

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Mon October 16 | 8:30 pm |

Jack H. Skirball Series

Janie Geiser: Double Vision

Janie Geiser's acclaimed collage films delve deeply into the realm of waking dreams, weaving fragments of sounds and moving images into mysterious, elliptical narratives at the edge of logic and memory. Geiser is a master of minimal means. Her work recontextualizes outmoded images and photographs, arcane objects, and forgotten popular culture, releasing us into a sensual undercurrent of textures – the anteroom of suspended time.

Geiser will present a program that includes four Los Angeles premieres: *Kriminalistik* (2014), *Silent Sister* (2015), *Cathode Garden* (2015), *Flowers of the Sky* (2016) and *Look and Learn* (2017) - in addition to earlier works such as *Arbor* (2012) and *The Hummingbird Wars* (2013).

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*

Program:

Arbor (16mm to digital video, 8 min., 2012)

Sound collage: Janie Geiser

Sound Mix: Kari Rae Seekins

From a set of photographs found in a thrift store, Geiser creates a liminal space between representation and abstraction, figure and landscape, fiction and memory. *Arbor* suggests the fragility and ephemerality of memory and its artifacts through subtle manipulations of the photographs: reframings, layerings, inversions, and the introduction of dimensional elements, including flowers and leaves. The photographs' subjects rarely engage the camera; they are glimpsed, rather than seen. They look elsewhere, and wait for

something inevitable. Gathering on a hillside, lounging on the grass beyond now-lost trees, the inhabitants of *Arbor* cycle through their one elusive afternoon, gradually succumbing to time or dissolving into landscape, reserving for themselves what we can't know – and becoming shadows in their own stories.

Silent Sister (digital video, 5:49 min., 2016)

Music Composed by Cassia Streb
Additional Sound Design by John Eagle
Sound Editing: Janie Geiser
Sound Mix: Kari Rae Seekins

An elliptical meditation on the body, illness, landscape, and time. In *Silent Sister*, the body is turned inside out, invaded, examined. Using medical illustrations, charts, photographs of abandoned hospitals, miniatures, and photographs of pre-suburban Los Angeles (which was a haven for the chronically ill), *Silent Sister* centers on the intersection of landscape and the body; both become the location of narrative, memory, erasure, history, and loss.

Cathode Garden (digital video, 8 min., 2015)

Sound Collage: Janie Geiser
Sound Mix: Kari Rae Seekins

A young woman moves between light and dark, life and death; a latter day Persephone. The natural world responds accordingly. Neglected negatives, abandoned envelopes, botanical and anatomical illustrations, and found home-made recordings re-order themselves, collapsing and re-emerging in her liminal world.

"Janie Geiser's gift for cutting between private, encoded images to create dense montages that defy ready interpretation, as vibrant as ever in *Cathode Garden*." - Tony Pipilo, *Artforum*

The Hummingbird Wars (digital video, 11 min., 2014)

Sound Collage: Janie Geiser
Sound Mix: Kari Rae Seekins

A theatrical fiction, collapsing time and place: turn-of-the-last-century performers apply stage makeup as if for war, to engage in battle for the soul of the world. The injuries are more emotional than

physical, but cut deeply just the same. A visual/aural collage film, drawing on sources as seemingly disparate as Ibsen's *A Doll House*, Japanese Gagaku music, makeup illustrations for 19th Century actors, the biography of a Shakespearean performer, blooming and decaying flowers, and a World War 1 First Aid Book, *The Hummingbird Wars*, suggests theater in a time of war, which is the theater of any time.

"Janie Geiser's *The Hummingbird Wars* (2014) is a dense collage comprising nineteenth-century photographs of stage actors, theater makeup, Japanese masks, flowers in various states of decay, an autobiographical text, and a World War I first-aid book. Unveiled via a dynamic deployment of cutout black mattes, whose flitting about the frame perhaps mimes that of the titular hummingbird, the images are both free-associative and recurrent, complicated through each new, interlocking cluster, as well as by an equally evocative audio track. Like the artist making her way through the paradoxical interrelations of history, art, and consciousness, the hummingbird gently traverses the clash of images that flesh out Geiser's mesmerizing tapestry."
- Tony Pipilo, *Artforum*, reviewing NYFF Projections 2014.

Kriminalistik (digital video, 5 min., 2013)

Sound Collage: Janie Geiser
Sound Mix: Kari Rae Seekins

From the found book pages of an early twentieth century German book on forensics, Geiser uncovers hidden narratives. Evidence is scientifically arranged and catalogued, suggesting a corridor to knowledge. Elusive. Crimson.

Look and Learn (digital video, 11:15 min., 2017)

Sound Collage: Janie Geiser
Sound Mix: Kari Rae Seekins

Look and Learn excavates the visual vocabulary we use to operate and construct the daily world. *Look and Learn* explores the juxtaposition of two material image forms: visual instructions (assembly guides, photography manuals, maps, diagrams) and photographs – mainly a set of several 1950's era elementary school group photographs. The visual instructions mimic maps in their hope of directing us to something, or somewhere, perhaps to a better understanding of our world and how things work.

These instructions fight for time with the school photos, which place groups of individual students into unforgiving grids. These photographs suggest a more orderly time when the instructions might actually be followed. The photos themselves become another kind of diagram, forming barely glimpsed guides to the students' future world. They look ahead, to the 60s and 70s, when the imagined order of things will be exploded.

Geiser's sound collage includes found records of film soundtracks, as well as institutional alarms, contemporary field recordings, and short segments of speeches from the 1965 Berkeley Teach-In. Perhaps some of these students found themselves there.

In the final section of *Look and Learn*, the images are harder to grasp, as Geiser moves the photos, along with documentary photographs of anti-war and civil rights era protests, quickly under the camera as she shoots. There is a sense of chaos, of a rushing forward and backwards, of time out of reach, of the impossibility of holding onto change – then, now, later...

Flowers of the Sky (digital video, 9:12 mins, 2016)

Sound collage: Janie Geiser
Sound Mix: Kari Rae Seekins

Flowers of the Sky (a medieval term for comets) draws on two panoramic photographs, found in a Los Angeles thrift shop, that depict a gathering of members of the Eastern Star, a Masonic order. In the first photograph, taken at a banquet meal, the participants are seated at tables and facing the camera. In the second photograph, everyone is dressed in ritual robes, looking away from the camera and toward a stage. A single figure stands there, centered on this platform, and faces them. Everyone is suspended, expectant.

Through isolating parts of the photographs and highlighting the different groupings of the Eastern Star members, *Flowers of the Sky* reveals and obscures the original events. There is a sense, looking at the photographs, of watching and waiting for something to happen, something beyond the experience of daily life. And something does. Nature reasserts herself, the figures double, vibrate, and rise, trying to escape their emulsive lives, suggesting a rapture that extends beyond their printed world.

"...the exercise of exploring the archival image and its potential for artistic reinvention – both rational and unconscious - stands out in this piece." - Curtas Vila do Conde 2017

Janie Geiser's work "prowls around the mysterious boundary-land between territories—like the lands of the conscious and the unconscious mind, or life and death, sanity and madness, hope and despair, animate and inanimate, nature and culture. From these uncanny in-between zones, her projects send back mysterious intelligence about the roiling nether lands we largely fear to traverse alone. Geiser is a guide to the other side, wherever that 'other' might be."

– Holly Willis, *KCET Artbound*

Named one of the world's top avant-garde filmmakers on Film Comment's "Best of the Decade" list, Janie Geiser works in multiple disciplines, including film, installation, puppetry, visual art, sound, and performance, often working and reworking fragments of discarded materials. Janie is on the faculty of the School of Theater at CalArts, and her work has been recognized with a Doris Duke Artist Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and an OBIE Award. Her films have screened at the Whitney, the Guggenheim, MOMA, the Centre Pompidou, Pacific Film Archives, and at major film festivals in New York, Rotterdam, London, Oberhausen, Vienna, Toronto, and Hong Kong.

Funded in part by the Ostrovsky Family Fund. Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud as part of the Jack H. Skirball Series.