

***IN SEARCH OF MEANING:
International Avant-Garde & Artists' Cinema***

November 7, 2017, 7 p.m.

Whitney Humanities Center Auditorium, Yale University.

Program curated and introduced by Mónica Savirón. Followed by a Q&A session.

1943 – 2016. 75 minutes. 16mm, and digital projection. This selection of works explores the changing world through phenomenological, instead of representational, imagery. Aiming to reflect on consciousness, emotion, and experience, these images are mirrors held up to a culture that has released itself from visual constraints. The works, made in the last decade, are shown in conversation with Maya Deren's debut film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*. She writes: "In film, the image can and should be only the beginning, the basic material of the creative action. We can believe in the existence of a monster if we are not asked to believe that it is present in the room with us. The film image—whose intangible reality consists of lights and shadows beamed through the air and caught on the surface of a silver screen—comes to us as the reflection of another world. At that distance we can accept the reality of the most monumental and extreme of images, and from that perspective we can perceive and comprehend them in their full dimension." (From *Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality; The Avant-Garde Film*). Guest curator Mónica Savirón will introduce the program with a presentation focusing not on how to make avant-garde films and videos, but on why.



(From Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*)

***AN ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE*, by Ja'Tovia Gary**

2015, 6 minutes, HD from 16mm and video, color & b/w, sound, 16:9



“[The film] begins with the sound of Alice Coltrane’s harp as 1950s-era churchgoers arrive for a service. Gary then layers animated drawings over actress (poet and civil rights activist) Ruby Dee performing the slave narrative of Fannie Moore, whose story was recorded in 1937 as part of the Federal Writers’ Project. Gary’s hand-drawn animations create honorifics: a halo over Dee’s head alternates with orbital and dot formations, giving way to laser beams dancing in diagonals from Dee’s eyes. And just as viewers acclimate to the sound of celluloid crackling in Gary’s collage of black-and-white found footage, she cuts to color videos of militarized police forces and the rebellions fighting back, taken from network news and citizen journalism covering Black Lives Matter protests in cities like Ferguson and Baltimore.”—Ariel Goldberg, *Art in America*.

***MOUNTAIN IN SHADOW*, by Lois Patiño**

2012, 14 minutes, HD, color, sound, 16:9



“I have been reflecting about how landscape is represented in cinema. In every film this approach is made from a different perspective, but always going around the relationship between the viewer and the image. [...] I tried to create a balance between the abstract and the figurative: trying to flatten the image and creating a big contrast in the almost black and white imagery. Here the referents were closer to the abstract expressionism, allowing me to go beyond the real space, creating an estrangement with the snowy mountains. [...] I film from the distance, and I don't move the camera, thus I try to concentrate the gaze and be more perceptible to the subtle movements of the elements of Nature. The image that we see is not the real space, but it represents a mental image when this connection with what you see is made.”—Lois Patiño, Bucharest International Experimental Film Festival.

***TRICKS ARE FOR KIDDO*, by Rhayne Vermette**

2012, 3 minutes, HD from 16mm, color, sound, 4:3



“The source material of *Tricks are for Kiddo* came from the found footage readily available at the co-op Winnipeg Film Group. It was made by taping pieces of film to clear leader. This film is an inquiry into various methods to excavate something from the physical assemblage of images, much like the notion of a film collage. My selection process was mainly engrossed with textures and either building up the density of an image, or deflating it. So far, my 16mm work cannot be run through a projector without enduring severe defacement and devastation.” —Rhayne Vermette, AXW Festival.

LAGOS SAND MERCHANTS, by Karimah Ashadu

2013, 10 minutes, HD, color, sound, 16:9



“This film focuses on a group of sand merchants on the outskirts of Lagos (Nigeria), arduously trawling the Lagos State Lagoon to unearth sand deep from the river bed, which will later be offered to the construction industry for sale. The cinematography of the film is led by the ‘Rotate 2 Mechanism’ or drumroll, a dynamic revolving device that challenges spatial perception. As the mechanism is actioned, the moving image lurches towards the ground and comes back up again, as if surfacing for air. The mechanism becomes a mirror for the task, producing a rhythmic quality that reflects the monotonous yet poetic relationship between the merchants and the lagoon.”—Karimah Ashadu.

HIGH WATER, by Paweł Wojtasik

2013, 9 minutes, HD, color, sound, 16:9



“*High Water* was filmed in post-Katrina New Orleans and the surrounding wetlands, one of the fastest disappearing coastal areas on the planet. The work engages viewers in a contemplation of a landscape damaged by human intervention that nevertheless struggles to retain its vitality. Some of the footage in the film was obtained using a 360-degree panoramic camera. The film is accompanied by Stephen Vitiello’s atmospheric soundtrack.”
—Paweł Wojtasik.

MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON, by Maya Deren

1943, 14 minutes, 16mm, black & white, sound, 4:3



"I wanted to put on film the feeling which a human being experiences about an incident, rather than to record the incident accurately. [...] This film is concerned with the interior experiences of an individual. It does not record an event that could be witnessed by other persons. Rather, it reproduces the way in which the sub-conscious of an individual will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simply and casual incident into a critical emotional experience."—Maya Deren, *Visionary Film*.

TUSSELMUSCLE, by Steve Cossman

2007-2009, 5 minutes, 16mm, color, sound, 4:3



“This film is composed of 7,000 single frames that were appropriated from view-master reel cells of floral imagery, then hand-spliced using a guillotine splicer to create a linear filmstrip. Musical patterns such as paradiddles (R-L-R-R, L-R-L-L) were assembled with the still images of flora to make and break rhythms: rose, carnation, rose, rose, carnation, rose, carnation, carnation. The piece is composed with temporary lulls restraining the building crescendo ultimately cut at the height of its intensity, a visual composition at 24 frames per second. To sustain a visual note, multiples of that image have been spliced together, at points up to a hundred of the same image to hold before moving back into rhythm.”—Steve Cossman.

***THE END*, by Amanda Thomson**

2015, 6 minutes, 16mm, black & white, optical sound, 4:3



“The film traces the progress of light from natural to artificial. In the end, nothing is left. This work was made as part of a project by the Iris Film Collective in Vancouver: each member was given 800 feet of black and white print stock to shoot, print, and edit a film on the theme of *The End of the World*. The film should not have a tail leader attached, therefore it is over after the last clear frame has passed through the projector.” —Amanda Thomson.

FOOTNOTES:

***ANSWER PRINT*, by Mónica Savirón**

2016, 5 minutes, HD from 16mm, color, sound, 4:3



"The fading that devastates color films occurs in the dark. It is accelerated by high temperatures and, to a lesser extent, relative humidity. Dye fading is irreversible. Once the dye images have faded, the information lost cannot be recovered"—Image Permanence Institute. "An answer print is the first film after the original has been timed for every shot with fades and dissolves if any. The question that it answers is 'what is this going to look like', and 'what corrections, if any, are needed'."—Bill Brand.

***BROKEN TONGUE*, by Mónica Savirón**

2013, 3 minutes, HD from 16mm, color and black & white, sound, 16:9



Broken Tongue is an ode to the freedom of movement, association, and expression. It pays homage to the diaspora of the different waves of migration, and challenges the way we represent our narratives. It is a search for a renewed consciousness, for reinvention, a ‘what if’, the formal equivalent of asking a question expressed with a broken tongue—or not so broken after all. Mainly made with images from the January 1st issues of *The New York Times* since its beginning in 1851 to 2013, *Broken Tongue* is a heartfelt tribute to avant-garde sound performer Tracie Morris and to her poem *Afrika*.”—Mónica Savirón.

This program has been organized in conjunction with the Yale Film and Media Studies Program. Special thanks to John Mackay, Katherine Germano, Anthony Sudol, and the participating artists.