

Curator Statement

SEEN/UNSEEN: A Festival of Experimental Film

“To see is to retain — to behold. Elimination of all fear is in sight — which must be aimed for. Once vision may have been given — that which seems inherent in the infant’s eye, an eye which reflects the loss of innocence more eloquently than any other human feature, an eye which soon learns to classify sights, an eye which mirrors the movement of the individual toward death by its increasing inability to see.”

- Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*

Stan Brakhage’s prolific body of work — both influenced by and a huge influence upon the other filmmakers whose work has been curated for SEEN/UNSEEN: A Festival of Experimental Film — exemplifies the philosophy of vision and art about which Brakhage so eloquently writes in *Metaphors*, and which this curated program is intended to represent to you, the audience, as we explore experimental cinema together. With experimental film, the “unseen” — which includes the response to a given work by the individual as well as the artist’s intent in creating the work — bears equal weight to that which is “seen” on its surface. What’s more, your interpretation of or response to the selection of films in this program will almost certainly vary widely from that of the friends and strangers experiencing it at the same time with you.

Experimental filmmaking tends to be concerned with the metaphorical, the abstract, the view into what is seen or implied by the “mind’s eye.” Experimental film defies convention, refuses categorization, gleefully ignores established barriers, boundaries and definitions of what cinema is. The experimental filmmaker is both artist and scientist, experimenting, hypothesizing, pushing constantly against the fabric of the cinematic media, shredding and repurposing conventional wisdom, seeking to understand and explore the many ways in which visuals, sound, editing and effects can all combine into the beautiful stew of an artwork that evokes, provokes and elicits visceral response from the audience.

There are films in this program that have a more traditional structure on their surface, but something deeper going on beneath. There are those that may seem quite inexplicable if viewed through a literal lens. Some are intended to trigger an emotional response such as a relaxed or meditative state, or anxiety, or the pulling sensation of the ebb and flow of an ocean tide. Others may appear more traditional in their storytelling, in some ways, but are disruptive or metaphorical in others.

Consider these films to be cinematic poetry, not prose, and you’ll be starting off in a good frame of mind to appreciate and enjoy this program. Experimental film does not spoon-feed you the answers.

It requires that you as audience be an active participant in this process, opening your mind to the experiences unfolding before you, absorbing the ideas presented here, responding and reacting to them. How you react to the program presented — collectively and individually — will be different than any other audience that has ever watched these films.

The name of this event, SEEN/UNSEEN, holds a double meaning, referring also to the nature of works themselves and what it takes an experimental filmmaker to get them seen by audiences once the work has gone into making them, for there are few mainstream distribution pathways for this kind of cinema. Outside the festival and museum and academia circuits, experimental film isn’t the most monetizable of art forms, and therefore it tends more to be seen by those who seek it out where it can be found. Even many film festivals include no experimental film in their programs. Most of these films presented in the program will be unfamiliar to anyone not already a student, of sorts, of experimental film.

| O | K | L | A | H | O | M | A | | C | O | N | T | E | M | P | O | R | A | R | Y |

Much like in meditation, the idea when absorbing experimental works such as these is to let go of distraction and expectation, to absorb what you see before you and to be open to the idea that the point of experiencing experimental artworks is, to a large degree, about opening yourself to new ideas. You may find some works easily digestible in the moment, but then find them inexplicably crawling around in your brain weeks or months later as your mind fumbles and picks at the knot of deeper meaning. Or you may find yourself repelled by a work, find its friction against your own expectations too grating, and find that you need to close your eyes, or even walk away for a moment. Most of all though, it is my hope that you will allow these artists, through the sharing of their artworks here, to provoke you, connect to you, and awaken your brain to both the seen and the unseen beauties and mysteries that lie within their flickering frames.

Kim Voynar
Curator, SEEN/UNSEEN: A Festival of Experimental Film