



**Mon October 17 | 8:30 pm**

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$10 [students \$8, CalArts \$5]

**FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS:**

# Janie Geiser

## "Nervous Films," Secret Stories

*Los Angeles premieres*

Janie Geiser's new series of experimental films—***Ghost Algebra*** (2009), ***Kindless Villain*** (2010), ***The Floor of the World*** (2010) and ***Ricky*** (2011)—weave textures of overlaid visual and aural elements haunted by lonely, frightened or sinister figures. Sad women, ambiguous children and weightless ghosts hover between life and death, light and shadow, porous earth and uncertain skies. Geiser brings collage to a new level, as a space traversed by cut-out silhouettes, purloined drawings and fragments of black-and-white films. The image trembles, is cropped, elusive, a forbidden sight snatched from darkness; the spectator is invited to trek through the suggested layers of meaning as through the intricate foliage of an enchanted forest. Also showing: the world premiere of a surprise film.

**In person: Janie Geiser**

"Geiser gives voice to the reaches of the unconscious, pointing to the abandoned splendor that exists prior to the rules of society and language."  
—Holly Willis, *RES*

"Geiser's films are *"as extravagantly beautiful as they are difficult, and as allusive as they are elusive"* – *CinemaScope*

Program:

## **The Nervous Films Series**

### ***Ghost Algebra***

Digital video (shot on 16mm film; screening format DigiBeta NTSC), sound collage: Janie Geiser, 7:30 min., 2009

Under erratic skies, a solitary figure navigates a landscape of constructed nature and broken bones. She peers through a decaying aperture, waiting and watching: the fragility of the body is exposed for what it is: ephemeral, liquid, a battlefield of nervous dreams. Using found and natural objects, rephotographed video, medical illustrations, and other collage elements, *Ghost Algebra* suggests one of the original meanings of the word "algebra": *the science of restoring what is missing, the reunion of broken parts.*

### ***Kindless Villain***

Digital video (shot on 16mm film; screening format DigiBeta NTSC), sound collage: Janie Geiser, 5:00 min., 2010

Two boys wander through a stone fortress, while the history of a never-ending battle forms traces in the waters below. Seemingly alone in their island world, the boys succumb to fatigue, and to rituals of power. Scratched phrases from an ancient recording of *Hamlet* reveal a sad cry for vengeance. War is a child's game, played quietly in this forgotten world.

### ***The Floor of the World***

Digital video (shot on 16mm film; screening format DigiBeta NTSC), sound collage: Janie Geiser, 9 min., 2010

In a shifting landscape of dirt and sky, excavation and construction merge. Figures move back and forth between life and death, and possibly somewhere else. The ephemerality of existence is a mundane question in this world, where numbers mark the way. The floor of the world turns out to be easily pierced, liquid, permeable.

### ***Ricky***

Digital video, sound collage: Janie Geiser, mixed by Kari Rae Seekins, 11 min., 2011

The realms of childhood, war, and loss echo through *Ricky*. A found sound recording forms the spine of the film... a scratched audio letter from father to son.

## **Other films shown**

### ***Ultima Thule***

16mm, color, sound design by Leon Rothenberg, 10:16 min., 2002

In her recent films, Geiser has been exploring the possibilities found in merging video texture with film, creating a kind of deep, ambiguous space, a suggestion of "the floating world." In *Ultima Thule*, gravity fails, land and sky lose their historical meaning. A small silver plane navigates an ultramarine storm, flying over barely-

glimpsed hills, an unlikely ferry to "Ultima Thule": the farthest point north, the limit of any journey. The seduction of immersion in blue is too strong to avoid, the land fills with water, and time loses its line.

### ***Terrace 49***

16mm, color, optical sound, sound by Leon Rothenberg, 5:37 min., 2004

"Images of impending disaster – slamming doors, a truck careening down a hill, and a frayed, almost snapping, elevator rope – collide with the repeated image of a woman's body, cycling toward ephemerality as the woman disappears into the texture of the film itself. In my recent films, I have been exploring the possibilities found in merging video texture with film, creating a lush, disorienting, ambiguous film space, and an atmosphere of temporal suspension. In *Terrace 49*, the space is shattered further, broken into shards; as fractured as memory and as fragile as glass." (JG)

### ***The Fourth Watch***

16mm, color, music by Tom Recchion, 10 min., 2000

The ancient Greeks divided the night into four sections; the last section before morning was called the fourth watch. In these hours before dawn, an endless succession of rooms is inhabited by silent film figures occupying flickering space in a midcentury house made of printed tin. Their presence is at once inevitable and uncanny. A boy turns his head in dread, a woman's eyes look askance, a sleepwalker reaches into a cabinet that dissolves with her touch, and hands write letters behind disappearing windows. The rooms reveal themselves and fill with impossible, shadowed light. It is not clear who is watching and who is trespassing in this nocturnal drama of lost souls.

"A small masterpiece of the uncanny brought about through beautifully controlled use of superimposition and scale and a cross breeding of incompatible species of texture and (cathode - solar) light. Glacial blue poltergeists – somnambulists, melodramatic stars and damaged children from silent films – emerge at night into a tin dollhouse opening up invisible envelopes of space, comingling with hypnotic chiaroscuro cast by trembling sunlight." – Mark McElhatten

**Janie Geiser** is an internationally recognized experimental filmmaker and visual/theater artist, whose work is known for its sense of mystery, its detailed evocation of self-contained worlds, and its strength of design. Geiser's films have been screened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Guggenheim Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, Pacific Film Archive, the Wexner Center for the Arts, the San Francisco Cinematheque, Los Angeles Filmforum, and at numerous festivals, including the New York Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival, Hong Kong International Film Festival, London International Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, Animac, and Ottawa International Animation Festival. *The Red Book* was selected for the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress, and *The Fourth Watch* was selected by *Film Comment* as one of the top ten experimental film of the last decade. Geiser's films are in the permanent collection of The Museum of Modern Art, the Donnell Media Center of the New York Public Library, CalArts, and numerous universities.

A Guggenheim fellow, Geiser is also an Obie Award-winning theater director, and a pioneer in the renaissance of American experimental puppet theater. She creates innovative, hypnotic works that integrate puppets and performing objects with live performers and film. Her performances have been presented at numerous US venues including the Public Theater in New York, The Walker Arts Center, Arts at St. Ann's, PS 122, and in Los Angeles at the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Jurassic Technology and REDCAT. Geiser is Co-Artistic Director of Automata, a Los Angeles nonprofit dedicated to object performance, puppetry, experimental film, and other lost or neglected art forms. She is also the director of the Cotsen Center for Puppetry and the Arts at CalArts.

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

The Jack H. Skirball Series is supported in part by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

###