

P R O T E U S

A NINETEENTH CENTURY VISION

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SYNOPSIS

*The ocean is a wilderness reaching round the globe,
wilder than a Bengal jungle, and fuller of monsters,
washing the very wharves of our cities and the gardens of
our sea-side residences.* – Henry David Thoreau, 1864

For the nineteenth century, the world beneath the sea played much the same role that "outer space" has played for the twentieth. The ocean depths were at once the ultimate scientific frontier and what Coleridge called "the reservoir of the soul": the place of the unconscious, of imagination and the fantastic. *Proteus* uses the undersea world as the locus for a meditation on the troubled intersection of scientific and artistic vision. The one-hour film is based almost entirely on the images of nineteenth century painters, graphic artists, photographers and scientific illustrators, photographed from rare materials in European and American collections and brought to life through innovative animation.

The central figure of the film is biologist and artist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919). As a young man, he found himself torn between seeming irreconcilables: science and art, materialism and religion, rationality and passion, outer and inner worlds. Through his discoveries beneath the sea, Haeckel would eventually reconcile these dualities, bringing science and art together in a unitary, almost mystical vision. His work would profoundly influence not only biology but also movements, thinkers and authors as disparate as Art Nouveau and Surrealism, Sigmund Freud and D.H. Lawrence, Vladimir Lenin and Thomas Edison.

The key to Haeckel's vision was a tiny undersea organism called the radiolarian. They are among the earliest forms of life. Haeckel discovered, described, classified and painted four thousand species of these one-celled creatures. In their intricate geometric skeletons, Haeckel saw all the future possibilities of organic and created form. *Proteus* explores their metamorphoses and celebrates their stunning beauty and seemingly infinite variety in animation sequences based on Haeckel's graphic work.

Around Haeckel's story, *Proteus* weaves a tapestry of poetry and myth, biology and oceanography, scientific history and spiritual biography. Goethe's Faust and the alchemical journey of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner are part of the story, together with the laying of the transatlantic telegraphic cable and the epic oceanographic voyage of HMS Challenger. All these threads lead us back to Haeckel and the radiolaria. Ultimately the film is a parable of both the difficulty and the possibility of unitary vision.

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The visual core of the film is Haeckel's artwork, photographed from the originals at the Ernst Haeckel Haus in Jena. Texts are taken from period letters, poems, ship logs and scientific narratives. The images and words of *Proteus* are complemented by the narration of Tony and Obie award-winning Broadway actress Marian Seldes (*Three Tall Women, A Delicate Balance, Ivanov, Equus*) the sound design of George Lockwood (*The Living End, Water and Power, The Decay of Fiction*) and Yuval Ron's score for piano, keyboards, string quartet, woodwinds and percussion.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS

The animated documentary *Proteus* explores the nineteenth century's engagement with the undersea world through science, technology, painting, poetry and myth. The central figure of the film is biologist and artist Ernst Haeckel, who found in the depths of the sea an ecstatic and visionary fusion of science and art. (49 words)

An “animated documentary” exploring the nineteenth century's engagement with the undersea world through science, technology, painting, poetry and myth. (20 words)

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Over the years I have worked with different animation techniques to bring life and motion to the art work of various cultures, including European signs and symbols, Tibetan Tanka paintings and Precolumbian stamp designs. When I first saw Ernst Haeckel's nineteenth century lithographs of single-celled undersea life forms, I was inspired to search for ways to animate their evolution and bring to life their extraordinary beauty and variety.

From my obsession with these tiny creatures, I found myself drawn into an ever-broadening investigation of the sea and the nineteenth century imagination. These explorations eventually encompassed marine biology and oceanography, poetry and painting, alchemy and mysticism, and led me into interaction with dozens of scientists and scholars around the world. The film *Proteus* is the end result of this long and – to me at least – endlessly surprising process.

David Lebrun
Director

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BIOGRAPHY AND FILMOGRAPHY OF THE DIRECTOR

Director David Lebrun was born in Los Angeles in 1944. He attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon and the UCLA Film School. He came to film from a background in philosophy and anthropology, and most of his films have been attempts to get inside the way of seeing and thinking of specific cultures. He has served as producer, director, writer or editor of more than sixty films, among them films on the Mazatec Indians of Oaxaca, the Hopi and Navajo of the American Southwest, Mexican folk artists, a 1960s traveling commune, Tibetan mythology and a year in the life of a Maya village in Yucatan. He edited the Academy-award winning feature documentary *Broken Rainbow*. He is currently producing a film on the history of the decipherment of the ancient Maya hieroglyphic writing system, *Breaking the Maya Code*, under a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Lebrun combines the structures and techniques of the documentary, experimental and animated genres to create a style appropriate to the culture and era of each film. In *Sanctus* (1966) he intercut three Mexican rituals (the Catholic mass, the bullfight and the Mazatec sacred mushroom ceremony), using parallel gestures, symbols and structures to create a meta-ritual on film. In *The Hog Farm Movie* he used wide angle lenses, a constantly moving hand-held camera, optical printer layering and jagged, looping editing to capture a commune's acid-fueled bus journey across 1968 America. In *Tanka* (1976) he programmed details from Tibetan sacred scroll paintings into an optical printer to create an illusion of animation, bringing to life the hallucinatory after-death experience described in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Several films of the late 1970s and early 1980s (*Luminous Bodies*, *Wind Over Water*, *Sidereal Time* and *The Crystal Ship*) were designed for live performance using multiple, variable speed projectors.

Proteus has been in the making for more than twenty years; the first version of the script was written in 1981, and major shooting was done in Jena, East Germany in 1986, well before the fall of the Berlin Wall. *Proteus* is Mr. Lebrun's first feature-length film.

Select Filmography (as director)

Sanctus (1966)

The Hog Farm Movie (1970)

Tanka (1976)

Luminous Bodies (1979)

Sidereal Time (1981)

Wind Over Water (1983)

Proteus (2003)

Breaking the Maya Code (in progress)

Metamorphosis (in progress)

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Select Festivals, Awards and Fellowships:

Awards for *Proteus*:

Outstanding Creative Achievement, Santa Barbara International Film Festival

Awards for *Tanka*:

Bronze Hugo, Chicago International Film Festival

Director's Choice Film, Sinking Creek Film Celebration

As well as:

Gold Medal, Virgin Islands International Film Festival

Cash Award, Ann Arbor Film Festival

Honorable Mention, Bellevue Film Festival

Select Festival Screenings (as Director):

Sundance Film Festival

Santa Barbara International Film Festival

Philadelphia Film Festival

Atlanta Film Festival

Newport Beach Film Festival

Woods Hole Film Festival

Filmex (Los Angeles International Film Festival)

Filmex Special Retrospective, *Animation, the Illusion of Motion*

Athens Film Festival

Sorrento Film Festival

Wellington Film Festival (New Zealand)

Conference on Visual Anthropology

The Margaret Mead Film Festival

The Flaherty Seminar.

Fellowships and Grants:

National Endowment for the Humanities Production Grant, 2001

National Endowment for the Humanities Scripting Grant, 1998

Dorland Mountain Colony Fellowship, 1981.

Reed College Creative Artist Grant, 1966

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

MARIAN SELDES (the Narrator) is a major figure in American theatre. Her Broadway roles have included *Medea*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Ondine*, *The Chalk Garden*, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, *Tiny Alice*, *A Delicate Balance*, *Father's Day*, *Equus*, *Deathtrap*, *Ivanov* and *Ring Round the Moon*. Off-Broadway roles have included *The Ginger Man*, *Isadora Duncan*, *Painting Churches*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Three Tall Women*, *The Boys From Syracuse*, *Dear Liar* and *The Play About the Baby*. Ms. Seldes most recently starred in *Becket/Albee* at the Century Theater. She has received a Tony Award and 5 Tony nominations, a Drama Desk Award and 5 Drama Desk Nominations, a Helen Hayes Nomination, 3 Obie Awards, including an Obie for Sustained Achievement in 2001, and other awards too numerous to mention. She was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 1996, and received an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from Julliard in 2003. Ms. Seldes also appears frequently on television and in films, most recently in *Mona Lisa Smile*.

COREY BURTON (the voice of Ernst Haeckel) studied radio drama with the legendary Daws Butler, and has worked with nearly all of the original Hollywood Radio Theatre veterans in classic-style broadcasts. The San Fernando Valley native has voiced sound-alikes and original characters for hundreds of commercials and other projects. Theatrical film work includes *E.T.*, *Total Recall*, *Poltergeist* and most of Disney Feature Animation's releases over the past two decades, including the roles of Moliere in *Atlantis* and Captain Hook in *Return to Neverland*. TV animation voice credits span several popular Disney and Warner Brothers series, among many others. Burton has been an announcer for all the major TV networks, can be heard at Disney and Universal Theme Parks worldwide and has narrated an eclectic assortment of documentaries.

RICHARD DYSART (the voice of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner) hails from Maine's Kenebec Valley. His New York career began off-Broadway with Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* and ended on Broadway with Jason Miller's *That Championship Season*. He performed in repertory theatre across America and is a founding member of San Francisco's American Conservatory Theatre (ACT). Mr. Dysart has acted in over forty films, including *Being There*, *The Hospital* and *Pale Rider*. TV-movie credits include *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, *The People vs. Jean Harris* and *Last Days of Patton*. Mr. Dysart gained nationwide TV fame as senior law partner Leland McKenzie on the NBC series *LA Law*. Now in retirement, he lives with his wife, artist Kathryn Jacobi, in Santa Monica and in Sychelt, British Columbia, where he tends an apple orchard.

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PHILIP PROCTOR (the voice of Wolfgang von Goethe) is one of the four members of the legendary Firesign Theatre, founded in the sixties and still going strong. Phil sang in *The Sound of Music* and *A Time for Singing* on Broadway, and has received numerous awards for his work in theatre. On television he is the voice of the *Big Brother* series and plays Howard on *The Rugrats*. Recent film roles have included seahorse Bob in *Finding Nemo*, Charlie in *Monsters, Inc.*, the drunken French Monkey in Eddie Murphy's *Dr. Dolittle* series, and a Chef in the Academy Award winner *Spirited Away*.

JAMES WARWICK (reading the log of HMS Challenger) trained as an actor and director at the Central School in London. He played leading roles in London's West End and national touring productions, including *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Dr. Faustus*, and Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*. British TV roles include *Partners in Crime*, *Lillie* and *The Bell*, all shown here on PBS Masterpiece Theatre. Since moving to the United States, Mr. Warwick has played Arthur in the national tour of *Camelot* and Sir Robert Chiltern in the Broadway production of *An Ideal Husband*, together with numerous other theatrical roles and hundreds of TV appearances. As a director, James has directed numerous productions at the Connecticut Rep, Paper Mill Playhouse, the Berkshire Theatre Festival and elsewhere. His latest production is *Suspect*, a new musical for the NYC Fringe Festival.

Composer YUVAL RON studied at the Berklee College of Music. He has composed scores for numerous feature and short films, and has done extensive television work for CBS, UPN, Fox, the Disney Channel and others. He has composed several commissioned works for chamber ensemble and symphony orchestra, most recently *Sephardic Songs of Exile*, for orchestra and soloists. Additionally, he has created 18 scores for theater and modern dance productions, notably his collaborations with the Butoh master Oguri.

Mr. Ron is also the founder of the Yuval Ron Ensemble, an ensemble of Israeli and Arabic musicians, in which he plays the oud. Together with the Ensemble he has produced numerous collaborative concerts of Israeli, Arabic and other world musicians, most recently in two seasons of concerts at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. His recordings include *In Between the Heartbeat*, *One*, and *One Truth*, a collaboration with Omar Faruk Tekbilek. His latest CD, *Under the Olive Tree*, brings together the sacred musical traditions of Judaism, Sufism and the Christian Armenian Church. He has received grants from the California Council for Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Composers Forum and the National Dance Project. Mr. Ron, an Israeli native, lives in Los Angeles.

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Sound Designer GEORGE LOCKWOOD began his career in visual effects for motion pictures, with credits ranging from the California Raisins commercials to such films as *Return of the Jedi*, *Total Recall*, *Darkman*, and the *Robocop* features. In the mid-80's, he supervised the restoration of such classic films as *The Ten Commandments* and *White Christmas*. He has been a regular judging panel member for television's Emmy Awards in the category of Visual Effects.

In 1989, George designed and produced his first soundtrack, Pat O'Neill's Sundance Film Festival Grand Prize winner *Water and Power*. His work in sound design also includes Gregg Araki's *The Living End*, Jefery Levy's *Drive* (winner of the Venice Film Festival's Critic's Prize), Les Bernstein's *Night Train* (on which he also did the visual effects) and O'Neill's recent *The Decay of Fiction* (on which he also served as Director of Photography). As a musician, Mr. Lockwood's experience ranges from the study of Carnatic (South Indian classical) violin with Dr. L. Subramaniam to playing Irish fiddle for James Cameron's *Titanic* and performing with his five-piece ensemble, Buzzworld. Mr. Lockwood received his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts School of Film and Video; he lives in Van Nuys, California.

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COMPLETE CREDITS

Voice cast:

narrator	MARIAN SELDES
Ernst Haeckel	COREY BURTON
the Ancient Mariner	RICHARD DYSART
Wolfgang von Goethe	PHILIP PROCTOR
log of HMS Challenger	JAMES WARWICK

Production credits:

written, produced and directed by	DAVID LEBRUN
music	YUVAL RON
sound design	GEORGE LOCKWOOD
animation design	DAVID LEBRUN
still photography	RICHARD EDWARDS DAVID LEBRUN AMY HALPERN
animation camera	CHUCK MARTIN KEVIN HAUG RICHARD EDWARDS
animation layout	HELDER SUN
cel retouching	CHRISTOPHER LEBRUN
video logging	ALAIN DUROCHER
film assembly	BRUCE LANE
keyboards	YUVAL RON
piano	BRIAN PEZZONE
violin	PHILLIP VAIMAN
violin	ALYSSA PARK
viola	SHANTI RANDALL
cello	DAVID SHAMBAN
piccolo, flute, clarinet, oboe, English horn	CHRIS BLETH
Italian cane flute, nose flute	ROBERTO CATELANA
wine glass, toy hammered dulcimer	ENZO FINA
additional percussion	STEVE FORMAN
Irish violin	GEORGE LOCKWOOD
music recording studio	PARAMOUNT RECORDINGS
engineer	GUY SNYDER

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Production credits (cont'd):

translations from the German	EVELYN BRINKER
narration recording, New York engineer	SONY STUDIOS VINCE CARO
narration recording, Los Angeles engineer	SUNBURST RECORDING BOB WAYNE
film and video editor dialogue editor	DAVID LEBRUN ERIC MARIN
sound effects editor, rerecording mixer	GEORGE LOCKWOOD
animation facilities	LUMENI NICK VASU, INC.
film laboratories	CFI FOTOKEM
film coding	ITECH FILM SERVICES
video transfers	FILMWORKS
analog audio transfers	MIX MAGIC
digital audio transfers	SOUNDWORKS STUDIO
optical track	NT AUDIO

Consultants:

FREDERICK BURWICK	Dept. of English, Univ. of California at Los Angeles
ALEX CALDER	University of Auckland, New Zealand
ALLEN COLLINS	Dept. of Integrative Biology, Univ. of California Berkeley
PAUL DAYTON	Scripps Institute of Oceanography, La Jolla
MARGARET DEACON	Dept. of Oceanography, Southampton University, UK
MARIO DI GREGORIO	History Dept., Universita' del' Aquila, Italy
MICHAEL GHISELIN	Senior Research Fellow, California Academy of Sciences
MICHAEL KERZE	Interfaith Center, Occidental College
TIMOTHY LENOIR	History Dept., Stanford University
ERIC MILLS	Dept. of Oceanography, Dalhousie Univ., Halifax Nova Scotia
JESUS PINEDA	Biology Dept., Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
PHILLIP REHBOCK	Dept. of History, University of Hawaii

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Consultants (cont'd):

ROBERT RICHARDS	Director, Fishbein Center for the History of Science, University of Chicago
TONY RICE	Institute of Oceanographic Sciences, Surrey
WILLIAM RIEDEL	Scripps Institute of Oceanography, La Jolla
HELEN ROZWADOWSKI	Dept. of History and Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania
JOHN WOODCOCK	Dept. of English, Indiana University

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ERNST HAECKEL HAUS
FRIEDRICH SCHILLER UNIVERSITÄT, JENA
Prof. Dr. sci. nat. R. Stolz, Institutsdirektor
Dr. Erika KrauBe

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REVIEWS AND ARTICLES

VARIETY

***PROTEUS* by Scott Foundas**

Man's dream of uniting nature and art forms the subject of *Proteus*, a stimulating scientific inquiry that may cause audiences to look at (and think about) the world around them in dramatically different terms. The first feature-length work by documentary and avant-garde filmmaker David Lebrun, one-of-a-kind pic, reportedly some two decades in the making, should become a sought-after item on the fest circuit and for experimental film showcases. Tube sales should also be brisk, though Lebrun's majestic, laboriously hand-crafted images more than deserve the splendor of the big screen.

Pic begins as an ostensibly straightforward investigation into the life and work of 19th century artist and biologist Ernst Haeckel, whose major work, *Art Forms in Nature*, synthesized his two disparate passions by presenting lithographs of some 4,000 species of previously unidentified single-celled sea creatures called radiolarian. Haeckel did both the identification and the lithography.

Haeckel's story becomes the jumping-off point for a series of fecund associations in which Lebrun establishes connective tissue between Haeckel and such unlikely compatriots as Sigmund Freud and Vladimir Lenin, the architects of the first transatlantic telegraph cable and the fictional title character of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (beautifully voiced by Richard Dysart).

It's a very dense amount of material to pack into an hour of screentime, but Lebrun manages to make it seem effortless, never moving too fast for non-science types to keep up. In the end, Lebrun keeps bringing it all back, dazzlingly, to Haeckel.

Like his subject's own work, *Proteus* (pic appropriately takes its name from the shape-shifting Greek god of the sea) does not merely represent a casual interest in a subject. Rather, what gives the film its propulsive strength is the sense that Lebrun has fully given himself over to Haeckel, allowing himself to become consumed to the point of near-obsession.

Particular energy has been spent on finding the ideal way to convey Haeckel's unique images in a distinctly cinematic vessel. *Proteus* is a constant visual treat, as Lebrun takes photographs of Haeckel's actual drawings and animates them in ways that make Haeckel's splendiferous orbs and tentacles dance in an array of carefully choreographed

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patterns. (Technique recalls what Thom Andersen did with the photographs of Muybridge in his 1974 *Eadwaerd Muybridge, Zoopraxographer.*)

In the end, Lebrun makes audiences contemplate the majestic vastness of the natural universe and its complex artistic perfection in ways that even Haeckel could only have imagined.

SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL CATALOG

***PROTEUS* by Shari Frilot**

Can the rigor of science combine with the passion and emotion of art to create a unified vision of the world? This was the question pursued by Ernst Haeckel, one of the most influential minds of the nineteenth century. Through an exquisite tapestry of poetry and myth, biology and oceanography, scientific history and spiritual biography, David Lebrun's remarkable documentary *Proteus* tells the story of Haeckel and his role in our evolving epistemology while offering a parable about both the difficulty and possibility of a unified vision.

Biologist and painter Haeckel (1834-1919) felt torn between seeming irreconcilables: science and art, materialism and religion, rationality and passion. A commercial drive to lay the transatlantic telegraphic cable led to an epic oceanographic voyage to explore the ultimate scientific frontier at that time--the bottom of the sea. This voyage caused Haeckel to discover the radiolarian. Incredibly beautiful and diverse, these tiny one-celled creatures are among the earliest forms of life. They were the key to Haeckel's vision: In their intricate geometric skeletons, he saw all the future possibilities of organic and created form.

Nineteenth-century paintings, graphic art, photographs, and scientific illustrations come magically to life through Lebrun's innovative animation techniques. Complemented by an atmospheric score, narration, and sound design, *Proteus* is a splendid investigation of the sea and nineteenth-century imagination.

PARK CITY RECORD

***FILM TAKES THOUGHTFUL STROLL ALONG BORDER OF ART AND SCIENCE: DAVID LEBRUN DOCUMENTARY PROFILES 19TH CENTURY SCIENTIST* by Nan Chalat-Noaker**

David Lebrun was driving along in Hollywood when he heard the perfect voice for his film. The noted Broadway actress Marian Seldes was narrating a story on National Public Radio.

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"It was captivating. I pulled over and wondered, 'Who is that voice?'" Lebrun quickly tracked her down in New York and waited in the wings as she concluded her performance in an off-Broadway production of an Edward Albee play. On the advice of a friend in the theater business, Lebrun offered Seldes "a single white rose" and the deal was sealed. She agreed to narrate *Proteus*, a film that Lebrun had been personally nurturing for 22 years.

It is, in part, a story about a scientist, Ernst Haeckel, who dedicated his life to the study of microscopic organisms on the ocean floor. But Lebrun, an anthropological film maker, saw Haeckel's work in a much larger context.

The great debate during Haeckel's life at the turn of the 19th century centered on reconciling new scientific theories with existing religious and cultural dogma. According to Lebrun's beautifully written narrative, the scientist's parents wanted their son to become a doctor. Haeckel, however, had an artist's temperament.

The two paths merge when Haeckel discovers and begins documenting an ocean-dwelling, one-celled organism, the radiolarian. The biologist/artist's stunning drawings of 4,000 species of radiolaria form the backdrop for Lebrun's documentary.

Lebrun's spin on Haeckel's work is understandable considering his own background. The filmmaker, whose father was a well-known painter, was born in Los Angeles and sent to an alternative high school in Arizona that emphasized world cultures. In college, Lebrun opted to study the philosophy of culture, myth and religion. "Then someone put a camera in my hands", he says.

Lebrun's passion for examining diverse cultures led him to his own Plains Indian quest and later to an in-depth study of Mayan culture. A National Endowment for the Humanities grant eventually led to a four-part Public Broadcasting System series on a Maya village in the Yucatan.

But Haeckel stayed in the back of his mind and finally, Lebrun was able to set aside time to finish it. Not knowing if *Proteus* really fit any specific category, last fall Lebrun entered it in the Sundance Film Festival Documentary competition. When they called him, he said, "It was stunning to hear I was in; at times I thought the film would sink like a stone in the sea."

Sundance chose to place the film in the "Special Screenings" category, which is just fine with Lebrun. "To any degree I can get it shown, I'll be delighted", he said, adding that he is most looking forward to seeing his film with an audience and "seeing what the response is."

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L.A. WEEKLY

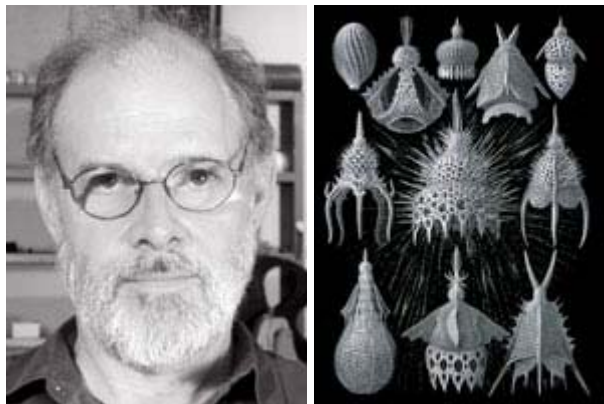
A MID-FESTIVAL REPORT FROM SUNDANCE 2004 by Ron Stringer

Five days into Sundance 2004, the pickings — not so much in the dramatic competition and high-profile premieres as in the Frontier, World Cinema and Special Screenings niches — have been anything but slim. In new work from past presenters, the promise of earlier panache finds mature fulfillment.... Stir into the mix the usual sprinkling of thoughtful documentaries, innovative shorts and unclassifiable experiments (David Lebrun's *Proteus*, an exposition of the beatific vision of 19th-century artist and marine biologist Ernst Haeckel; and Jessica Yu's *In the Realms of the Unreal*, an exploration of a 15,000-page graphic novel by the reclusive Catholic schizophrenic Henry Darger, come first to mind) and you have the makings of a high old time in Park City. So far, anyway.

ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE

THE NEW AGE OF ANIMATION AT SUNDANCE by Mary Ann Skweres

In mesmerizing sequences of evolving shapes, animation brings to life the intricate geometric skeletons and extraordinary beauty of tiny undersea organisms called radiolarian in the documentary, *Proteus* (60 min., color, 35mm). Nineteenth century biologist and artist, Ernst Haeckel's (1834-1919) lithographs of the single-cell life forms inspired producer/writer/director/editor David Lebrun to explore that century's fascination with the sea, once the ultimate scientific frontier. Told almost completely with 19th century images, the visual core of the film is artwork photographed from the originals at the Ernest Haeckel Haus in East Germany, and animated using traditional techniques — photographing cells on an Oxberry optical printer. Texts from period letters, poetry, ship logs and scientific discourses make up the narrative. Taking 23 years, the project was completed on weekends or when Lebrun had some time off, "This was my labor of love. I found myself, not having originally planned to, doing an animated feature by myself. That's a big job."



Inspired by the lithographs of 19th century biologist and artist Ernst Haeckel, filmmaker David Lebrun (left) labored for 23 years to make *Proteus*. Courtesy of Night Fire Films.

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WIRED.COM

***DOCUMENTARIES DRAW ON ANIMATION* by Jason Silverman**

Even 10 years ago, mixing animation and documentary would have been both impractical and taboo -- animation emerges from the brain of an artist, while documentary is supposed to be grounded in objective truth.

But the plummeting costs of animation and dissolving rules of nonfiction have brought this cinematic odd couple together. Michael Moore's Oscar-winning *Bowling for Columbine* featured an animated sequence created by Howard Moss. Recent PBS documentaries *Hybrid* and *Repetition Compulsion* were largely or entirely animated.

Animation, according to Cara Mertes, executive director of the PBS nonfiction series P.O.V., is one sign of a brave new era of documentary.

"Documentary has never been more exciting, and that's because of the expansion of the form," said Mertes. "Filmmakers are incorporating fictional elements, experimental elements and animation, and the animation that documentary filmmakers are using has been wonderfully imaginative and extremely effective."

Filmmakers are bringing a number of different styles and methods of animation to their documentaries. *In the Realms of the Unreal* used After Effects to create a staccato, childlike motion -- like Colorforms come to life -- perfectly appropriate to the subject matter. David Lebrun, in his documentary *Proteus*, used quick cutting of photographic images to create an animation-like effect.

Proteus explores the life of the 19th- and 20th-century scientist Ernst Haeckel, who discovered, among other things, the radiolarian -- a single-celled organism that comes in a startling diversity of geometric forms. Haeckel sketched more than 4,000 of these, and Lebrun, through a complicated and painstaking photographic process, transferred 1,000 to film.

Lebrun then combined these still images in a process similar to traditional cel animation. Because of that, *Proteus* is as much a visual experience as a narrative one.

"The animation throws *Proteus* into something that is beyond documentary into a sensory experience -- hopefully an ecstatic, visionary one," Lebrun said. "If I just presented the animation by itself, outside of the context of the documentary, it would probably seem experimental or radical. But by creating a documentary, I can hopefully propel the audience into a very intense, stroboscopic, hallucinatory animated experience."