

Un-dependently Yours: Imagining A World Beyond The Red Carpet

Experiments in Cinema
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"May beats a carpet," 1927, Manitoba, Canada, photographer unknown.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	Bryan Konefsky	1
Blown Off the Big Screen	Gene Youngblood	3
We Sit in the Dark (Safety in Numbers)	Sasha Waters Freyer	7
FLEXfest and the (Past and) Future of Festivals	Roger Beebe	13
why (notes on the White Cube-Black Box-Telescreen Triad)	Michael Betancourt	20
Notes From a Curmudgeon	Charles Lum	32
What Makes "Experiments in Cinema" Such a Great Festival?	Caryn Cline	36
I Fell in Love with a French Man	Alexie Dmitriev	40
Regional Support Network (RSN)	Clint Enns and Leslie Supnet	46
Come into the Fashion Zone	Chip Lord	52
A Brief Look Back	Ben Popp	55
Eye Contact	Kristen Lauth Shaeffer	63
Cinema, <i>redivivus</i>	Tina Wasserman	67
"Don't Even Look At It" – Pixelvision and Multi-Screens	Gerry Fialka	71
On Scorpios, Leather (and Satin) Jackets and the Importance of Experimental Film Festivals	Kamila Kuc	88
On CROSSROADS	Steve Polta	97
Fracking (with) post-modernism, or there's a lil' Dr Frankenstein in all of us	Bryan Konefsky	110
Curating Artists' Cinema	Caroline Koebel	122
Changing the World, One Film at a Time	Bart Weiss	129

Curating Artists' Cinema

By: Caroline Koebel

As a maker of experimental film and artists' video, I am keenly aware of the contemporaneous need for the making of context and community, for creating the (meta-) conditions of the work's existence beyond the source of origin, its contemplation by others. "Audience" as an abstract concept is a fount of desire, integral to critical and aesthetic process, and the basis of a dialogical ontology of filmmaking.

In their devotion both to filmmaking and disseminating radical film art culture, American avant-garde mavericks Maya Deren and Jonas Mekas inspire next generations also to simultaneously make and curate. Gen Xers such as me find a home in cinema-as-counter-hegemonic-expressive-form after being weaned on punk and hardcore music subcultures. Such currents of influence exude DIY and DIWO ethos, the very spirit that sparks today's most vital actions in global artists' cinema.

Various forces, from Craig Baldwin and Other Cinema in San Francisco to M.M. Serra and Film-Makers' Cooperative in NYC (to name two beacons), manifest a quintessential communality bent on sharing the autonomy, radicalism, and love of alter-cinema. The late Helen Hill—from the collective guide to hand-processing *Recipes for Disaster: A Handcrafted Film Cookbooklet* she spearheaded through teaching filmmaking to a broad demographic to her body of exuberant cinema—continues as an animate presence in this world.

These advocates unite artists and audiences: a community of makers whose works excite, awe, provoke, inspire, and challenge, and a community of moving image art enthusiasts who feel an affirmation of self by partaking of a personal,

Curating Artists' Cinema

poetic, experimental, and critical cinema without commercial cachet.

Especially since the reality of experimental film and artists' video, historically, has been at such loggerheads with capital, it's understandable that avant-garde cinema's artists and audiences would be in such symbiosis and typically exhibit merely faint boundaries, if any at all. To be audience of this cinema is to be irrevocably marked by it; to become part of it; to carry it with you as a secret not to divulge on the marketplace but, hopefully, to be whispered into unsuspecting yet receptive ears.

The Friendship State is a program of films and videos by Lyndsay Bloom, Jennifer Lane, Kelly Sears, Scott Stark, and me that I presented originally at Microscope Gallery in November 2012. Texas-based at the time with an upcoming return visit to NYC, I wanted to articulate more formally the dialog already shaping between other makers and me around the state (Austin, Houston, Marfa) and to explore the state's desirable traits (the motto of Texas is "friendship"). Following the Brooklyn premiere, the program toured to Austin Film Society, CineMarfa, and Peras de Olmo - Ars Continua in Buenos Aires.

For the Friendship State at Zeitgeist Multi-Disciplinary Arts Center Lyndsay and I road-tripped to New Orleans, where our gracious and loquacious hosts were utterly captivating in their storytelling prowess. An especially memorable portrait drawn by Rene Broussard, Zeitgeist Director, was of his friendship with Helen Hill. Each week at the farmer's market Helen would buy a crawfish and on the walk home release it into the water. The friends shared this ritual throughout Helen's pregnancy and sustained it once the baby was born.

Curator's Corner is a feature of the Aurora Picture Show website for which Curator Mary Magsamen selects an APS

member to spotlight (and streams their work). Stumbling upon the phenomenal animations of Kelly Sears on the site resulted in my programming a solo screening in May 2012 for Experimental Response Cinema (ERC) in Austin. Just as Kelly makes use of indispensable critical and creative tools in her life as an explorer of (the edges of) cinema, she likewise brings intense focus and precision to logistics and consequently the in-person Austin event was a jewel to behold on all levels.

Her apt sense of physics (and of other areas of scientific inquiry) infuses her powers to make motion out of still parts with anything but static results. *The Drift* in particular conveys a sense of liberatory movement both on and off screen (I recall feeling that I too, like an astronaut, was floating in space). In the Q&A the artist talked about training her brain's "animation muscle" and the significance of this highly intentional neurological process to her cinema. The night was a bright example of experimental film's capacity to exercise viewer's muscles, or rather whole beings, in myriad and lasting ways.



Still from *The Drift* (2007) By Kelly Sears

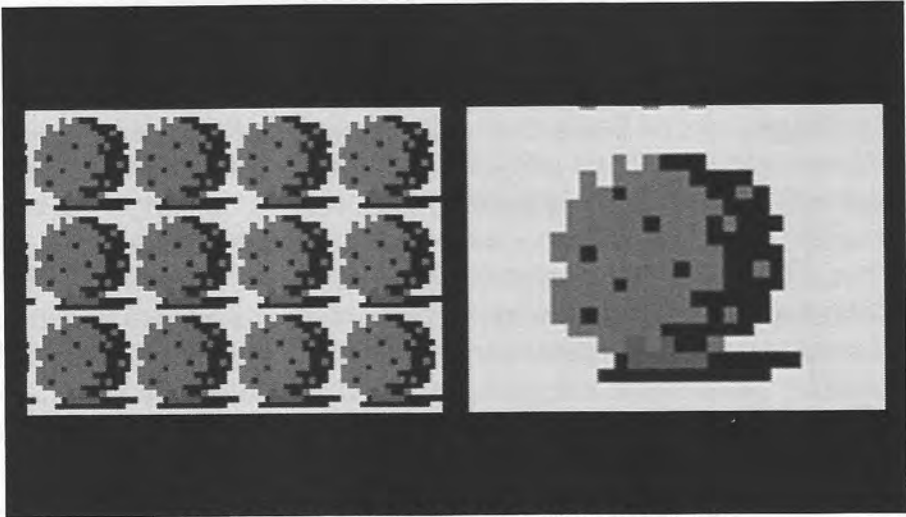
Curating Artists' Cinema

Commissioned by Aurora Picture Show, Kino B: Contemporary Cinema by Berlin-Based Artists premiered in October 2013 in Houston, Texas, and toured in 2014 to Transart Institute at Uferstudios in Berlin, Germany, and to the Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio. Curatorial parameters entailed selecting an initial title from my base in Austin and then resisting any temptation for virtual research in favor of learning-in-place from a vantage point of Berlin itself (ultimately resulting in a frenzy of online communications and viewings and old-school meetings and real-live 16mm projections).

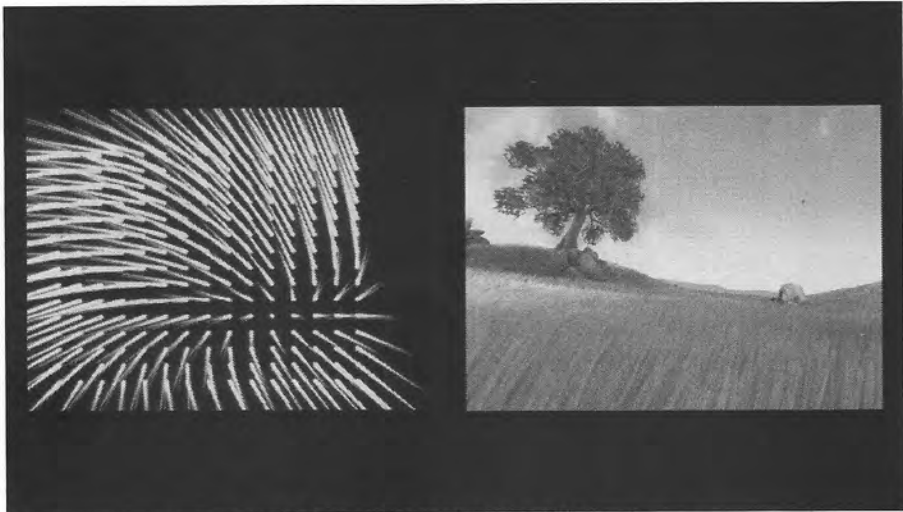
Thus, I landed in the foreign capital with Sylvia Schedelbauer's *Sounding Glass* in hand and a month later returned stateside with eight additional titles by the (now) late luminary Harun Farocki, Guillaume Cailleau & Ben Russell, Isabella Gresser, Bernd Lützeler, Anna Marziano, Deborah S. Phillips, Michael Poetschko, and Daniel Steegmann Mangrané—artists who share a command of cinema's potential for experientially transformative critical reflection.

It was a hot and humid August day in Berlin when I rode my bike east along Karl-Marx-Allee to the home studio of Harun Farocki and Antje Ehmman, passing the Computerspielmuseum on my way. Experiencing the pair in the intimacy of their own space has left a strong impression on me; the sight as we ranged over various topics and debated how different projects would resonate in the Kino B program of Harun drinking espresso and Antje eating an avocado remains vivid. The quiet yet palpable beauty of their bond gave me solace in the wake of the collapse of my own long-term relationship as I pedaled back west, passing once again the Computer Game Museum but now with the newly acquired knowledge that it, as a sponsor of Farocki's *Parallel*, would feature in my Kino B program.

In April 2013 I guest curated a special presentation for Fusebox Festival in Austin of *De Profundis*, a radical film experiment by Lawrence Brose inspired by Oscar Wilde's transgressive



Still from *Parallel* (2012) By Harun Farocki



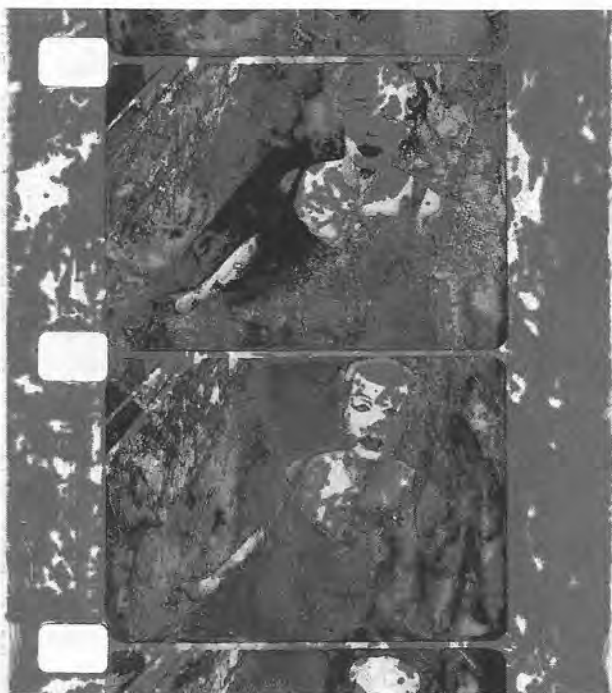
Still from *Parallel* (2012) By Harun Farocki

aesthetics and prison letter. Because at the time he himself was trapped in a legal battle, "The United States vs. Lawrence

Curating Artists' Cinema

Brose," the Buffalo-based filmmaker was prohibited from travel. Our initial work-around was to Skype him in live but due to additional legal restraints we screened a prerecorded video interview between Lawrence and William C. Altreuter, Attorney, addressing the 1997 film and Lawrence's current-day persecution in light of one another.

Yet for the artist's insight and prescience I'd like to turn to an earlier interview conducted by Scott MacDonald shortly after the release of *De Profundis*: "I did try to create a different kind of sonic space, and a sense of overload that would reflect our time and that earlier one. The arguments that were going on between Wilde and Gide, and between Wilde and the Victorian society that convicted him, are still going on. But a hundred years later, we've come to a position where, partly because of what happened around Wilde, we can have voices and even



Still from *De Profundis* (1997) By Lawrence Brose

the beginnings of a language with which we can begin to discuss things. Yet language fails us.”

I am returned here to curating artists' cinema. The crux of the matter is that an act of expression such as *De Profundis* wields immense powers of resistance to authoritarian structures and therefore is under constant peril of erasure (through various means of censorship and silencing). It is thrilling, affirming, and gratifying to coexist with others—significantly: artists and audiences—collectively maintaining that such cinema is not to be bullied out of existence.

About the Artist

Caroline Koebel makes experimental cinema clashing aesthetics and politics. Retrospectives include Festival Cine//B (Santiago), Centre for Contemporary Art at Ujazdowski Castle (Warsaw) and Directors Lounge (Berlin). She has presented at Experiments In Cinema (Albuquerque), Scope Art Fair (NYC), Edinburgh International Film Festival, European Media Art Festival (Osnabrück), LOOP Barcelona; published in *Brooklyn Rail*, *Afterimage*, *Jump Cut*, *Millennium Film Journal*. BA in Film Studies: UC Berkeley. MFA in Visual Arts: UC San Diego. She is on faculty at Transart Institute, and in summer 2015 will teach a Brecht Workshop in Berlin. Her solo show *Incursions Into Cosmic Fear* opens in June at Young Projects in Los Angeles.
