

**Los Angeles Filmforum presents**  
**Filmforum 50, program 9: An Evening with Morgan Fisher**  
**Sunday, February 15, 2026, 7:30 pm**  
**At 2220 Arts + Archives**

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2026 is our 51st year. [www.lafilmforum.org](http://www.lafilmforum.org)

**In person: Morgan Fisher**

A crucial participant and creator of experimental film in Los Angeles for close to sixty years, Morgan Fisher's precise and beautiful films each address aspects of the processes of filmmaking with humor and conceptual rigor. In the last half of the 1970s he was a member of the Los Angeles Independent Film Oasis, a collective of filmmakers that presented screenings of independent film. In the 1970s he extended his practice to include film installation and video, and in the last thirty years painting and photography.

“Focusing with rare intensity and insight upon the construction (and deconstruction) of cinematic illusionism, Fisher's earliest films, such as *The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)* and *Production Stills*, revealed the careful self-reflexivity and theoretical sophistication that have remained important trademarks of his work. Fisher's late masterpieces *Standard Gauge* and *( )* have added another dimension to his meta-cinematic concerns, channeling Fisher's ardent love, and deep knowledge, of cinema into a heartfelt, and at times distinctly melancholy, searching for the essence of film. Fisher's late films offer a radical, ‘termite’ history of the cinema from within the machine, a recovery and even an ontology, of precisely those film techniques and technologies that are typically overlooked and, paradoxically, designed to be invisible—the insert, film gauges, and the motion picture camera itself. An undergraduate art history major at Harvard, Fisher received his formal training in filmmaking in Los Angeles, at USC and UCLA, before taking a variety of jobs in the commercial film industry— as an editor, stock footage researcher, assistant director and even bit actor—working for the likes of Roger Corman and Haskell Wexler. Typically identified with the structuralist film movement, Fisher's work must also be understood in the broader context of conceptual and minimalist art, on the one hand, and, on the other, the emergent ‘apparatus theory’ of Marxist film scholars in the 1970s, led by Jean-Luis Baudry.” — Haden Guest, Harvard Film Archive, <https://harvardfilmarchive.org/programs/morgan-fisher-presents>

“In a way, Morgan Fisher (Washington DC, 1942) is the missing link between that Hollywood idea of films and experimental cinema, thanks to a series of works that intelligently break down the conventions of industrial cinema with humor, in a line of conceptual thought that smacks of avant-garde. Most of Fisher's films are true meta-cinema, films that say ‘You're watching a movie,’ and the movie you're watching is about making a movie that has been emptied of any content other than just that. Fisher's films have been called ‘structural cinema’ due to their material approach to cinema, but the truth is that this idea is not entirely correct, since his interest is directed more towards conventional procedures, which in the years when he began working in the late sixties inevitably involved working with celluloid, projectors, synchronization methods, cameras and other paraphernalia (which, curiously, all continues to graphically represent

cinema). Each film is a carefully thought-out system, where the ultimate decisions are taken by industrial standards: the duration of the film reels, the apparatus most often used, the regulated procedures, and the predetermined categories. Fisher, who is also a painter and adapts this way of doing things to painting, has expressed his closeness to Duchamp and the ready-made, and in a certain way what he does in his cinema is to place that industrially manufactured object in front of our eyes so that what is important in the work is not the work itself but the gesture it proclaims.” — Elena Duque, <https://s8cinema.com/en/2024/05/20/morgan-fisher-2-en/>

**Morgan Fisher** was born in Washington, D.C., in 1942. He studied at Harvard College, receiving a B.A. in art history in 1965. Moved to Los Angeles to attend film school. Began making short films in 1968. Films shown at film festivals (Oberhausen, Berlin, Pesaro, London, New York, etc., and most recently at (S8) Mostra de Cinema Periférico, A Coruña, in 2024, and in museums (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, etc.). His films have been in two Whitney Biennials (1984, 2005). His most recent film, *Another Movie* (2017), was shown at the Berlin and London festivals, Courtisane, Curtas Vila do Conde, and the Museum of Modern Art. Toward the end of the 1990s he extended his practice to include painting, drawing, photography, and painting installation. His non-film work has been exhibited at, among other places, REDCAT, Portikus, Raven Row, Museum Abteiberg, Generali Foundation, and the 2014 Whitney Biennial. Fisher has been a visiting teacher at Brown University, California Institute of the Arts, and the University of California, Los Angeles. He shows with Galerie Buchholz, Cologne/Berlin/New York, Maureen Paley, London, and Bortolami, New York. A book of his writings on his work in film and other media was published by Walther König in 2013. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

### **Screening:**

All screening in 16mm

### ***Projection Instructions***

1976, 16mm, b&w, sound, 4 min.

Preserved by the Academy Film Archive

Performed by Mark Toscano

“With *Projection Instructions* Morgan Fisher turns his interest to the screening space and the act of projection. Every film must be performed by the projectionist, but generally the projectionist's job is done correctly when it goes unnoticed. *Projection Instructions* puts the projectionist at the center of the work, requiring his full attention, as all the textual instructions on the screen (‘Turn sound off,’ ‘Throw out of focus’...) need to be read and respected.

“The projectionist is no longer the means for delivering the performances of actors to the audience; the projectionist is a performer who, at Fisher’s instruction (or, in a sense, at the film’s instruction), succinctly demonstrates (or fails to demonstrate) the various dimensions of the viewing experience controlled from the projection booth.” — Scott McDonald

### ***The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)***

1968, 16mm, b/w, sound, 15 min.

Print courtesy of the Morgan Fisher Collection at the Academy Film Archive

“The length and straightforward self-reflexivity of the title locate the film outside the commercial cinema, but the specification of the traditional industry situation of *The Director Working with His Actor* reveals a direct connection with industry procedures unusual for avant-garde film-makers in the late 1960s.” — Scott McDonald

“A film in 5 sections; each of them is a single roll of 16mm film long. We see a bare room with a young man sitting behind a tape recorder. Another man, played by Fisher himself, busily enters; he tests the recording machine and eventually goes into a back room, which, when illuminated, turns out to be a projection booth. Each section of the film elaborates the situation of the director and his actor working on an unfinished film which gradually becomes the film we are watching, but which is not the film they were working on. Throughout we hear the comments of the two men as they watch the rushes of their film. Watching rushes is part of the necessary procedures of the film making process, which must remain invisible in the finished film. In this work, however, procedure itself is the subject.” — Stoffel Debuysere, *Diagonal Thoughts*, 2009, <https://www.diagonalthoughts.com/?p=847>

### ***Production Stills***

1970, 16mm, color, sound, 11 min.

Print courtesy of the Morgan Fisher Collection at the Academy Film Archive

“Fisher’s films are, in truth, only part of a more expansive art practice and his *Production Stills* was, tellingly, screened in 1970 at the Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with its historic “Information” show, among the first US museum exhibits devoted to conceptual art.” — Haden Guest, Harvard Film Archives

“As its title indicates, the subject in *Production Stills* is a series of production stills of a film that was never made, and that at the same time is the film we are watching. Scott McDonald calls *Production Stills* “the quintessential Fisher film.” A perfectly enclosed narrative of its own production: the image is one long take ... of a wall on which a hand sequentially pins a number of Polaroids, one after the other. The Polaroids depict the crew making the film; the synchronous sound allows us to hear in real time their chatter and the hum of the still camera, so that we can anticipate the photos and assign faces to the voices we hear.” — Stoffel Debuysere, *Diagonal Thoughts*, 2009, <https://www.diagonalthoughts.com/?p=847>

### ***Standard Gauge***

1984, 16mm, color, sound, 35 min.

Print courtesy of the Morgan Fisher Collection at the Academy Film Archive

“A frame of frames, a piece of pieces, a length of lengths. Standard gauge on substandard; narrower, yes, but longer. An ECU that’s an ELS. *Disjecta membra*; Hollywood anthologized. A kind of autobiography of its maker, a kind of history of the institution from whose shards it is composed, the commercial motion picture industry. A mutual interrogation between 35mm and 16mm, the gauge of Hollywood and the gauge of the amateur and independent.” — Morgan Fisher

“While on one level, *Standard Gauge* is Fisher’s homage to 35mm and to the diverse cinematic world it made possible, the irony of its having been filmed in 16mm reveals a conceptual paradox central to the film, and which unites it with the webs of irony and paradox evident in his earlier work. ...As Fisher explains in his program notes, the thirty-two minute shot ‘...is virtually the maximum length of a scene in 16mm, and is longer by far than 35mm is capable of.’ For all its potentials and accomplishments, standard gauge is limited, and in ways that a non-standard gauge—a gauge quite marginal to mainstream film history—is not.” — Scott MacDonald

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2003, 16mm, color & b&w, silent, 21 min.

Print courtesy of the Morgan Fisher Collection at the Academy Film Archive

“The origin of () was my fascination with inserts. Inserts are a crucial kind of shot in the syntax of narrative films. ...I wanted to free the inserts from their stories, I wanted them to have as much autonomy as they could. I thought that discontinuity, cutting from one film to another, was the best way to do this. It is narrative that creates the need for an insert, assigns an insert to its place and keeps it there. The less the sense of narrative, the greater the freedom each insert would have. But of course any succession of shots, no matter how disparate, brings into play the principles of montage. That cannot be helped. Where there is juxtaposition, we assume specific intention and so look for meaning. Even if there is no specific intention, and here there is none, we still look for meaning, some way of understanding the juxtapositions. ... Reflecting my interest in the work of Raymond Roussel, () is constructed according to a hidden rule that determines the position of each shot and so is more exacting than any rule in Roussel. The rule has nothing to do with what happens in each shot and has no importance beyond dictating where each shot goes. What happens at the cuts is a matter of chance. The strict observance of the rule makes () a structural film, the result of the rule makes it a surrealist film.” — Morgan Fisher

“( ) succeeds astonishingly where Frampton’s parallel effort, *Hapax Legomena: Remote Control* (1972) failed; it uses aleatory methods to release the narrative unconscious of a set of randomly selected films. ( ) is made up entirely of “inserts” from feature films organized according to Oulipian principles. Inserts were usually shot by assistants when star actors, large crews, or expensive sets were not needed. These include details of weapons, wounds, letters, signs, tombstones, machinery, games of chance, timepieces, money, and even intimate caresses.” — P. Adams Sitney, “Medium Shots: The Films of Morgan Fisher”, *Artforum International*

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Coming Soon:

March 1 - Eve-Lauryan LaFountain: Conversation Pieces, at 2220 Arts

March 8 - Femme Grotesquerie animation, at 2220 Arts

March 20 - The Volcano Trilogy, by Cauleen Smith, at the Velaslavasay Panorama

March 22 - Gunvor Nelson Tribute, program 1, at 2220 Arts

March 27 - Gunvor Nelson Tribute, program 2, at the Academy Museum

March 28 - Gunvor Nelson Tribute, program 3, at the UCLA Film & TV Archive at the Hammer Museum

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