

apexart

2010 - 2011 Unsolicited Program Project Proposal
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Robert Gardner's Non-commercials

"We do not regard the audience to be served simply an indiscriminate mass of viewers; nor do we believe that it is necessary to aim at a common denominator and especially the least common denominator."

Artist and filmmaker Robert Gardner was part of a small group of investors in the Boston/Cambridge area who successfully waged the largest, longest coup in FCC history - over a period of ten years Boston Broadcasters Incorporated (BBI), a collective of esteemed academics, local leaders and professionals, fought for and won the license of Boston's Channel 5, a network affiliate, against the current license holder, the enormously powerful Herald Traveler Corporation. In 1972 the new WCVB Channel 5 went on the air and was operated as any ABC affiliate station would run with the major exception of several programming changes initiated and encouraged by Gardner.

By taking a closer look at his 'non-commercials', one minute films of members of the community at work inserted as random commercial breaks; his suggestion of running the Bill of Rights on a 24-hour loop during the US bicentennial; his role in the creation of Chronicle, one of the first locally produced television 'magazines;' and, most importantly, the development of Screening Room a series of 90-minute program which introduced an audience of 3 million viewers to experimental and documentary filmmakers and animators (such as Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, Les Blank, and John Whitney), this show aims to place Gardner's attempts to bring alternative culture-driven programs to a commercial television audience as an act of artistic subversion within mass culture.

Gardner's involvement in the acquisition of the station, and his role in and attempts at programming alternative cultural content for a mass audience will be the point of departure for an exhibition that revisits the story, and showcases his work as program director for nearly ten years. Multiple projections, text documents, photographs, and other archival material displayed within the gallery space will encourage visitors to consider Gardner's impact on his audience and to ask the question - Could something like this ever happen again? In addition, we propose to host a series of one-night events hosted by Gardner and former guests of Screening Room, including Jonas Mekas, George Griffin, Yvonne Rainer, and Peter Hutton which could involve showing and talking about their work.