

Catalog text for **Trick/Film Chicago '80** by Barbara Scharres
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FACCINTO, Victor (1945, California)

Victor Faccinto is an atypical artist among animators in that he makes no concession to the preconception that animation should be funny, fun, or suitable for children. His films are often funny, but it is indeed black humor. They are rarely fun (depending upon how you define it), and they are definitely not for children. They are not for everyone, period. The themes of sex, violence and death have been pursued relentlessly by Faccinto through a large body of work. These are not unusual themes for a contemporary artist, but judging by the controversy his work tends to arouse, they are unusual themes for an animator.

Although Faccinto is not from Chicago, his work strongly relates both visually and philosophically to that of certain Chicago Imagist painters, particularly Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson and Karl Wirsum. Films made between 1970 and 1975 were made with flat paper puppets on painted backgrounds. Violence is a recurring theme, as is the distortion of figures into mutilated, semi-animal, sometimes masked, forms.

This violent distortion dissolves the world of external appearances and unearths a powerfully disturbing world where the soul is worn on the outside.

The little Everyman followed through several films of this period, notably **SECRETE OF LIFE** and **FILET OF SOUL**, is Video Vic, a humanoid character with an executioner-like hood over his head. Despite his ominous appearance, Vic is a victim, pursued, tortured, punished by other nightmare figures who in turn, themselves become victims. All characters bear some outward grotesquery, seemingly the physical manifestation of the excesses of their human emotions and fears. At the top of this insular world is a fearful God/Satan who is the ugliest of all. He is a dual being, one half dispensing reward, the other half punishment, at random, to the hapless characters. This is a worldly vision of the underside of life. This is the god of tattoo parlors and lucky prayer candles, the god of fuzzy dice and anyone who desperately hopes to escape some of life's trials, while harboring the terrible suspicion that it was already decided from the beginning.

Since 1975, Faccinto's style of animation has changed radically, although his artistic vision has not. That has in many ways been strengthened and clarified by the increased directness of his interaction with the images he manipulates. The paper puppets and cartoon appearance are gone. In **SWEET AND SOUR** and **BOOK OF DEAD** he draws images and adds coloration on pieces of found footage, such as home movies, discarded news shots and police documents. The idea of marking and being marked is central to these films. The animator has unmasked himself. The role of creator, giver of life and death, reward and punishment has passed from the middleman God/Satan of former films to Faccinto himself.

The accusation of sexism has often been made against him, since female characters and images in his films are sexually assaulted, mutilated and murdered. Yet this is equally true of the male characters. Relations between male and female are uniformly charged with violence and sadism and sometimes an overwhelming air of sadness, as if to indicate that this area of human encounter, so promising of pleasure and happiness, is particularly laden with pain. Everyone is a victim in these films, the men no less than the women.

In **BOOK OF DEAD**, no human image can hide from

the secrets the animator chooses to reveal. Figures walking on a beach grow satanic horns and tails; tiny pitchforks and snakes pierce the bodies of others. Murder, disfigurement and enactment of the basest lust are the actions most frequently depicted. Through drawings on the frame, the human beings in the innitally-innocent photographic images have been made to do the bidding of their creator and suffer his many torments. Sometimes his shadowy hand reaches into the frame to erase or alter a drawing. **BOOK OF DEAD** is Faccinto's most developed work, continuing the exploration of death apparent in all his films. Through the stream of violent actions, the ominous markings on characters' bodies and faces, and the unnatural lights in their eyes, he seems to indicate that everything that lives is marked for death. This realization is accompanied by a calmness and even a certain resignation that was missing in films of the Video Vic series. We are faced with death images combining singular beauty and horror. We look with fascination, because death is the only thing in a Faccinto film that reveals itself no further. Like the filmmaker, we stop in awe at the external image that cannot be changed. The deteriorating face can have his little animated snakes crawling out of the nose, yet the dead body itself does not give up its inner reality and mystery.

In composing works from elements which are both visually and psychologically disturbing, sometimes horrifying, Faccinto accomplishes some strange balance, especially in his more recent films, between the gut reaction which those elements are capable of provoking and a bizarre beauty and wholeness of purpose which the films radiate. There is a kind of body and soul relationship set up in the work as the tangible expression of the filmmaker's philosophical concerns. He has narrowed down the questions, marked out a special and limited universe as his field of inquiry, and single-mindedly pursues the answers available within that realm.

Faccinto directed: 1970 **WHERE IS IT ALL GOING, WHERE DID IT ALL COME FROM?**, 1971 **THE SECRETE OF LIFE**; 1972 **FILET OF SOUL**; 1973 **MR. SANDMAN**; 1974 **SHAMELESS**; 1975 **EXERCISE**; 1976 **SWEET AND SOUR**; 1978 **BOOK OF DEAD**.