

POUSTINIA

The Art of Gendron Jensen

POUSTINIA

Directed by Kristian Berg

A short documentary on the life and work of artist Gendron Jensen

*One of the best documentaries about an artist in a long while.
Touching and radiant.* -Ann Landi, ARTnews

The skill with which Jensen renders the uneven fissures and concentric rings of these amplified bones gives them a striking majesty... they mediate between past and present, functioning as repositories of both natural and mythic histories.
- Rob Silberman, Art in America

Synopsis

"Poustinia" tells of Gendron Jensen, a man passionately devoted to his artistic calling- he draws detailed, precise images of bones. Though bones traditionally represent sterility and death, Gendron sees them as "portals, threshold estuaries unto exaltation" representing the very foundation of being. Jensen has developed and steadfastly maintained this vision his entire life. "There is a majesty inherent in bones... a humbling geography that summons me to map its glories."

Kicked out of a monastery in his 20's, Jensen spent 17 years finding and drawing bones and other "mortal leavings" on his family's rented farm in the north woods of Minnesota. In 1987 he moved to the mountains of New Mexico to embrace new life and love. This move marked Jensen's introduction and immersion at age 50 into the arcane art of stone lithography.

Filmmaker Kristian Berg recreates Jensen's artistic journey - a brief, sincere portrait of a "forest eccentric", a technical virtuoso, a romantic visionary, and an original human being.

For more than 40 years this 74-year-old largely self-taught artist has obsessively, lovingly transformed found relics into wakeful images of uncommon beauty. His meticulously rendered, often monumental graphite drawings and stone lithographs compel the viewer to see anew -to journey beyond ordinary context to a deeper, more spiritual realm.

Director Statement

I met Gendron Jensen in 1967 when I was nine years old. He and my dad - an Episcopal priest - were great friends. Entering his bone-filled studio at the Jensen farm was a strange and memorable experience. Gendron's first art exhibition was in 1971 in the fellowship hall of our church- a series of graphite drawings of old milk pails he found around the farm titled "I Thirst". I first began shooting video of Gendron for a high school project in 1977, recording on reel-to-reel black and white videotape. Though the tapes were lost I never lost the desire to complete this film. I went off to school and eventually became a public television writer and producer. Now, decades later, comes this intimate portrait into the life of a dedicated, supremely gifted artist with a deeply felt view of the world and our place in it.

Production Notes

Minnesota composer/musicians contributed mightily to *POUSTINIA*. Steve Kaul of the Brass Kings wrote and performed the National Steel blues slide guitar that bookends and accents Gendron's artistic and physical journey from the North Woods of Minnesota to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico. Grand Rapids Minnesota native Anthony Miltich composed and performed several folk guitar tracks. And Anthony's nephew, gypsy jazz guitar savant Sam Miltich and his Clearwater Hot Club contributed "La Bossa du Grand Marais" with its romantic flair and gypsy fiddle by Tim Kliphuis. Sam is also Gendron Jensen's godson.

The Filmmaker

Kristian Berg's first independent film experience was as associate producer on *FORECLOSURE* (1982) a short community-made rural Minnesota narrative film produced as a statement on the farm crisis. As a producer for Twin Cities Public Television he wrote, produced and directed the PBS documentaries *THE DAKOTA CONFLICT* (1993) and *DAKOTA EXILE* (1996) on the story of the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War and the resulting diaspora of the Dakota people. For Court TV he produced hour-length episodes on the Scottsboro Boys civil rights trials and the capture and trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann. He has also created stories for various PBS series including *NEWTON'S APPLE*, *ZOOM*, *NOVA: ScienceNOW*, and *HISTORY DETECTIVES*. He was awarded fellowships from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to attend the Sundance Film Festival (2002) and the CPB/PBS Producers Academy WGBH workshop (2003). Berg is currently a senior producer at WPSU/Penn State Public Media.



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Festival Awards

Diane Seligman Award for Best Short Documentary
14th Woodstock Film Festival 2013
Woodstock NY

Best Short Documentary - Audience Award
33rd Minneapolis St Paul International Film Festival 2014
Minneapolis MN

Grand Prize & Best Documentary
7th Lancaster International Short Film Festival 2014
Lancaster PA

Screenings

7th Taos Shortz Film Fest 2014
Taos NM

7th Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival 2014
Sebastopol CA

5th Duluth Superior Film Festival 2014
Duluth MN

4th Green Bay Film Festival 2014
Green Bay WI

2nd Grand Junction Film Fest 2014
Grand Junction CO

Harwood Museum of Art
Arthur Bell Auditorium
Taos NM June 7, 2014

3rd College Town Film Festival 2015
State College, PA

Casket Cinema
Art-A-Whirl 2015 Short Film Showcase
Minneapolis, MN May 16, 2015

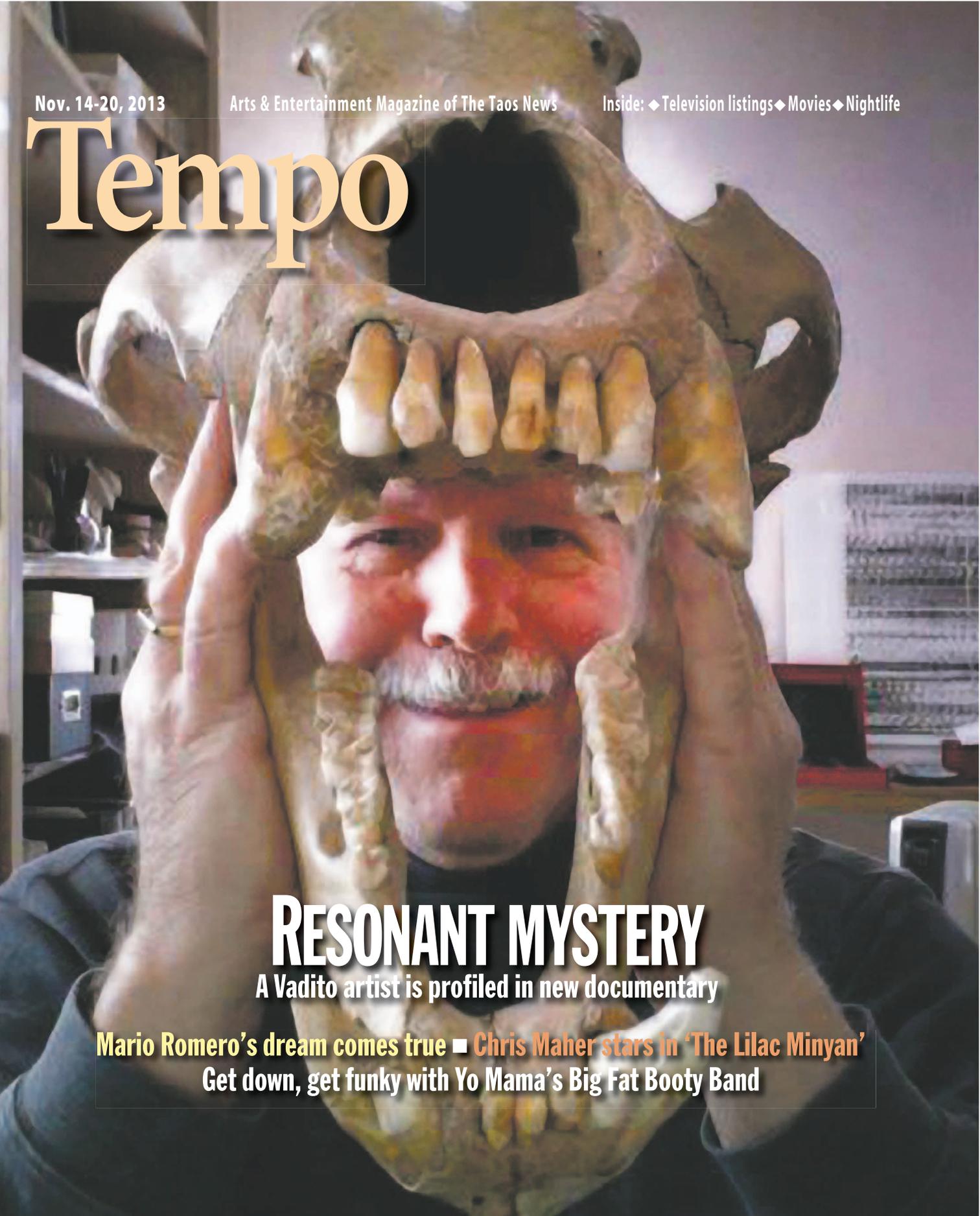
Best of MSPIFF at Creative City Market
Presented by the Film Society of Minneapolis St. Paul
Minneapolis, MN August 13, 2015

Nov. 14-20, 2013

Arts & Entertainment Magazine of The Taos News

Inside: ♦ Television listings ♦ Movies ♦ Nightlife

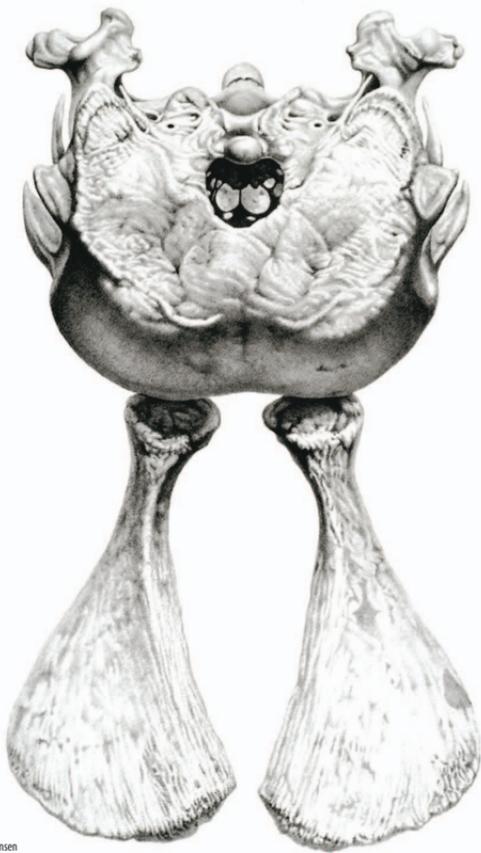
Tempo

A man with a mustache is smiling and holding a large animal skull in front of his face. The skull is held up by his hands, framing his eyes and nose. The skull has a row of sharp teeth visible. The background is a workshop or studio with various items on shelves.

RESONANT MYSTERY

A Vadito artist is profiled in new documentary

Mario Romero's dream comes true ■ Chris Maher stars in 'The Lilac Minyan'
Get down, get funky with Yo Mama's Big Fat Booty Band



'Bidden V' by Gendron Jensen

Courtesy: Image

Resonant mystery

A Vadito artist who looks into bones
and beyond is profiled in new documentary

By Yvonne Posquera

Artist Gendron Jensen has lived in Vadito with his wife Christine Taylor Patten for 26 years. An accomplished artist, Jensen is most notable for his drawings and lithography prints of found animal bones.

Over a four-day period in July 2011, a Minnesota filmmaker named Kristian Berg ventured into the Carson National Forest around Vadito to shoot a documentary about Jensen.

Berg's 28-minute film, titled "Poustinia," recently won the award for Best Short Documentary at the 2013 Woodstock Film Festival.

Artist biographies abound, both in print and film, but in keeping with Jensen's highly spirited approach to art and nature, "Poustinia" is a romp verité through the woods and Jensen's creative process.

Nevertheless, making art is mostly a solitary pursuit. When asked how he could tolerate having someone follow him around with a camera, Jensen first points out that "artists can't live in a vacuum. We find out who we are through others. In the context of relationship, there is more to be experienced and discovered versus us being alone."

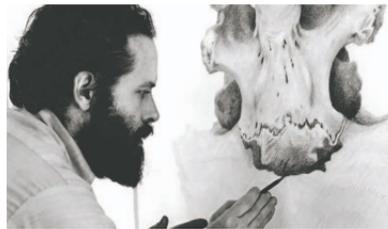
When the question persisted, he explains, "Kristina and cameraman Benjamin Webb vanished in the doing of their craft. In the act of recording, there was no sense of intrusion or invasion; it was like a dance."

Jensen's list of accomplishments is substantial. He has several decades worth of exhibitions, lectures, articles, prizes and fellowships to his credit, according to his website. Some of his drawings appear in public, academic, and corporate collections across the country.

"Jensen's painstakingly meticulous pencil renditions automatically silence a viewer into a meditative state," Taos County Arts Commissioner David Hinke says. "The respect he clearly has for his subject matter, bones, is the opposite of clinical."

In a statement on his website (gendronjensen.com), Jensen says "For me, beyond the physical fact of death, bones are portals, thresholden estuaries unto exaltation. The bones seem to verily sing, they hum with resonant mystery."

POUSTINIA continues on Page 26

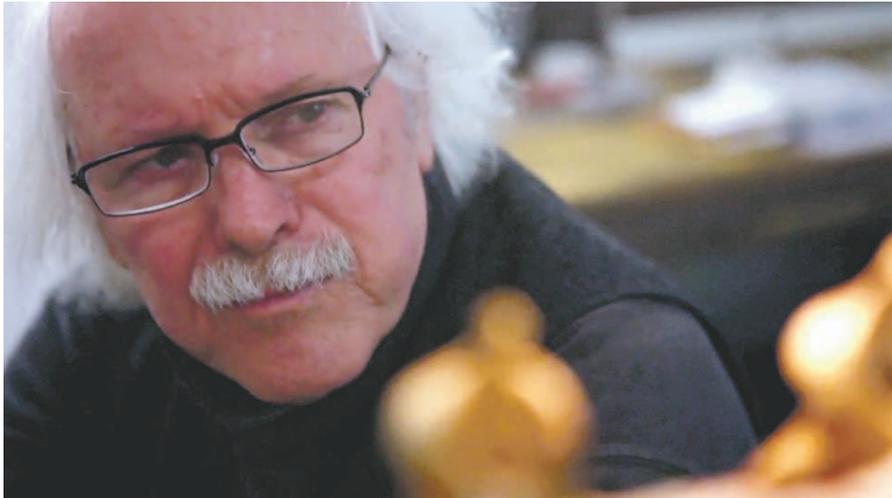


In the film, 'Poustinia,' we see Vadito artist Gendron Jensen as he begins his artistic quest.

"For me, **beyond** the physical fact of death, bones are portals, thresholden estuaries unto exaltation. The bones seem to verily **sing**, they **hum** with resonant mystery."

“There is **no other artist** that I know who **has the patience** that Gendron has to **draw the way he does**. He has been true to his vision for all these years and **never wavers from it.**”

Bill Lagattuta



Courtesy image

Gendron Jensen as he is today, as depicted in a frame capture from the film.

When a cineaste chooses the subject of their film, a lot of preliminary research goes into identifying who will be the main focus of the film. That wasn't the case with Berg's process; because he had an existing relationship with Jensen.

“I knew Gendron as a child,” Berg said. “My dad was the Episcopal priest in Grand Rapids, Minn., and he and Gendron were great friends. In fact, Gendron calls dad his ‘chosen brother.’”

The personal affection between the filmmaker and the artist is evident. Jensen says about Berg, “I felt I was in good hands. I once told his father: ‘My soul is in your hands.’ Now during the filming, I was in his son's hands.”

Berg had started work on the documentary in 2001, filming Jensen during visits to Minnesota. Then, a decade later, Berg got the chance to film Jensen at home in Vadito. “I shot interviews with Gendron and Christine, and on one of Gendron's ‘bone hunts’ in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains,” he says.

The film crew also shot footage at the University of New Mexico Tamarind Institute in Albuquerque, where Jensen was finishing a big stone lithography project.

Bill Lagattuta, a master printmaker at Tamarind, says, “Lithography is a print-making process that really lends itself to drawing and there is no other artist who I know that has the patience that Gendron has to draw the way he does. He has been true to his vision for all these years and never wavers from it.”



‘Bidden II’ by Jensen

Courtesy image

The “Documentary Filmmakers Handbook” notes that ultimately, a film's “story” is found in the editing room. Indeed, when asked about the short running time (28 minutes) of “Poustinia,” Berg concurs, “The film found its own length. Our film editor, Gregory Feinberg, found wonderful connections and circular patterns within the story — cutting back and forth from 73-year-old Gendron to footage we had of him at 43 years old.”

Documentaries are a way of experiencing the world. And we all know a good documentary when we see it; not only is information conveyed, but our higher desire for artistic storytelling is satisfied. Clearly, the prestigious juror panel at the Woodstock Film Festival felt “Poustinia” fit this bill. By way of the film, it is simply terrific that a Taos County resident has received this honor.

Jensen's longtime residence in Vadito reflects his deep affection for the area. He loves the area for its multiculturalism and points out that the Spanish word for artist is *artista*, in the feminine.

“That's because we are the birthers of more than our kind. It takes more than our self to create art,” Jensen says. “It's the community that creates the artist.”

MINNPOST

Art-A-Whirl to screen short films; Davina & The Vagabonds, Charlie Parr among State Fair acts

By [Pamela Espeland](#) | 05/13/15

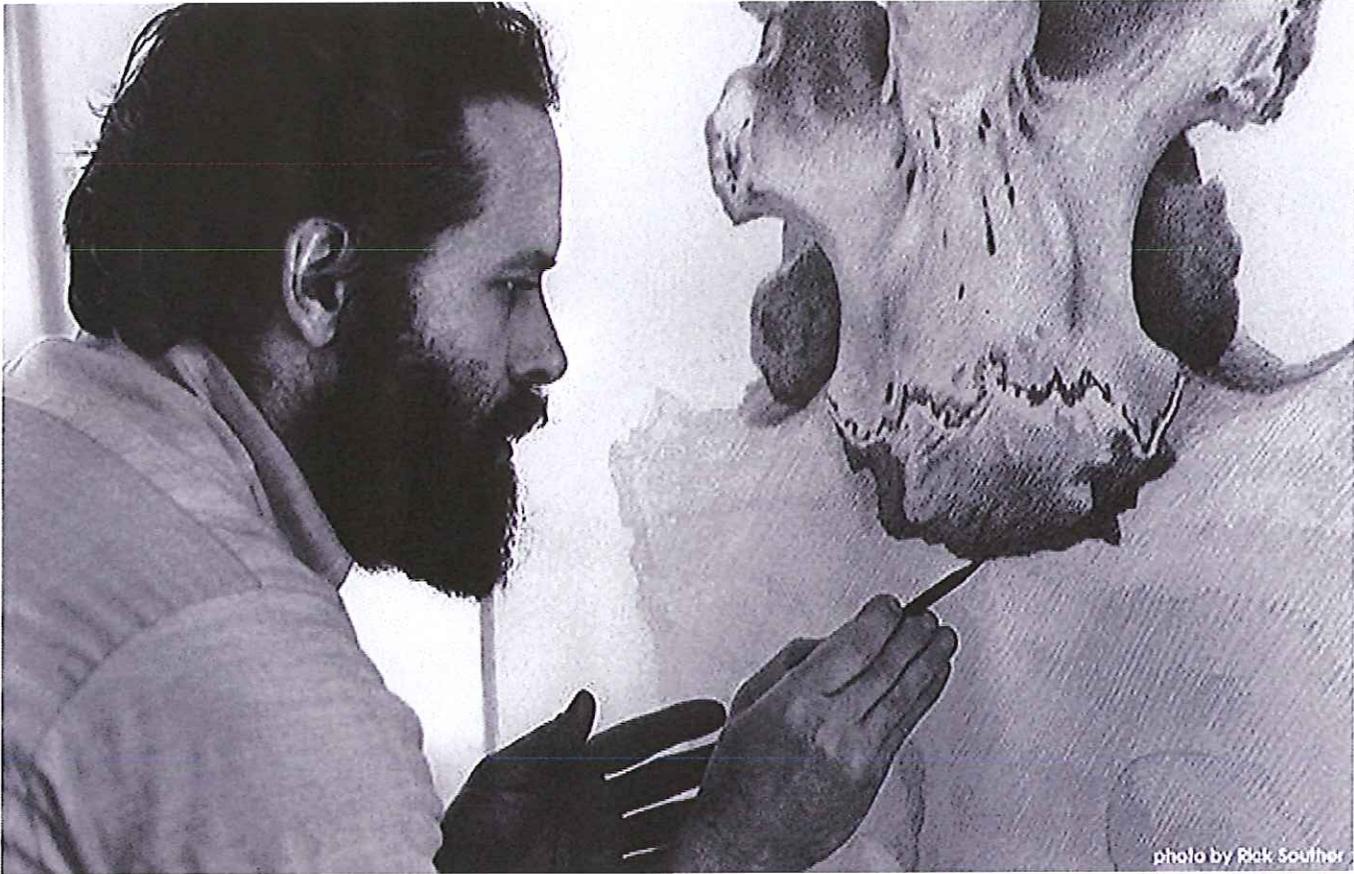


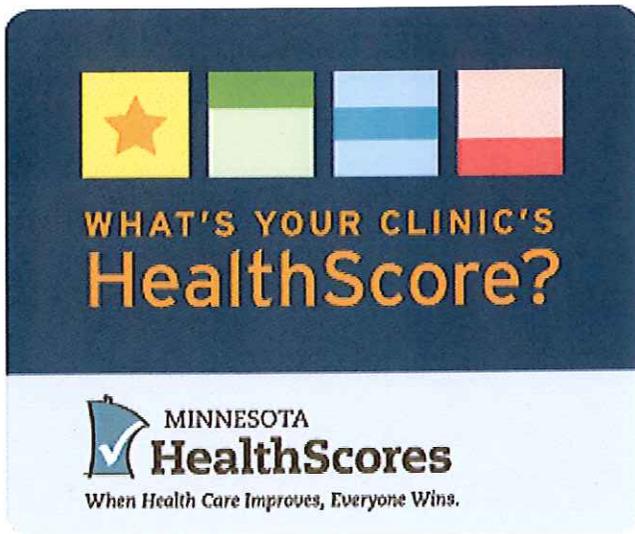
photo by Rick Souther
Photo by Rick Souther

A still from "Poustinia: The Art of Gendron Jensen," to air during Art-A-Whirl.

Among the zillions of things to do at this weekend's Art-A-Whirl is a **Short Film Showcase at Casket Cinema**, an underground micro-cinema in the Casket Arts Building. The six films include "Warren MacKenzie: A Potter's Hand," the acclaimed documentary about the great Minnesota potter ([here's the trailer](#)), and the award-winning documentary "Poustinia: The Art of Gendron Jensen."

"Poustinia" is a profound and beautiful jewel of a film, a sensitive look at an unusual artist and man. A self-described "North Woods weirdo," **Gendron Jensen** draws bones with pencil and paper: meticulously detailed, precise and insightful images of the bones of wild creatures he finds on his walks through forests. Kicked out of a monastery in his 20s, he spent 17 years as a semi-

hermit on a rented farm in northern Minnesota before moving to the mountains of New Mexico. Now 75, he's been drawing bones for more than 45 years. He finds in them all the meaning and inspiration he needs.



In the film, Jensen explains what “Poustinia” means: “It’s Slavic in origin. ‘Poustin’ means a house or little dwelling place. ‘Poustinia’ has to do with our spiritual grounding ... For me, it has always been the bones. ... It’s the water that the fish names, the locus out of which our unfurling evolves.” And: “The bones are not static to me, even though the creature is dead. ... [They are] animate, active, vibrant, vital beings.”

Jensen speaks like a poet, probably one reason he was chosen to illustrate Robert Bly’s 1977 book “This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood.” He has

been a fellow at the Smithsonian, studying the blue whale skeletons in their collection. His work and that of his wife, artist Christine Taylor Patten, are in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Filmmaker Kristian Berg, who grew up in Grand Rapids and once worked at TPT, has known Jensen most of his life, and he treats his subject with utmost respect and affection. This short film, just 28 minutes, will leave you with much to ponder: about being an artist, persistence, love, and the general rightness of finding and following your path, however strange it may seem to others. “Look into instead of at,” Jensen says. “Be open.”

If you can’t catch “Poustinia” at Casket Cinema, you can watch it on TPT 2 on Thursday, June 11 at 9:30 p.m. or Sunday, June 14, at 6:30 p.m.

*The Short Film Showcase screens Saturday, May 16 at 7:30 p.m. **FMI. Free.***

Intricate artist focuses on nature's small miracles

An essentially simple and direct style is pursued with such scrupulous care and single-minded intensity of vision as to make the drawings of Gendron Jensen very nearly amount to a whole new art form.

That is admitted overstatement, but it seems forgivable when one is standing before the amazingly pure, yet mystic, pencil creations of this relatively unknown 38-year-old artist, who lives almost reclusively in Grand Rapids, Minn., and who lives quite exclusively in the service of meaningful beauties that he extracts from tiny fragments of nature's leftovers.

An understated exhibition (through Oct. 12) of about two dozen Jensen works has a stunning impact at the Art Lending Gallery, 25 Groveland Ter.

The drawings are somewhat larger than usual for the medium, but don't raise their voices above the muted grayish tones of pencil on paper. Still, their powerful designs grapple your eye from across the room and the intricacy of their close-up detail draws you into unsuspected worlds of natural wonder and private imagination.

I feel uncomfortable describing the source materials of Jensen's art because a bald description invites wrong connotations that, I feel, can be offset only by seeing the remarkable uses to which this artist puts them.

About eight years ago, Jensen started looking carefully at the small scraps and refuse of natural living-and-dying he chanced upon in the woods and streams near his rural studio. They were little bits of animal and fish bones, fragments of turtle skeletons, minuscule cast-off snail shells smaller than a pea: In other words, the relics of minor animal beings abandoned and ignored on nature's midden-heap.

Close scrutiny of the fragments revealed to him not only elegant shapes in their overall design, but a wealth, an infinitude, of fine-grain variations in detail. Apparently identical segments of vertebrae or of shell specimens were separately different in these minute ways.

Don
Morrison



Gendron Jensen's meticulous approach to art

What this has to do with art is that he converted both the never-ending richness of nature's functional design and the even more prodigal variations that happen within similar design forms into carefully structured compositions that are based on an absolute factuality (their elements drawn precisely from life) but which create a whole new design of consciously abstract beauty.

These works could be called "real" surrealism or surrealistic reality. The complex shapes are recognizable as authentic anatomical structures but, of course, we've never looked at them this closely before. Drawn to a magnified scale, the tiny specimens become imposing pieces of fantastic architecture, and when several are juxtaposed into a larger composition, it is a trip into wide-open realms of imagination.

Many of the drawings pair off similar shapes in symmetrical opposition—a pair of crayfish claw-segments or a mirror-imaged pattern of fish vertebrae and bone-

plates—with an effect like Rorschach ink-blots. The staff at the Art Lending Gallery says this provokes lively response from visitors, who find wonderfully fanciful images and stories in wholly abstract designs. One drawing has acquired an affectionate gallery nickname: "The Duelling Dinosaur Pickles."

But, they all go far beyond mere whimsy or contrivance. Jensen's draftsmanship and the almost obsessive precision of his pencil is awesome. Close examination reveals that he has recorded the most infinitesimal variations of detail in the textures of snail shells or the lacy porosities of bone: his paired specimens are *not* identical; his series of helmet-like crayfish heads or shell spirals are each an exact portrait of a separate, tiny, distinctive entity.

This helps impart the mystic qualities of the work (a spiritual devotedness, if you will). The pains the artist takes in recording the distinctiveness of each obscure creature's material remnant argues the importance he sees in the life it once had. The value, by extension, that all life has if only we would stop to recognize the special uniqueness of every living thing, however great or pitifully small.

Minneapolis

Tribune



Entertainment/
Arts/Books

1D

Sunday
September 24
1978

20D

Minneapolis Tribune

Sun., Sept. 24, 1978

Looking at art

By William R. Hegeman

■

Gendron Jensen speaks in a language tinged with the cadences of the King James Bible. The tales of faith and doubt, blindness and discovery, truth and error found in that book help model his view of the world.

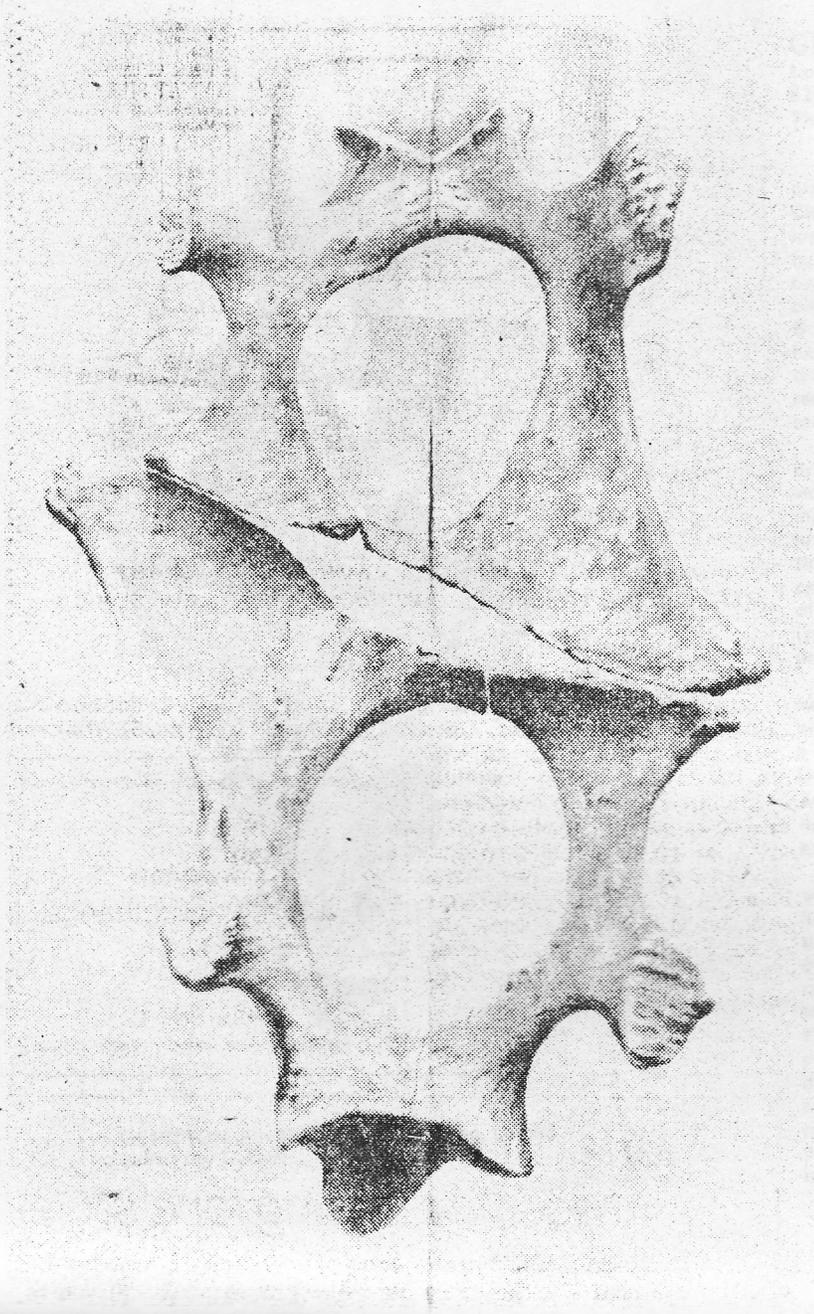
Like all profoundly religious people, Jensen is a moralist, and his exquisite pencil drawings are invitations to see anew. Eschewing traditional devotional imagery, he chooses for his subjects such minute remains of animal life as turtle joints, crayfish claws and snail shells. These are rendered in large-scale drawings, though the intimate details of the subject are never lost.

The drawings are meditative acts for the artist and a similar serious scrutiny is demanded of the viewer. Close examination of a pair of snail shells, for instance, shows not only the myriad details of the shells but the formal elegance of the interconnecting spirals that make the two shells a single entity.

Wrenched from their natural context and altered in scale, these bones and shells are transmuted. Though tied to their origins in nature, they are curiously self-sufficient, self-referential images. In that, they become art, not just illustration. Jensen's aquatic series and other drawings are at the Art Lending Gallery, 25 Groveland, through Oct. 12.

■

William R. Hegeman is the Minneapolis correspondent for Art News magazine.



"Aquatic Series, No. 3" by Gendron Jensen

Woodstock Film Festival honors film about Minnesota artist

Posted by: Lee Svitak Dean under [Art](#), [Awards](#), [Behind the scenes](#), [Movies](#)
October 10, 2013 - 9:18 AM

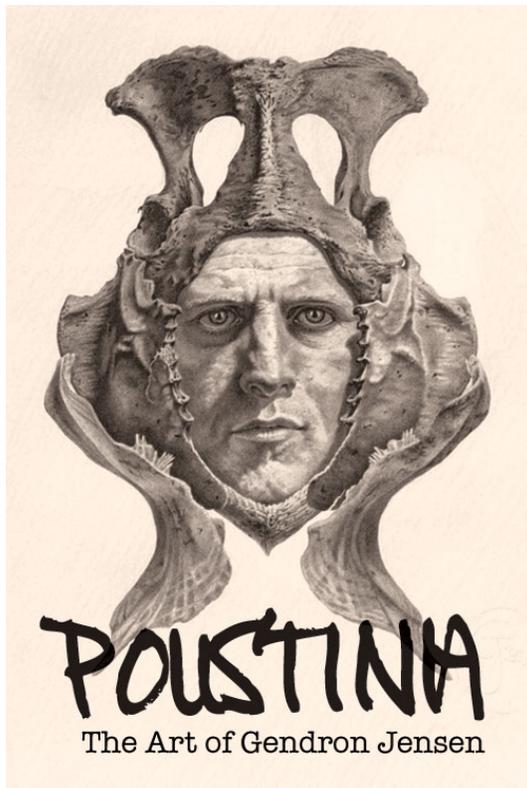


Gendron Jensen in 2010. Photo by Lee Svitak Dean

Among the winners at last weekend's [Woodstock Film Festival](#), in New York, was a film about artist [Gendron Jensen](#), 73, who for many years lived in Grand Rapids, Minn. Gendron has been drawing meticulously detailed images of bones for more than 45 years, in pencil and in stone lithography.

Filmmaker [Kristian Berg](#), who grew up in Grand Rapids, won Best Short Documentary for the 28-minute film, "[Poustinia/ The Art of Gendron Jensen](#)." Its title references a place where one retreats to meditate and pray.

The documentary focuses on Gendron's artistic passion and his search for what he calls "the bony relics of wild creatures." The film taps into a remarkable archive of film footage and photos from the past, as we watch Gendron first as a young man and later, white-haired and slightly stooped, in his 70s, still tramping through the forests and at work in his studio, which is now outside Taos, N.M., where he lives with his wife, artist Christine Taylor Patten. "For me, it's always been the bones," Gendron says in the film.



The promotional image from the movie is a self-portrait that Gendron did in 1983. In the drawing, his profile is surrounded by the bones of four creatures: the pelvic girdle of a black bear, freshwater fish bones, the sternum of an eagle and the jaw bone of a snapping turtle.

Largely self-funded, the documentary has been in the works for more than a decade, though Kristian's effort to capture Gendron on film began much earlier. While in high school, Kristian shot a black-and-white film of the artist, who was a close friend of his father. "I've known him since I was 8 years old. All the kids in the neighborhood knew Gendron," Kristian said. "He had his first art show in our church." That early footage, however, did not survive. Music in the film is from local composers.

The documentary has been entered into other film contests, and Kristian, a longtime filmmaker who once worked at Twin Cities Public Television, hopes to see it air locally at some point. "It's a natural that it should be in Minnesota. It should be all over the nation, really," he said. "My ultimate wish for the film is to inspire gallery owners to put together screenings where Gendron could lecture on his work."

Find the film trailer below.

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What Makes a Regional Film Festival Worth Attending? For Woodstock, It's the Casual Vibes

2013 Woodstock Film Festival Audience Awards

Best Narrative Feature:

[THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM](#) directed by Andrew Mudge

Honorable Mention: [UNDER THE SAME SUN](#) directed by Sameh Zoabi

A TIE for Best Documentary Feature:

[AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY: THE EVOLUTION OF GRACE LEE BOGGS](#) directed by Grace Lee

[MAGICAL UNIVERSE](#) directed by Jeremy Workman

Maverick Awards

- The Maverick Award for **BEST FEATURE NARRATIVE** was presented to:
[The Forgotten Kingdom](#), directed by Andrew Mudge
- Honorable Mention was presented to [Winter In the Blood](#), directed by Alex and Andrew Smith
- The Maverick Award for **BEST FEATURE DOCUMENTARY** was presented to:
[American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs](#), directed by Grace Lee
- Honorable Mention was presented to [Magical Universe](#), directed by Jeremy Workman
- The Maverick Award for **BEST ANIMATION** was presented to:
[Feral](#), directed by Daniel Sousa
- Honorable Mention was presented to [A Tangled Tale](#), directed by Corrie Francis Parks

- The Diane Seligman Award for **BEST SHORT NARRATIVE** was presented to [The Earth, the Way I Left It](#), directed by Jeff Pinilla
- The Diane Seligman Award for **BEST STUDENT SHORT FILM** was presented to [Above The Sea](#), directed by Keola Racela;
- Honorable Mention was presented to [Late Spring](#), directed by Zachery Kerschberg
- The Diane Seligman Award for **BEST SHORT DOCUMENTARY** was presented to [Poustinia](#), directed by Kristian Berg
- Honorable Mention was presented to [The Beast and the Angel](#), directed by Shira Piven
- The Haskell Wexler Award for **BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY** was presented to [The Forgotten Kingdom](#), cinematography by Carlos Carvalho

Grand Rapids native takes top honors at renowned film festival

Story Commenting



Photography by David Morris Cunningham (thehalkulens.com)

2013 Woodstock Festival

Photo from Woodstock Film Festival

From left; Leon Gast, Paul Rachman, Kristian Berg, Lisa Gossels, and Anthony Miltich at the Woodstock Film Festival in New York state.

POUSTINIA - official selection of the 2013 Woodstock Film Festival - won the Diane Seligman Award for Best Short Documentary. Jurors included Leon Gast (Oscar-winning director, WHEN WE WERE KINGS), Paul Rachman (director, AMERICAN HARDCORE and co-founder Slamdance Film Festival) and Lisa Gossels (director, THE CHILDREN OF CHABANNES).