

AT LARGE / By ROBERT TAYLOR

The light that is Maud Morgan

In Paris, Maud Morgan met James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway. Curious about Bolshevism, she visited Russia in 1928 and was disillusioned. She has talked with Ghandi, studied with painter Hans Hofmann, and was once asked to run for the state legislature of New York.

None of these close encounters of the biographical kind are in the new 23-minute color film "Light Coming Through," co-directed by Richard Leacock and Nancy Raine. The film has different aims, notably to show how Morgan copes creatively with being a woman and with growing old today, and its very existence testifies to the respect she commands among Boston's visual artists. For more than a decade, the 77-year-old Cambridge resident has served as role model and inspiration to countless artists, and the homage she has earned is completely deserved.

"Light Coming Through" is having a world premiere starting today and running through Nov. 2 at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Free to the public, the production might well symbolize the diverse events of Artweek Boston. (More than 100 museums, galleries and art organizations have scheduled tours, seminars, lectures and movies, and some 550 open studios are participating in Artweek, which is now in full-swing and ends Sunday.) It is an interesting film which captures with remarkable sensitivity Maud Morgan's inner life.

Leacock's initial image shows Morgan proceeding through thick underbrush. The camera follows a short distance to the rear, establishing one of the central motifs, movement from an enclosed space toward openness. Presently, the path expands, and she emerges on a bluff overlooking a beach. "Isn't it wonderful," she exclaims, "how nature protects."

Next we see Maud Morgan working in her studio upon a self-portrait. A sequence of images records the growth of this portrait, and meanwhile, often in soliloquy, she muses upon the landmarks of her life,

her feelings as a woman and artist, about age, her recent divorce, and the magical patterns of nature. Finally, we observe Morgan swimming in a quarry and splashing in a waterfall, accepting the sun, the cascading roar, the crystalline shiver of the water, enjoying nature as freely as she has given herself to art.

The film is lyrical and poetic, but you shouldn't expect a conventional linear pattern from it. The technique is essentially impressionistic, selecting and orchestrating visual images rather than narrating a story. Of course it may be argued that Maud Morgan is more than the sum of her inner experiences; she is also a social being. Who she is depends just as much on mundane fact as it does on attitude and atmosphere.

For example, a handout on the movie marshals the prose in the manner of a biographical sketch, and it informs us that Maud Morgan, daughter of the Francis Higginson Cabots, was born in New York City. That her education took place not in an art school (art school happened in her 20s) but at the Sorbonne and Barnard. That her travels throughout the Far East 50 years ago are the source for the mulberry-paper collages she



Maud Morgan in her Cambridge apartment.

has been doing for the past five years. That she spent her honeymoon with the Ernest Hemingways in Key West and studied with Hofmann in Germany. That she has exhibited with Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. That she decided to live singly in Cambridge in 1957, and went through an emotional upheaval. That she has spent 20 years in relative isolation from the demands of the New York marketplace where she used to exhibit, but this doesn't preclude working at an astonishing pace here — six exhibitions during the 1979-80 season.

How relevant is such information? Impossible to say. Obviously it won't fit a 23-minute movie. Let us be content with the music of time making the recent years of Maud Morgan a demonstration that self-realization does not have an endpoint.