

## *(nostalgia)*

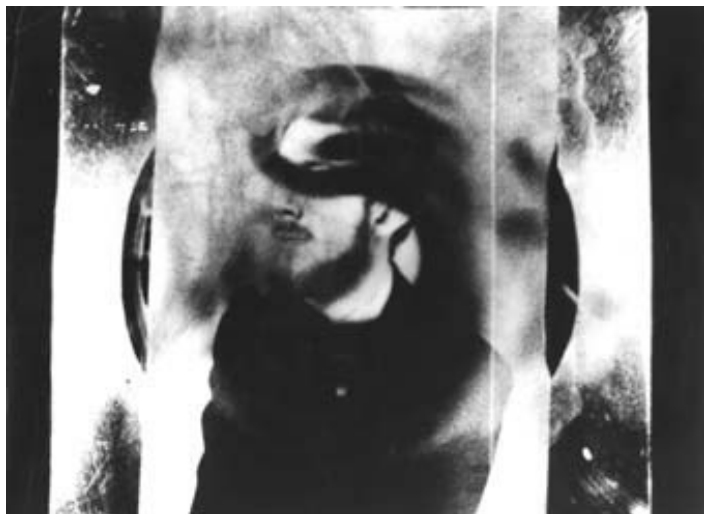
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“What does it mean? I am uncertain but perfectly willing to offer a plausible explanation,” intones the narrator in *(nostalgia)* by Hollis Frampton (1936-1984). Film images, while capturing moments in time, also create illusions that outlast what they record. Frampton explores the disjuncture of image and memory in *(nostalgia)*, deadpan retelling of his transformation from New York art photographer to filmmaker.

A voracious reader, the Ohio-born Frampton won a scholarship to the Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, where he studied extensively, but he did not bother to graduate. He followed the same path at Western Reserve University before moving to Washington, D.C., to visit poet Ezra Pound, then institutionalized at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. Poetry, Frampton decided, was not his vocation, and he went to New York and took up photography. Rooming briefly with his Andover classmates, artists Carl Andre and Frank Stella, he produced the wry photographic series *The Secret World of Frank Stella* (1958-1962) and photographed the art world, supporting himself by doing odd jobs. Experiments with filmmaking led to “Zorns Lemma” (1970), the first avant-garde feature screened at the New York Film Festival.

Made the next year, *(nostalgia)* lays old memories to rest with a new twist. The film is structured around a sequence of 13 photographs from Frampton’s days documenting the art scene. Each photo is presented and burned to ash as the narrator describes a different image. As the film unfolds, we realize that the narration anticipates what will appear in the next photo. The distance between word and image is jarring, as is the camera’s painstaking, almost loving, documentation of the immolation of the photographer’s work. One by one, still images of Stella, Larry Poons, James Rosenquist, and Frampton himself meet the moving flame.

The narrative game keeps viewers on their toes and divides attention between sight and sound, past and present. The voice often expresses regret or longing. “I despised this photograph for several years. But I could never bring myself to destroy a negative so incriminating,” confesses Frampton’s narrator, Canadian filmmaker and multimedia artist Michael Snow. Snow’s flat delivery fuels the understated wit



*Courtesy National Film Preservation Foundation*

but also intensifies the distancing and adds another layer of complication, especially when he describes a portrait of his studio taken by Frampton.

*Nostalgia*, derived from the Greek, was defined by Frampton as “the wounds of returning.” as the narrator talks about each image, his stories bring to light the inadequacies of the filmmaker’s former self and the electric burner consumes the evidence of the previously described photograph. But like a phoenix, a new beginning emerges from the ashes. As Frampton said to Scott MacDonald about the images: “You see, that are not destroyed; they can be resurrected by rewinding the film.”

### *About the Preservation*

Through an Avant-Garde Masters grant funded by The Film Foundation and administered by the NFPF, the Museum of Modern Art worked with the filmmaker’s 16mm reversal original to preserve *(nostalgia)*. The intermittent scratch is part of the original film. *(nostalgia)* is the first of Frampton’s seven-film *Hapax Legomena* series; the preservation of the other six parts was supported by an NFPF grant to New York University and completed through a collaboration between New York University and the museum.

### *More information*

Rachel Moore’s book-length essay *(nostalgia)* (Afterall Books, 2006) features an illustrated transcription of the narration. Frampton is interviewed in *A Critical Cinema*, by Scott MacDonald (University of California Press, 1988), and his writings are compiled in *Circles of Confusion* (Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983). Prints of Frampton’s films are available from the Museum of Modern Art.

*The views expressed in these essays are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.*