



Shortly after completing what many would consider to be his crowning artistic achievement, [Film Portrait](#), [Jerome Hill](#), a Renaissance man in the true sense of the word, passed away at the hands of cancer. Though many nowadays probably do not know his name, his legacy lives on through his foundation, through several of the most artistically vital institutions he helped create, and in the memories of the many great artists he helped to sustain. Jonas Mekas opened the No. 56-57 (Spring 1973) issue of *Film Culture* with the following moving requiem:

#### A POET IS DEAD (IN MEMORY OF JEROME HILL) by Jonas Mekas

*“Only four weeks ago, Jerome Hill’s film ‘Film Portrait’ was screened at the Museum of Modern Art, and he was there himself to talk, to answer questions. He was thin and white. Very few people knew it, but he knew it, and his close friends knew it: Jerome has been ill, very ill. He collected his strength to come to the screening, to see his friends, to see the screen sing for the last time. The film was beautiful, the projection was beautiful, and the screen sang. Jerome received an enthusiastic and warm reception for*

*his film. It was a perfect, beautiful crowning of a very humble life of a very great artist.*

*No, Jerome Hill didn't receive proper recognition during his life. From his friends, yes: Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, P. Adams Sitney, James Broughton, a few others saw his work and praised it and told him what a great artist he was. 'Film Portrait' will remain among the masterworks of cinema—a masterwork of form, of treatment of an era, an extraordinary work of animation and color. I cannot go into all its values and all its beauties here. But the film critics, during his life, they looked at Jerome, they looked at his work, and they couldn't see it: they saw his grandfather's railroads behind him, instead; they discussed the railroads, and the money, and they missed the colors and the movements and the glories of cinema. And so one more artist is gone, and now we can begin to praise his work! Will it always be the same? Why can't we praise our living artists! No, Jerome won't add a single frame now, he made his last film.*

*One of the extraordinary things about Jerome was that while everybody around him was getting older with the years, Jerome seemed to get younger and younger. His work got younger and younger every year. His cinema began at Warner Brothers, and it ended in the lines of avant-garde film. His progress was slow and painful. He had to free himself from many society, family and commerce traditions. But he was freeing himself and opening himself continuously, until, in the early '60s, his search brought him into the lines of the avant-garde film. After that, he seemed to discover his own style, and he threw himself into the making of the 'Film Portrait', his crowning achievement. His films and his paintings exploded with little bursts of ecstasies.*

*Simultaneously with his own creative work, he became very sensitive to the creative work of other film artists and he did everything to assist their work. Probably nobody will ever know the extent of help he has given to independent film-makers; because of his humility, practically all help was given anonymously. But I can tell you this much, that neither the Film-Makers' Cooperative nor the Film-Makers' Cinematheque nor Film Culture magazine nor the Anthology Film Archives would exist or be what they are, if not for the kind help of Jerome Hill, who came always just at the right*

*time, whenever our heads were sinking below the water line; without pampering-but never letting us down in real need. The whole movement of the American avant-garde film of the '60s would have taken a completely different turn, much slower and thinner, without the help of Jerome. I am not writing here a history of the American avant-garde film; I am writing a last tribute to Jerome. So I am talking in very general terms, and I am skipping details and names and figures. But when such a history is written, that history will be dedicated to Jerome Hill.*

*But now Jerome is gone, his body. The American avant-garde film is a chapter in the history of cinema, a fact of cinmea [sic], a reality of cinema that cannot be turned back. The cinema will never be the same again. And a long line of works of great beauty has been created. A form of cinema exists vaguely known as the avant-garde film, that will have to be discussed, analyzed, taken into account by whoever makes cinema, teaches cinema, or looks at cinema. Will there be another Maecenas for the art of cinema, for avant-garde film? Will there be anyone to whom we'll be able to turn in real need? The creation of art and the Maecenas of art go hand in hand. An artist, in order to create, doesn't need a wide acclaim and a wide audience: give him two or three friends, one critic, and one Maecenas, and he'll produce great works and he'll expand the vision and ideals of humanity.*

*Yes, it's very possible that we are at the end of a great period of creativity in American cinema; it's very possible that Jerome Hill's death marks the beginning of another stage of the American avant-garde film: the stage of preserving for posterity what has been created. It was the genius foresight of Jerome that he thought about that too: during the last three years of his life he put himself completely behind the creation of the Anthology Film Archives, a place in which the works of American avant-garde film-makers can be preserved and seen in their full glory. Yes, even here, Jerome was younger than many of us: he was in the future. He knew that it's not enough to create, no: taking loving care of what has been created, taking care of the flowering fruits of the human spirit, which is art- he knew that that was the other side of the matter, and they both made One. Such was the work and wisdom of Jerome Hill.*

*But death has its own wisdom. Jerome Hill died on November 21, in the afternoon, in St. Luke's Hospital. Upon his wish, he was cremated. A small funeral service was held for family and friends at St. James's Episcopal Church, Madison Avenue at 72nd Street, at noon on November 24."*

(Village Voice, Dec. 7th, 1972)

