frustrations of workers in the various animation studios, but maybe that's just a theory.

*It's an interesting theory.*

We thought we could keep small teams of three or four people and do cel animation in the style of UPA. Wolf, who had cut his teeth on *Teamwork—Past and Present*, did his best cartooning in *Romance of Transportation*. My work was mainly learning how to do layouts for cartoons; how to express that to the animation-camera department (which was fairly hidebound and not very good at that point); to control the kind of doping and camera moves; and build the equipment for cel animation which could carry all the planes. Most of the movement was done in the layout, then we used little cycles. It was flat. Bob Verrall did the wonderful backgrounds for *Romance*, and I helped him, that is, I painted alongside him, using his style. Wolf did the animation.

*What a great team.*

It was a terrific team. We all learned a great deal from that film and we hoped to go on with it, but we were being distracted by live action. Part of Wolf's enthusiasm was for live-action film and he was learning to be a cinematographer. I was interested too, and so we did *Corral* very soon after *Romance of Transportation*.

*With the Academy Award nomination, did The Romance of Transportation in Canada give you status at the Board, a sense of accomplishment?*

Yes, because a lot of the people at the Film Board really didn't like the storyboard for that film. It was highly criticized by our distribution department. When it came out, it was such a success in the classrooms. They really found it hard to get their heads around that. They really wanted something quite pedagogical, and I might have given them something like that but for Wolf Koenig and Bob Verrall.

*Do you think they felt it was too entertaining, too humorous?*

It might not have been so entertaining if Guy Glover had not gotten into the act and put that fey commentary on it.

*So a team was being assembled that would go on to produce so much good work.*

That's right, but at the same time we were having to produce, what I would call service work. Titles, diagrams, bits and pieces, and it was all happening in a very small space. We were right on top of each other. So keeping it straightened out became my job. I was voted in as the supervisor of the animation department. Not the producer or the executive producer, but the supervisor, the shop foreman.

*Why did they choose you?*

Because I had been away and I was clean of any kind of political nonsense that went on during those nervous times. I helped to establish a firm, long-term relationship with

# Colin Low

Background image: *City of Gold*



***City of Gold*: "The Mountie [told] stories about grizzly bears, wild men, crazy people, Madame Zoom and all that stuff."**

Tom Daly, whom I liked. I got along with him, but he was a hard taskmaster. Then there was the establishment, the top people at the Film Board, who really didn't know anything about animation and wished it would go away.

*You very quickly moved on to Corral, which was a real departure for you.*

Well, it's simply because the sedentary life of an animator drove me crazy most of the time, coming from the kind of background I came from. I used to get homesick for the West and especially for my family. *Corral* was a summer holiday that I cooked up with Wolf, who loved the idea of taking a 35mm camera out West. It was to be part of a series called *Canadian Profiles*, which was meant to train young filmmakers. The film was much more successful than Wolf or I, or anyone else, could have anticipated.

*It's still a wonderful film and it's one of the ones that John Grierson showed in my [Marc] class at McGill as an example of how to make a documentary. Was it storyboarded?*

I scripted it. And I still have the script, and from my memory

of the whole thing, the film ended up very much like the script, although Wolf gave it a whole different feel in terms of the kinetics. He insisted on a gyro head for the camera, so we could do the moves fluidly. Then we hit upon the idea at the end of doing the run out of the herd of horses along a highway. It was a smooth, paved highway which had no fences alongside it. People think that shot is done from a helicopter or something.

*There's a real kinetic feel to the whole film.*

Wolf had a lot to do with that.

*But the subject itself? You're an Alberta boy.*

Sure, I spent my childhood on horseback. I rode to school. I knew the cowboy in the film when he was a small boy. So I knew what it felt like to be on a horse and half of the film I spent rounding up and looking after the horses. My father turned 40 head of horses over to us.

*Corral is considered to be one of the classics of the NFB from that great period in the 1950s. How do you feel about it now, in retrospect?*

It became a nuisance, really. It was hard to top. The Film Board was 15 years old. There was a critical mass of talent in the place then. The people who were there were passionate about their jobs. Certainly in the animation department, because McLaren radiated this experimental energy. Koenig and Kroitor were important and Verrall was an incredible inspiration because he was a superb, natural graphic artist. *Corral* came out of my background and looking back I had found that stuff really quite boring. A year before shooting I saw Wally Jensen [the cowboy in the film] on his horse in the rain with his dog delivering cattle to auction. Five hundred head of cattle; suddenly, I saw him very differently.

*Did the film turn your career around?*

It did because it corrupted me for animation. I never really learned the whole craft of animation. I produced a lot of work and I was very good at layouts, but I was never a cartoonist and partly because of my training, I was much more interested in the three dimensional, live action and the kinetic, rather than funny little characters flat on the screen. Some moments of Disney would really turn me on, but I realized that they were exorbitantly expensive.

*Could we talk about another big success during that period, City of Gold?*

It's almost too good to be true, the two films coming together.

*How did City of Gold come about?*

Wolf said he would like to make a film about the Second World War from stills. He was crazy about taking pictures, and he was a very good still photographer, a natural. Cartier Bresson was his hero. He said, "With all those great World War II photos, you could make a film out of them." I said, "Wolf, you'd be bored after three or four pictures." He said, "You could make a drama. Sometimes stills are more dramatic than live action." I went over to the archives and there was a lady there who said she had some wonderful pictures that had just come in from Whitehorse. They were from negatives that were found in a sod-roofed log cabin in Dawson City by a local radiologist and a jeweller, and would I like to look at them. I looked at these incredibly sharp, beautiful photographs from 8 x 10 negatives and I thought, my God, this is Wolf's dream. So I called him up and he and Bob Verrall came over to the archives right away. I said, "Look at these pictures." They said, "This is fantastic. Where the hell is Dawson City?" I said, "It's up north, by Whitehorse." No one had really heard about Dawson City, but these pictures...maybe 200 photographs.

*And these were the ones shot by A. E. Hegg? They had been preserved, but no one had paid attention to them?*

The log cabin was falling in, so the health department had made the city tear it down and all these plates were found in wooden boxes. The radiologist had X-ray processing equipment for big plates, so he printed them up, and the jeweller was selling them to tourists who came to Dawson City. One of the guys from archives had seen them in Whitehorse and bought a set of them. That's how they got to the Board. We talked it up at the Board and one of our friends, Hugh O'Connor, who worked in filmstrips, said, "I know a retired Mountie who spent time in Dawson City. Why don't I set up a dinner, and you and Wolf come over?" The Mountie was enthralling in terms of stories about grizzly bears, wild men, crazy people, Madame Zoom and all that stuff. Wolf's mouth was wide open. He said we should go to Dawson City, right away, and see what's there. So we decided to go. Partly because of the success of *Corral*, we persuaded the head of English production, Mulholland, to let us go ahead without even a formal budget proposal or even a script—except that we showed him the pictures. I did some research before we went to Dawson City, and when we got there we shot some live-action stuff. But we got confused about what we were doing and started making a film about gold mining.

*Is that Gold?*

That's right. We shot footage for two films simultaneously in less than six weeks. It was just the two of us, Wolf and I, in a rented taxi from the undertaker, who kept on borrowing it back to bring in stiffes, which made us feel a little spooky when we were out in the quaking aspen forests with all these ghosts in the back seat.

*And you were tracking ghosts.*

We met some real ghosts. A guy who had worked in Hollywood movies as a silent comedian claimed Charlie Chaplin copied his tramp performances. He had failed to make it into sound pictures and ended up in Dawson City.

*Didn't Chaplin use that shot of the long line of men going over the pass in Gold Rush?*

He did, but I've seen that shot used about half-a-dozen times from various different angles. A lot of those prints got all over the place. Hegg printed them for *Harper's* in New York, and then they were put into woodcuts. They were sold in New York City to collectors.

*But you had the original glass plates. The technique that you used on City of Gold was like going back to your animation days, whereby you panned and zoomed across the images.*

What we did, because we had the negatives, was pack them up in wooden boxes in Dawson City and flew them back to Ottawa where they were retouched. Then we made diapositives, in effect 11 x 14 transparencies, and that's what we worked with. We could preserve, in 35mm, the tonality, so they wouldn't increase in contrast. If you work directly off prints, the contrast increases through the several stages. We used the original plate to make, in effect, an interpositive. I had made the Krieghoff film, *Jolifou Inn*, in a similar manner. I had started that film by doing colour transparencies, big ones, 11 x 14. To improve our animation camera movement, the Board had hired an English mathematician by the name of Brian Salt, who was also a filmmaker. He made mathematics films and was a wonderfully erudite, scholarly and intense man with a pipe and corduroys. The thing that was unusual about an earlier film I did, *The Age of Beaver*, was that all the camera moves were preplotted from a log table. All the accelerations and exponential moves were made from a log table.

*Is that what you did with City of Gold?*

Exactly. Brian would work the movements out to four decimal places and make the animation-camera people follow them. If there were any bumps or bad moves, he would say, "This is not in the mathematics, now take it back to here." He would go over to the movieola and say, "Here's the jump. It's not in the mathematics, so it's your fault on the animation stand." The animators had to follow the meter counters on the north, south, east and west moves.



***Universe:* "Altogether, from the first discussions to the final film, it took seven years to make."**

*It did result in very smooth camera movements.*

We were working on the primitive animation equipment which McLaren had worked with, but because we were now working with larger than 11 x 14 fields all the time, we needed larger equipment. This equipment didn't exist in Hollywood. It didn't exist anywhere, so it was built at the Film Board. Ultimately, we began working with Oxberry in New York and all our animation equipment was developed between Oxberry and the engineering department at the Film Board. It compared to Disney's multiplates, but at that particular time Brian Salt was adding the discipline that made our moves so smooth.

*Who's idea was it to get Pierre Berton involved with City of Gold?*

It was Wolf's, and that didn't happen until we had a cutting copy. Tom Daly was very involved in the editing and Roman Kroitor was involved also. Roman had good ideas about the storyline. The whole idea about going up to Dawson City and going straight to the gold field was Roman's idea.

*Could we now segue into Universe, which came three years later?*

*Universe started earlier.*

*Prior to City of Gold?*

Sometime earlier. Bertold Bartosch, who was then living in Paris, had started me thinking about the subject. Bertold was a very old man whose last film had been destroyed by the Nazis. It was a film called *The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse*. He was part of the labour movement from Belgium and had done the magnificent animation in *L'Idea*. When I met him, he was an old man living on the top of a theatre and his wife really was the only one with a salary. He had wonderful ideas like a dome field with light sources under a very wide-angle lens. He had a camera with very long exposures, operated by a bicycle pump with a weight so that you could control exactly the length of each exposure.

*Is that how you approached Universe?*

From my discussions with Bartosch, I realized that the film would have to be three dimensional. Then I had some early talks with Roman Kroitor, who was always talking about computers and artificial intelligence. I said, "What kind of movie would you like to make?" I think we were walking to the Research Council for lunch. He said, "I want to make a feature film about an astronomer, but it is a love story." We began our discussions about *Universe* then. However, it was always put off and put off until finally it somehow got into the program as a classroom film of a half-hour length. We were still going to keep the astronomer, but the love story faded into the background. The Board management wanted to divide the film into three parts, because 10 minutes would be better for the classroom, but we wanted to do a half-hour. Altogether, from the first discussions to the final film, it took seven years to make.

*When did Sydney Goldsmith get involved?*

Sydney was involved early. After Brian Salt returned to England, he was the only decent mathematician in the place.

*It seems to me that Universe was the genesis of everything you ended up doing later with Imax. It was the first of your visionary films.*

That's true. I think Roman and I were equally mad. Plotting curved movement is very hard to do mathematically. Sine curves and three-axis movement get very complicated. Roman suggested that we could have a pen that vibrated at 24 frames a second or something on wheels that ran at 24 frames a second. The engineering department built it for us. They called it a "turtle," now sometimes called a "Kroitorer," which vibrated at 24 frames a second. We would run it over a piece of celluloid and it made little pinpricks every one twenty-fourth of a second. It would slide quite marvelously, because it was on its own little casters, and we would record the accelerations and decelerations in pinpricks. However,

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**Universe**

those pinpricks had to be made visible. So, what we did was run a grease pencil over the piece of celluloid and all the pin pricks were made visible. They were tiny, so tiny that you could barely see them, but if you put them under a microscope they were the size of footballs. My suggestion was that we put an arm on the side of the animation table, which had an X/Y axis on it, and then we got a microscope with a crosshair in it and followed the "footballs," centring on each of these "footballs" with the crosshairs. It made the most elegant, floating movement you possibly could imagine. It gave you the sense that you could do curved movement through the stars, through the galaxies colliding with each other. Eve Lambert had done similar effects with Norman on the cancer film, a zoom through a cell. It was very effective. When most people did a star zoom, you could see the stars appearing in the distance, but we kept the star bank outside of the frame and continually shifted our end position on the the multiple superimpositions. That's the way it was done. There were about 80 superimpositions on that star zoom; 80 pieces of artwork.

*In a way, this technique was taking you back to your animation work, wasn't it?*

Animation with motorized movement. Norman had done zooms with motorized movement from the very beginning. *C'est l'aviron* was a motorized movement film.

*Stanley Kubrick has said that Universe was an inspiration for 2001: A Space Odyssey. Could you talk a little bit about that?*

*Universe* didn't get released until 1960. The Russian sputnik went up in 1958 and then there was pressure to finish the film. The Board management also stopped complaining about the the cost overruns. The sputnik launch gave us a shot in the arm to finish the film and when it was complete, NASA ordered 300 prints of it.

*The Film Board must have been pleased.*

The Board sold almost 4,000 16mm prints. It was simply because we were there before anybody else with a serious film on the subject with special effects nobody had ever seen before. They were mostly new inventions, the way we did the special effects, but we did them modestly. They were mostly tabletops really.

*Kubrick somehow saw the film.*

I'll tell you how he saw it. I was in New York at the Blue Ribbon Film Festival. I was in my hotel room and I got a message asking me to call Stanley Kubrick. The next day I called back, and he wanted to meet me for lunch. There he told me he was doing a film with Arthur Clarke. I said that's wonderful, *Childhood's End* was one of my favourite books. The only science fiction I really liked, because it is metaphysical. It's an enormously metaphysical book. He asked me if I would work on the film as a designer for the special effects. I said, "That's a wonderful idea. I love your work and I love Arthur Clarke's work, but I've started a project with Roman Kroitor for the 1967 World's Fair in Montreal. I couldn't possibly get involved, but I would love to help in any way I can." Then he began to ask me very specific things about *Universe*, like how did we do this and how did we do that. We had a very long conversation. He said, "I'll be in touch with you again. I'll send you a copy of the script." He also said, "I don't want to make this film in Hollywood. I may have to make it in England, but I really don't want to. How about making it at the National Film Board?" I said, "We've never done anything on that scale. We've got a beautiful shooting stage, but it is never used enough. Yes, we could." I did most of *Universe* in the basement, in the vaults of the Film Board.

*So you're telling us 2001 could have been made in Montreal?*

I went back and talked to the director of production, who was always very friendly to me.



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*That was Grant McLean?*

Yes. I said to him, "I met this guy in New York at the Blue Ribbon festival called Stanley Kubrick. He wants to make this film with Arthur C. Clarke at the Film Board, and I think we could do it on our sound stage. I think we could make the sets." I told him the problem would be building the spaceships big enough because of the depth of field problems that you would encounter with small models and you would have to make them bigger if you wanted to make them really look like they're out there in space. "What do you think?" He said, "Look, Low, we aren't in the feature-film business. It's probably going to cost the earth. What's the budget?" And I said, "probably \$5 million." He said, "We can't undertake that. It's interfering with the private sector, forget it." I said, "You're probably right and, anyway, I'm going to be busy with Roman on this World's Fair thing." Then it was announced that *Labyrinth* was definitely on.

*So you had to call Kubrick and tell him that it was no go.*

I talked to him again. I told him it couldn't possibly be done for \$5 million. Later I went to visit Arthur Clarke in New York. Kubrick paid for my trip, and I spent a most enjoyable evening in his apartment, which was way up, looking over New York City. We looked through Kubrick's telescope on the balcony then went back in to watch TV because Lyndon Johnson was being elected president that night. We talked about *2001* and many things. It was a long evening, a nice evening and we were cheering for Johnson. I said I was involved with this project with Kroitor and I couldn't back out because we were already shooting test footage.

*Did Kubrick eventually use your ideas?*

Yes. Certainly they were used, but I didn't complain because I didn't ask for a contract. What happened was that he hired Wally Gentleman from the Board and tried to hire Syd Goldsmith. Wally wanted to go back to England, so he went, but I don't think he and Kubrick got along at all.

*I [Marc] also heard that Arthur Lipsett was approached as well. Is this true?*

I don't know. I don't think so.

*I heard that from Derek Lamb.*

Maybe, because Arthur Lipsett was quite famous then.

*You had worked very closely with Lipsett on Very Nice, Very Nice.*

I had hired Arthur at the Board. I loved the samples he brought into the animation department, and he did a lot of service work. He really did work very hard. Initially he was very sensible. He was very easy and good to have around. Then he got playing with magnetic tape and going around at night taking stuff out of the throwaway cans, putting together a soundtrack which became the soundtrack for *Very Nice, Very Nice*. It was really quite wonderful; strange, these bits and pieces out of garbage cans. Then he asked me if I would support him shooting a lot of stills because we had done *City of Gold* at that point. He had been doing very decorative drawings and some stuff on cels which were very handsome for live-action films. He built models, too. I said,

**Below: *Very Nice, Very Nice*; Background Image: *Jolifou Inn***



"I'll get you a budget to buy some film for your still camera."

*He was a young man, wasn't he?*

He was a kid. Couldn't have been older than 21 or 22.

*Was he unstable?*

No, not at that point. He was the most serious guy. One tended to get some eccentricity in the animation department. You don't get very good people without being eccentric.

*Derek has told me a little bit about Arthur because they also were very close.*

They liked each other a lot. The tragic thing was the drugs. We thought of him as such a reasonable character.

*He had been an art student, hadn't he?*

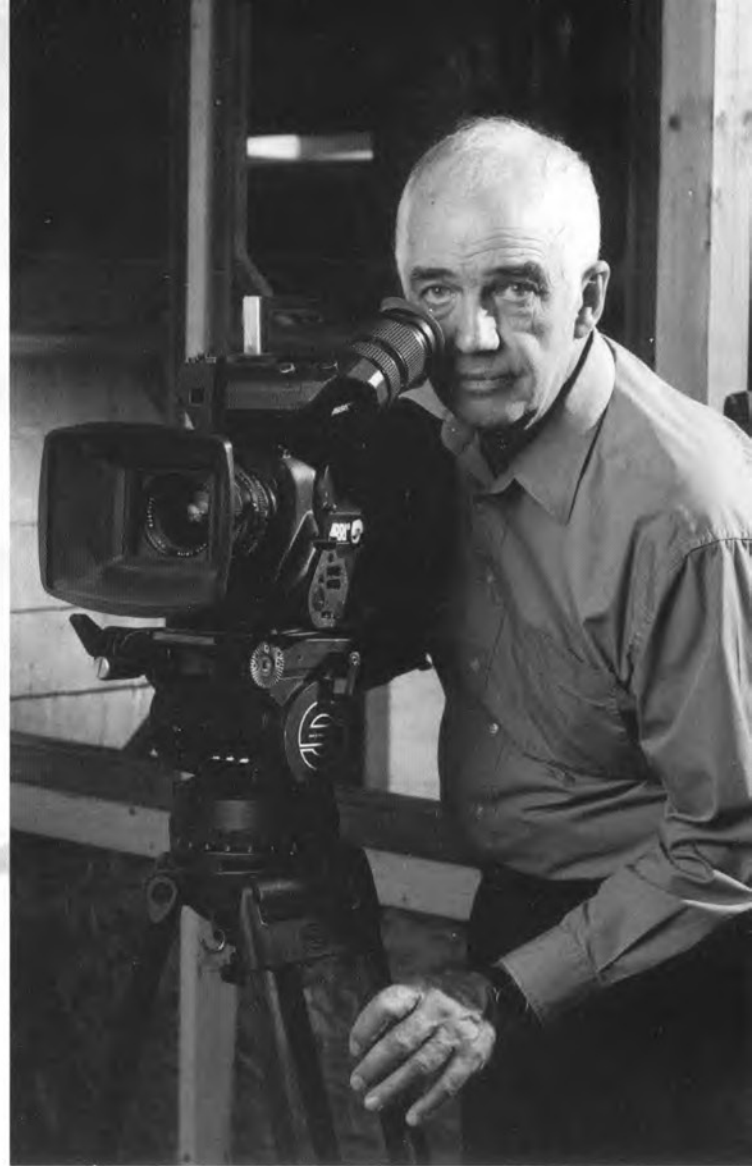
Yes, and a terrific artist. The whole experiment with drugs affected a lot of people by the end of the 1960s. There was a lot of LSD around. By this time I had very little to do with the animation department. After *Very Nice, Very Nice*, I watched his films and thought there was some very interesting stuff in them, but he needed some kind of support. I was working on *Labyrinth* and tired most of the time. He invited me over to see his house full of storyboards pinned up. In the end, I couldn't understand what he was trying to do.

*Let's go back to Very Nice, Very Nice.*

It was cut together and was a big success. However, there is another story about Arthur Lipsett. He did a beautiful film for me that was never, ever shown, and was lost. It was called *Faces*. It was done very quickly to demonstrate multi-image to the mayor of Montreal. It was done on two screens, in black-and-white, and projected in theatre three. Arthur had cut it together and he worked with Maurice Blackburn on the soundtrack. It was breathtaking. It just stunned the mayor and that's why we got the go-ahead on *Labyrinth*. It was done from art books that I had brought down here from the National Gallery. I told Jeff Hale to shoot 100 images on the animation stand, and he gave them to Arthur to cut together. It was so good that Roman took it to Japan to get the first Imax film. It got mislaid over there and never came back. There was only one cutting copy made. It couldn't be shown on television.

*Did you know him when he committed suicide?*

I saw him through various stages of disintegration. Sometimes he didn't seem to know me. The Film Board tried to reinvolve him, rehabilitate him, after he came back from Toronto. Toronto did him in, I think.



**Colin Low: "Coming from a ranch, I didn't go to movies very much. I thought I was going to the National Film Board to make posters. I was surprised to find that the first day there I was making films."**

*That was during the early 1970s drug scene.*

I was deeply concerned. He had come to my house once during the *Labyrinth* work and brought his storyboards. I told him I didn't have the time or the energy to get involved. I also remember when he first showed me *Very Nice, Very Nice* in the theatre, I told him it's a terrible downer. I don't believe the world is that disgusting. I said, "For God's sake, at least get a shot of that beautiful girl and put it in at the end."

*And did he?*

Yes, he did. I think it was a bad time for young, creative people. ●

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*The second part of this interview will be published in Take One No. 26, Winter 2000.*