

Special program at
MIFF 2014, 7th February 2014 – 4.30pm to 10pm, NCPA Little Theatre

Living Archives and cinematic friendships

Screenings and Discussions led by Nicole Wolf

Short info (see concept note below):

This afternoon will present the project **Living Archive. Archive Work as contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice** (initiative of Arsenal. Institute of film and video art, Berlin) through one of its participants Nicole Wolf. The presentation will include screenings of the newly restored and digitized version of Deepa Dhanraj's KYA HUA IS SHAHER KO/ WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THIS CITY (1986) as well as the archival print of Sara Gómez' DE CIERTA MANERA/ ONE WAY OR ANOTHER (1974). Further excerpts from the Arsenal Archive will be introduced. Deepa Dhanraj will be present for discussion.

4.30pm to 7pm: Cinematic Friendships and Political Fiction

The screening of Sara Gómez' DE CIERTA MANERA (1974) starts a trajectory of feminist filmmaking as political fiction. We will discuss the film in relation to other filmmaking practices where the merging of documentary and fictional modalities stems from the deep political involvement of the filmmakers, including Yugantar's IDHI KATHA MATRAMENA?/ YEH SIRF KAHANI HAI? (1983). In each case the developed film language projects on screen the questions and desires linked to imagining ones present otherwise, new possibilities of listening are created and hereby a politics for a present to come proposed. This session thus traces a history of cinematic friendships across geographical locations as a background to recent examples in India and elsewhere and to propose contemporary cinematic and political affiliations.

Screening of 35mm print:

DE CIERTA MANERA/ ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, by Sara Gomez (Cuba 1974, 79min, black & white, 35mm, Spanish with English subtitles)

Synopsis: A pioneering figure of Cuban cinema, Sara Gómez was one of the first women to work within the auspices of the ICAIC, Cuba's post Revolutionary film ministry.

De cierta manera, her only feature film, was the first by a woman in Cuba, the first shot on 16mm in Cuba, and one of the few made by an Afro-Cuban director. Gómez died during production, at age 31, and De cierta manera would be finished by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and other colleagues several years after Gómez completed cinematography.

While many of these historical markers would make DE CIERTA MANERA worthy of attention, the film stands on its own as a dramatic rethinking of cinematic form and purpose. To achieve her complex portrait of still marginalized communities of former slum dwellers, now working under the Revolution, who cling to regressive aspects of machismo and mysticism Gómez shifts between a variety of narrative modes, attacking

the ongoing problems of the revolutionary project through historical analysis, street level documentary, and a fictionalized love story. As Gómez says in the film's opening credits, it is "a film about real people, and some fictitious ones." (Text from Light Industry)

Further films presented through excerpts only, including:

IDHI KATHA MATRAMENA?/ YEH SIRF KAHANI HAI?, by Yugantar film collective (India, 1983, 25min, black & white, original version 16mm, Telugu with English Subtitles)

Yugantar collaborated with the women's research and activist collective Stree Shakti Sangathana to produce a fictional reconstruction of domestic violence seen from a woman's point of view. The experience of domestic violence is cinematically developed as multi-layered and a self-reflective female character as well as the importance of female friendship is introduced on screen.

The film will be introduced in conversation with Deepa Dhanraj, one of the founding members of the Yugantar film collective.

IT HAPPENED JUST BEFORE, by Anja Salomonowitz (Austria 2005, 72min, color, German with English Subtitles)

Five people in their everyday surroundings tell stories that they have never experienced personally. They recount tales of people involved in trafficking in women. They tell of exploitation, violence and force. They tell of realities which have happened and which might have happened in the places shown. A space for a new form of listening and a politics is created on and in front of the screen.

7-7.30pm Break

7.30pm – 10pm:

Screening of **KYA HUA IS SHAHER KO/ WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THIS CITY**, by Deepa Dhanraj, India 1986, 95min (original format 16mm, screened digital)

Followed by discussion with Deepa Dhanraj

Synopsis: **WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THIS CITY?** explores the processes of political maneuvering which led to the Hyderabad communal riots in 1984. The city's history, the provocative speeches of its politicians and the instrumentalisation of religious processions stand next to the testimonies and the striking visual accounts of the Old City's working class—those who lose their livelihoods through violent attacks and long periods of imposed curfew. The film is pioneering in recording and analyzing the rhetoric and visual expression of Hindu nationalist and supremacist politics. Initially shot for the local communities in Hyderabad, its courage in capturing the ensuing violence combined

with its respectful lyricism and contemplation, enhanced through Navroze Contractor's camera work endows this political documentary with an acute contemporary relevance.

Concept Note:

Recounted memories are one possibility for a first encounter with a film. Deepa Dhanraj's *KYA HUA IS SHAHAR KO* (What has happened to this city?) (1986) is one of those films that I first *saw* through memories only; memories recounted by the filmmaker herself and the cameraperson Navroze Contractor of an intense process of making and showing as well as memories of viewing experiences by other filmmakers to whom the film became an important moment in their own film-political journey. The only 16mm copy that remained with Deepa Dhanraj was not fit for screenings anymore and an existing VHS copy was hard to watch due its quality. So while the film existed as a 'poor image' (Hito Steyerl), it did not circulate as such and was hence 'lost' for re-viewing or being viewed anew by a younger generation of filmmakers. Only while I researched the archive of the *Arsenal. Institute for Film and Video Art* in Berlin did I realize that a 16mm copy of *KYA HUA IS SHAHAR KO* was kept in Germany, not without traces of age, with slightly obstructing German subtitles, but perfectly watchable.

This encounter initiated a series of questions towards the film's place, within the archive and outside of it. Rather than being driven by a logic of *discovery* and *rescue* of *lost* material, a trajectory started that surely acknowledged the value of the film as historical material, but was interested in what it might actualize in diverse contexts of the present.

I was invited to participate in the project **Living Archive. Archive Work as contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice** through which the Arsenal opened their entire archive (film prints, artefacts, paperwork, oral history and memories) for 37 artists, filmmakers, performers, musicians, curators and theorists over the course.

I followed this invitation in two directions:

1) Deepa Dhanraj and myself started collaborating on bringing *KYA HUA IS SHAHAR KO* back to old and new audiences. This included a complicated process of producing a digital version from the various image and sound material available in Berlin and different cities in India as well as a research process into the particular conditions and politics of the film's making which finds articulation in the booklet text and the additional interview material accompanying the DVD which was released in June 2013.

2) Researching the Arsenal film archive one can trace avant-garde and independent film histories internationally, including a strong focus on feminist cinematic works. What I felt was missing here was the work of *Yugantar*, the India based feminist film collective of which Deepa Dhanraj was a founding member and which produced 4 films between 1980 and 1983. My archival impulse was not one of 'completing' an archive by filling a gap or to correct constructions of feminist film histories often based on practices in Europe and the US. It seemed more productive to playfully speculate on what the

insertion of *Yugantar*'s films could provoke within the archive. My eclectic and speculative addition seemed appropriate for an archive which was itself built through personal relationships and nurtured through a passion for cinema as intrinsically political rather than through the urge to build systematic national film histories.

I started searching the archive for cinematic friendships. Which films share the queries and urgencies with *Yugantar*'s ways of collectively creating films? Can feminist affiliations be outlined across the archive? Which new political vocabularies were developed through feminist film practices during the 70s and 80s? How do those cinematic friendships in the archive relate to present expansions of documentary practices and modalities?

Nicole Wolf lives in London and Berlin. She researches, writes, teaches and curates with moving images. Her interest lies in political cinemas, specifically experimentations with documentary modalities, to think through their relation to publics, the constitution of conflict and their potential for dissonance and protest. A continuous engagement with South Asian documentary practices and feminism informs her inquiry into cinematic international alliances. She currently teaches at the Visual Cultures Department of Goldsmiths, London. n.wolf@gold.ac.uk

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