

## FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

**Mon April 15**

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$12 [members \$9]

## ALLAN SEKULA: Selected Films & Books

A pioneer in critiquing while reworking the tradition of “social documentary,” Allan Sekula (1951–2013), CalArts faculty from 1985 until his death, left a compelling legacy of films, photographs and publications. To celebrate a new edition of *Fish Story* (Mack Books, 2018), Sekula’s probing investigation of maritime space and culture first published in 1995, REDCAT presents some of his shorter films: *Performance under Working Conditions* (1973), *Tsukiji* (2001) and *Art Isn’t Fair* (2012). In addition to *Fish Story*, recent Sekula publications on display include *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973–1983* (Mack, 2016), *Facing the Music: Documenting Walt Disney Concert Hall And The Redevelopment of Downtown Los Angeles* (posthumously edited by Ed Dimendberg, East of Borneo, 2015), and *The 17 Photographs of Vivian Maier Collected by Allan Sekula* (a limited edition print portfolio).

**In person: Stephen Callis, Ed Dimendberg, Thomas Lawson and Sally Stein**

“Sekula’s images and writings have shifted the terms on which the medium is understood and has influenced a generation of artists and scholars. His extensive travels to many of the world’s seaports are matched only by his enlightening journeys across history, politics, and aesthetics that through their consummate intelligence transform and connect domains usually considered separate.”

– Ed Dimendberg, *Bomb Magazine*

“An important voice in photography’s postmodern discourse.”

– Laurie Taylor, *Frieze*

“When globalization was still a little-understood phenomenon, Sekula recognized the enormity of its changes—from maritime transformations to labor conditions—and brought them to light in socially and critically engaged work.” – The Getty Research Institute

Program of the Evening:

**7:00: Light reception in the Lobby**

The books and the Vivian Maier portfolio will be on display and for sale.

**8:30: Screening in the Theater**

Projection of *The Vivian Maier Portfolio*  
(silent video presentation)

*Performance under Working Conditions*  
(1973, 20 min, b/w video)

Performance: Gregg Arreguin, Allan Sekula, David Scholar  
Camera: Lennart Bourin

A rarely shown early video performance, originally produced as a companion piece to a photo novel about working in a pizza restaurant. The structure is that of live television, an empty studio with two cameras and a switcher, no editing after the fact. Two cooks try to reproduce the gestures and banter of their work minus the ingredients and utensils of the kitchen. This is labor performed as madcap talky pantomime, without capital. One of the lines goes back to the anarcho-syndicalism of Laurel and Hardy.

*Tsukiji*

(2001, 43:30, color, sound. Digital video. Japanese, English)

Direction/camera: Allan Sekula

Editing: Michael Jarmon

A "city symphony" film of sorts, dedicated to the largest fish-market in the world, and one of the last surviving proletarian spaces in Tokyo. A film about cutting in a double sense, it harkens back to a moment of intersection of modernism and social realism, evoking the ghost of the left-wing Japanese novelist of the 1920s and 30s, Takiji Kobayashi, author of *Kani kosen* (*The Crab Factory Ship*, 1929) and an early victim of Japanese fascism. – Allan Sekula

"*Tsukiji*, thus, was a risk for the established artist, who chose to depart from photography for the distant shores of video, a challenge that he rose to magnificently. The pacing of the video is spellbinding, with a masterful interplay between composed establishing shots and painfully intimate close-ups of fish gasping in their dying moments, or

the lonely and vacant faces of the workers making their rounds. Sekula has a spectacular eye for visual detail, and there are many arresting moments here. Sekula has spoken of his work in relation to the traditions of still-life painting, and you can see why. These images – wet, sloppy with blood, scales and slime – are outrageously sensual, seducing us even as they elicit repulsion.”  
– Sarah Milroy, *Globe and Mail*

“A masterpiece...” – James Benning.

*Art Isn't Fair*  
(2012, 05:16, Digital Video)  
Camera/writing: Allan Sekula  
Editing: Elisabeth Hesik  
Studio Sound: Mitchel Hampton  
Harp Improvisation: Susan Allen

Sekula's final video trenchantly investigates the recent rise of contemporary transnational art fairs. While filming the 2004 Miami-Basel Art Fair, Sekula aimed to expose the utter inequity in the luxe-studded art world. Inspired by J.J. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Sekula finally returned to this material in the last two years of his life when invited to contribute to a Swiss-based video collection commemorating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rousseau's birth. “I want the scene to resemble (ironically) ‘heaven,’ – or at least ‘heaven for the rich’ and thus the idea of the harp came to mind,” he told harpist and fellow CalArts faculty Susan Allen to secure her contribution.

“A short montage of footage I shot of an event hosted by the jewelry company Bulgari at the 2004 Miami-Basel Art Fair. The event took the form of a *cadavre exquis* performed by a panel of famous artists for an audience of wealthy collectors and other practitioners and *aficionados*... All this gives the event the potential rhythm similar to that of Jean Vigo's *À propos de Nice*.” – Allan Sekula

**The screening will be followed by a brief panel discussion**

Books on display and for sale:

*Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973–1983*  
(first edition 1984; new edition by Mack Books, 2016)  
<http://www.mackbooks.co.uk/books/1112-Photography-Against-the-Grain-Essays-and-Photo-Works-1973-1983.html>

*Fish Story* (first edition 1995, new edition by Mack Books, 2018)  
<http://www.mackbooks.co.uk/books/1214-Fish-Story.html>

*Facing the Music: Documenting Walt Disney Concert Hall And The Redevelopment of Downtown Los Angeles – A Project by Allan Sekula* (posthumously edited by Ed Dimendberg, with contributions by Louis Adamic, James Baker, Laura Diamond Dixit, Anthony Hernandez, Karin Apollonia Müller, Leonard Nadel, Allan Sekula, and Billy Woodberry, East of Borneo Books, 2015)  
<https://eastofborneo.org/shop/facing-the-music-documenting-walt-disney-concert-hall-and-the-redevelopment-of-downtown-los-angeles/>

*The 17 Vivian Maier Photographs Collected by Allan Sekula* (2017)

Limited edition portfolio of 17 photographs in Canon Lucia archival pigment ink on Canson Infinity Platine Fibre Rag paper, housed in an archival clamshell box. Each set signed by printer Stephen Callis, numbered and stamped on verso (each); numbers in colophon. All proceeds from the sale of the 17 boxed archival sets benefit the Allan Sekula Social Documentary Fund at CalArts.

**Allan Sekula** (1951-2013) was an American photographer, writer, critic and filmmaker. Born in Erie, Pennsylvania, he lived most of his life in and around Los Angeles, earning BA and MFA degrees in Visual Arts from University of California, San Diego, and teaching at California Institute of the Arts for over three decades.

His artwork bridged the gap between conceptual art and documentary practices, focusing on economic and social themes ranging from family life, work and unemployment, to schooling and the military-industrial complex.

Since the mid-1980s Sekula focused persistently on the geo-economics of globalized production and distribution of goods by way of the sea. In the extended exhibition cum book project *Fish Story* (1989-1995), he argued that the sea is the “forgotten space” of modernity, and the relatively new cargo container is the “coffin of remote labor power, of labor performed elsewhere”. *Fish Story* was deliberately exhibited in port cities: Rotterdam, Stockholm, Glasgow and Calais, Los Angeles and Seattle. In Seattle in early 1999, the work was closely tied to a growing popular resistance to neo-liberal globalization, culminating in anti-WTO protests, as well as Sekula’s own slide piece, *Waiting for Tear Gas* 1999/2000. The most recent exhibition of the complete work was in the 2002 Documenta XI in

Kassel, Germany – accompanied by the publication of *Seemansgarn*, a German edition of *Fish Story*. Other books by Sekula include *Photography Against the Grain* (1984), *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* (1996), *TITANIC's wake* (2003), *Performance under Working Conditions* (2003) and *Polonia and Other Fables* (2009). His writings have been translated into Polish, French and Japanese.

Sekula's films include *Tsukiji* (2001), *Gala* (2005), *A Short Film for Laos* (2006), *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006) and (co-directed with Noël Burch) *The Forgotten Space* (2010), which premiered at the Venice Film Festival, winning the Orizzonte Special Jury Prize. Sekula also received awards from Camera Austria, US Artists Fellows Award, College Art Association, U.S. National Endowment for the Arts, DAAD, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, among others.

Since 2013, posthumous solo exhibitions of Sekula's work were organized by Johan Jacobs Museum, Zürich (2014); Galerie Michel Rein (2014); Lewis & Clark, Portland (2015); NTC CCA, Singapore (2015); TBA21, Vienna (2017); Fondació Tàpies, Barcelona (2017); Beirut Art Center (2017) – as well as posthumous group exhibitions featuring his work at the Whitney Biennial (2014); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2015); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); MoMA, New York (2015); Museum Folkwang, Essen (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2016), Documenta 14, Athens/Kassel (2017) and Taipei Biennial (2018).

Posthumous publications include *Allan Sekula and the Traffic in Photographs*, Grey Room 55/ Spring 2014 (MIT, 2014); *Facing the Music: Documenting Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Redevelopment of Downtown Los Angeles, A Project by Allan Sekula* (East of Borneo, 2015); *Allan Sekula / Ship of Fools / The Dockers' Museum* (Leuven University Press, 2015); 2nd edition of Sekula's first (1984) collection of essays and photo works, *Photography Against the Grain* (MACK, 2016); *Allan Sekula / Okeanos* (Sternberg Press 2017); 2nd edition of Sekula's *Fish Story* (MACK, 2018).

Posthumous symposia organized around Sekula's work and influence took place in Zürich (2014), Singapore (2015), Vienna (2017), Antwerp (2017) and Beirut (2017).

His library was transferred to the Clark Art Institute in 2015; his archive to the Getty Research Institute in 2016. His art works are in the collections of Museum of Modern Art, N.Y; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museo De Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; MACBA, Barcelona; Tate, London; TBA 21, Vienna; Generali Foundation, Vienna; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Stedelijk, Amsterdam; M HKA, Antwerp, among others.

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**Stephen Callis** is a documentary photographer from Southern California exploring the mark left on the landscape by land use and development. He earned a BA at UC Santa Cruz and an MFA at CalArts where he studied with Allan Sekula, among other faculty. He is currently a Professor of Photography at Moorpark Community College. Most recently, he printed the limited edition portfolio, *The 17 Vivian Maier Images Collected by Allan Sekula*.

**Edward Dimendberg** is Professor of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of several books about architecture, film, and cities, and edited Allan Sekula's *Facing the Music: Documenting Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Redevelopment of Downtown Los Angeles*. He is currently a visiting scholar at the Getty Research Institute and a fellow of the J.S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

**Thomas Lawson** is an artist with a diverse, project-driven output. From 1979 until 1992 he, along with Susan Morgan, published and edited *REAL LIFE Magazine*, by and about younger artists. From 2002 until 2009 he was co-editor of *Afterall Journal*, a joint publication between Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, London and CalArts. Since 2009 he has been Editor-in-Chief of *East of Borneo*, a collaborative online magazine and archive of contemporary art.

**Sally Stein**, Professor Emerita, University of California, Irvine, has taught and written about the history of photography and mass media with particular focus on the interacting codes of color and black and white photography starting in the 1930s. Stein was also Allan Sekula's partner & wife for over three decades, and since his death in 2013 she has overseen his estate, archive, and dissemination of Sekula's works including the above publications.

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

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