

DIRECTIONS: TIMELINE

True Montreal Story

By Ellen Maguire

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When Chris Landreth, 43, won an Academy Award in February for his short film "Ryan," above, about the pioneering animator Ryan Larkin, 61, it brought a chapter in the history of Canadian filmmaking full circle. But even after Mr. Landreth's Oscar, there has been no Hollywood ending for this story. ("Ryan" screens in New Directors/New Films at the Museum of Modern Art, with "Agnes and His Brothers," on Saturday and Sunday.)

1970 -- Ryan Larkin, known for his innovative charcoal and watercolor animation, receives an Oscar nomination for his short film "Walking." 1971 -- Mr. Larkin, already an alcoholic, begins to use cocaine. He makes "Street Musique," his fourth, and so far his last, film. 1978 -- Mr. Larkin resigns from the National Film Board of Canada; he had "lost his creative spirit," he says. Over the next decade, he loses all his money and begins panhandling in Montreal. 1996 -- Chris Landreth of Toronto receives an Oscar nomination for his animated short "The End." 2000 -- The director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival invites Mr. Larkin -- now living at the Old Brewery Mission in Montreal -- to join the selection committee, where he meets Mr. Landreth. "Here was a person living out my primordial fear that my creativity will dry up -- in a very spectacular way," says Mr. Landreth, whose mother struggled with alcoholism. 2001 -- Mr. Landreth decides to make a film about Mr. Larkin, and videotapes 20 hours of interviews with him. To render psychological damage, Mr. Landreth will develop a style of computer animation he calls "psychorealism": limbs twist in agony, heads turn to reveal gaping holes. The film will be finished in 2004. 2005 -- Mr. Landreth accepts the Oscar for "Ryan" and says: "I am here tonight because of the grace and humility of one guy watching from Montreal." Mr. Larkin watches from a bar. He continues to live at the mission, where Mr. Landreth has set up a fund for his care. His plans to make a short film about a panhandler's worldview remain unrealized. "The media say I struggle with addiction," he says. "But I'm happy. I'm not struggling with anything but life in this world."

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