

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS:

Mon Oct 18 | 8:30 pm |

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$12 [members \$9]

LEI LEI

***Breathless Animals* and a selection of shorts**

Co-presented by China Onscreen

Following its world premiere at the Berlinale and its US premiere at Art of the Real, *Breathless Animals* (Dongwu Fangyan, 2019) constantly surprises and unsettles the viewer by keeping the titular animals off-screen – within the cadence of the speaker’s nonlinear memory. In this intimate, yet hypnotic, fictional “reconstruction” of what his mother experienced and dreamt about in her youth (the first television, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath...), award-winning Chinese filmmaker Lei Lei brilliantly pushes the boundaries of experimental animation through an arresting, discretely emotional montage of archival photographs, newsreels and sound recordings, collected, reframed, processed and recontextualized.

Los Angeles premiere

Breathless Animals will be preceded by a selection of short films: *Recycled* (Zhaopian Huishou, 2013) and *Hand Colored # 2* (Zhaopian Shougong Shangshe, 2017) by Lei Lei and Thomas Sauvin; *This is not a Time to Lie* (Zhe Bu Shi Yi Ge Ke Yi Shuo Huang De Shi Ke, 2013), and *Books on Books* (Shu Shang De Shu, 2017) by Lei Lei.

In person: Lei Lei

“By disconnecting image and sound, *Breathless Animals* opens a wonderfully speculative space. Watching it is like feeling the distance between images, a chain of visual echoes.” – *Hyperallergic*

“A hypnotic and postmodern entity built upon the breaking down of mediums...” – *Asian Movie Pulse*

Program

Recycled (*Zhaopian Huishou*)

(made in collaboration with Thomas Sauvin, 2013, 5:40 minutes)

The images come from negatives salvaged from a recycling plant on the edge of Beijing, where they had been sent to be scrapped for their silver nitrate content. Over the years French collector Thomas Sauvin built this archive of more than half a million 35mm negatives, depicting the capital and the life of her inhabitants over the last thirty years. From 2011 to 2013, Chinese artist Lei Lei selected over 3000 photos to create the animation.

Hand Colored #2 (*Zhaopian Shougong Shangshe*)

(made in collaboration with Thomas Sauvin, 2017, 4:52 minutes)

In 2013, we collected a number of black-and-white photos from Chinese flea markets and imagined that all of them belonged to one fictional Chinese person. Through rendering, collage, and a cyclical process of hand-coloring, scanning, and printing, we created connections among the photos. We spent two years repeating this process. These 1168 hand-colored photos invoke the passage of time, injecting life into the imaginary protagonist as he ventures through time and space. (LL)

This is not a Time to Lie

(*Zhe Bu Shi Yi Ge Ke Yi Shuo Huang De Shi Ke*, 2013, 3:30 minutes)

I'm scared, I don't dare to look ahead.

This is not a time to lie.

(Mountains and water, characters and objects in the film are all made from old book covers.) (LL)

Books on Books

(*Shu Shang De Shu*, 2017, 7:14 minutes)

The cutout patterns are from my father's book, *Book Cover Collection in the West*, which was published in 1988, when Chinese leaders launched their great "Reform" and "Opening Up" to embrace the world. Many leading concepts of book cover design were introduced in this book, which has had an eye-opening influence on the younger generation of Chinese designers since. (LL)

Breathless Animals

(Dongwu Fangyan, 2019, 68 minutes)

"What did you dream about and how was your life as a teenager?"
A woman recalls her youthful memories from the 1950s to the 1980s while the re-creation of modernity in China unfolds in front of our eyes. One day, the first breathless animal appears to her, a white horse...

An unseen woman speaks in voiceover. She talks of hardship, of a mother who died young, of a father sent to a reform camp during the Cultural Revolution. Found in flea markets across China; in brochures of the time; in newsreels and official documentaries; various images dance across the screen: bicycles, TV sets, furniture, facades and smart interiors. Photographs are made to move and moving pictures slowed to a standstill: an unruly stream of animated images stopping, starting and changing direction, in conversation with the noise made by the rewinding of the audio tapes, as the music blares and dies. The gaps between the images mirror the gaps in the woman's testimony, as informed by dreams as it is by reality – dreams of animals and their violent demise, memories of dozing in front of the TV, flickering figures from far away, warped by sleep and experience, in a living room akin to a cinema. Which are the images that tell the story of a country: the ones you see or the ones you don't? (adapted from the Berlin International Film Festival catalogue)

TRT: 89:26 minutes

The Artist

Born in 1985 in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, **Lei Lei** graduated from Tsinghua University with a Master's degree in Animation in 2009. Since then, he has worked as an independent animator as well as an artist involved in video art, painting, installation, music and performance. His works include short animation films such as *This Is Love* (Best Narrative Short Award at Ottawa International Film Festival in 2010), *Recycled* (selected at Annecy Film Festival, Grand Prix of Shorts & Non-Narrative Films at Holland International Animation Film Festival), *Week-end* (awarded the Jimei x Arles Discovery Award for short film), as well as many others, which have been selected in numerous international festivals and exhibited in museums.

Lei Lei's work has been featured in exhibitions throughout East Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia, and he has completed several artist residencies, including Yaddo, the Asian Cultural Council Cai

fellowship, the Artist Residency Program at Abbaye de Fontevraud, France, the Locarno Summer Academy, and Macdowell fellowship. In 2014 he served on the Jury of Zagreb / Holland International Animation Film Festival. *Breathless Animals*, his first feature-length film, premiered at the Berlinale Forum 2019.

Lei Lei lives and works in Beijing and Los Angeles, and since 2017, he has been a faculty member in the Experimental Animation Program at the California Institute of the Arts.

“Chinese animator, artist and musician Lei Lei, creates (or recreates) environments that often fuse magic realism, science-fiction, comic books and video games into visually delicious, handmade, candy colored worlds that are naïve, hopeful, nostalgic and occasionally silly in the belief that love can liberate us all. Throughout his work, Lei Lei lovingly celebrates the marginalized, misunderstood and forgotten, resuscitating them with a new air of hope, purpose and humanity. – Chris Robinson, Artistic Director, Ottawa International Animation Festival)

Excerpts of an interview with Lei Lei

For the past few years, I’ve picked up the hobby of collecting old photos and magazines from flea markets, and I would organize and reconstruct a story out of them. *Breathless Animals* represents an accumulation of work over time. Recently I have become fascinated with family oral histories. In this film, I did not try to make the images directly portray “reality”; instead, it is somehow a “fiction” that does not depict the protagonists themselves. Interestingly, when images and dialogues are both “fictional” or “remakes” of the reality, a mirror of the “reality” also surfaces. This “mirror” is why I created this film... Conversations with my mother are easy and natural and do not require much effort. I do not reveal her identity [as the person I am dialoguing with on the soundtrack] at the beginning of the film, to create a theatrical effect later. This allows the audience to suddenly have a different perspective, and to be able to replay the images and dialogues in their heads... The conversations took place very naturally, last summer. It was not my intention to do an interview as we talked. Instead, I threw some keywords that I had read in old magazines – such as “bicycle”, “television”, “dream,” and so on. My mother then expanded on them with anecdotes. The conversation lasted about four hours, over two nights...

The images I used came from the 1950s to the 1980s; I am not presenting them chronologically, but interweave them in a chaotic manner. My intent is to use collage to reconstruct the relationship

between images. In cinema, if the right to reconstruct an unknown history is given to the audience, then each viewer will come up with a different answer. From the 1950s to the 1980s, my parents' generation experienced the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, being sent down to the countryside, and the restoration of the national college entrance exams. These historical movements have profoundly affected their lives and directly changed their fate. As I was born in 1985, these historical movements are very foreign to me...

From a collector's perspective, I wanted these wonderful old photos to be displayed on a big screen. I wanted to render them in cinematic language. The interchange between still and moving images is driven by factors such as the music, the content of the conversation, the details of the images and so on. I was not particularly interested in the original meaning of the images, or in the history behind the photos. I am more interested by how a photo is "converted" through the medium of cinema, or how images have multiple meanings. I hope that the audience can get involved during the viewing process...

The music footage came from family tapes in 1988. I edited and mixed the tape recordings to make the music. The music production process is consistent with the source of the material and the visual references...

My work is different from the Chinese realist documentaries. As someone born in the mid-1980s, I don't carry the burden of history, and this film is not about documenting or hawking historical events. I don't care about the so-called "reality". I am more interested in creating a crevice between the images and language. I believe this is the kind of experiment that enables a sense of aesthetics in cinema.

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