

Eric Breitbart: A Conversation on 50 Years as an Independent Filmmaker

Abstract:

Eric Breitbart is an independent filmmaker who made a living in the business for nearly 50 years. The focus of many of his films centered around the subject of “work,” in the artisanal or even industrial sense of the word, but he also concentrated on many different subjects which appealed to him. He also contributed articles to a number of publications on various film-related subjects, and he has exhibited his photography in France. In this conversation, Breitbart discusses his career, the benefits and challenges of being an independent filmmaker, and the joys and hardships he has experienced in his life, including an accident that left him unable to continue working.

The conversation covers the beginning of his career, after he left the Army in the mid 1960s. He was thrust into the anti-war movement when he joined the film collective, New York Newsreel. Here, he embraced social change that demarcated the late ‘60s and developed his skills as a filmmaker, which reached its culmination in *The Army Film*. Shortly thereafter, he moved on to independently distribute many educational and industrial films, as well as directing many of his own including *Janie’s Janie* and *Clockwork*. Various projects surfaced throughout the next two decades on subjects including the 1904 World’s Fair (*A World on Display*), the art historian Aby Warburg (*Aby Warburg: The Archive of Memory*) and residents at a palliative care facility in France (*La Maison*). His work is unique in its focus, preserving the memory of some often overlooked subjects, and his style of filmmaking was “independent” in the truest sense of the word.

Voiceover Narration:

On a few afternoons in the fall of 2016, I had the opportunity to talk to independent filmmaker Eric Breitbart about his life and career.

Our conversation spanned many topics, beginning with his foray into filmmaking, his career and filmmaking style, talk about many of his unique projects and the tragedies he’s experienced in his life.

We touched on many points, both specific to his career and his broad thoughts about how the independent film industry has changed, and how he views the exhibition and preservation of his work.

I went into this expecting one thing, and as can be expected, I came out with an entirely different experience. I had heard that Eric was disabled, but to me, I didn't fully understand what that meant.