



## **WOMEN FILMMAKERS, EMBODIMENT AND ABSTRACTION (1970-1995)**

**Curated by Tess Takahashi and Josh Guilford**

**Wednesday, December 4th | 7pm | Free Admission**

**Amherst College | Keefe Campus Center Theater**

This program presents eight short films created by women filmmakers between 1970-1995, which have been drawn from the collections of three experimental film distributors in the U.S. and Canada. It highlights a prevalent – yet under-examined – tension that structures diverse forms of women’s experimental cinema from this period, gathering a range of works that exhibit a complex oscillation between abstraction and embodiment, where non-representational images and sounds continuously merge and clash with representations of gendered, raced, and sexualized bodies. Examining the co-presence of these seemingly divergent tendencies within the work of filmmakers from different regions, generations, and cultural locations, the program considers how the aesthetic conflict between abstraction and representation indexes broader cultural tensions negotiated by women artists working within the traditions of experimental cinema after the 1960s, revealing how such artists sought to reconcile prevailing inquiries into medium specificity with emergent discourses on identity politics. By foregrounding works that reference mediums other than film – such as dance, painting, and collage – the program also points to affinities between women’s experimental cinema and explorations of abstraction conducted in parallel artistic disciplines.

## PART ONE

### **“Swish,” Jean Sousa, 1982, 16mm, color, silent, 3 min**

“This film deals with the physical properties of the film medium, and pushing those distinctive features to their limit. The subject of the film is motion, and it is an attempt to get inside of it. It was made with a moving subject and a moving camera with an open shutter, the result being that each frame is unique, without the smooth continuity that is expected in film. The subject, a female body at close range, provides an intimacy and eroticism. At the same time it can be seen as a modern version of Futurist simultaneity.” -JS

### **“Abstraction,” Rosalind Schneider, 1971, 16mm, color, sound, 10 min**

"*Abstraction* deals with the interpretation of abstract form as found in the combination of the nude body, landscape, and objects. Imagery is achieved through visual distortion dealing with reflective surfaces, as well as the superimposition of subject matter. The rhythmic structure focuses on a pulsating expansion and contraction that simulates a life force. An attempt has been made to reveal the basic concepts of a painter's approach to the distillation of reality." - RS

### **“Roseblood,” Sharon Couzin, 1974, 16mm, color, sound, 8 min**

“The dance of Carolyn Chave Kaplan; Music from Stockhausen's ‘Hymnen’ and ‘Mantra,’ Enesco's ‘Sonata No. 3 in A Minor.’ Images of a woman in dance, in flora, in picture, in eyes, in architecture, in sunshine, in color, in crystal, in space, in confusion, in danger, in disintegration, in her hand, in birth, in the Valley of Sorrow, in the sea, in repetition, in sculpture and in herself.” -SC "Some really extraordinary subliminal combinations are happening." – Pat O'Neill

### **“Yogurt Culture,” Patti Lee Chenis, 1970, 16mm, b&w, sound (digital file), 11 min**

“Animated pen and ink Cartoon space-like drawings on transparent acetate sheets & silver paint superimposed plastic bubble packing material & plastic helmet approaching 3D without the use of 3D glasses. Part of a series of yogurt culture film.” -PC

## PART TWO

### **“Girl from Moush,” Garine Tarossian, 1993, 16mm, color, sound, 5 min**

“Girl from Moush’ is a poetic montage of the artist's journey through her subconscious Armenia. It is not an Armenia based in a reality, but one which appears, like the mythical city of Shangri La, when one closes one's eyes. Rooted in what Jung may call a ‘communal consciousness,’ her Armenia appears on film as a collage of myth, legend, experience and immigration. In her memoir, Gariné reveals a longing which is visualized but yet never solidly based in our reality. Icons of Armenia appear on the screen for only a second, and then disappear from both the viewer's and the artist's minds. The world of the traveller is filled with uncertainty and fascination. As viewers we are engaged and forced through uncharted landscapes that have been traditionally been restricted to the mind of the artist. Projected into proportions which are larger than life, the viewer is forced to confront and assimilate all that s/he views and perceives.” -Berlinale, Panorama 40th Anniversary Screening, 2019

**“Stranger Baby,” Lana Lin, 1995, 16mm, color, sound, 15 min**

“Micro-narratives moving between fiction, non-fiction, and science fiction elaborate multiple meanings of the term ‘alien.’” -LL “Substituting sly metaphor for political rhetoric on immigration, Lin examines our world of ethical and racial complexities.” – LA Asian Pacific Film Festival catalogue

**“Chronicles of a Lying Spirit (by Kelly Gabron),” Cauleen Smith, 1992, 16mm, color, sound, 13 minutes**

"CHRONICLES OF A LYING SPIRIT (BY KELLY GABRON) is less a depiction of 'reality' than an exploration of the implications of the mediation of Black history by film, television, magazines and newspapers. Using her alter ego, Kelly Gabron, Smith fabricates a personal history of her emergence as an artist from white-male-dominated American history (and American film history). Smith collages images and bits of text from a scrapbook by 'Kelly Gabron' that had been completed before the film was begun, and provides female narration by 'Kelly Gabron' that, slowly but surely, makes itself felt over the male narration about Kelly Gabron (Chris Brown is the male voice). The film's barrage of image, text and voice is repeated twice, and is followed by a coda. That most viewers see the second presentation of the imagery differently from the original presentation demonstrates one problem with trusting any media representation." - Scott MacDonald

**“Lie Back and Enjoy It,” JoAnn Elam, 1982, b&w, sound, 8 min**

"JoAnn Elam's LIE BACK AND ENJOY IT is an absorbing eight-minute dialectical film about the politics of representation. More specifically, it examines the politics of filmic representation of women under patriarchy .... An undergraduate male student paid it a true compliment in declaring that he can no longer look at a woman in a film without thinking about the consequences of the filmmaker's use of her as a person and as a spectacle .... The film is endowed with remarkable structural and rhetorical lucidity .... Its image track consists of technologically manipulated images of women, and some printed titles. Its soundtrack consists of a dialogue between a Man (a filmmaker) and a Woman (of whom he's going to make a film) .... Everyone who watches movies with women in them ought to see it." - Claudia Gorbman, *Jump Cut*

TRT ca. 77 mins

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Still: “Abstraction” (Rosalind Schneider, 1971).

