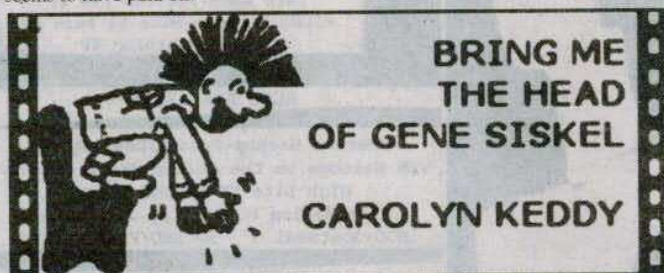


Awards.

Our hero's moment of truth happens early one morning, when his boss's secretary gets an emergency call to handle a suicide victim—a duty Daigo must perform solo. Before long, family and friends are beginning to appear nervous around him, pointedly encouraging him to get a "proper" job. And he still hasn't quite plucked up the nerve to tell his wife what he does exactly—until it's too late. The formerly easy-going Mika demands that Daigo find some, any kind of new employment. Daigo is on course to being one of the more disdained men in town. Even schoolgirls on the bus catch the smell of death.

There's lots to like about *Departures'* unpretentious approach, as well as the paucity of sentimentality that makes it seem more like an indie production. The film was nearly ten years in preparation, and all the work seems to have paid off.



I saw the Avengers last night. Even though they still sound good, look good, and the songs hold up, there is something weird about a 50-plus-year-old woman singing about being a teenage rebel. Or is there? I am still unsure. I have nothing against the whole nostalgia trip punk bands are on these days. Well, at least when they are getting back together and playing live. I go see them, but I still see five times as many new bands, so that balances it out. Right? I guess that's one way to justify it.

So where does the rock poster fall into all this nostalgia mania? Quite honestly I never even considered it. In fact when I received the *American Artifact: The Rise Of American Poster Art* DVD I groaned. A documentary about poster artists is not something I am really interested in watching. But watching films is what I do, so I did.

American Artifact: The Rise Of American Poster Art starts off poorly. Director Merle Becker is also the narrator. She begins with a seemingly ridiculous admission that when she came across the book *The Art Of Modern Rock* she was "totally blown away." Yet, just because the book doesn't cause the same reaction in me doesn't mean she isn't sincere. It is just hard to believe. As a result of this amazing experience, Becker quits her TV job and heads off to interview poster artists. This is followed by a very long credit sequence that introduces all the artists and their work.

Once *American Artifact: The Rise Of American Poster Art* gets going it is incredibly fascinating. The documentary starts with the beginning of posters in the late 1800s which were mostly used for wanted signs, then moves on to advertising boxing matches and other events including musical acts. Becker interviews two print houses in Nashville, TN that still use the letterpress style of printing. Although they don't get too much into the history or origins of letterpress, the method is explained and shown.

Then on to the '60s in San Francisco, where artists made psychedelic posters to advertise rock shows at the Fillmore and The Avalon Ballroom. The "Big Five" of Wes Wilson, Rick Griffin, Victor Moscoso, Stanley Mouse, and Alton Kelley are discussed in full detail even as acknowledgement goes out that they only earned the name due to a show of their art called "The Joint Show." There were other artists working on posters at the time as well. The two artists of the "Big Five" interviewed Moscoso and Mouse explains their processes as well as those of their contemporaries. There seems to be great admiration between the '60s artists and what each other did.

Posters for rock shows disappeared mostly in the '70s. Punk rock bands sort of revived the process by making fliers for their shows. Although this was more out of necessity to get the word out about the show than to create some art. They did make some very creative fliers. Later in the '80s rock posters started to resurface led most famously by Frank Kozik. Other artists were also doing them at the same time and the whole thing blew up into the current silk-screened, colorful posters you see today. The lesser-known modern poster makers don't seem as interesting as their predecessors, but maybe as time goes on their stories will develop more.

Every now and then Becker interrupts *American Artifact: The Rise Of American Poster Art* with her narration. It probably wouldn't be that

disruptive if she didn't say things I know to be untrue. When switching from '60s San Francisco artists to those in Detroit, Becker comments, "Most people don't think of Detroit when they think of '60s rock." To which I immediately counter that pretty much every punk rocker would probably think of MC5 or the Stooges who are both '60s bands from Detroit before thinking of San Francisco's Jefferson Airplane. So maybe not your average person on the street, but I'd bet most people who are into music from any decade would.

Other little things detract from the effectiveness of *American Artifact: The Rise Of American Poster Art* as well. When discussing '80s punk rock flier art, the introduction to punk is explained as rebelling against the music of the '70s. But instead of showing prog bands like Yes, mostly commonly known for this reaction, late '80s hair metal bands such as Bon Jovi are shown. These are the bands that supposedly grunge upstaged, not punk. Also during a montage of punk fliers from the '80s the cover of the Makers' 1996 album is shown. Though that is not surprising from a person who claims punk started to be called grunge in the '90s. These trivialities annoy me because if I notice this many errors I can only wonder how many more there are that I don't. It makes it hard to accept Becker's opinion as a true authority on the subject of poster art.

If unlike me you can rise above these little mistakes, *American Artifact: The Rise Of American Poster Art* as a whole is immensely interesting. Overall it is a well done documentary, and shot and edited exceptionally well. It opened my eyes toward a whole that world that otherwise would never get any appreciation from me. (www.americanartifactmovie.com)

The premise of *Silence Ca Tue!* interested me right away. A frustrated Belgian filmmaker Christophe La Mont is fed up with his country's film industry. He gets together a few friends to be his crew and his actors then they are off to film on the streets. La Mont puts himself and the others in seemingly normal situations to let the action unfold, as it will. The film theoretically will form from these ordinary situations. They go to a party and get drunk. They stay up all night and then take a meeting with a film producer the next morning. Things go awry and then worse as the day progresses.

Silence Ca Tue! is a very realistic film. The title means "Silence, we are shooting." Although my personal day-to-day activities don't ever devolve into such seemingly unprovoked and unnecessary violence, the film is something to which anyone can relate. Who hasn't wanted to do something at one point that a person or people tell you that you can't because you don't have the money or the talent. It is the basis of punk rock. The film also seems flawlessly improvised. I wouldn't have even guessed there was a script if I hadn't watched the "making of" extra on the DVD. (www.brink.com)

I am not sure if it was the intention of *Shelter: A Squatumentary* to prove that squatting in the Bay Area is impossible, but it does. *Shelter: A Squatumentary* looks at three different squatting situations in Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville, California from 2004–2007. The tactics are different, but the end result is always the same: eviction.

The first squat is Hellarity House in Oakland. The house was started by a man that received an insurance settlement and decided to buy some properties. He envisioned it as a community of like-minded people. He didn't charge rent, but expected people to work in exchange for living in the house. It seemed to have worked for a while, but then somehow he got evicted from his own place. Eventually the house was up for sale. The tenants were outbid and the new landlord began the long process of eviction.

The next house is Banana House. After researching an abandoned house in Berkeley, Steve Dicaprio attempts to go the legal route to live there. Although he does everything seemingly by the books, he is routinely harassed by the police, locked out of the house, and arrested.

Finally is Power Machine a warehouse in Emeryville, CA. The owner agrees to look the other way as long as no one notices people living in the space. The building is eventually sold, but the tenants have more of a problem with each other than the new owners.

Each situation is frustrating. Why would someone not research a house and its tenants before buying it? You almost feel like the new landlord gets what he deserves: an endless court battle. Why shouldn't someone be able to claim a house that the owner abandoned long ago, particularly since she seems to have no interest in reclaiming it? Why can squatters get along? The questions may not have logical answers in *Shelter: A Squatumentary*, but it is interesting to think about them. (www.killnormal.com/shelter)

I am always looking for films to review. If you made one, send a copy to Carolyn Keddy, PO Box 460402, San Francisco, CA 94146-0402. If your film is playing in the San Francisco Bay Area, let me know at carolyn@maximumrockroll.com. I will go see it. www.carolynkeddy.com