

# Peter Rosen's documentary asks, Who Gets to Call it Art?



The 80-minute documentary **Who Gets to Call it Art?** is a dream come true for director/producer Peter Rosen. "I was intensely interested in the artists' studios clustered within a ten-square-block area in Manhattan," Rosen says. "I wanted to make a film about the artists many years ago, but I couldn't figure out how to do it. It would have been boring to go from one artist to another in linear fashion. Around 1999, I got an idea for building a story around Henry Geldzahler, curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan."

Rosen's idea was to tell a story about how Geldzahler influenced the pop art scene in New York. Peter Rosen Productions Inc. entered into a partnership with Muse Film and Television and launched the project with an 11-minute demo film made from photographs and archival copies of television interviews.

Rosen never met Geldzahler, who died in 1994, but he found numerous photos, interviews and clips of speeches made by the curator.

"I didn't have too many preconceptions about how we should tell the story, but I did have some visual ideas," Rosen says. "We filmed all the artists in Super 16 with a lot of fluid camera moves and some crazy handheld work. It was a very schizophrenic time in the art world in New York, so I wanted the look to be very edgy, with the camera always wandering around shooting something unexpected in cinema vérité style."

Rosen says that around 80 percent of the film is archival footage, with the rest culled from interviews with artists, critics and journalists, including Mark Di Suvero, David Hockney, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Poons, James Rosenquist, Francesco Clemente, John Chamberlain, Jonas Mekas, Frank Stella and others.

"It's great filming artists because they are non-conformists who don't care what people think about them," he says. "It was completely open and freeform. We were ready to shoot as soon as we walked into their studios. We used a fast film (Kodak Vision

500T 7279 film) and relied on natural light augmented with Chimeras and little Inkie's for fill, and maybe a little backlight. Sometimes we just used a bit of eyelight. It depends on what your eye tells you. If you want to be true to what an artist had achieved, you have to shoot on film. Video doesn't have the subtleties and colors film offers."



The negative was processed at DuArt labs, in New York, which also provided dailies and film-to-tape transfers for editing. Rosen lauds editor Jed Parker. "This project was made in the edit room," he says. "We had a wealth of material, but the structure and storyline came during editing. It took about two years."

The film was timed in a digital intermediate suite at DuArt. The final cut was recorded onto color intermediate film used to master 35mm release prints. Rosen notes that this method avoided the traditional optical step previously needed to make 35mm blow-ups.

"There are 200 to 300 art house theaters in the United States and many others around the world interested in documentaries," he says. "There's a young and growing audience for this type of film. Your distributor needs two, three or four high-quality 35mm prints to make the circuit of theaters, otherwise you have almost no chance."

Rosen says that the original negative, including out-takes and sound tracks, is archived at DuArt. They shot about ten feet of interview film for every one that made the final cut. He stresses that another advantage of film is that it is an archival medium. The interview footage and audio with the artists and critics are a legacy for the future.

**Who Gets to Call it Art?** won first prize at the Festival di Palazzo Venezia Roma Art Doc Fest and was also one of only 12 feature films selected for the International Documentary Association's 2005 DocuWeek™ Showcase. The documentary will be screening at the Film Forum in Manhattan beginning February 1, 2006. ■

**Above:** Shots from *Who Gets to Call it Art?* a film by Peter Rosen (inset).