



An Interview with Alison Crocetta

By Steve Ramos

CINCINNATI, Ohio—Audiences with the rare opportunity to view artist Alison Crocetta's fifteen film works at her June 17 retrospective at the Alice F. and Harris K. Weston Art Gallery in the Aronoff Center for the Arts (half of them sound, half silent), will experience the work of a multi-discipline filmmaker joining a vast community of multi-discipline art filmmakers.

Crocetta comes from a background of sculpture, installation and performance and uses all these artistic mediums for what she calls her "hybrid" moving image works which have been her focus for the past eight years.

As soft-spoken as her silent films, Crocetta does not think of herself as a trailblazer. Instead, she understands that she's a small and recent contribution to an extraordinary tradition of avant-garde film artists who come from classical disciplines yet integrate the plastic arts as well as a performance tradition into the moving image.

A faculty member in the Department of Art at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, she also looks back across the history of film for inspiration—beyond the heyday of the avant-garde via the New American Cinema Group and the Film-Makers' Co-op and even further back to early Hollywood and the Golden Age of silent cinema.

This search for inspiration from the mostly forgotten silents puts her in the company of artists such as Peter Land with his focus on Keystone Cops-variety slapstick, while Crocetta channels the more artful whimsy of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. There are no allusions to specific film classics in Crocetta's work, rather there is to the era of silent film itself.

"I'm coming to filmmaking totally self-taught," Crocetta says. "I think that's important. I'm coming to film through the visual arts and my background in performance and visual arts. It's a natural progression. I was thinking about films for ten years before I made them."

She is inspired by the '60s dance films of Joan Jonas and Bruce Nauman's photo series *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*. Unlike the silent filmmakers of early Hollywood, Crocetta steps in front of the

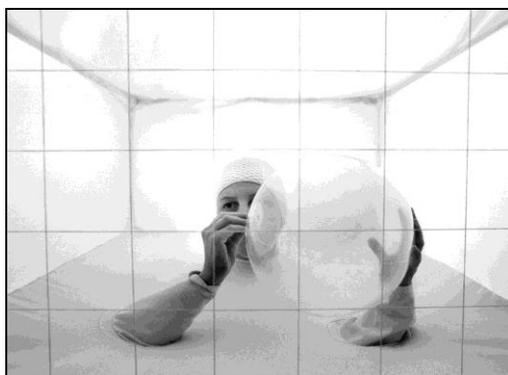
ALICE F. AND HARRIS K. WESTON ART GALLERY

camera and includes herself in her work; the human body, her body, takes center stage.

In this sense, Crocetta's films are an extension of her performance art as well as her visual skills. Lighting becomes a force for artistic expression instead of a means for highlighting a dramatic performance. The sound effects, whether from the musical trio Janus or the composer Barbara White, complement the images.

She described her use of a fixed camera as an expression of her deep interest in photography. In her Super 8 mm film trilogy *Gather/Shed/Lift*, she uses her body and costumes as architecture.

Whether speeding up or slowing down the images, Crocetta creates a whimsical sense of humor kindred to Chaplin and Keaton. It's as if she's walking through the history of film itself from silent cinema to the avant-garde and beyond.



Crocetta may share an artistic philosophy with the giants of the American avant-garde but she freely admits that she's still learning about the pioneers that helped pave the way for her work: Maya Deren, who also united film and dance, Richard Leacock and Shirley Clarke. Films like her 2003 Super 8 mm trilogy *Clear/Fill/Reveal* are subtle instead of flashy (she is no Pipilotti Rist) and share more with silent cinema and the avant-garde than the music videos of better known artists like Chris Cunningham or Michel Gondry.

Crocetta describes straightforward, walled projections throughout the lower Weston Art Gallery for many of her works. However, for the Weston's trademark glass box at street level, she remains busy creating what she calls her "headspace structure," part object and part film architecture that creates a one-on-one cinematic viewing experience like a modern-day nickelodeon.

"I'm starting to become comfortable with the thought [of being a filmmaker] and I've made enough work to think of myself as a filmmaker," Crocetta says. "I think I walk between the lines of filmmaking. I'm the director and I'm editing the films. I'm really working back to my roots in the visual arts."

Perhaps her work harkens back to a bygone era where mainstream audiences watched silent films. Yet, at the same time, Crocetta's films are truly auteur and remain on the outside of commercial cinema.

ALICE F. AND HARRIS K. WESTON ART GALLERY

Jonas Mekas, a poet and critic in addition to being a filmmaker, once said that people pay too much attention to the length of the film; now more than ever with Hollywood blockbusters running close to 150 minutes. In *Moving Images by Alison Crocetta*, one experiences little blockbusters, momentary flashes of beauty, laughter and drama that do the history of cinema proud.

Steve Ramos is a film journalist who contributes to a variety of national and international publications including Boxoffice Magazine, Screen Daily and New York Magazine.com. He can be reached at steveramos1@mac.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Alison Crocetta won a recent commission from EMPAC RPI (Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) in Troy, N.Y., to create a new film which will premiere in fall 2011. "A Circus of One," she stated, "continues my exploration into the relationship between sculptural form and performance action. In this new work, I document a series of short performance actions that range from the slightly dangerous to the absurd."

Page 1: Alison Crocetta, film still from *Shed*, 2008
Page 2: Alison Crocetta, film still from *Fill*, 2003



Weston Art Gallery in the Aronoff Center for the Arts
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