

Sheldon showcases filmmaker's creations

By Eric Peterson

A small but crucial fact about filmmaker Robert Breer's work is that he does most of it not on 3 by 5-inch white cards, as reported in *American Film*, the *Daily Nebraskan* and other sources, but on the larger format of 4 by 6 cards. Amateur animators have come to Breer "bloodshot...and hunchbacked," he said, perhaps exaggerating for effect, because they tried squeezing their work on cards too small.

Breer, one of the most prominent American avant-garde animators, was in Lincoln Thursday and Friday as part of a Sheldon Film Theatre film/Video Showcase of his short films.

Breer first began working creatively as a painter and sculptor. He went to live in Paris in 1949 and returned to the U.S. in 1958, and his love for France shows in his first extant film, *Recreation*.

"Americans went to Paris...to get away from a repressive society," Breer explained. "It was for sex and free living...to get away from family, to get away from the Puritan ethics and all that. And art was in a dynamic state."

Breer became involved with an avant-garde movement in painting there called neo-plasticism, concerned with a geometric abstraction influenced by Mondrian, Breer said. Mostly they were Commu-

nists, he added, with "a ferocious identification with the avant-garde."

What got Breer interested in film was the juxtaposition of images possible. "A thing that struck me about film as opposed to painting was that you don't see everything simultaneously. You could move from hot to cold (in film) without the hot and cold cancelling each other. There weren't any rules yet...because film was so new. That was what was thrilling about it."

Breer said he came to see his films as *tableaux vivants* — moving paintings — which were more like a series of still pictures for him than a portrayal of movement. The realistic or representational elements which pop up and then vanish from more abstract work served several functions in these moving paintings.

"Whether they constitute starting points or take-offs or diversions of digressions — all of those things are true," Breer said. "I found that this bombardment of images made for a thing that nobody had ever seen before, including me." The punctuated or percussive image in *Recreation* and many short films since is the price, he said, of putting the forms he wants next to each other.

Breer said working conditions for independent animators are not encouraging at present. "It's difficult. I think everybody is struggling — trying for small grants or working for television. It's a kind of backyard or cottage industry I guess, sort of a cross between an art and a craft."

The work still proves worth it for Breer. "It's a very enticing art form. I worry that the level of animation as an art form isn't as high as it should be. One reason is, of course, economics; another is the ten-

dency toward self-congratulation among animated filmmakers if they've got anything up there to wiggle on the screen at all."

Breer's lack of pretention was refreshing. "I never even considered myself an animator until other people started calling me that — I taught myself to make dogs walk and things like that."

Breer teaches at Cooper Union College in New York state. He said he is now working on a film about words. "I want the words on the screen quite a bit — convulsing themselves on the screen...trying to isolate the form of the word you read as opposed to the sound that goes off in your head as you read it."

Alabama . . .



Dave Trouba/Daily Nebraskan

Randy Owen onstage at the Bob Devaney Sport Center Friday.

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After deciding on a name, the group played small concerts in clubs throughout the South. The band members quickly agreed they didn't miss those days much.

"We always wanted to be professionals. It's harder to be a professional when you're in a bar and people are coming there to get a drink and meet someone, rather than to just listen to the music," Gentry said.

He said the band doesn't need a small setting to feel closer with the audience. "We like to get the audience closer to us now," Gentry said. "If we had our way, the audience would be right up there with us on stage all the time."

The band's first single was entitled "I Wanna Be With You Tonight." Unfortunately, shortly after recording the song, the label went bankrupt.

The group re-surfaced again in 1980 on MDJ label. On the strength of two regional hits on that tiny label — "I Wanna Come Over" and "My Home's In Alabama," RCA signed them to a contract in 1980.

The national hits came quickly after than. Their first album, *My Home's In Alabama*, contained three singles which soared to the top of the country charts.

Each song the band records has the "Alabama feel" to it, yet they don't write much of their material. Gentry explained what they look for in other writers' songs.

"A song has to touch me in a way that other songs don't," he said. "They have to make me cry or hurt or really believe. It has to be something that really ties together as far as the lyrics go and has the right feel as far as the music goes."

Despite the success with recorded music, Alabama still considers itself primarily a live band. "Live concerts is what it's all about," Owen said. "It's a whole different world. Studios are creativity. The stage is for entertaining. You like to play perfect on stage, but you're there to entertain and to make people forget about 9 to 5 and the various problems they have."

"The studio is to create something . . . for radio really," Owen said.

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