RON RICE (1935-1964)

Josh Guilford (Brown University)

Ron Rice was a central figure in the 1960s American avant-garde cinema. His films are closely affiliated with beat literature given their emphasis on improvisation and spontaneity, their engagement with themes such as social marginality, drugs, travel, and sexuality, and their documentation of artistic subcultures in San Francisco’s North Beach, Mexico, New York City, and Venice, California. As is suggested by his use of the neologism “Dazendada” to describe his work, Rice was influenced equally by the historical avant-garde (Dada, Soviet Cinema) and distinctly late-modern American cultural developments such as free jazz and the popularization of Zen Buddhism. At the same time, the comedic dimensions of his films have invited comparisons to silent slapstick cinema.

Rice only completed three works before his death by pneumonia at the age of 29: *The Flower Thief* (1960), *Senseless* (1962), and *Chumlum* (1964). An additional feature, *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* (1963/82), was assembled posthumously. While *The Flower Thief*’s rejection of narrative coherence and professionalism made it a cornerstone of the New American Cinema’s rebellion against classical aesthetics, Rice’s subsequent explorations of irrational montage, psychedelic imagery, and sexual debauchery contributed to the formation of a more explicitly countercultural Underground Film movement in the mid ‘60s. His works feature celebrated performances by underground actors such as Taylor Mead, Jack Smith, and Winifred Bryant.

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PARATEXTUAL MATERIAL

Stills from *The Flower Thief*, *Chumlum*, and *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* are available for viewing on the Anthology Film Archives website at:

<http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/collections/reference-library/stills/624>

Poor quality digital reproductions of *Chumlum* and *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* are available for viewing on UbuWeb at:

<http://www.ubu.com/film/rice.html>

A poor quality digital reproduction of *The Flower Thief* is available for viewing on YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCnX20yfJHk>