

Pasatiempo

Whiteboard wonder

Brian Sandford
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Whiteboards experimental filmmaker Godfrey Reggio used when planning and organizing his 2022 film *Once Within a Time* are on display at The Lena Wall installation under the name Yerf Dog Scripto. Photo Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

details

Whiteboards from *Once Within a Time*

On display indefinitely

The Lena Wall, Lena Street and Second Street

TheLenaWall.com

About The Lena Wall

Art displays are updated occasionally on the side of a building on the corner of Lena and Second streets. New Mexico artists and poets whose work has been displayed in the space previously include Kaitlin Bryson and Darryl Lorenzo Wellington. The wall is curated by Axle Contemporary co-owner and cofounder Matthew Chase-Daniel (chasedaniel.com/thelenawall).

Anyone who has watched one of Santa Fe experimental director Godfrey Reggio's films —from 1982's *Koyaanisqatsi* through last year's *Once Within a Time* — knows that what comes out of his head can be a chaotic combination of challenging, breathtaking, and confounding.

What's inside that head is more of a mystery —one that visitors to The Lena Wall can attempt to unravel in the coming months. There, four whiteboards Reggio used when planning and organizing *Once Within a Time* await exploration, each covered with words scrawled in black and red. Reggio used his own name as director of that film but is using the alternate title Yerf Dog Scripto for The Lena Wall installation.

While *Once Within a Time* took a year and a half to produce, Scripto says, he spent a whopping eight years crafting the words that can be viewed at The Lena Wall.

"So, those words are not lightly put," he says. "I go with the word as an aphorism. I sit there, and whatever starts talking, I write out. Now I know that might sound strange. But that adds a background to my subterranean, you know what I mean?"

One can be forgiven for not knowing what Scripto means; he often digs deep into his massive vocabulary and will wander down conversational tributaries where he assumes, occasionally incorrectly, that others can follow. As such, The Lena Wall project doubles as a monument to a creative mind, allowing time to reflect on Scripto's intentions.

Examples of the phrases on the whiteboards at Lena Wall:

- “Sanitized Killed Tortured Consumed by the (-ism) w/in Us All Human Animal”
- “A Neo-Fairy Tale of a Past that is the Future Present”
- “One Eats the Other Same Mother”
- “A Dawn of Darkness Watermarked in Light”

Some words are circled, with arrows pointing to phrases on the opposite side of a page. The result is its own form of helter-skelter art, with block letters instead of splattered paint.

“Dreaming gives you a point of view that’s visceral, that one can see and hear without hearing,” Scripto says. “And that’s how I tried to make these films. When you make a feature, it’s very important to know what you’re making it for. Are you trying to convince someone? Are you trying to show balance? In my case, I’m not trying to convince anyone. I do things not for profit, so I can do exactly what I want to do.”

Once Within a Time is described as showing life on Earth as humanity clashes with earth, air, water, fire, and money, all while headed toward a critical choice between annihilation and redemption. It marks Scripto/Reggio’s first directorial role since *Visitors* in 2013. That film, in turn, was his first as director since *Naqoyqatsi*, the final film in his Qatsi trilogy, in 2002.



Godfrey Reggio/ Yerf Dog Scripto of Santa Fe poses for a portrait at his home on June 29. The filmmaker still creates, but says he no longer has the physical energy to direct. Photo Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

All those films delve into humanity’s relationship with technology — a topic on many minds as big-tech companies roll out artificial intelligence even as AI’s creators warn of potentially calamitous consequences. Composer Phillip Glass provided the music for most of Scripto/Reggio’s work.

The key question raised in *Once Within a Time*, Scripto says: Have humans changed our reality to the point where we no longer recognize ourselves? Unfortunately for would-be viewers, *Once Within a Time* isn’t available on any streaming service. It had its world premiere at the 2022 Santa Fe International Film Festival, where Reggio was given a lifetime achievement award. Those who saw it might have noticed it features Santa Fe’s John Flax, a cofounder of Theater Grottesco. Steven Soderbergh and Alexander Rodnyansky were the executive producers of *Once Within a Time*, and Jon Kane codirected.

And the filmmaker continues to create: Scripto begins work at 5 a.m. daily, and says he favors the lack of distractions in the wee hours. He works alone, but not in silence.

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— *Godfrey Reggio/Yerf Dog Scripto*

"I can't live without music," he says. "It's a direct communion beyond metaphor to the soul. And I think we all have a soul."

So what kind of music does an experimental filmmaker who seems to think in a counterclockwise direction listen to? Balinese gamelan music from the 1960s, perhaps?

"I'm listening to everything from Bob Dylan — early Bob Dylan," Scripto says. "Every time I hear it, it's better. I listen to a lot of jazz; it means a lot to me because I grew up with that [in New Orleans]. Jazz is about the soul. I also listen to Russian [composers], like Igor Stravinsky."

Scripto, 83, suffers from a health condition that limits his mobility and causes frequent physical discomfort; he declines to offer specifics beyond that.

"With that having been said, I'm not going to direct anymore, because I don't have the physical energy," he says. "I think it requires the physical capacity to be one with everybody."

Scripto says he has plenty to keep him busy — and he recalls a resonant lesson from three decades ago about the value of structure.

"The dalai lama gave a talk at the university in Albuquerque in '91 or '92, and after, he said he'd take a few questions," Scripto says. "A girl jumped up and said, 'Your holiness, what is the single most important thing I can pay attention to?' His reply: 'Routine. Next question.'"

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https://www.santafenewmexican.com/pasatiempo/movies/whiteboard-wonder/article_od23c93e-106d-11ee-b186-f7f938b7bbe7.html
