

Gravitational Lensing: Feminist Film Dialogues

Program 2: Self as Social Construct

Shapeshifters Cinema, July 20, 2024

***Women* by Connie Beeson, 1974, 16mm film to DV, 13 mins**

A sardonic film about the clichés laid on women.

***Forward Fast* by Lorraine Sovern, 2022, DV, 3 mins**

While embarking upon an archival process of preservation, the filmmaker dives into a stark exploration of self as she discovers the seeds of patriarchy and misogyny already planted and steeping the imagery of her childhood films.

***Mirror, Mirror* by Jan Krawitz, 1990, 16mm film to DV, 17 mins**

This film provocatively explores the relationship between a woman's body image and the quest for an ideal. Blending humor and candor, the film illuminates the vagaries in the concept of an "ideal" body.

***Beauties* by Lisa Marr, 2017, super-8mm film to DV, 9:35 mins**

A cinematic mash note to the unabashedly anarchic, proto-feminist Sennett Bathing Beauties. Originally exhibited as an expanded cinema performance for 8 projectors and 1 victrola, the film was made using super-8 cyanotypes, eco-processing (coffee, strawberries) and tinting (turmeric), expired stock (Plus-x, Kodachrome), rephotographed found footage, drawn animation, and a 78 rpm acetate record that degrades with each playing.

***Matchbox* by Jennifer Cabral, 2023, DV, 7:27 mins**

In this work—part historical research, part imaginary—the filmmaker confronts the right of a white woman to compare her lack of autonomy with that of an enslaved body. Matches are continuously lit in an attempt to illuminate the colonially-toned attributions used to describe her maternal grandmother. The flame reveals the words resting in each box, exposing the distorted representation of whiteness as standards of beauty and superiority.

***Free, White and 21* by Howardena Pindell, 1980, SV to DV, 11:46 mins**

In this video Pindell recounts a litany of racist experiences that she and her mother endured. She interrupts her narrative with actions like wrapping her head with a gauze bandage. Pindell alternately appears as a character in whiteface and a blond wig, who undercuts the artist's testimony with disparaging remarks. "I had faced de facto censorship issues throughout my life as part of the system of apartheid in the United States," Pindell, who worked as MoMA's first Black woman curator during the 1970s, later recalled. "In the tape, I was bristling at the women's movement as well as the art world."

*** INTERMISSION ***

***Reinventing the Wheel* by Elena Knox, 2014, DV, 3:15 mins**

Reinventing the Wheel is a stop-motion animation, in which a poem plays out on a letterboard as on the TV game-show *Wheel of Fortune*. As contestants guess at phrases and earn prizes, the doll-like hostess who turns their guessed letters becomes a medium for her own message to the host and all you viewers at home.

Softer by Ayanna Dozier, 2020, 16mm to DV, 5 mins

Softer examines the demands of "softening" that are requested of Black women's bodies in society—from job prospects to romantic ones—be that in their voice, their manners, and, critically, their hair. This experimental short plays upon the grooming rituals of softening that are terrifyingly rough through a recreation of a permanent wave machine-produced perm (popular in the 1930s-1950s) and meditates on the historical ways in which Black women have tried to answer this demand on softness through respectable appearance and behavior.

***Picturing Oriental Girls: a [Re] Educational Videotape* by Valerie Soe, 1992, 12 mins, SV to DV**

Picturing Oriental Girls is filled with geisha girls, china dolls and dragon ladies populating a visual compendium of representations of Asian women in American film and television. Juxtaposed with text from mail-order bride catalogs, men's magazines and popular literature, these clips from over 25 films and television programs explicate the orientalism and exoticism prevalent in mass media images of "oriental girls."

***Fragile* by Sasha Waters, 2023, 16mm film to DV, 8:30 mins**

Six women a decade younger than the filmmaker, speak a personal meditation on the early history of cinema, the anxiety of aging, and the woeful comedy of professional envy. A wry take on the Structural film tradition of demystification.

***Flower Eater* by Heather Brown, 2023, 16mm to DV, 3:07 mins**

"This piece reflects my own conflicting feelings of pleasure, pain, desire, rage, vulnerability, and violence on a psychological level. I take part in the flower's sensual destruction and my own overindulgence. Through pain and bleeding I transform to become the flower, a crucifixion of sorts. Evolving past stereotypes of gender, I am both the delicate flower and the savage flower eater." (Heather Brown)

***Trans* by Sophie Constantinou, 1994, 16mm film to DV, 10 mins**

In this playful, direct address, trans man Henry gives nuanced voice to his experience and extols the singular joy of wearing a suit.

***Venus in Ferns* by Laura Conway, 2023, 16mm film to DV, 8 mins**

A dance satire set in a Victorian garden that quotes gardening advice columns from the 1800s as its primary source material. As Florence, the columnist, teaches her flock gardening techniques, she re-inscribes toxic gender scripts. However, despite her best attempts to domesticate nature, she finds Kingdom Plantae to be a queer destination.

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Gravitational Lensing: Feminist Film Dialogues is dedicated to exploring the visions, voices, concerns and lineage of women, non-binary, genderqueer and trans filmmakers through public film screenings, workshops, conversations and presentations.

Curators: Amy Reid and Kathleen Quillian

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