

# Police Burn “Flaming Creatures”

Emil Bacilla  
Larry Weiner

1967

On Wednesday, January 18, the Ann Arbor Police Department confiscated Jack Smith’s film *FLAMING CREATURES* during a showing to 300 college students, hippies, and film buffs. This was, we suppose, an attempt to protect these people from having to see things that they weren’t supposed to see.

It was a very subtle bust, actually. Everyone was sitting there watching the film when the screen went black and the lights came up. There was confusion for a few minutes, people wondering if the film was over or what.

Then someone from the Cinema Guild came up and said that they didn’t know what was happening either, so hang loose. Then someone else came in and said the film’s been confiscated, and you can get your money back if you want it.

Everybody went out of the auditorium into the building proper, and stood around until the detectives came down from the projection booth with the film. They were met with a thunderous round of applause, which quickly turned into a chorus of boos and hisses. Someone said “lets march on the police station,” and about one hundred persons staged a sit-in at the station for four hours.

The next day, the police arrested Ellen Frank, Mary Barkev (co-chairman of the Cinema Guild), Hugh Cohen (faculty advisor) and Ralph Walda (the projectionist). They were charged with violation of the obscenity law, which carries a maximum sentence of one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. All were released the same day on personal bond.

Meanwhile, the Cinema Guild has filed suit against the Ann Arbor police chief and the Washtenaw County Prosecutor in Detroit Federal District Court. The case was set for Jan. 30 before Judge Thaddeus Machrowicz.

The suit asked for an injunction restraining the local police from subsequent prosecution, arrests, and seizures for showing art films, a declaratory judgment prohibiting “prior censorship of films” by the police, immediate return of the seized copy of “Flaming Creatures”, and \$15,000 damages.

The Ann Arbor chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union blasted the film seizure. In a statement the group said: “It is impossible to make judgments regarding the alleged obscenity of the film on the basis of the showing of only ten minutes of the picture. The courts have held that the socially redeeming qualities of an artistic work outweigh charges of obscenity brought against individual portions of the work.”

## Sidebar

“Bo do dee do. Oh de do doo, poo oee doo. A mother’s wisdom

“...ahhhh! A Mother’s wisdom has dragged me down to this! a crummy loft! a life of futility! hunger! despair! Bo be do do, boo pee doo ahha. What went wrong? WHAT WENT WRONG!

“Somewhere, something went completely wrong. The City and the State have turned against the arts; the most sensitive budding points of spiritual and esthetic activity are being hurt. Bureaucracy is triumphing. Civic duty had run amok. Kafka keeps writing, his pen screeching.”

—Jack Smith, Director of FLAMING CREATURES

# fifth Estate

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