

the New York avant-garde. Many of the figures named are ones who have personally inspired me as a writer and artist. Allen Ginsberg's stoned hippie mantras, particularly his opus "Howl" (1956), found me in high school and blew my mind wide open. Likewise, Jonas Mekas's films changed my understanding of what cinema could be. Hoberman mentions that a young, eccentric filmmaker named Barbara Rubin seduced Ginsberg and got him to shave his bushy beard. In June of last year, I was invited to visit a recreation of Mekas's studio that his son Sebastian had set up in Jersey City. At one point, Sebastian reached atop a file cabinet and picked up a shoebox. He told me it was a gift to Jonas from Barbara and slowly opened it. There, perfectly, eerily preserved inside the unassuming cardboard, was a talisman—Allen Ginsberg's beard. This artists' heyday can often feel populated by individuals whose legacies have since ballooned to build into myths. *Everything Is Now* succeeds in reminding us that although many of the people written about may no longer be around, their work and their actual spirits live on in a real and gratifying way.

At times, some resonances are somewhat unsettling. Mentions of crackdowns on free speech—police raids on coffee shop concerts and experimental film screenings in the name of "public decency" sound, well, familiar today. Famously, comedian Lenny Bruce was arrested at a jazz workshop on obscenity charges (for using the word "cocksucker"). Black poet LeRoi Jones, later known as Amiri Baraka, faced run-ins with the police as well. Jonas Mekas was jailed for showing Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) and Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'amour* (1950). At the time, the supposed controversy brought on by these artists wasn't even something they took seriously. Are people really to believe that the drugged-out hipsters going to see the latest in avant-garde cinema at the Film-Makers' Cooperative found any sort of "obscenity" in the work of Jack Smith that would've caused them any emotional distress? Obviously this work was only obscene to those who wanted to snuff it out. These attacks from "tough on thoughtcrime" culture warrior conservatives continue apace today, and the consequences are much more grim.

Everything Is Now provides an indispensable account of the cultural trailblazers who made pivotal use of their moment. While those in power would surely like to force wonderful and diverse societal voices they might deem "undesirable" deep underground, it's vital we remind ourselves what such artists stand for and against. With corporate, mainstream "content" reaching total ubiquity, and every once-great landmark shuttering to make way for another bank, New York must not give up its creative soul. To do this, it must remember where its soul came from—that explosion of artistic energy in the sixties. ♦

Coming soon to Acropolis

- Urthworks: 3 Films by Ben Rivers (Dir. Ben Rivers, 2010-2019)—Los Angeles premieres, September 28 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with Rivers in person
- *Bogancloch* (Dir. Ben Rivers, 2024)—Los Angeles premiere, September 30 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with Rivers in person
- *When the Sun Is Eaten (Chi'bal K'iin)* + *Polly Two*: Eclipse films by Kevin Jerome Everson (Dir. Kevin Jerome Everson, 2025/2018)—Los Angeles premieres, October 20 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with Everson in person

Acropolis Cinema presents:



September 25, 2025 – 2220 Arts + Archives

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Celebrating the publication of *Everything Is Now: The 1960s New York Avant-Garde—Primal Happenings, Underground Movies, Radical Pop*. Tonight's event will feature a book signing beginning at 7:00pm, followed by a program of 16mm short films and a Q&A with J. Hoberman.

About the program:

The Whirled (aka Four Shorts of Jack Smith) (Dir. Ken Jacobs, 1961, 16mm, 19 min)

The Whirled comprises four short films: *Saturday Afternoon Blood Sacrifice*, 1956; *Little Cobra Dance*, 1956; *Hunch Your Back*, 1963; and *Death of P'Town*, 1961. Says Ken Jacobs: "The first two shorts were shot around Jack's loft on Reade Street on two 100' rolls in an impromptu way very different from my initial fastidious art-film approach. I would never be an art-film true-believer again. After years of shooting my raging epic *Star Spangled to Death* starring Jack as The Spirit Not of Life But of Living, and after a few months of being on the outs with each other, we got together for one last stab at friendship and at another film in Provincetown, Summer 1961."

Senseless (Dir. Ron Rice, 1962, 16mm, 28 min)

Consisting of a poetic stream of razor-sharp images, the overt content of *Senseless* portrays ecstatic travelers going to pot over the fantasies and pleasures of a trip to Mexico. Highly effective cutting subtly interweaves the contrapuntal development of themes of love and hate, peace and violence, beauty and destruction. One of just four films made by Rice during his short lifetime (like Jean Vigo, he died at 29), *Senseless* won a filmmaker's award at one of the Charles Theater's monthly showcases for local avant-garde artists.

New York Eye and Ear Control (Dir. Michael Snow, 1964, 16mm, 34 min)

A 34-minute abstraction made in collaboration with Joyce Wieland and Paul Haines that combines live 16mm footage with a cutout of a woman's silhouette and a free jazz score by Albert Ayler, Don Cherry, John Tchicai, Roswell Rudd, Gary Peacock, and Sonny Murray. While many audience members reacted negatively to Snow's film when it first screened in Toronto, Andy Warhol and Gerard Malanga were impressed upon the film's New York premiere, and it has since become one of Snow's best-known works.

D. M. T. (Dir. Jud Yalkut, 1966, 16mm, 3 min)

A psychedelic short film by Jud Yalkut based on Jackie Cassen's light show. Slides by Jackie Cassen. Choreography by Mary McKay and danced by her. Sound: Bach, The Beatles, and the voice of Ralph Metzner reading a "Psychedelic Prayer" by Timothy Leary. Filmic translation of the first multi-media presentation of Jackie Cassen and Rudi Stern, originally premiered at the Bridge Theater in New York in the spring of 1966.

TRT: 84 min

In person: J. Hoberman

Everything Is Now by Connor Willians

The following article was originally published in The Brooklyn Rail, June 2025

The sixties were a time of seismic revolutions in US society and culture. The particular issues at

stake in the sixties remain: extreme racism, increased awareness of humanity's impact on the environment, feminism, gay and trans visibility, censorship, nuclear war—a highly fraught time, then and now. These issues galvanized a myriad of artists to create new forms, new visions. Capitalism, certainly an enemy of sixties counterculture, has only exploded in the decades since, impacting the ability of radical artists to live and speak truth to power. But in the sixties artists could, albeit barely, afford to live as artists. Maybe because of that, artists in the sixties were more effective at confronting their times. This premise guides the history of a sixties US renaissance laid out by J. Hoberman in his expertly researched and gripping historical account *Everything Is Now: The 1960s New York Avant-Garde—Primal Happenings, Underground Movies, Radical Pop*.

The sheer amount of information packed into *Everything Is Now* can be overwhelming. That's not to say that the experience of reading the book is necessarily unpleasant—rather, Hoberman's book is so dense with facts that it could induce a sort of overstimulation. I noticed on the back cover that a Guardian critic's blurb for *The Dream Life*, one of Hoberman's previous books, mentioned that it was so “invigorating” that the reader “had to ration [themselves] to a chapter a week.” I had a similar experience reading *Everything Is Now*.

More an intermediate guide to the sixties than a handbook for beginners, the commitment to specifics on display in *Everything Is Now* is quite commendable. Hoberman intends for the book to be considered as a map: “Paris is filled with plaques marking the former dwelling places of distinguished artists and writers. New York is not, hence my emphasis on specific addresses and locations, often marking buildings that (New York being New York) no longer exist.” Hoberman, who was the film critic for the *Village Voice* from the 1970s until 2012, covers the period of 1958–71 by relying heavily on reportage from the legendary paper, as well as the *New York Times*, and coverage from critic contemporaries such as Jill Johnston. Just as Cynthia Carr's 2012 biography *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* told the life story of one artist while also creating a masterful history of 1980s Downtown New York, Hoberman's book paints an all-encompassing picture of a time and place. Each page is its own history lesson, a testament to the ferocity of the era's creative ferment, filled with the ever-evolving goings-on of New York figures like Jack Smith, Barbara Rubin, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), and Ornette Coleman. Not only did each of their scenes—cinema, poetry, music—take giant strides into experimentation, but there was also a large confluence of mediums and movements.

Hoberman goes into detail about the folk and jazz scenes of the day, but focuses rather sharply on the rock and roll careers of Bob Dylan and the Velvet Underground. He writes of Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965) that it “not only invented what would be known as folk rock, it out-stoned the Stones, beat the Beatles to put the beat in Beat poetry and, with songs like ‘Maggie's Farm’ and ‘It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding),’ took protest into the realm of pataphysics.” He later states (in my opinion, somewhat preposterously) regarding Andy Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls* and Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*, both released the following year, “Warhol would never make a comparable film, nor Dylan a greater album.” As for the Velvets, Hoberman recounts that “their set was a form of aesthetic blitzkrieg. The poet John Ashbery ... responded exactly as if someone spiked his martini with LSD: ‘I don't understand this at all,’ he is said to have cried, bursting into tears.” There were rumblings and transformations across genres; jazz groups like the Sun Ra Arkestra took inspiration from the cosmos and consequently sent their listeners on astral trips. But what took place in the realm of rock and roll in the sixties—the deep, confrontational experimentation and its direct impact on audiences and music for generations to come—was unlike anything else. The violin and pounding drums of the Velvet Underground's “Heroin” still gives one chills today.

Name by name, Hoberman goes through the who, the where, and the when of major moments in