

# When The Hand Is Not Always Quicker Than The Eye

Frances Leeming

From my early formation as an intermedia artist my interests in the temporality of performance art and experimental film have been maintained. I followed other artists (Robert Whitman, Carolee Schneeman, Alex Hay, etc.) who had earlier incorporated film within their performances and happenings. I initially used film to produce magnification and dislocation of staged meanings of the body and space in performance. Newsreel disaster films were projected onto models of domestic architecture. Such acts contributed to what Kim Sawchuk has termed “monstrous feminist aesthetics.” Because my films are initially constructed by manipulating pictorial bodies by hand and not by computer, the film object retains a relationship to the gestures of the bodies in performance. I see this simple but laborious technique of image pixilation I see as a theatricality that plays with and troubles the convincibility of animation’s desire for realism as filmic spectacle.

My feminist research focus during the last fifteen years has tracked cultural issues of gender construction and consumption, advertising as the “official art of cultural capitalism,” fantasy architectures, and cultural tourism. This has included image research into representations of women, the feminine and domesticity, and the rhetorics of science and progress that have appeared in photojournalism, advertising, Hollywood film, and television texts since the 1940s.

**Man-Made Life (1985)**

**The Orientation Express (1987)**

The social critiques within my animated films *Man-Made Life* and *The Orientation Express* borrowed from the photo-montage work of Hannah Hoch and John Heartfield. Found imagery is taken from historically specific mass-media circulation photomagazines (*Life*, *Look*, *National Geographic*, *Vanity Fair*, etc.), institutional photo archives, and some original photography.

A core research thematic for my current work is a continued exploration of subjectivity and what strategies of resistance can be re-discovered as fictional interventions. *The Orientation Express* articulated representations of women acting out within prescribed social spheres of home, education, religion, and the workplace.

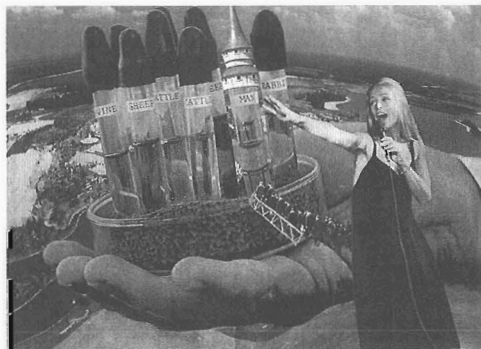
### **Pavilions in a Theme Park (2002)**

The just-completed film suggests what Mirielle Peron calls a “feminist pataphysics” at the level of imaginary solutions, a re-invented gendered science through fictive narratives. The research for this project analyses discourses of genetic engineering and reproductive technologies and control for their metaphorical and liminal possibilities. The liminal for my purposes is the contrast between the civil and unruly common to fairgrounds, theme parks, world’s fairs, and heritage sites.



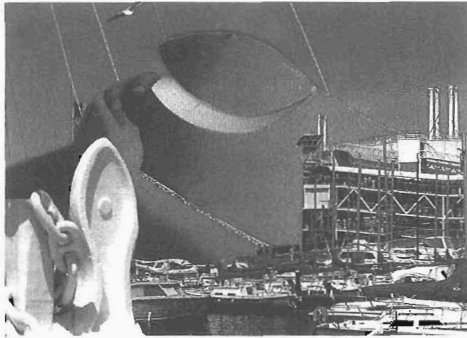
**Pavilions in a Theme Park** takes place at four sites:

1. **A Fortune Teller’s Booth / Information Centre:** The Fortune Teller counsels the wife of a successful entertainment mogul, a bio-engineer, and a surrogate mother.
2. **The Centre for Genetic Admiration:** A review of Walt Disney’s confusions between the “natural world” of human and botanical reproduction into anthropomorphic pedagogies.
3. **Franchising Futures:** A trade show of bio-entrepreneurialism featuring reproductive technology laboratories, sperm and egg banks, etc.
4. **Sea World:** A pavilion whose architecture is the third trimester pregnant body, which battles the scientific/medical interventions of competing teams of professionals.



Each Act of the film begins with a Fortune Telling session. The Fortune Teller has the technology and the intuition to embrace the past, present, and future. Mrs D. requires an explanation of the past, Mr B.E. (the bio-entrepreneur) is facing the present, and Ms S.M. (the surrogate mother) is in the process of making decisions about her immediate future.

In the first session we see the appearance of Walt Disney as a pollinating bee (Fig. 4) in sex education demonstrations. Disney's fictional depictions of procreation without sex—his Pinocchio character has been referred to as “mass



culture's first test tube boy" —are referenced along with "human pollination" evocations by fertility expert Severino Antinori.

The Franchising Futures Pavillion (Fig. 5) addresses the technological promise of "designer children." Young girls are seen working in a sperm donation clinic (Fig. 6). Photojournalism's miracles of Life, Birth, Creation, etc. are captured in mayonnaise jars.

Sea World is an amphitheatre with a retractable roof (Fig. 7). This site deals with the representations of the mother and the projected needs and protections of the fetus. Peggy Phelan's article "White Men and Pregnancy—Discovering The Body to be Rescued" gave me a plot line to follow. The surrogate mother who we see talking to the Fortune Teller is the Sea World pavilion.

There are many above-and-below water scenes in Sea World. Expensive yachts are

seen racing (Fig. 8) in the amniotic fluid. The yachts are also exploration vessels searching for new forms of life. Wildlife documentary addresses are borrowed for the narrative.

The production process for this and my last film does not utilize a standard approach for animated film. Following the content research, I build collections of imagery from which I create and rehearse narratives. I then write dialogue and layer the narratives further with genres of music and sound effects. This leads to the real post-production stage at which point I might re-shoot scenes, re-write the screenplays and re-edit the picture stories.