



NAOMI UMAN:

THE UKRAINIAN TIME MACHINE

FRAGMENTS FROM A DIARY

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THE UKRAINIAN TIME MACHINE

FRAGMENTS FROM A DIARY

Mon December 12 | 8:30 pm

Jack H. Skirball Series

Los Angeles premiere

In 2006, experimental filmmaker Naomi Uman returned to the land her great-grandparents had left a hundred years earlier. Living among the *babushky* of a tiny Ukrainian village, she discovered a lifestyle that didn't seem to have changed much in a century, and set out to make a series of "precise miniatures of a rural life that's fading" (Robert Flaherty Seminar) shot in 16mm, while keeping a video diary. In *Kalendar* (2008, 16mm, silent, 11 min.), a series of exquisite snapshots examine the meanings of the months in the Ukrainian calendar. *Videodiary 2-1-2006 to Present* (2011, video, 83 min.) reframes the previous elements into a larger narrative struggling with issues of identity, gender, and her intimate connection with the history of Judaism and global immigration.

In person: Naomi Uman

"Like a crochet needle swiftly passing through loops of silk and wool... Naomi Uman's camera lives amongst the people, homes and villages she films."

— *Pacific Cinematheque* (Vancouver, BC).

PROGRAM

Kalendar

2008, 16mm, silent, 11 min.

I began taking Ukrainian lessons with the schoolteachers in the village of Legedzine. It was very difficult for them because they did not speak any English and my Russian was rudimentary. When they taught me the months of the year, they would point at stuff. It was the month of July and they were drying Leipen, which are Linden flowers. They told me the name and pointed at the flower. Then they went through all the months, teaching me what the names meant and I instantly had an idea for a movie. (Naomi Uman)

Videodiary 2-1-2006 to Present

2011, video, 83 min.

This video began as a diary, a filmmaker's journal for herself. As she struggles to document a pilgrimage of religious Jews to the Ukrainian city of Uman, Naomi Uman comes to recognize that her own journey warrants examining. This piece is a work in a progress, an ever-changing document revealing intimate details and sharing private moments of joy, doubt and fear. — *The Viennale*

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

I am an experimental filmmaker. My non-fiction films draw from personal experience. I live with my subjects for long periods of time, often waiting to film or record sound until I have become integrated into a community or a family. I had lived with a family of immigrants, both documented and undocumented, for a period of almost a year before making a film that was unflinching in its portrait of their lives. This film, which turned a critical eye on the subject family and the situation which creates this separate and unequal world in which they live within the United States, caused the public to question my right as a filmmaker to criticize people whose status as immigrants was a status that I had never experienced myself.

Taking this to heart, I decided to embark on my own immigration. I decided to make the journey in reverse that my relatives made more than a hundred years ago. All of my great-grandparents left Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. I have returned to live in the tiny village of Legedzine, thirty kilometers from the city of Uman and two hundred and fifty kilometers from the city of Kyiv. I came here in search of my own family's history, hoping to find traces of what their lives were like. What I have found is a time machine that has allowed me to go back into history and live with a community of people whose lives remain relatively unchanged, who live and work as my relatives did a century ago.

The work I shot during my time in Ukraine, *The Ukrainian Time Machine*, consists of four 16 mm films; *Kalendar* (2007), *Unnamed Film* (2008), *On This Day* (2008), *Clay* (2008), plus *Videodiary 2-1-2006 to Present* (2011). Together these films describe the time I spent in Ukraine and my relationship to it through the passage of time and patterns of repetition in history.

My work consistently participates in creating a living history. I focus on customs that are about to disappear. I live with people who continue to milk cows by hand; who plant, harvest, and preserve their own food. I, too, engage in these practices... Seeing the past before it vanishes prolongs the present and makes it more profound. In village society it is the *babushky* (grandmothers, old women)

who hold the key to surviving in the absence of economic wellbeing. It is their practical thinking and preservation of what might be considered trash that enables them to survive on pensions of less than eighty dollars a month. In immersing myself in this culture, I have needed to create a life in a foreign place without the luxury of regular access to stores, a car, or the ability to communicate easily with my neighbors. I have learned from watching the babushky how to live simply and practically, wasting absolutely nothing.

FILMMAKER'S BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in New York City, **Naomi Uman** is a filmmaker, visual artist, farmer and adventurer. She works alone, often accompanied by a small dog, exploring the worlds of others and her own. The treasures found on these expeditions are manifest in small films, paintings, handmade clothing, home harvested and cooked meals and now, her first video project.

Uman's films have been exhibited at venues including Sundance, Rotterdam International Film Festival, The New York Film Festival, The San Francisco International Film Festival, The Guggenheim Museum, The Smithsonian, and Whitney Museums as well as Mexico City's Museo de Arte Moderno and Museo El Chopo and Laboratorio Arte Alameda. She has received grants from the Creative Capital, Rockefeller and Guggenheim Foundations as well as the National Endowment for the Arts.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Leche, 1998

removed, 1999

Private Movie, 2000

Hand Eye Coordination, 2001

Mala Leche, 2003

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.

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