What's thrilling about the 13th Annual Atlanta Film and Video Festival has little to do with celluloid and much to do with video. This year's six-day event, as always, an eclectic showcase for independent artists, signals a major shift toward video as a cutting-edge form for exploring experimental textures; video as a more accessible eye into marginal lifestyles; and video as a frontier for witty personal declarations.

It's not that the festival, sponsored by Atlanta's IMAGE Film and Video Center, is ignoring film as a medium. Indeed, the screenings begin Tuesday at Woodruff Arts Center with the local premiere of "Building Bombs," Atlanta filmmakers Mark Mori and Susan Robinson's richly ironic documentary about the Savannah River Plant, told through the first-person stories of people who worked there. And it officially opens Wednesday with a gala benefit screening of "That's Adequate," West Coast director Harry Hurwitz's affectionate spoof of silent movies, a noisy Bronx cheer that wedds the irreverence of "Spinal Tap" to the pre-talking style of D.W. Griffith.

The festival's eight other programs spotlight 34 films and videos shot by artists from across North America. "Interestingly, we got more video work than film," says IMAGE director Ruby Lerner. "And of the video work we did get, a lot of it was quite strong."

Rather than lump pieces under "documentary" or "student" headings, the programming designed by Ms. Lerner and her staff strives for a kind of creative synergy. "This way," she says, "you possibly get people interested in certain themes, issues or kinds of work."

For instance, Thursday night's provocatively titled "Literary Inspirations (Or Full Frontal Existentialism)" is tailor-made, Ms. Lerner suggests, for "card-carrying philosophers, poets and semioticians," who'll get a discount admission to the screening. The program jostles the down-home focus of Atlanta's folklore-inspired Gary Moss and George deColian with the far-out obst.-
sessions of Seattle video artist Gary Hill.

Merritt, Moss and deGolian unveiled "The Bitter Berry: The Life and Times of a Poet" on the hard times of Mr. Reece, a North Georgian whose poetry and video work have competed with a stubborn case of tuberculosis. In 1958, at age 41, he took his life, leaving behind an unfinished autobiography. With the help of Georgia poet Bettie Sellars, the filmmakers tell Mr. Reece's story for him, using his own words.

Mr. Hill evokes a literary source as well, although the virtuosic volley for him, using his own words of Georgi poet Bettie Sellars, the not-strung-after-autobiography. With the help ofGeorgia poet Bettie Sellars, the filmmakers tell Mr. Reece's story for him, using his own words.

That the festival can attract the work of a Gary Hill, recognized as one of the country's top experimental video artists, is a sure measure of its value. Other veterans represented include center of video video "on the hard times of Mr. Reece, the virtuosic volley for him, using his own words of Georgi poet Bettie Sellars, the not-strung-after-autobiography. With the help of Georgia poet Bettie Sellars, the filmmakers tell Mr. Reece's story for him, using his own words.

The video, which is the crown prince of '80s underground filmmaking, switched to a Super-8 video format a few years ago, and its provocative stories of intimate, offhand video diaries documenting everything from his romantic details to his recent movements. Without Mr. Kuchar's self-conscious narration, laced with Jewish angst that only he knows, the plot of "Sadobabies: Runaways in San Francisco" approaches a near-cliched subject — the plight of teenage street kids — with deceptive ease. Meeting disaffected punk vagabonds on their own level, it lets them tell a story through improvised songs, drinking bouts and recollection. First, it illustrates their subculture, detailing its colorful personalities as facets of an intimate community. Then, it kicks open a trap door. As products of physical and emotional abuse, these runaway transfers aggression onto torture dolls — "sadobabies" — that grishly, wonderfully testify to the emotions the kids are still trying to exercise. (Featured in the Saturday 1 p.m. program, "Streetwise.")

"Crack Clouds Over Hell's Kitchen" — Produced by the Educational Video Center in New York, this high school student video draws on the experience of its teenage interviewers, who query crackheads — called "McChrists" — with a disarming openness. Athletes talk freely, you suspect, because there's noucose hype inflating the conversations. A refreshing antecedent to Geraldo Riverale (Also featured in "Streetwise.")

"The Mission" — Made by Skokie, Ill., chickheads Jim McCarthy and Steve Martini, this 23-minute stroll among the boon-sodden celebrants who occupy the infield of the Kentucky Derby tops David Letterman for middle-American absurdity. (Featured in the Friday 10:30 p.m. program, "Friday Night Late!") to be aired at IMAGE, 76 Bennett St. N.W.

Balancing out the festival are programs with a firm focus on political issues and personal heroism.

Night's main event is the Oscar-nominated documentary "Promises to Keep," a profile of Washington, D.C., homeless activist Mitch Snyder. On Saturday at 3:30 p.m., the program "Faces of Oppression/Faces of Courage," 3:30 p.m. "Goings and Comings," 8 p.m. Sunday: "Daughters.", "The Afterlife of Grandpa," a student film with exuberant passion and wonder of wonders — finds fresh whimsy in a body-reversal theme. As the title character, played with the incomparable Gary Hill, remembers his accomplishment "The Afterlife of Grandpa," a student film with exuberant passion and wonder of wonders — finds fresh whimsy in a body-reversal theme. As the title character, played with the incomparable Gary Hill, remembers his accomplishment. A Gary Hill, recognized as one of the country's top experimental video artists, is a sure measure of its value. Other veterans represented include center of video video "on the hard times of Mr. Reece, the virtuosic volley for him, using his own words of Georgi poet Bettie Sellars, the not-strung-after-autobiography. With the help of Georgia poet Bettie Sellars, the filmmakers tell Mr. Reece's story for him, using his own words.

Robert Vaughn is featured in a scene from 'That's Adequate.'

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