

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Mon Dec 2 | 8:30 pm |

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$12 [members \$9]

HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHICK STRAND!

To celebrate the birthday of filmmaker, teacher and cultural force Chick Strand (December 3), who passed away ten years ago last July, REDCAT has organized a program of rarely seen masterworks. Hailed for her profoundly expressive voice, Strand's eye was unsurpassed for its complex and empathetic responses to people and their worlds, whether in California, Mexico, or her imagination. Strand's films defy categorization, moving between intimate portraits and intuitive ethnographies; lush poetic metaphor and anecdotal storytelling; subtly recorded images and astonishing found footage; and haunting portrayals of women alone and within families. Join us in celebrating one of Los Angeles's great artists. Curated by Steve Anker and Betzy Bromberg.

"Sensuous, deeply felt, rigorous, uncompromising – the work of Chick Strand belongs in the canon of avant-garde cinema alongside that of her contemporaries Stan Brakhage, Bruce Baillie and Bruce Conner... Her diverse output is permeated by... [a]... profound sense of humanity, of film as a tool for identification and relation, transcending time and culture." — Vera Brunner-Sung, *BFI Film Forever*

"Strand discovered an extraordinary sensuous lyricism, simultaneously wanton and disciplined."

— David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*

"Aesthetically, her films are some of the most beautifully crafted works I've seen; stunningly gorgeous in their visual composition and exceptionally honest and sincere in their content. They have influenced countless filmmakers working on that divide of document and experiment, changing our views of both expressive and

representational models of filmmaking. Any way you look at it, Chick Strand is undoubtedly one of the most important figures in the history of American cinema." — Pablo de Ocampo, *The Portland Mercury*

THE PROGRAM

Angel Blue Sweet Wings

(1966, 3 minutes, 16mm, color, sound)

"An experimental film poem in celebration of life and vision." (Chick Strand)

Guacamole

(1976, 10 minute, 16mm, color, sound)

"Poetic surrealism. Approach is experimental in relationship of image and sound. A film about the loss of innocence and the search for the essence of the human spirit." (Chick Strand)

Cosas de mi Vida

(1976, 25 minutes, 16mm, color, sound)

"Expressive documentary in an ethnographic approach about Anselmo, a Mexican Indian. It is a film about his struggle for survival in the Third World. Orphaned at age 7, he was the sole support of himself and his baby sister, who eventually starved and died in his arms. The film continues with Anselmo's struggle to live and to do something with his life other than a docile acceptance of poverty. Totally uneducated in a formal way, he taught himself how to play a horn and when he became a man he started his own street band. The film was started in 1965 and finished in 1975. During the 10 years, I saw the physical change in Anselmo's life in terms of things he could buy to make his family at first able to survive, and during the last years, to make them more comfortable. I felt a change in his spirit from a proud, individualistic and graceful man into one obsessed with possessions and role playing in order to get ahead and stay on top, but one cannot help but admire his energy and determination to succeed, to drag himself and his family out of the hopelessness and sameness of poverty to give them a future. Anselmo tells his own story in English although he does not speak the language. After he told me of his life in Spanish, I translated it into English and taught him how to say it." (Chick Strand)

Fake Fruit Factory

(1986, 22 minutes, 16mm, color, sound)

"Intimate documentary about young women who make papier-mache fruit and vegetables in a small factory in Mexico. They have a gringo boss, but the factory is owned by his Mexican wife. The focus of the film is on the color, music and movement involved, and the gossip which goes on constantly, revealing what the young women think about men." (Chick Strand)

Fever Dream

(1976, 7 minutes, b&w, sound)

A wet hot dream about sensuality." (Chick Strand)

Mujer de Milfuegos

(1976, 15 minutes, 16mm, color, sound)

"A kind of heretic fantasy film. An expressionistic, surrealistic portrait of a Latin American woman. Not a personal portrait so much as an evocation of the consciousness of women in rural parts of such countries as Spain, Greece and Mexico; women who wear black from the age 15 and spend their entire lives giving birth, preparing food and tending to household and farm responsibilities. MUJER DE MILFUEGOS depicts in poetic, almost abstract terms, their daily repetitive tasks as a form of obsessive ritual.

The film uses dramatic action to express the thoughts and feelings of a woman living within this culture. As she becomes transformed, her isolation and desire, conveyed in symbolic activities, endows her with a universal quality. Through experiences of ecstasy and madness we are shown different aspects of the human personality. The final sequence presents her awareness of another level of knowledge." (Chick Strand)

ARTIST BIO

Chick Strand's (1931-2009) accomplishments as an artist spanned more than three decades. In the early 1960s, with a new anthropology degree in hand, she turned her attention to ethnographic filmmaking. Her early work focused on Meso-American cultures explored through the language of the experimental documentary.

In 1961, she founded Canyon Cinema with Bruce Baillie, an organization that later spawned the San Francisco Cinematheque. They organized screenings of experimental, documentary and

narrative films in East Bay backyards and community centers. Acting in response to a lack of public venues for independent movies, they were part of a wider explosion in American avant-garde film. The era was one of social idealism and communal energy, and the films they showcased boldly embraced purely cinematic visual expression and cultural critique.

Strand left Northern California in the late 1960s to pursue studies in ethnographic film at UCLA. She then joined the faculty of Occidental College, where she served as the director of the film as art program for a quarter of a century. In the 1970s she continued to define her visual technique, and her subjects more frequently became women. She soon evolved a distinctive film style: backlit subjects photographed in close up and in motion, with a handheld telephoto lens. The technique produced sensual, lyrical images that became Strand's signature. Her entire filmography numbers nearly a score of works, and along the way, she also became an accomplished photographer and painter.

A note from Chick Strand, penned in the late 1990s:

"Still making films after all of these years, (35). Four more are being edited now and should be finished in a couple of years.

I hope that my work stands alone without an introduction. If you want to know more about me and my work, write to me in care of Canyon and I'll answer any questions you might have. Otherwise I have nothing of importance to say.

Meanwhile, I've put a picture of myself in the catalogue for the first time. Take a peek at this mug and understand you are looking into the eyes of a person who believes that after day comes night and after that, day comes again.

Love to all,
Chick

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