

NFB EXPO PROJECTS OVER THE DECADES

LABYRINTH

Expo 1967 Montreal

Directed by: Roman Kroitor, Colin Low and Hugh O'Connor

Montreal's Expo 67 is widely seen as the most audacious and groundbreaking event of its kind of the 20th century. It sparked the NFB to create not a travelogue about Canada, but something completely new: *Labyrinth*. The leading film critic of the day called it "mind-expanding" and "by far the most ambitious enterprise in Canadian film history." A multi-screen, multi-space immersive production, it foreshadowed everything from the surround environments of IMAX 3D cinemas, amusement park rides and interactive museum exhibits to today's virtual reality. A truly immersive experience that blended the emotional, psychological, physical and cinematic elements of a huge three-chamber purpose-built structure, *Labyrinth* took audiences on an interior voyage to the heart of what it means to be human, using extraordinary large-screen images.

And what images they were, across the spectrum of human experience and across the globe— from Russian astronaut training to a ballet school, from a Greek Orthodox baptism to the faithful bathing in the river Ganges, from Winston Churchill's funeral procession to the painful goodbye of a family leaving on an immigrant ship, and from a Canadian snowstorm to the nighttime hunt in Ethiopia for a crocodile.

The impact of *Labyrinth* was unmistakable: 1,324,560 people saw it, some waiting as long as seven hours to get in.

THE LAND

Expo 1970 Osaka

Directed by: Rex Tasker and Jean-Claude Labrecque

Continuing to embrace the large-screen format, the NFB documentary *The Land*, directed by Jean-Claude Labrecque and Rex Tasker, was presented at Osaka in 70mm, showcasing spectacular airborne images of Canada, from the Arctic Ocean to Newfoundland fishing villages, and from Percé Rock to Niagara Falls, on a most unusual massive triangular screen, which was flanked on both sides by rectangular screens for still photo projections. The raw power of cinema on this scale, and with this level of kinetic change and density, was embraced by the team. The ambition to capture the country was so large that the NFB issued a news release assuring Canadians that they "ought not be alarmed at a mysterious aircraft skimming about their area taking a low-level look at their neighbourhoods—it's just the National Film Board doing its bit for the 1970 World's Fair."

THE CITY

Expo 1970 Osaka

Directed by: Kaj Pindal

This short animated and stylized depiction of Canadian urban life was inspired, in part, by NFB animation pioneer Norman McLaren. Director Kaj Pindal and his producer, Robert Verrall, adapted techniques used by McLaren in his audacious 1961 Times Square film, a Canadian tourism publicity clip consisting of paper cut-out animation and thousands of light bulbs triggered by the film's images. *The City* advanced the technique to evoke a sense of the natural world being pushed aside by urbanization. Pindal's wit and ability to communicate through strikingly simple and universal images meant audiences for *The City* would see Canada as open and inclusive, and the compelling silhouette-style character designs of people and buildings appealed to the sophisticated Japanese design tastes.

RIVER JOURNEY

Expo1984 New Orleans

Directed by: John N. Smith

In the NFB's first IMAX film created for a world's fair, a massive moving image, taken from a swooping helicopter, captures a peaceful river, surrounded by a thick pine forest. This being Canada, the scene could be thousands of kilometres from the nearest town, a glimpse into the quiet of nature. But the camera rises, and we are in fact over Toronto's Centre Island, and then flying straight towards its towering skyline, our expectations excitingly subverted. This scene underlined the power of *River Journey*, which was, according to one U.S. journalist, "stunning, outclassing all other film productions at the fair." It managed to knit together in cinematic fashion seemingly every river in a country with thousands of them.

River Journey is without narration; as Smith puts it, "the score is the narration." The majesty of the music matches that of the visuals. The astonishing clarity and sweep of the film brought together the natural and urban realities of Canada in one spectacular sequence after another, seemingly tailor-made for the IMAX experience.

TRANSITIONS

Expo 1986 Vancouver

Directed by: Colin Low and Tony Ianzelo

Transitions, the world's first live-action 3D IMAX film, captured the technological development of the tools of transportation, and also incorporated state-of-art graphics created by the NFB's then newly formed Computer Animation Centre, blending documentary and synthetic imaging in new ways. *Variety* magazine said: "While most 3D is still a gimmick, these filmmakers have elevated the device to an art form."

Yet again, the early genius of NFB animator Norman McLaren played an inspirational role: IMAX 3D was inspired by McLaren's early experiments for the Festival of Britain in 1950-51.

To shoot in 3D meant placing two cameras side by side, to mimic and capture the world the way our eyes see it. But the sheer bulk of IMAX equipment made that impossible, so a system of mirrors and absolute synchronization had to be developed. And then this gigantic assembly had to work out in

the field, shooting forms of transportation and movement—from canoe portages and steam engine trains to hovering hummingbirds, spinning skaters and Chinese dragon dancers.

MOMENTUM

Expo 1992 Seville

Directed by: Colin Low and Tony Ianzelo

If the evolution of the NFB's creations at world's fairs was all about expanding how people see, a natural next step would be to bring an unparalleled clarity of image. That's precisely what directors Colin Low and Tony Ianzelo sought to do with *Momentum*, the world's first IMAX HD film, and the centrepiece of the Canadian Pavilion at Expo 1992 Seville in Spain.

Taking the extraordinary sharpness of the IMAX frame and effectively doubling it, by shooting and projecting the motion picture images at twice the conventional rate, they created a viewing experience that so fluid that Seville attendees marvelled at the 20-minute journey across the country's geographical and social landscape, which included a visit to all three oceans and the border with the U.S. Audiences didn't even have a second to get ready for what was in store—not with a giant icebreaker heading, seemingly, right for the camera in the opening shot. But amidst the unrelenting drive of the film's exploration of prairies, forests, a farm in winter, a speeding dogsled, hummingbirds and an Indigenous community roundup of horses, there is what Colin Low described as "a pacing in this film—breathing moments to build emotion through motion."

GLIMPSES

Expo 2010 Shanghai

Director: Jean-François Pouliot

In the years leading up to Expo 2010 in Shanghai, the NFB had begun to experiment with digital storytelling tools, being among the very first to create interactive web-based works: non-linear, user-driven experiences that combined and re-mixed elements of original and archival images, films, sounds, animation and text to reinvent documentary possibilities. This was the fluid context within which the NFB and filmmaker Jean-François Pouliot set out to create *Glimpses*. At Shanghai, adopting the Canada Pavilion's theme of "The Living City," the NFB team was inspired by these new digital possibilities, and collaborated with two outstanding photographers, Serge Clément and Claude-Simon Langlois, who, fulfilling the director's vision, toured several Canadian cities, capturing images of people and places to flesh out the concept of a "collage city." *Glimpses* has the qualities of a drama, mixing performers and the images of real people into a seamless, engrossing theatrical experience.

The intensive attention to detail, with every image nurtured and adjusted as part of an overall painterly effect, contributed to the reinvention of the big Expo film experience. *Glimpses* was presented on a gigantic semi-circular 150-degree curved screen that, as one observer put it, "IMAX could envy: 5 meters high by 20 meters long."

EXPO 67 LIVE

Montreal, 2017

Writer, Designer and Director: Karine Lanoie-Brien

Video/audio/photography installation

Advances in projection technology allow 21st-century creators to think outside of world's fair buildings—and in 2017, outside the Expo context entirely. It was as an homage to Expo 67 that brought a world's fair creation to the streets of Montreal, at a time when the NFB was experimenting with installations in galleries and museums, at festivals and in public spaces, at locations in Canada and abroad—making the documentary experience more tactile, collaborative and emotional.

Expo 67 Live brought together 23 projectors, 435 linear feet of screens (five storeys high), 5 giant cubes, 43 audio speakers and more than 1,000 archival images from Expo 67 to capture the experience of that landmark event. Created by the NFB in collaboration with Place des Arts, the project drew on the enormous archive of moving and still images, and audio files from the fair to create a film that surrounded the nightly audience, with the communal feel of being at a concert.

TRACES

Expo 2020 Dubai

Installation

Original Concept, Creative Art Direction and Production Design: KANVA

[Olga Karpova, Félix Roy, Tudor Radulescu and Rami Bebawi]

Premiering at Canada's strikingly original national pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, the installation *TRACES* uses new artistic tools, fresh voices and our innate affection for birds to enchant us and challenge us to think about climate change as something deeply personal.

TRACES is an intimate spectacle, an installation series of eight "boxes," all at human scale, which invite visitors to enter, engage with and contemplate the imminent demise of so much of our environment. It will carry on after Dubai, on a five-year international exhibition tour.

The installation will present visitors with species "fossilized in mid-flight" within amber-coloured blocks, lit from within, beautiful but profoundly sorrowful, as if their near-extinction had been frozen in the present. *TRACES* takes murmuration as its inspiration and central visual element—that astonishing, fleeting, organic and unpredictable movement of a flock of airborne starlings, thousands in concert, moving as one yet seemingly at random.

The *TRACES* boxes, some located outside, some inside, are in a physical conversation with the Canada Pavilion's wooden structure, which is itself an abstracted representation of the nation's landscapes. Its circular shape is "a universal symbol of unity, evoking the relationships humans have between each other and with the land."