



KARL LEMIEUX

Mamori

January 13 - March 14, 2010

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

Québec

KARL LEMIEUX
MAMORI

“What interests me is the substance and treatment of exaltation.”

Throughout the process of creating *Mamori*, Karl Lemieux used the full range of means he has woven together from his radical exploration of the powers specific to cinema, and in doing so summoned up that exalting state which takes us outside ourselves and the world. In a dialogue with matter, he put together a dynamic and abstract visual event that captivates the eye and plunges our attention into the thrilling movement of the energy that went into the visual composition. “Beginning with my first short film, I devoted myself almost exclusively to formal experiments that apprehend the image as a sensation.”

“I am moved,” says Lemieux, “because the film comes across as sensation... there is a subtle physical sensation that takes shape through the rhythm of the images, sounds and editing.”

A native of the Victoriaville area, Lemieux grew up with the Festival de musique actuelle and, inspired by the aesthetics of “noise music,” soon began working with images in the same way that avant-garde composers were treating sound. He detected an equivalence between acoustic and visual abstraction in the physical stimulation that each produced. “I am fascinated by the fact that these two forms of abstraction can come together in the cinema.”

The seed of *Mamori* lay in Lemieux’s desire to work with Spanish composer Francisco López, a prominent figure in avant-garde music whose work on sound abstraction Lemieux admires. López approaches sound as a phenomenon of perception and his work, which has a distinctly philosophical dimension to it, is devoted to exploring the real world through sound. After an initial contact and discussions, López invited Lemieux to participate in a creative residency at the Mamori ArtLab, which he had set up in the Amazon rain forest for sound artists making compositions based on sonic material recorded in the field. Hence the term *field recordings*.

Lemieux became involved in an intense and, as he puts it, “extraordinary experiment because it was first of all a creative ritual that led us to undertake an expedition into the world’s largest forest to work with the energy found in the forces of nature.” The artist approached his residency with the intention of working on a macro level, delving into the minutiae of his material but without making any attempt to “document” the environment as such. He took digital photographs and shot individual frames using Super-8 film—these included many long exposures that imparted motion to his images. He sought to capture the phenomena of light, using, as background, the textures of tropical vegetation, all the while remaining focused on the creative work to come. “It was an interesting constraint for me to tell myself that everything I could capture here would serve as raw material for my film.”

Mamori was also made possible by support from the National Film Board of Canada, which gave Lemieux access to its famous Animation Studio on Côte-de-Liesse Road in Montreal, a mythic place where Norman McLaren created his masterpieces. Upon his return from Brazil, Lemieux settled into an NFB space, converted it into a makeshift laboratory and set out on a long journey of exploration. There, the colour photographs he'd taken in Amazonia underwent an intricate process of transformation: the original digital photos were refilmed a photograph at a time, at a traditional animation stand using a 16-mm camera that had probably gone unused since the 1970s—Lemieux had unearthed it while rooting around the NFB premises. He did all his film development himself, fascinated by the different results he obtained. "This was probably the first film developed at the NFB since 1996," he said.

As early as his very first pieces, made at a time when many were working with video, Lemieux needed to "touch the film"; it had "a presence" with which he needed to be in contact. Lemieux takes a hands-on approach to his materials, enjoys touching and cutting film, and editing with adhesive tape, a ritual that has become his *modus operandi*. He mentions the beauty of the famous Steenbeck editing tables and his desire to travel with the entire range of filmmaking equipment: Super-8, 16-mm, 35-mm. "All of these tools yield different results and, using them, I get very special images."

In his NFB studio, Lemieux sought to bring out the grain of his images, to draw out something more tactile and pictorial than he saw in the original photos, "something akin to charcoal drawings done on paper, or to paintings." He did photochemical tests on expired colour film and kept only the resulting black-and-white images.

Lemieux prefers to work in black and white. Like Pierre Soulages and Franz Kline, he has an affinity for black. "The absence of colour," he says, "is a first level of abstraction." The gestural quality of Abstract Expressionist painting has also inspired him and he recalls the noise that a Riopelle suggests to him, the action inscribed on a canvas and the suspended energy at the tail end of a brush stroke.

"I am most of all interested in the question of experience—the experience one has watching a film, a corporal, physical and human experience." Viewing *Mamori*, we find ourselves drawn into the process that went into its creation; we follow Lemieux's successive manipulations of the image in its process of becoming. The rhythms of repetition and alternation, and the movement of black and white become the work's vector. Rhythm is used to structure an animated and lively force that exists for itself alone; only certain infiltrations of the sound score take our imaginations back to the tropical forest and that distant place in Amazonia that is *Mamori*.



KARL LEMIEUX

Born in Arthabaska in 1980.
Lives and works in Montréal.

An artist who belongs to the new wave of Montréal experimental film, Karl Lemieux attended Concordia University's Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema. While still a student, he became interested in the direct film-manipulation techniques used by Pierre Hébert, Jürgen Reble and Ken Jacobs. The New York School of the 1960s—Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Paul Sharits—and the work of French filmmaker Philippe Grandrieux shaped his conception of experimental cinema. Along with Daichi Saito, he founded the Double Negative Collective, which is devoted to the production and exhibition of experimental films.

Music plays an important role in the work of Lemieux, who grew up in Kingsey Falls near Victoriaville, where the Festival de musique actuelle is held. The improvisations of noise music are what sparked his interest in creating his own works. He is active on the music scene, regularly participating in concerts and performances in which he projects and manipulates—live—16-mm films on two to seven projectors at a time. He has worked with Roger Teller-Craig—Musée-goers will recall his contribution to the Friday Nocturne on April 4, 2008, along with Pas Chic Chic—as well as David Bryant of Set Fire to Flames and Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Radwan Moumneh of Jerusalem in My Heart, Shalabi Effect, Elizabeth Anka Vajagic, Jonathan Parant of Fly Pan Am, Alexandre St-Onge, Christof Migone, Olivier Borzeix, Hyena Hive, Thomas Ankersmit and Kevin Doria of Growing. On the theatre scene, he has been involved in two works by Marie Brassard, *L'invisible* (2008) and *The Glass Eye* (2007).

Lemieux has made many short films, including *The Bridge* (1998); *K1* (2001); *Mouvement de lumière/Motion of Light* (2004), distributed by the NFB on the DVD compilation *Matières vives/Volatile Materials* (abstract animation after McLaren); *Western Sunburn* (2007); *Trash and No Star!* (2008); and *Passage* (2008), distributed by Cinéma Abattoir on *À rebours*. These films have been shown at numerous festivals, including the Toronto International Film Festival, Montréal's Festival du Nouveau Cinéma; the International Animation Film Festival in Anney; the 25FPS International Experimental Film and Video Festival in Croatia; the EXIS Experimental Film and Video Festival in South Korea; the Festival des Cinémas Différents in Paris; the Lausanne Underground Film and Music Festival; and the Anthology Film Archives in New York. *Passage* (2008) garnered the Music in Shorts Award at the 24th International Hamburg Short Film Festival in 2008, the Grand Prize of the Jury/PHI GROUP, the Prix audace/NuFilm and the Prix image Bureau de Post/De Shed at the 2008 edition of Prends ça court!

FRANCISCO LÓPEZ

Born in Madrid in 1964.
Lives and works in Spain.

A key figure on the international avant-garde experimental music scene and a sound artist, Francisco López holds a PhD in biology and has taught at the University of Madrid.

< <

Over the past twenty-five years, he has developed soundscapes based on a personal response to the world. Breaking down the borders between industrial sounds and the sounds of nature, passionately going beyond the limits of the audible to the strongest powers of sound, López's artistic approach is completely oriented toward the acoustic exploration of the real world. His first recordings were of sounds emitted by white-noise generators, radios, tape recorders and cassettes. López's choices are determined by sounds' capacity to blend in with musical contexts totally foreign to their own origins.

< <

A selection of his first pieces, *Untitled 1981-1983*, is available on a mini-CD from the Sjaalplaat label. Drawing on the vast experience he has acquired making field recordings throughout the world since 1980, he has published over 200 pieces on various labels, including Alien 8. In 2000, he created his own music label, Absolute. López's compositions, mixes of barely audible sounds, have prompted Bad Alchemy (USA) to write that he plays "on the keyboard of silence."

< <

On Lopéz's official Web site (<http://www.francislopez.net/art/>), one can read the following: "Francisco López considers sound to be a simple vibration, which he strips of the meaning that stems from its origins, retaining only its acoustic qualities (like Pierre Schaeffer's sound objects). He approaches sound as a phenomenon of perception (not as a signifying phenomenon) and his work on environments can be summed up in the concept of 'expanded music' which eschews all documentary efforts and all representations of the world."

< <

He has done sound performances and installations throughout the world, and has had work commissioned by such reputed organizations as the Goethe Institute, the V2 Organization (Rotterdam) and the Argos Festival (Brussels). During his performances, he often plays in total darkness or asks his audience to put on blindfolds. In 2006, he was awarded First Prize in the Sound Art Competition of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León. On three occasions, in 2007, 2002 and 1999, he received an honourable mention at the Ars Electronica Festival. His *Untitled 213* was presented at the Spanish pavilion during the 2008 Saragossa International Exhibition.

< <



Mamori, 35-mm film, 8 min, digital transfer loop projection

© 2010 National Film Board of Canada

Direction, camera and animation: Karl Lemieux

Field recordings, composition and sound design: Francisco López

Editing: Mathieu Bouchard-Malo

Re-recording: Jean Paul Vialard

Digital imaging specialist: Pierre Plouffe

Producer: Julie Roy

Acknowledgments

Many people contributed to the production of *Mamori*.

Thanks to the Double Negative Collective, Michèle Bélanger, Louis Dupuis, Aldo La Ricca, the Mamori Artlab and the Vieira Da Silva family.

Thanks also to the team at the National Film Board of Canada

(Diane Ayotte, René Chénier, Serge Gaspard Gaudreau, Sue Courley,

Michèle Labelle, Francine Langdeau, Julie Laperrière, Françoise Laprise,

Guillaume Marin-Lafond, Christine Noël, Diane Régimbald).

Thanks to the team of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

(Éric Biodeau, Denis Labelle, Sylvain Parent, Michel Pêtrin, Carl Solar).

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to all those connected with the project, whether directly or indirectly.

French Program
Animation and Youth Studio
National Film Board of Canada
www.nfb.ca



The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal is a provincially owned corporation funded by the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec. It receives additional financial support from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts.