

EXPERIMENTAL AND DOCUMENTARY CINEMA: THE VISIBLE SPECTRUM

Experimental and Documentary Cinema is a new, annual film series to be presented as part of Duke's Screen/Society at the Rubenstein Art Center. The purpose of this film series is to expand discourses of “experimental” and “documentary” in cinema. Each fall semester, a guest curator or a curatorial team will be chosen to design a 5-part program that highlights films that lie at the interstice of these two terms. This inaugural year, the guest curators are Chi-hui Yang of the Ford Foundation and Jon-Sesrie Goff of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Their program is entitled, “The Visible Spectrum.”

The Visible Spectrum

September 4-October 2, 2018

The Rubenstein Arts Center Film Theater, Duke University

Curated by Chi-hui Yang and Jon-Sesrie Goff, *The Visible Spectrum* brings the work of 18 artists to the Rubenstein Arts Center this fall. The program explores the ways that artists have radically experimented with documentary form to articulate the fullness of history and lived experience. By carefully building the shapes of ideas, these 18 artists offer exploded and wholly singular ways of seeing, and deep reimaginings of race, the state, the body and History itself.

An intergenerational conversation between filmmakers from across geographies, traditions and communities, the series asks us to consider how meaning is made, and how we construct history in our daily lives. From what deep diasporic time looks like, to how artistic lineages move across generations, to what an indigenous aesthetics is today, these works interrogate the power, limits and possibilities of images themselves and propose an accountability and ethics of working with the documentary form.

Including essay films, home movies, performance videos, unclassifiable hybrids, improvised poetics, archival interventions, landscape portraits and more from: Ayo Akingbade, Madeline Anderson, Korakrit Arunanondchai, Ephraim Asili, Cab Calloway, Nazli Dincel, Kevin Jerome Everson, Ja'tovia Gary, John Gianvito, Sky Hopinka, Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese, Howardena Pindell, belit sag, Monica Saviron, Cauleen Smith, Maryam Tafakory.

Sponsorship / Acknowledgements:

The Vice Provost for the Arts, the Program in the Arts of the Moving Image, the Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies, the MFA in Experimental and Documentary Arts, the Center for Documentary Studies, and the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute.

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<https://ami.duke.edu/screensociety/visible-spectrum-series>

Hear from the organizers



Shambhavi Kaul, Assistant Professor of the Practice of Filmmaking in the Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies:

The idea for this film series, Experimental and Documentary Cinema, emerged from a graduate class I teach in the MFA|EDA program at Duke called Documentary Fieldwork. In that class, the question of how experimental and documentary approaches may confluence in a currently relevant practice comes up regularly.

Looking forward, the plan is for The Visible Spectrum to be the first in an annual series. Each year I hope to bring new guest curators who may have their own particular take on this framework. We thus hope to be challenged and surprised by what unfolds. This year we are extremely lucky to have Chi-hui Yang and Jon Goff as our guest curators.

The newly opened Rubenstein Art Center has dramatically raised the possibility of cooperation and collaboration between art units on campus and beyond. For this series, we hope our audiences will bring together our undergraduate and graduate students, our faculty, and the triangle area community at large. All five screenings are free and open to the public.

Chi-Hui Yang, Program Officer, Ford Foundation:

Through my work at the Ford Foundation, I think quite a bit about the creative languages we need to make sense of and articulate responses to the social justice issues facing us. The works in this program represent the kinds of interventions I think we need in political and social discourse.

Jon-Sesrie Goff is an adventurous curator and thinker; I was drawn to collaborate with him because of his deeply political sense for documentary and his incredible knowledge and love for the archive.



These films, which represent reality but question the construction of it through careful formal play, could not be more vital and necessary to see today, when the need for a critical and engaged media-watching citizenry is needed more than ever.

Jon-Sesrie Goff, Museum Specialist for Film at the Smithsonian Museum of African American Art and Culture:

As a graduate of the MFA|EDA program, my engagement with the Documentary Arts on Duke's campus has been integral to my exploration and innovation of the medium as a transformative tool for social justice.

Much of the work I do at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture as the Museum Specialist for Film is about reclaiming lost works and voices in the moving-image field, reinserting them into archive, and providing a forum for contemporary and emerging makers to share their work with new audiences. Working with Chi-hui on curating "The Visible Spectrum" gave us an opportunity to look across cultures and geographical borders at how filmmakers are grappling with an array of urgent issues.



Program Notes

September 4: [Madeline Anderson: I Am Somebody](#)

7 pm Rubenstein Arts Center, 72 mins

Chi-hui Yang and Jon-Sesrie Goff in person



Grounded in the trailblazing works of Madeline Anderson, this program spans over a half-century of cultural production by black women. Anderson's use of the news library archive combined with pointed filmed footage creates expansive narratives to document integration efforts in the American North and South during the late 1950s in "Integration Report One" and focuses her lens on the unionization efforts and subsequent strike of hospital workers in Charleston, SC who must address both racism and sexism in the workplace in "I Am Somebody."

"Ecstatic Experience" by Ja'Tovia Gary echoes the themes presented in Anderson's work with a found footage collage that incorporates analog film and video that flickers with allusions to historic and contemporary notions of freedom for the oppressed guided by her hand-painted, scratched frames, and digital manipulations. Nestled, chronologically, between these works lies Howardena Pindell's "Free, White, and 21," that expands the limitations of 1970s era feminism to include the voices of women of color, and Ayo Akingbade's "Tower XYZ." Pindell turns the camera on herself to recount experiences of discrimination while Akingbade points her 16mm camera at her community to explore an imagined future for young women in the city of London, with the refrain "Let's get rid of the ghetto..." Beyond the gaze, all these works are differentiated through the craftsmanship and techniques employed by each filmmaker.

- *Integration Report 1*, Madeline Anderson, 1960, 21 min, US
- *An Ecstatic Experience*, Ja'tovia Gary, 2017, 6 min, US
- *Tower XYZ*, Ayo Akingbade, 2016, 3 min, UK
- *I Am Somebody*, Madeline Anderson, 1970, 30 min, US
- *Free, White, and 21*, Howardena Pindell, 1980, 12 min, US

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[Madeline Anderson Interview at Metrograph](#)

September 11: [Ephraim Asili: Diaspora Suite](#)

7 pm Rubenstein Arts Center, 92mins

Ephraim Asili in person



In 2011, New York-based filmmaker, DJ, and traveler Ephraim Asili began an extraordinary series of films on the African diaspora. These films—"Forged Ways" (2011), "American Hunger" (2013), "Many Thousands Gone" (2015), "Kindah" (2016), and "Fluid Frontiers" (2017)—bring together archival research and Asili's travels through Brazil, Canada, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jamaica, and the United States to chart cultural connections across time and space. Together as the Diaspora Suite, the five films, all shot on 16mm are poetic examinations of place and time. Through imaginative juxtaposition of geographies, non-sync sound and exquisite visual rhythms, Asili proposes an aesthetics of diasporic time, where movements, bodies and cultures speak across oceans, the present and the deep past.

Where "Forged Ways" oscillates between Harlem and Ethiopia and chronicles a man navigating day to day life from city to village, "American Hunger" juxtaposes a street festival in Philadelphia, slave forts in Ghana and the New Jersey shore to explore the relationship between personal experience and collective history. In "Many Thousand Gone," Asili parallels Salvador, Brazil, the last city in the Western Hemisphere to outlaw slavery with Harlem, NY, accompanied by an improvised score by Joe McPhee. "Kindah," shot in Hudson, NY and Accompong, Jamaica traces the legacy of rebel slaves and their descendants, and "Fluid Frontiers" explores the relationship between concepts of resistance and liberation, exemplified by the Underground Railroad, Broadside Press, and artworks of Detroit artists.

- *Forged Ways*, 2011, 15 min, 16mm, US
- *American Hunger*, 2013, 19 min, 16mm, US
- *Many Thousands Gone*, 2015, 8 min, 16mm, US
- *Kindah*, 2016, 12 min, 16mm, US
- *Fluid Frontiers*, 2017, 23 min, 16mm, US

Special thanks to Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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[Ephraim Asili Interview in Brooklyn Rail](#)

September 18: [Monuments for the Future](#)

7 pm Rubenstein Arts Center, 85mins



What are the necessary monuments for our collective future; ones that unfurl and welcome, that push national narratives to hold more and ask us to rethink where we look for history and how we see it? This collection of films proposes a radical reimagining of time and place and what voices we put at the center of History.

John Gianvito's monumental 2007 film "Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind" provides the center for this program. Loosely inspired by Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States," it is an epic, visual meditation on the progressive history of the United States, from colonial times to the present, as seen through its cemeteries, historical plaques and markers. Making its way through 400 years of American history, it visits the resting places of such figures as Malcolm X, Mother Jones, Frederick Douglass, Cesar Chavez, Susan B. Anthony and Crazy Horse, alongside lesser known but equally important heroes and radicals, including Frank Little, Uriah Smith Stephens and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Parallels of diaspora and the legacy of revolution are evoked in "Cab Calloway Visit Haiti" - excerpts from home movies the musician shot while on tour in the Caribbean, including a visit to a statue of Toussaint Louverture. Mining the archive, Monica Saviron's "Broken Tongue" is an ode to the freedom of movement, association, and expression and challenges the way narratives are constructed. Made primarily with images from the January 1st issues of The New York Times from 1851 to 2013, it animates sound performer Tracie Morris' poem "Afrika." In "Pilgrim" Cauleen Smith constructs a meditation on place and creative and spiritual inspiration through spaces of generosity: Alice Coltrane's Sai Anantam Ashram in Agoura, California, the Watts Towers in Los Angeles, and the Watervliet Shaker Community, in Troy, NY. In "Shape of a Surface," Nazli Dincel explores the ruins of a city once built for Aphrodite and its Pagan, Christian and Muslim pasts, through the surfaces and mirror reflections of present day bodies and perspectives.

- *Cab Calloway Visits Haiti*, Cab Calloway, 1951, 7 min, US
- *Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind*, John Gianvito, 2007, 58 min, US
- *Broken Tongue*, Monica Saviron, 2017, 3 min, US
- *Pilgrim*, Cauleen Smith, 2017, 8 min, US
- *Shape of a Surface*, Nazli Dincel, 2017, 9 min, US

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[John Gianvito Interview at Cinema Scope](#)

September 25: [Image Control](#)

7 pm Rubenstein Arts Center, 83mins



In this collection of works that address politics, social movements and personal histories, the image - photographs, symbols, archival materials, propaganda videos – is deconstructed and examined to understand its limits, controlling influences and symbolic power. When representations of reality can be used to liberate, but also reproduce violence, control the body and foreclose the making of meaning, what artistic interventions are necessary, how do we confront the image?

Each of these works offers formal propositions for what a reflexive documentary image can be. A video essay about its own making, belit sag's "Ayhan and Me" examines notions of artistic production, censorship, and control through her relationship as an artist with photographs of Ayhan Çarkin, a Turkish paramilitary policeman accused of extra judicial killings. An "incomplete and imperfect portrait of reflections from Standing Rock," Sky Hopinka's "Dislocation Blues" acknowledges the limits of representation and looking back as a way to approximate history and collectivity. In Maryam Tafakory's "I Have Sinned a Rapturous Sin," videos of Islamic clergymen instructing women on how to control their desire are confronted with fragments from feminist Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad's poem *Sin*. A damning performance video that calls out the symbols and ideologies that blind the public, Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese's "Behemoth: Or the Game of God" follows a preacher dragging a coffin through the streets claiming that their god is within it. Korakrit Arunanondchai's "With History in a Room Filled With People With Funny Names 4" is a cosmic interplay of the personal and political. In associative, essayistic form, it addresses death and attempts to make sense of the universe of what shapes existence today: drones, spirits, animals, news media, political activism and a sea of data. Kevin Jerome Everson's "The Citizens" uses the archival image to examine the construction of the Black public figure through fragments of Muhammad Ali, Althea Gibson and Fidel Castro.

- *Ayhan and Me*, belit sag, 2016, 15 min, Netherlands/Turkey
- *Dislocation Blues*, Sky Hopinka, 2017, 17 min, US
- *I Have Sinned a Rapturous Sin*, Maryam Tafakory, 2018, 9 min, UK/Iran
- *Behemoth: Or the Game of God*, Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese, 2015, 12 min, Lesotho/Germany
- *With History in a Room Filled With People With Funny Names 4*, Korakrit Arunanondchai, 2018, 24 min, US/Thailand
- *The Citizens*, Kevin Jerome Everson, 2009, 6 min, US

October 2: [Adam and Zack Khalil - Indigenous Futures](#)

7 pm Rubenstein Arts Center, 78mins

Adam and Zack Khalil in person



With a practice that includes experimental filmmaking, documentary, performance and curation, Adam and Zack Khalil have charted out a critical and unconventional space for situating and interrogating ideas of indigeneity today. In their first feature documentary, *INAATE/SE/*, the Khalils re-imagine an ancient Ojibway story, the Seven Fires Prophecy, which both predates and predicts first contact with Europeans. A kaleidoscopic experience blending documentary, narrative, and experimental forms, *INAATE/SE/* transcends linear colonized history to explore how the prophecy resonates through the generations in their indigenous community within Michigan's Upper Peninsula. With acute geographic specificity, and grand historical scope, the film fixes its lens between the sacred and the profane to pry open the construction of contemporary indigenous identity. In their recent short film, "The Violence of a Civilization without Secrets," the Khalils collaborate with artist Jackson Polys to reflect on indigenous sovereignty, the undead violence of museum archives and post-mortem justice through a court case that decided the fate of the remains of a prehistoric Paleoamerican man found in Kennewick, Washington in 1996.

- *INAATE/SE/ [it shines a certain way. to a certain place./it flies. falls./]*, 2016, 68 min
- *The Violence of a Civilization without Secrets*, 2017, 10 min

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[Adam and Zack Khalil interview at MOMA](#)