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Art Flicks Sparkle on Cell Phones

By [Niall McKay](#) | [Also](#) by this reporter

02:00 AM Apr, 27, 2006

Art-house flicks for cell phones and iPods might teach Hollywood a thing or two about mobile entertainment if the movie bigwigs would just pay attention to the tiny screen, experts say.

This week at the [San Francisco International Film Festival](#), 20 movies made for mobile devices with 2-inch-by-3-inch screens will be shown as part of the festival's Pocket Cinema program.

Some of the films tackle very big issues, like Katherin McInnis' *spookspeak*, a four-minute film parodying the National Security Agency's Echelon electronic eavesdropping program.

McInnis' movie blends text and audio of about 300 watchwords that, when used in e-mails or cell-phone conversations, allegedly trigger further scrutiny by the NSA's spy systems.

"The idea behind *spookspeak* is to warn people that their conversations might not be private," said McInnis, a San Francisco-based visual artist and documentary filmmaker. "I find it really disturbing that I have to worry about what I say when e-mailing friends in Iran."

Also on the program is *Suprematist Kapital* (.mov), by San Francisco filmmakers James T. Hong and Yin-Ju Chen, which tells a five-minute history of Western capitalism.

"It was inspired by years of paying off student loans," said Hong.

The [Pocket Cinema](#) program highlights the art world's contribution to mobile video, which the entertainment industry hopes will be the next big content boom. Fox, for example, is releasing [mobisodes](#) of the TV show *Prison Break*, while Touchstone Television Productions is producing a version of *Lost* just for mobiles.

"Think internet video circa 1999 with networks optimized for video and (with) a built-in payment engine," said Seamus McAteer, senior analyst with [MMetrics](#), a San Francisco market research firm. "The business will mature much faster than internet video."

The entertainment industry could learn a lot about mobile film from the art world, said Joel Bachar, founder of [Microcinema International](#), which has been distributing independent and experimental films for more than a decade.

Bachar said videos that use less movement and fewer edits are easier to download and watch on a mobile. Also, mobile art videos that combine the use of sound and images to convey a nontraditional type of narrative are a lot easier to consume on a cell phone than a TV series.

"Simply repurposing television shows for the cell phone," he said, "is not a good use of the medium."

Already, some 2 million Americans watch video once a month on their mobile devices, according to MMetrics.

This is likely to increase as network operators like Verizon Communications offer more programming. The company recently cut a content deal with internet video provider [Atom Entertainment](#) to offer its content to subscribers.

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