



Rediscovering the work of Lawrence Brose

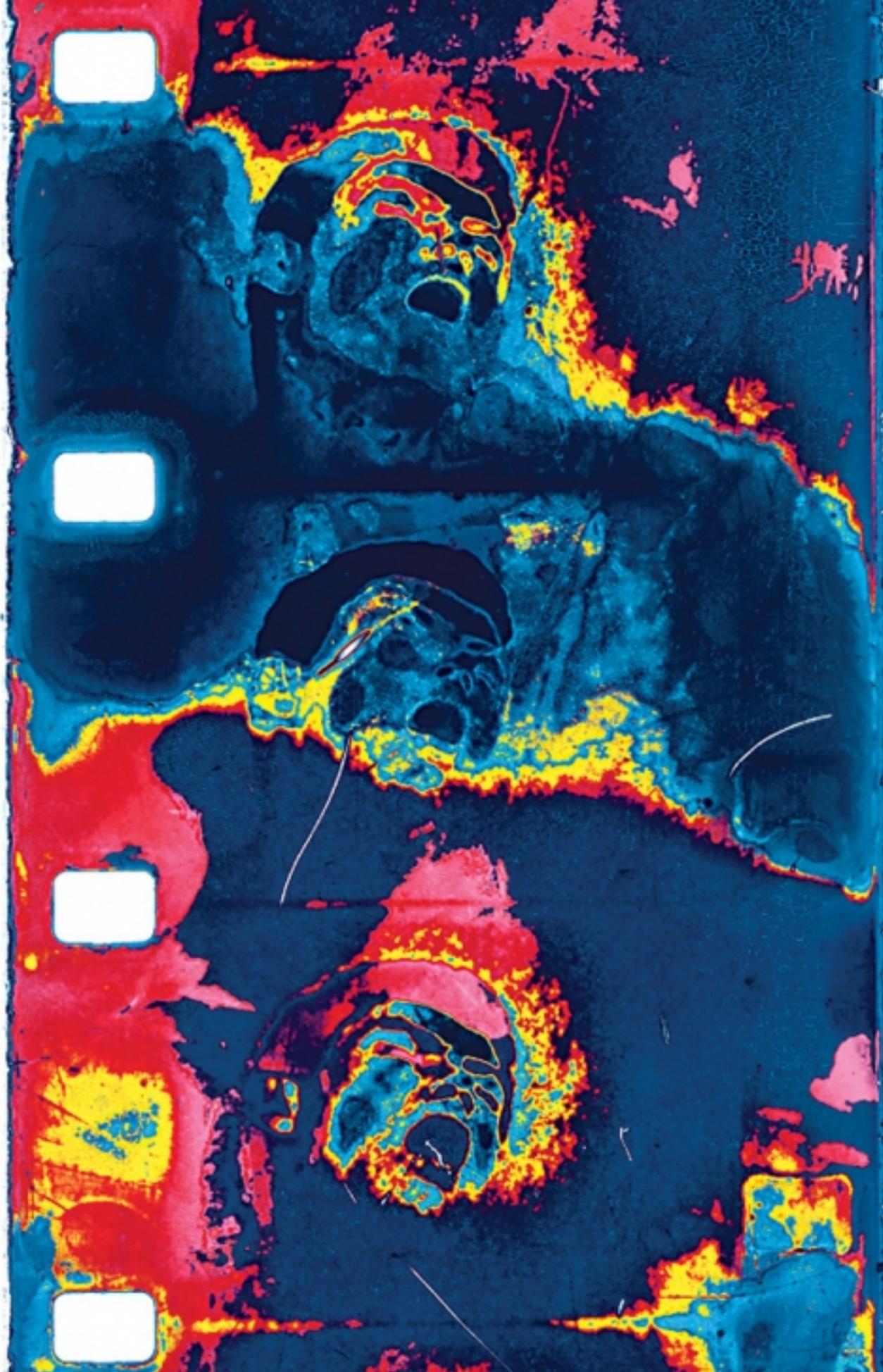
BY ELIZABETH LICATA



The art that all but disappeared beneath the detritus of his recent court battle is finally having its triumphant return. If you know that the works in Lawrence Brose's current show at BT&C gallery are largely taken from images chosen by the prosecution in that case, then you begin to realize how wide and deep the gap between contemporary art and contemporary jurisprudence really is. It seems incredible that prosecutors would look at Brose's 1998 non-narrative film *De Profundis*—based on Oscar Wilde's famous prison letter—and see anything but an artist's complex, expressive interpretation of issues that have occupied poets and writers for centuries.

To those who saw *De Profundis* right after its creation and then saw the stills created and displayed in the months following, the works in the current show at BT&C are beautiful, but not surprising. Brose handprocessed 16mm black and white film, transforming this documentary medium into a stream of lush, solarized, scratched, painterly imagery. The stills capture the look of the film, though they cannot express its equally complex soundtrack.

Brose has said he feels that cinema itself is an underworld, and given the cinematic lineage of his aesthetic—with such precursors as Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, and others—it's no surprise that his film is saturated with a sense of dreams and imaginings made momentarily public. It is also saturated with chemical manipulations and other technical interventions that heighten our



A still from Brose's "De Profundis"

sense of Brose's intensely personal relationship with the material qualities of film. In much of the imagery, figures emerge and recede into spreading pools of color. Brose demonstrates that there is still visual pleasure and technical innovation to be gleaned through working with the physical skin of film. The stills from *De Profundis* included in this show capture much of the film's excitement, and will give those unfamiliar with Brose's work—so long absent from the local scene—a sense of why it's worth talking about.

Although the *De Profundis* stills alone are ample reason to visit this exhibition, there is also work from the project interrupted by Brose's legal hassles. While he was touring *De Profundis*, Brose was also working on a project tentatively entitled *Crossing the Line*, which takes as its literal subject matter the transgressive and unruly traditions of sailors when crossing the equator. These rites continued up until 1997–98 and Brose was able to get hold of some video documentation. He has reinvented that imagery through various printmaking processes undertaken through a residency at SUNY Alfred. Unlike the *De Profundis* prints, the *Crossing the Line* imagery is produced in rich black and white tones, on Somerset paper.

The expressive formal qualities of film are seldom explored in an era when audiences content themselves with the sixth installment of the latest franchise. In this show, Lawrence Brose does not only remind us that he still exists as an artist; he reminds us of film's painterly and evocative possibilities.

Lawrence Brose: Indicted is on view at BT&C Gallery, 1250 Niagara St., June 12–24, with an opening reception on June 12, 6–9 p.m.

Elizabeth Licata is editor of *Spree*; she reviewed Brose's *De Profundis* for *Afterimage* in 1998.

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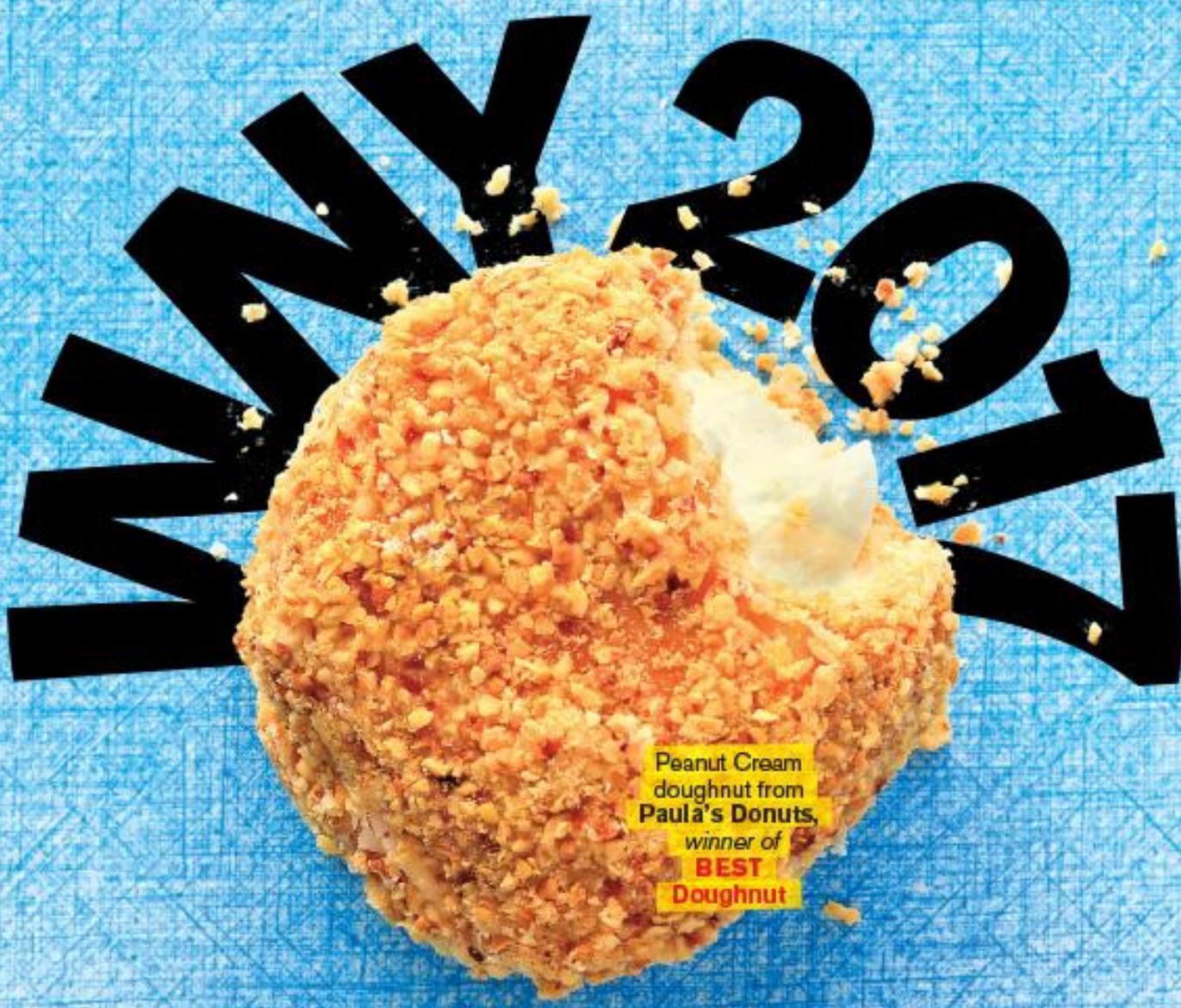
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