



*Remains to be Seen* (1989, revised 1990)

# Films

by Phil Solomon (4 Films, 1980-89)

Program Notes by  
Kurt Easterwood.

Originally published by the  
San Francisco Cinematheque.

Thursday, April 19, 1990.

*NOCTURNE* (1980, revised 1989), 16mm, B&W, silent, 10 minutes;  
*WHAT'S OUT TONIGHT IS LOST* (1983), 16mm, color, silent, 8  
minutes; *REMAINS TO BE SEEN* (1989, revised 1990), Super-8mm,  
color, sound, 15 minutes; *THE EXQUISITE HOUR* (1989),  
Super-8mm, color, sound, 15 minutes.

Phil Solomon often likes to describe his filmmaking as a reverse form of archaeology, attempting to find buried artifacts not by removing soil, but by dumping more on. In Solomon's case the "soil" is the layers of surface texture and imagery he acquires through optically printing (re-photographing) or chemically treating pre-existing film footage, either his own or found. Solomon's project, though employing a process contrary to that of the archaeologist, shares with the latter the same inquisitive impulse to search for what is hidden below the surface: both are engaged in a quest for remains.



*Nocturne* (1980, revised 1989)

Visually, Solomon's films border on the abstract, hiding behind scrimms of densely-packed images and shifting textures. But it is precisely this refractive nature of the films that works against the abstraction of a particular reality. The more we try to define exactly where our place is in the amorphous nature of the actual film material, the deeper we enter into what is—behind its surface. In the end, the role of archaeologist is placed onto the viewer. We search, we dream, we long both with Solomon and through Solomon. The territory we begin to traverse is sometimes murky, at other times ghostly, but always one destined to yield buried treasures. These riches are not handed to the viewer on a silver platter, however. There is no mapped-out yellow brick road; only the darkness of a starry night where the constellations formed are our own.

Despite their technical virtuosity, the films remain handmade. The heavily textured surfaces give the films a fragility, as if at any moment the film material itself could break. More importantly, though, it is their placing of the viewer in the uncomfortable realm of the past that makes one feel like one is walking on eggshells. The effort to grasp that which is slipping past, and the attendant sense of loss, pervades the work of Solomon, and as such, his films require ginger steps. But they also require a wide-eyed innocence, for through the fog Solomon is discovering remains to be seen, and so should we.