

## New Beginnings: Works by Peggy Ahwesh, Sadie Benning, and Nina Fonoroff

Thursday, January 25, 2018 at 7:30 pm — Artists' Television Access  
presented in association with Canyon Cinema Foundation

**New Beginnings** is a recurring curatorial endeavor oriented to the presentation of historic works of international artist-made cinema in the contemporary context. This seasonal series intends to open space for new cinematic encounters, revive interest in forgotten (or not forgotten) classics, to problematize canons through the unearthing of unsung cinematic oddities, to provide fresh insights to well-known works, and to offer opportunities for guest curatorial input and experiment.

**New Beginnings** for the New Year features a selection of Sadie Benning's proto-riot grrl PXLvision cine-confessions, Peggy Ahwesh's documentary-styled verité melodrama *Martina's Playhouse* (1989) and Nina Fonoroff's *The Accursed Mazurka* (1994), an epic collage consideration of spiraling mental illness, recovery and identity. Created in the context of early 1990s feminism, these collected works explore contrasts between cinematic subjectivity and objectivity as well as strategies for the representation of self and other while blurring lines between documentary, performance and personal confession.

**Living Inside** (1989) by Sadie Benning; PXLVision screened as digital video, b&w, sound, 5 minutes, exhibition file from Video Data Bank

When she was 16, Benning stopped going to high school for three weeks and stayed inside with her camera, her TV set, and a pile of dirty laundry. This tape mirrors her psyche during this time. With the image breaking up between edits, the rough quality of this early tape captures Benning's sense of isolation and sadness, her retreat from the world. As such, *Living Inside* is the confession of a chronic outsider. (Video Data Bank)

**Me and Rubyfruit** (1990) by Sadie Benning; PXLVision screened as digital video, b&w, sound, 6 minutes, exhibition file from Video Data Bank

Based on a novel by Rita Mae Brown, *Me and Rubyfruit* chronicles the enchantment of teenage lesbian love against a backdrop of pornographic images and phone sex ads. Benning portrays the innocence of female romance and the taboo prospect of female marriage. (Video Data Bank)

**Jollies** (1990) by Sadie Benning; PXLVision screened as digital video, b&w, sound, 11 minutes, exhibition file from Video Data Bank

Benning gives a chronology of her crushes and kisses, tracing the development of her nascent sexuality. Addressing the camera with an air of seduction and romance, giving the viewer a sense of her anxiety and special delight as she came to realize her lesbian identity. (Video Data Bank)

***Martina's Playhouse*** (1989) by Peggy Ahwesh; Super-8mm screened as digital video; color, sound, 20 minutes, exhibition file from Electronic Arts Intermix

A child refuses to participate in society and the authorities are at a loss. *Martina's Playhouse*, a response to "Pee Wee's Playhouse," focuses on the girl child, grappling with the fluidity of gender roles as she role-plays with her toys. (Peggy Ahwesh)

***The Accursed Mazurka*** (1994) by Nina Fonoroff; 16mm, color, sound, 40 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Obsessive journal entries, clinical reports, varied sources of music, and a series of watercolors depicting a pierced and bleeding brain are among the many elements that make up a narrative around the occasion of mental breakdown. Instruments of electrical transmission are metaphors for the diseased brain, as reconstructed by a woman who has lost her reason, her body and her foothold in personal identity. The unseen protagonist at first attributes her illness to repeated hearings of a Chopin mazurka on the radio. Radio static, a telephone switchboard gone awry, a woman imagistically redoubled playing the accordion become points of departure for a rant situated in the remembrance of a mental state so extreme as to make impossible any attempt at representation. Like an overwound mechanism, her account is eclipsed by images and sound that derail the story's trajectory. The reports of a series of practitioners on the patient's symptoms and "progress" reveal the ineffectuality of conventional mental health treatment while the patient offers hyperbolic excesses in describing her experience. On the road to recovery, she searches for possible causes for the lapse of sanity... (Nina Fonoroff)

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