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### Experimenting with experimentation

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BY ADAM BALL

New Mexico filmmaker, teacher and curator **Bryan Konefsky** has been championing experimental filmmaking and its right to be treated with the same respect and consideration allotted to more mainstream, narrative-based filmmaking since he moved to our state in 1991. To him, handmade, personal, singular works will always be more interesting than the larger, big budget, collaborative works that come out of Hollywood — what he calls “codependent” cinema.

Starting April 17, Konefsky will bring *Experiments in Cinema, v3.0* to Albuquerque and it will continue all weekend, shattering the audience's idea of the potential of film. *Local iQ* sat down and talked with Konefsky about the festival and about contemporary media in general. *Local iQ*: Tell us about Experiments in Cinema. Bryan Konefsky: This is the third year we have done the festival. The festival is a collaboration between Basement Films and The Department of Cinematic Arts [at UNM]. It's designed to advance the mission of Basement Films even further — supporting underrepresented forms of cinema. With so many Hollywood films being produced in the state, the conversation around what a movie experience is, seems to be becoming more conflated as people are simply rallying around 'the cult of celebrity.' The point of our festival is to bring the international community of experimentalists to the state and to challenge New Mexicans to think differently about cinematic histories and inspire and develop home grown communities of experimentalists. We also hope that our festival will help expand the state-wide conversation around movie making. *iQ*: How many and what types of films will you be screening? *BK*: This year we are going to show about 45 films and most of them, typical of experimental cinema, are shorts. The longest piece we have is about 30 minutes. We are really interested in introducing New Mexico to international experimental cinema. We have films from Russia, Germany, Brazil, Panama, France, Canada and from the States — including works from New Mexico. We will screen abstract films, essay films, political manifestos, film poems, dance films, portrait films and others.

**iQ**: What experimental filmmakers excite you now? Specifically, newer filmmakers that have emerged in the last 10 years or so?

**BK**: It seems like most of the interesting experimentation is coming out of Europe these days. Some of it is being distributed by this group called Six-Pack Cinema. There, people such as Peter Tcherkassky and Haron Farocki come to mind. And then there are veterans of the form such as George Kuchar, Barbara Hammer, Jim Trainor and Agnes Varda. But, I'm most interested in a new generation of experimentalists who are imagining the (cinema) in ways we could never imagine. This new crop of film artists include Nomi Talisman (Israel), Courtney Egon (New Orleans), Hanni Welter (Germany), Alexei Dmitriev (Russia), Chi Jang Yin (China) and Karen Hipscher (New York).



## An interview with Bryan Konefsky, *Experiments in Cinema V.3.0*

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**iQ:** Are there any more narrative-leaning or mainstream, non-experimental filmmakers that you find interesting, that have emerged in the last few decades or so?

**BK:** No (laughs). I could say Guy Maddin. I think the movies he is making are pretty interesting. I call watching mainstream movies "research."

**iQ:** Which filmmakers or films when you were younger, changed the way you thought about movies or influenced you in any major way?

**BK:** The first time I saw Todd Haynes' *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*; it was in theaters for about a week or so before the Carpenter family sued (to have its release stopped). That was remarkable and that really changed the way I thought about cinema. When I was an undergrad in college I had an opportunity to take a course with George Morris who used to write for *Village Voice* and he is credited at the end of *Slacker* as an inspiration. He taught a French New Wave class and I just got thrown into watching films like *Godard's Weekend*. I had no idea what was going on but that really interested me. **iQ:** What is your take on so-called "new media," in particular high definition digital video and YouTube? How has this changed the medium of being a film/video maker? **BK:** New media is one of those meaningless terms that people use when they don't know how to truly describe something. I like the term 'technologies of representation' better; they change and they are developed; they are analog one day; they might be digital the next day; they might be biomorphic. Even though technologies change, their purpose is always the same. That purpose is to be a creative tool (like a paintbrush), and as a creative tool their function is to be a barometer of the human condition. My tagline about new technologies is that they are not going to save us. **iQ:** How do you feel about the influx of films being shot in New Mexico? What do you like or don't like about the system as it currently stands? What do you think they need to do differently? **BK:** I think for short term economic impact on the state, I think it's great that Hollywood is here. Have they made anything that is interesting aesthetically? I don't think so. Will they ever? I don't think so. I don't think Hollywood ever has the potential of ever making an interesting movie. **iQ:** Did you always feel that way? **BK:** For a long time I have. Since the late '70s, when I sort of rediscovered cinema on my own terms. When I am being less cynical, I do believe that the experimentalists and those making more mainstream movies have something to say to each other. When I am being more cynical, I can't get beyond recognizing the millions and millions of dollars Hollywood wastes every time they produce a film. That money could be used in so many more useful and meaningful ways. However, it is interesting that Hollywood is here because, as a result, the governor has now taken an interest in New Mexican filmmakers. So we have *The Governor's Cup* and the New Visions Award. And in the case of the New Visions Award, they actually have an experimental category. That is remarkable and I don't think the New Mexico Film office, who hosts that award, would have moved in that direction had Hollywood not come to the state.

**Konefsky will host Experiments in Cinema v3.0, a four-day film festival scheduled to run from Apr.17 to Apr. 20 at multiple venues around the city. For more information, visit [basementfilms.org/experiments.html](http://basementfilms.org/experiments.html)**

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