*Fireworks (1947)*

Running Time: 14 minutes

Kenneth Anger (b. 3 February, 1927, Santa Monica, California -)

*Fireworks*, Kenneth Anger’s breakthrough short film, brought him immediate renown, and acclaim from the likes of Jean Cocteau, upon its debut at the 1949 *Festival du Film Maudit* (Hutchison 27). Inspired by the baroque approach to imagery and mise en scène that dominates Cocteau’s *Le Sang d’un poète* [*The Blood of a Poet,* 1930], and exploring the trance-like machinations of the unconscious and dreams found in the cinema of Maya Deren, this film cemented Anger’s reputation as a pioneer of the “postwar American avant-garde cinema” (Mier). Homoeroticism, a growing disenchantment with violence, and the monolithic rememoration of figures of fascination and authority are amongst the major themes explored in *Fireworks*. To speak of an underlying thematic unity is to reduce the film’s stylistic and philosophical multiplicity; nevertheless, a number of key motifs predominate in the narrative and visual storytelling. For example, while the morphing matrices of phallic symbols (a totem, a missing middle finger) and icons of American power and consumerism (navy soldiers, a Christmas tree) hint at an overt use of symbolism, the suspended gaze of the camera emphasizes Anger’s own articulation of the work as the release of “all the explosive pyrotechnics of a dream” (*Fireworks*). After its public release, homophobic outrage against the perceived pornographic content of the film led to an obscenity trial; in the end, the California Supreme Court declared that *Fireworks* was art (Hattenstone).

**References and further reading**

Hutchison, Alice L. (2004) *Kenneth Anger: a demonic visionary*. London: Black Dog

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Meir, Christopher. (2003) “Fireworks.” *Senses of Cinema*.

“Kenneth Anger's Magic Lantern Cycle.” *Harvard Film Archive*. Web.

Hattenstone, Simon. (2010) “Kenneth Anger: ‘No, I am not a Satanist’.” *The Guardian*.

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**Selected Filmography**

*Lucifer Rising* (1972)

*Scorpio Rising* (1964)

*Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954)

*Rabbit's Moon* (1950)

*Puce Moment* (1949)

*Fireworks* (1947)

***Paratextual Material***

* VIDEO: See the Nigel Finch documentary, *Kenneth Anger’s Hollywood Babylon* (1991), along with a short article on Anger’s work a an author in *Cinephilia and Beyond*: (http://cinearchive.org/post/76969770877/donald-cammell-dennis-hopper-alejandro)
* See the *Vice*’s interview, article and expose on Anger: (http://www.vice.com/vice-meets/kenneth-anger)Kennet

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