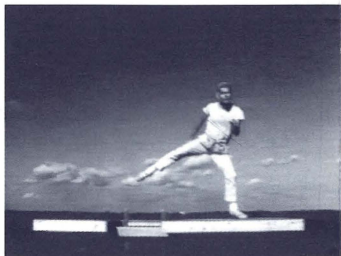


FILM PORTRAIT

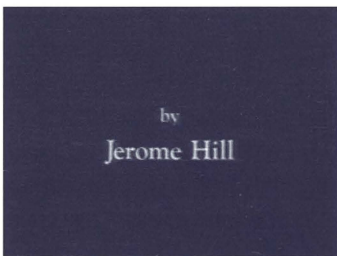
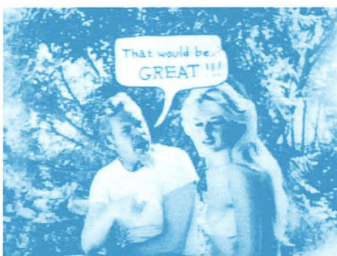
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MoMA

# Jerome: Hill and Foundation





The third of four siblings, Jerome Hill was named after his grandfather, James Jerome Hill (1893–1916), developer of the Great Northern Railway and founder of the First National Bank of St. Paul, Minnesota. From an early age, Jerome evinced an interest in the arts, and while a teenager he created murals for the chemistry laboratory at St. Paul Academy, from which he graduated at age seventeen. He studied Music at Yale, attended the British Academy of Painting in Rome, and took lessons at the Académie Scandinave, in Paris. Between 1929 and 1937, Hill's paintings were exhibited at various salons in Paris, and in New York galleries. During this time, Hill was a still photographer and a filmmaker experimenting with cinema's potential for poetic expressiveness. Using a new 16mm camera developed by Kodak, the Cine Special, Hill made two works, *Magic Umbrella* (1927) and *La Cartomancienne* (The fortune teller, 1932), which were not shown publicly until he incorporated them into his 1972 autobiographical feature *Film Portrait*. Hill's two documentaries, however, were screened theatrically—*Seeing Eye* (1937), about the companionship of animals, and *Snow Flight* (1938), about Nordic skiing (retitled *Ski Flight* when it accompanied Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* at its premiere at Radio City Music Hall, in New York).

During the 1920s and 1930s, Hill moved between New York, California, Paris, and the south of France, where, in 1939, he bought a home on a promontory overlooking the Mediterranean, in Cassis, not far from Marseilles. Today that property belongs to the Camargo Foundation, part of Jerome Hill's legacy, which provides a residency program to scholars and artists.

During World War II, Hill served in United States Army film units, where he wrote several scripts for instructional films, and, because of his fluency in French language and culture, worked as a liaison officer between American and Free French forces. After the war's end, Hill expanded both his filmmaking and philanthropic activities. With Erica Anderson, an Austrian filmmaker, he codirected two notable documentaries about extraordinary people. *Grandma Moses*, a short film, was completed in 1949, and *Albert Schweitzer*, a feature-length documentary with a narration written by Schweitzer himself, and photographed in the doctor's hometown and at his hospital in Africa, won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1957.

Hill had hoped to make a film about Carl Jung, but found the strategies of documentary making so successfully used in *Grandma Moses* and *Albert Schweitzer* too



orthodox and restrictive for Jung's psychoanalytic ideas. Instead, he completed two feature-length "fiction" works inflected by Jung's thinking, *The Sand Castle* (1961) and *Open the Door and See All the People* (1964). These were risky ventures, both aesthetically and commercially, but their unconventional structure, national theatrical release, and generally favorable critical response helped develop the seedbed for the next generation of independent American filmmaking.

Hill completed a number of abstract and nonrepresentational short films, including *Canaries* (1968), on which he applied paint directly onto clear film stock, a noncamera filmmaking mode also used by Stan Brakhage. Hill maintained a long-time friendship with Brakhage, as well as with other avant-garde filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas, James Broughton, and Peter Kubelka, whose work he would help support. Hill preferred to keep his contributions anonymous, and when in 1964 he established the Avon Foundation in St. Paul, his initial wish was to remain unnamed as the funding source. Among the early recipients of the Avon Foundation were the Minnesota Foundation, for a documentary about the dances and rituals of the local Blackfoot tribe (into whose nation Hill had been inducted as a child), and the Film Art Fund, for the establishment of the Anthology Film Archives, in New York City.

Hill's final film, *Film Portrait*, is a paradigmatic diary-film completed while the artist was aware that cancer would soon claim his life. *Film Portrait* had its world premiere at The Museum of Modern Art on October 24, 1972, less than a month before Hill's demise, at age sixty-seven. Using historical family photographs, amateur home movies, and his own works of cinema, Hill created an autobiographical depiction of a life as refracted through artistic expression. *Film Portrait* is one of cinema's first self-reflexive films, and it remains a standard by which others may be judged.

After Hill's death, the Avon Foundation was rechristened the Jerome Foundation by its trustees, and it is the Jerome that helps to sustain and nourish the independent and avant-garde film and media community in Minnesota and the metropolitan New York area. Its presence is critical. It is New York's oldest continuing private funding source, and at times it has been the only one to offer support to emerging New York artists, encouraging them in the making of their films, videos, and new media investigations.

— Laurence Kadish, Senior Curator, Department of Film and Media,  
The Museum of Modern Art