

## Henry Hills on *Emma's Dilemma* (Microscope version):

I knew Emma her entire life. I was inspired to work with her on this project upon hearing her comments after attending a screening of my films when she was 9. The sophistication of her observations was uncanny for such a child. This was before mini- DV, though, and I was uncomfortable working in 8mm video and was unable to raise funds to shoot with her in 16mm. She had just turned 12 in 1997 when we began shooting. The project was to consist of her interviewing a range of artists about their work. Poet Jackson Mac Low was the first subject, followed after a few months by interviews with Ken Jacobs and Richard Foreman which became separate films, *NERVOUS KEN* (2003) and *KING RICHARD* (2004). We continued working together on a more or less regular basis until she was 16 and then did a final shoot the next year. As we progressed I felt the main center of focus subtly shifting from my artist subjects to my teen protagonist. I had all along intended to take an experimental (rather than documentary) approach to the interview material, to fragment and reassemble it in various ways, frequently riffing on the subjects' own work, exploring qualities of this new medium of digital video. In this final version these explorations strangely function as interstitial material.

When an exhibit of Emma's Polaroids was announced at Microscope Gallery in Brooklyn, my longtime dear friend, poet Charles Bernstein, Emma's father, asked me to put together some unseen outtakes out of the 30 or so hours I had shot with Emma. I took this opportunity to finally finish this project which had lain dormant for so many years. I had been somewhat fearful of approaching the material after Emma's death in 2008. There is a bizarre aspect to editing, intensely focussing on and analyzing minute moments of time, revealing gestures and vocabularies and manners of speaking and moving, which to the editor seems like spending time with those recorded (even if I never met them). It was fantastic to hang out with Emma one last time, and only when I finished, really in the sound mix, did I feel the immense tragedy of this lost life. I sent a preview copy to Charles and he wrote me yesterday: "You really pulled the whole work together in the new version. It takes on a narrative force, as a quest, with the time stopping or opening up in those stuttering moments, which operate as networks of stoppages in Duchamp's sense. It's like having Emma back, in flickering moments; and then not."

The material is basically assembled in chronological order. This is primarily a film about Emma and her changes from age 12 to 17, before she made any of the work in the Microscope shows, but it includes much of the archaeology of its making.