

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Mon April 7 | 8:30|

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$10.00 [members \$8.00]

Shelly Silver **Intimate Visions and Public Spaces**

Touch

(digital video, 68 min., 2013)

Special Mention plus The Intangible Heritage Award, Cinéma du Réel

preceded by:

What I'm Looking For

(digital video, 15 min, 2004)

This screening of two works by Shelly Silver begins with *What I'm Looking For* (2004, digital video, 15 min.), the second in her trilogy of fictional essay films shot in public spaces, which explores the relationship between a female photographer and subjects met on the Internet. The program continues with *Touch* (2013, digital video, 68 min.), in which a gay man recounts, mostly in Mandarin, his return to New York's Chinatown after 50 years in order to care for his dying mother. Like the narrator—a librarian, cataloguer and recorder—the city has changed and yet the past still haunts familiar streets. The character is an invention of the filmmaker, but as her narrator confides, “words make the impossible imaginable, therefore possible.” Currently chair of Columbia's Visual Arts Program, Silver has utilized video, film and still photography to investigate contested territories between public and private, narrative and documentary, the watcher and the watched.

<http://www.redcat.org/event/shelly-silver>

In person: Shelly Silver

“By staking her right to documentary material as well as fictional writing, Shelly Silver sizes up the likelihood of an imaginary point of view reaching a truth more subtle than autobiographical truth.”

– Charlotte Garson, Cinéma du Réel

"*Touch* is a poignant and lyrical video diary, a tapestry of vérité camerawork, stolen moments and probing observations, challenging the manner in which we engage with the communities that created us and how we embrace and chronicle images of the everyday."

– Bradford Nordeen, *Outfest*

Shelly Silver is a New York based artist utilizing video, film and photography. Her work, which spans a wide range of subject matter and genres, explores the personal and societal relations that connect and restrict us; the indirect routes of pleasure and desire; the stories that are told about us and the stories we construct about ourselves.

In Shelly Silver's enigmatic narratives of contemporary identity, truth and fiction are constantly in doubt, the veracity of what is seen and what is not seen is questioned, and the modes by which information is disclosed, withheld and mediated hold meaning. Appropriating the structures and codes of television and cinema narratives, Silver relies on the viewer's complicity -- the expectation of how media stories are "read," the desire to believe and identify with their conventions and characters. Blurring authenticity and falseness, artifice and reality ('real' compared to what), Silver often merges stylized black-and-white film with color video, fragmented images with written text and sound, elements of documentary and melodrama with comedy.

From the elusive *Things I Forget to Tell Myself* (1989) to the multi-leveled melodrama of *The Houses That Are Left* (1991), her fragmented narratives are steeped in ironic inquiry. References to broadcast advertising and television formats are informed by Silver's experience as a commercial video editor. Investigating how contemporary identity is both reflected and constructed by television and cinema, Silver questions storytelling, role-playing and the means by which popular narratives articulate fictions of the self.

In the 1990s, Silver lived for extended periods outside of the United States. Her experiences as an "outside observer" in Germany, France, and Japan have led to works in which she questions the myths and realities of cultural and national identity. Interweaving of documentary, essay, and story-telling techniques in works such as *Former East/Former West* (1994) and *37 Stories About Leaving Home* (1996), Silver explores how we negotiate cultural narratives to arrive at definitions of the self.

The feature-length fiction *suicide* (2003) follows a woman's strange intercontinental voyage, chronicling her fiercely hopeful and desperate search for a reason to continue living. Shot in the genre of a personal journal film, and starring Silver herself as the fictional

filmmaker heroine, suicide is an audacious act of flirting with the revelatory autobiographical. As the heroine slips ever further into the shadow areas between the real and the imagined, she narrates the films two voyages, her own as well as a Quixote-like tale of a Princess and her...penis.

Silver's most recent work include *In Complete World* (2008), a feature-length documentary made up of street interviews done throughout NYC; and *5 Lessons and 9 Questions about Chinatown* (2009), about "10 square blocks, past, present, future, time, light, movement, immigration, exclusion, gentrification, racism, history, China, America, 3 languages, 13 voices, 152 years..."

Shelly Silver was born in 1957 in Brooklyn, NY. She received a B.A. (Phi Beta Kappa) in History and a B.F.A. in Mixed Media from Cornell University. She subsequently attended the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program.

She has been exhibited throughout the US, Europe and Asia at venues such as MoMA, NYC, MoCA, LA, The Pompidou Center, Paris; The Kyoto Museum, Japan, The ICA London, The London Film Festival, The Singapore Film Festival and has won many awards including at The Leipzig International Documentary Festival, The Australian Int'l Film & Video Festival and The Houston Int'l Film Festival. Silver has received fellowships and grants from the NEA, the DAAD, NYSCA, NYFA, the Jerome Foundation and Anonymous Was a Woman Foundation. She is a 2005 John Simon Guggenheim Fellow.

Silver currently lives in New York where she is an associate professor in Visual Arts, School of the Arts, Columbia University.

<http://www.shellysilver.com>

"I always jump feet first into projects knowing little of their terrain or scope. I could compare the process to an adventure (misadventure) or experiment. It is through the process of filming and editing that I get my bearings. If I knew what I was going to see and say in advance, I wouldn't bother to make the film. This approach hasn't changed much over the years. I still start with the feeling of jumping off a cliff, although now, based on previous experience, I assume that I'll survive the fall.

In terms of subjects, some projects find me, which was the case for *5 lessons and 9 questions about Chinatown*, when Karin Chien commissioned me to make a short film about Chinatown (where I've lived for the past 25 years) for the reopening of the Museum of Chinese in America. After making *5 lessons and 9 questions about Chinatown*, which has multiple voices and points of view, I wanted to

address the neighborhood from one solitary vantage point, which led me to make *TOUCH*, a fictional essay about a gay man who returns to the neighborhood to take care of his dying mother.

'Collision' is an interesting word, in that it implies a meeting, an interaction between two or more bodies causing a change due to the force of contact. I often think of different elements of my film colliding. The straight cut, the aggressive changing and juxtaposition of one image or sound into another is among the strongest components of filmmaking. In narrative film language, one is taught to make edits as seamless as possible. I've always tended to do the opposite, trying to get the most bang out of every juxtaposition and joining."

– Shelly Silver

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Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud