

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Mon Jan 20 | 7:30 pm |

Please note that this event is *starting at 7:30pm!*

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$12 [members \$9]

Homage to SUZAN PITT

Guest-Curated by Blue Kraning.

Special Thanks to Laura Kraning.

All titles provided by the Academy Film Archive.

To celebrate the extraordinary career of experimental animator Suzan Pitt (1943-2019), REDCAT is proud to organize a screening of some of her most important pieces, such as the always-stunning *Asparagus* (1979), *Joy Street* (1995), and *El Doctor* (2006), among others. Pitt's work pushed the boundaries of animation and has been shown in film festivals, major museums, and exhibition spaces around the world (such as the Whitney, MoMA, the Stedelijk Museum and the Venice Biennial.) She was a prolific painter, designed operas and multimedia shows, and produced hand-painted art coats. She received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright Scholar Award, three National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, and a Rockefeller Fellowship. Pitt taught at Harvard and was a most beloved and influential faculty member at CalArts from 1998 until 2017.

After the screening, several speakers will be invited to celebrate the memory and legacy of Suzan Pitt.

In person: guests TBA

"Pitt's legacy lies in the singular expression she gave to the twisting yet revelatory paths of an unfettered imagination, one that was able to draw equal inspiration from deeply personal autobiography and historical traditions of avant-garde mythopoetics. The sexual frankness of Pitt's lyrically enigmatic films also gave a new and feminist direction to currents in underground filmmaking." – Haden Guest

"[Pitt's] animation is a visual orgy... The experience of her work is of overwhelming generosity. She strips herself bare and gives her viewers a look directly into her very soul. She is sensuous, erotic,

bold, brilliant, bizarre, adventurous, honest, candid and consumed with the creative process. Her art is a luscious ice cream cone dripping with despair, surreality, hope and redemption.” — *Animation Nation*

Screening (7:30 PM)

Jefferson Circus Songs

(1973, 16 min) – digital file

Restored digital file from the Academy Film Archive

“Made while Pitt was teaching at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and in collaboration with local schoolchildren who helped create their own roles – this carnivalesque fairy tale of whimsical costumes and kaleidoscopic colors blends live action and stop-motion animation into an enchanting flight of imagination that plays like an antique children’s music box come to life.” – The Criterion Channel

Asparagus

(1979, 18 min) – 35mm

Restored 35mm print from the Academy Film Archive

This candy colored nightmare rocked audiences upon its release and catapulted Suzan Pitt to the front ranks of indie animation. Stunning cel animation propels its blank-faced protagonist into the world of the phallus, rendered here as a field of asparagus, which she deep throats, excretes and flushes away... The film's set piece occurs before a Claymation audience who gape as the artist opens her Medusa's box to release rare wonders. A moving meditation on art and the cost of reproduction, *Asparagus* remains, twenty-five years after its release, a benchmark of single frame intensity.

Asparagus from seed is a very primitive vegetable going back to the time of the dinosaurs. It comes out of the ground as a phallic stalk, pointy and purple green, the essence of a beautiful masculine form. As summer passes it stretches tall and becomes a delicate fern, seen on roadsides tilting in the wind, the essence of the feminine like long strands of tangled hair in the breeze. I thought of it as a beautiful symbol of sexuality. From that I made a visual poem about the creative process, taking the role of the magician/artist as the protagonist who ushers the viewers through her search for the essence of the creative forces that rule and drive our existence. – Suzan Pitt

“...the extraordinary *Asparagus*, one of the most lavish and wondrous animated shorts ever made, an overwhelming visual experience.”

- John Canemaker

Clay Woman Smoking

(21 sec., 1970s) – new digital file

Claymation. A naked woman sits in a chair (of the same design seen in *Asparagus*) smoking in a corner mirror set up creating four views of the woman.

"With the discovery of the "lost" *Clay Woman Smoking*, we will for the first time screen a short that wasn't probably shown since the 1980s. I am not sure of the date but I believe this was a partial test done to prepare for the theatre scene in *Asparagus*. I grew up seeing this short film in Suzan's screenings." – Blue Kraning

Joy Street

(1995, 24 min) – 35mm

Restored 35mm print from the Academy Film Archive

An ambitious, astonishing story of a woman's journey from suicidal despair to personal renewal, with the help of an unlikely spirit guide.

I stared one night at the china cartoon mouse ashtray and I drew courage from its color and childlike purity. I imagined a depressed and isolated woman who might find a way out through the re-discovery of our innate relationship to nature, our primal home.... Over 4 years I painted the thousands of animation cels in Mexico (in hotel rooms, in the rainforest) and the US. The use of various "styles" and ways of picturing were used to implement the changing atmospheres and locations... The film is entirely painted by hand and shot in 35mm on the Oxberry camera at Harvard University. Using photographs, paint on film, cutouts and many other animation forms, it was also a collaboration with other artists (Roy Nathanson and The Jazz Passengers with Debbie Harry, Laura Kraning, Becky High, sound design by David Slusser (PIXAR studios) and many other animators, painters, and musicians). – Suzan Pitt

"Inventive, astonishing, and visually lush." – *The New York Times*

Visitation

(2011, 9 min) – digital file

Cast in grainy black and white 16mm surrealistic images, *Visitation* allows an imaginary glimpse into the aura of "an outer-world night..."

It unwinds through a hand painted heavenly hell of unending life and death. Steeped in the alchemical and inner dream life it explores a landscape of gothic figures that enact evolving metaphysical dramas. Using painted cut-outs and early cinema techniques (multiple passes, mattes, multi-plane levels, in-camera superimpositions, shutter manipulation, etc.), *Visitation* was shot with a 16mm Bolex camera on black and white film for a grainy handmade look. The abstract sequences were created by placing objects directly onto raw film and then exposed with a flashlight. The film's process mirrors the alchemical nature of chemical, material, and metaphysical experimentation. It was animated in collaboration with Masha Vasilkovsky in Suzan Pitt's LA studio.

El Doctor

(2006, 24 min) - 35mm
New 35mm print from the Academy Film Archive

El Doctor takes place in a crumbling hospital at the turn of the century in Mexico, inhabited by surreal characters including a man shot with one hundred holes, a girl who has sprouted morning glories, and a woman who thinks she is a horse. The Doctor in charge prefers to drink, while The Saint of Holes and a mysterious Gargoyle rearrange the Doctor's fated demise and send him on a journey of altered perspective.

Based on a script written by Blue Kraning, *El Doctor* is entirely hand painted by a small group of artists in Los Angeles and Mexico; it includes animation by Masha Vasilkovsky, Rinat Gazinov, and Gérard Goulet (*The Triplets of Belleville*), sand animation by Ben Zelkowicz, direct paint-on-film animation by Naomi Uman and sound design by David Slusser (PIXAR studios). It also features historic Mexican music recordings from the Arhoolie collection.

"A lavishly surreal parable about an aging Mexican doctor, painted in lurid, Crumb-like caricatures." – *Village Voice*

Pinball (2013, 7 min)- HD digital file

"One of Pitt's final films, *Pinball*, is a dazzling display of her vision and talent as a painter—a ricocheting cascade of images that forms a mesmerizing patterned dance, set on edge by George Antheil's score for another painter's film, *Ballet mécanique*, codirected by Dudley Murphy and Fernand Léger." – Haden Guest

ARTIST BIO

Suzan Pitt was born and grew up in Kansas City, MO. In 1965 she graduated with a BFA in painting from Cranbrook Academy of Art. One person exhibitions of her paintings have been presented at The Ginza Art Space in Tokyo, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Holly Solomon Gallery NY, Cantor-Lemberg Gallery Detroit, Hans Mayer Gallery Dusseldorf, and the Delahunty Gallery NY among many others.

In 1968 she began making animated films that were inspired by her paintings. *Asparagus* (1979) premiered in an installation at the Whitney Museum in 1979 and ran for two years with David Lynch's *Eraserhead* in midnight shows in New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco. In 2017, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented a retrospective of her films. Her paintings and films are in the permanent collections of the Walker Art Center, The Museum of Modern Art, The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Los Angeles; and her films have been featured in hundreds of venues around the world, including the Sundance Film Festival, the New York Film Festival, the London Film Festival, the Ottawa International Animated Film Festival, the Morelia International Film Festival, and Tokyo Forum Film Festival.

Pitt designed the first two operas to include animated film images for the opera stage: *The Magic Flute* (1983) at the Hamburg State Opera; and *The Damnation of Faust* (1988) at the State Opera of Wiesbaden. She also created large multimedia shows at the Venice Biennale and Harvard University.

A member of the COLAB artist collective in New York she painted her first coats for the Amore store and the Times Square Show in the early 1980s. During the 1990s she traveled by kayak and horseback to remote areas of rainforest in Mexico and Guatemala with a Fulbright Scholar award and made paintings of virgin rainforest which were presented at the Guatemalan American Institute. These travels were the inspiration for *Joy Street* (1995) and *El Doctor* (2006). Pitt taught at Harvard, and later joined the Experimental Animation Program at the California Institute of the Arts, where she was a long-time faculty. She received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Rockefeller Fellowship and three production grants from the National Endowment of the Arts.

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