

Killer shrews eat humans!!!

... And there's a serious artistic angle

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Special to The Record

It's time for a bit of monster-killer-horror-theatre! The Community Art Lab at the Foreman Art Gallery is showing a goofily painful 1959 film about a scientist whose genetic experiments create Killer Shrews — as soon discovered by a group of rather unlucky people stranded on an island destined to become supper. Deliciously evil.

"It's just hilarious," says Yaël Filipovic, the Art Lab's education and cultural action curator. "I'm a big Mystery Science Theater buff, and they did a take on the Killer Shrews, and I went to find the original."

She was successful in her quest, such that the film will be shown at the end of the month on the Bishop's University campus.

And it's all thanks to the long television run enjoyed by Mystery Science Theatre 3000, which rescued all sorts of old movies from the rubbish heap. A man and his robots pals are trapped on a space station and every week are forced by an evil scientist to watch bad sci-fi flicks. It was a — wait for it — cult classic — that ran on US television in the late

1980s and through a chunk of the '90s.

Our trapped hero maintains his sanity by making fun of the reels projected onto the screen, while the scientist seeks the perfect movie weapon that will drive his captives mad and thus take over the world by forcing everyone to watch that film.

Filipovic also has an ulterior motive for choosing this movie. It's presented in conjunction with the Foreman's new exhibition, Filing Memory, by multimedia artist Christina Battle (previewed in last week's Talk).

"Christina's work deals with surveillance and public memory," says Filipovic. "She uses a lot of archives in her video work" — such as declassified FBI files on the US civil rights heroes who were back then considered dangerous dissidents. "There's also a big issue with copyright in her work."

Filipovic says that the copyright on her B-movie has expired, allowing the Art Lab to show the film, for free.

"I'm interested in the idea of our remixing of culture. Looking at Christina's work, the idea of authorship has changed so much. We borrow so much, we write papers and make un-

conscious references to other works all the time, we can't help it. We remix constantly, and the lines of authorship are changing."

Filipovic says the modern idea of a lone genius popping up out of the blue is just wrong. In the days of the great painters of the Renaissance, for example, an artist had a host of assistants helping with brushstrokes. So-called geniuses benefit from the help of many people along the way, an idea that's showing up in the art world with the formation of collectives producing works together. And in an interview with artist Battle two weeks ago, she noted the help of local curator Vicky Chainey Gagnon to help give her show a local connection.

For some, "it is unacceptable to give credit to the many," Filipovic notes.

"Remixing culture" allows us "to talk about it more critically," she says.

There have been copyright battles over music sampling, over the posting of short out-takes from television shows on YouTube, and arguments over how long copyright should last (10 years? at death? 50 years after death?); and debates over just what constitutes fair use, a legal concept that has become narrowed by

some court decisions in the US. The ability to "borrow" and build upon is essential to political satirists, for example. And when does a borrowing a beat and adding to it create an entirely new work?

"We want to allow a space where we can explore copyright issues as a community," says Filipovic.

She gives an example of a complicated copyright issue: the Art Lab wanted to reproduce an image taken at a public event held by artist Ron Benner, who will dismantle his campus corn stalks exhibit on Sunday, Sept. 19 by cooking them up for passers-by to eat (1:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., on the Bishop's University campus). The photo they wanted to use to advertise the afternoon was found on the Internet, but the photograph's owner could not be found. "On the Internet, an image can just start floating around, it can lose its context."

Its use is technically illegal, but "the image was taken by a member of the public during this event... and posted anonymously. We took that as someone that would welcome the idea of the image being posted somewhere else."

Shrews

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As for the Killer Shrews, it will be shown outside, in the Quad, the Bishop's University green space bounded by the Arch, the library, and the McGreer and Johnson buildings at 8 p.m., on Wednesday, Sept. 29. All are welcome, and the show is free.

On Oct. 21, a documentary on how copyright impacts schools and YouTube will be shown on Oct. 21 at 7 p.m. at Cafe Java on Queen Street in Lennoxville.

And there's a copyright round table scheduled for 6 p.m. on Nov. 5 at the Foreman Gallery on campus.

Those interested in Canadian copyright issues can check out the blog of Michael Geist, a law professor and Internet specialist at the University of Ottawa (www.michaelgeist.ca/), or the work of journalist Jesse Brown at TVO.org. Now remix this!