

Atlantic Film Festival

by Ellen Reynolds

Showcasing eight feature-length films and videos with an "atlantic connection", the eighth annual Atlantic Film Festival Atlantique took place in Halifax last week. Over 30 films and videos, including many "shorts"; were part of the film festival, an event which has grown significantly year by year.

The Festival opened with a gala evening presenting the feature film *Finding Mary March*, which was filmed entirely in Newfoundland. This film dramatizes the hunt for the burial remains of Mary March, the last Beothuk Indian. Director Ken Pittman received the '88 Medalion Laboratory Award for Most Promising Filmmaker.

From October 11 through to October 15, films, videos and workshops with guest filmmakers were held at Wormwood's Cinema, the National Film Board and Oxford Theatre. Some of the highlights were singled out at the awards ceremony October 16 at Wormwood's. The People's Choice Award went to *Something About Love* by Tom Berry which stars Sydney's Stefan Wodolowski (he also co-wrote the script) as a big shot LA television producer who considers returning to his estranged Cape Breton home.

Comic Book Confidential by Ron Mann, a profile of 22 of the most significant artists and writers working in comic books, graphic novels and strip art, won the award for Best Feature Length Documentary. Best Short Film

Slightly overlooked by local press, the Festival highlighted the mini-boom in Atlantic film production.

Award went to *Jackass Johnny* by Alex Busby and David Coole, an off-best poetic experimental travel film. *Straight to the Heart (A Corps Perdu)* won the award for Best Feature Length Dramatic Film. Directed by Lea Pool, this film is the story of a photojournalist from Montreal who returns home after witnessing atrocities in Nicaragua.

The '88 Film Festival was a success despite the minimal media coverage. The event was well promoted but, unfortunately, most of us haven't yet recognized the growth and excitement in our own regional film industry. This year's festival was an opportunity to see this growing industry and the best of atlantic films and videos.



BLAM!

Hearing Pink Floyd's *Money* is what turned Rob Mann from a mild-mannered Sam the Record Man clerk into a full-fledged filmmaker. Freaking out after the 200th playing of "that fucking song," Mann hurled the album across the store. Transferred upstairs to the jazz section, Mann developed a love for black music and jazz, a love he wanted to capture on film.

Mann believes that film is art

His ideals

"... I realized that (selling out) is wrong — you have to do the film you want to make from the very beginning and then, who

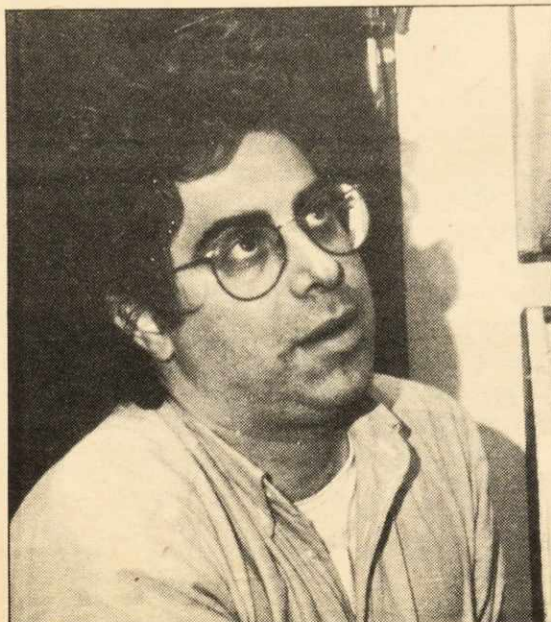
and says he has a lot of fun when he combines his passions — jazz, poetry, and most recently comic books — with his art.

Mann explained his view in a voice reminiscent of Tom Waits and Frank Zappa (two of his heroes), the laconic drawl of the radical intellectual, roused only when the interviewer calls his filmmaking traditional or when warming to the banners of censorship and subversion.

Here are some excerpts:

cares if you make a lot of money. I mean, money comes and goes — it's courage that matters and courage to do what you believe in. If I'd made that film (a commercial

cheapo product) I probably couldn't live with myself. I would've crossed over that line."



Raymond Mah: Dal Photo

Filmmaker Ron Mann says comics are art.

Comic Book Confidential

from an interview with Steven Slater



"Horror" graphic, circa 1950s.

Discovering comix

"It was a discovery process for me ... but what really jammed it home was finding out about Wortham, the psychologist who wrote *Seduction of the Innocent*, and said that comic books were believed to lead to juvenile delinquency. How my mother didn't want me to read comics was a hangover from the '50's and how J. Edgar Hoover had falsified statistics on juvenile delinquency and how it was a political tool ... What ensued was that publications had to do something quickly because they weren't getting their comic books distributed so they banded together to form the Comic Book Code of America. And that led to another period in comic book history which is hilarious and frightening at the same time — people were whiting out the words "horror" and "terror" and flattening women's breasts ..."

Film as traditional and possibly didactic

(Chokes) "Wow. I've never been called traditional or conventional ... but the film is linear, yes. Comic books are a static medium and that's a challenge (to transfer to film) — how to bring that work

to life. It's a pop history — it says who we are. As we've grown up, comics have grown up too. And it's also a social history."

Comics for kids

"... I'm presenting the subject to an audience that thinks comic books are just for kids, a place for super heroes and talking ducks ... But today there are more adult themes in comics."

Politics

"This film is political if you see comics as subversive, as I do. I mean, I thought *Mad Magazine* was very subversive. But comics have that potential of moving us, but they're the opposite of what (Village Voice cartoonist) Jules

Feiffer calls junk culture. *Mad Magazine* really made people think — about advertising, about what society was ramming down your throat."

Comics as art

"Will Eisner made it like film noir type of style. He really broke apart the panels. Comics are like motion pictures on paper, sure, and a lot of filmmakers like Fellini, and Renet, and Lucas are avid comic book readers."

"There's so much junk out of television now and out of movies, that people are turning more towards an alternative. Comics are in bookstores now — that's what's turning on a new audience."

The Review: "Euphoric, sense-shaking"

by Shelley Galliah

Motivated by a desire to change people's perception of comic books as figments of junk art, Ron Mann's *Comic Book Confidential* is a cult classic. This ambitious film destroys the stereotype of the bland and boring documentary. The viewer is mesmerized by an intricate collage of black and white photographs and footage, candid interviews, colourful comic book segments and dazzling graphics. In short, the visual spectacle was amazing and the accompanying soundtrack pulsating.

The film explores the history of comic book art from the 1938 birth of Superman, "who did for comic books what Babe Ruth did for baseball," to the new age work "Raw", a slightly bizarre graphics magazine. The movie illustrates the comic book as a product of society. Wartime patriotism created a need for cartoon super

heroes, and the later age of skepticism provoked Harvey Kurtzman's satirical "Mad" which parodied older comic book themes. The psychedelic '60s likewise exposed an LSD motivated underground comic book scene. As art, its freedom of expression was seriously threatened with the 1954 comic book code, and actual footage of the hearings are included. The documentary is rounded by its interviews with cartoonists such as Harvey Kurtzman, Stan Lee (Spiderman), Robert Crumb (Fritz the Cat), and Art Spiegelman (Raw).

I recommend this film to anyone who is not afraid of a euphoric, sense-shaking experience. It made me appreciate the comic book as an accessible authentic art form in an energetic, eye-blitzing, mind-blowing natural high that lingered long after the last frame disappeared and long after I had left the empty cinema.