

# “From My Mouth to Your Ear”: Recounting a Life in Art and Cinema

MM Serra with Lynne Sachs

## Introduction

MM Serra is a powerhouse New York City cinema visionary and a beloved friend since the late 1980s. As Executive Director of the Film-Makers’ Cooperative, Serra (as I have always called her) asked me to join the Cooperative’s board of directors in 1997, soon after I moved to town with my partner filmmaker, Mark Street, and our daughters, Maya and Noa Street-Sachs. Over the course of the next 17 years, we worked together on innumerable projects including: a 2006 anti-war exhibition (fig. 1) and DVD entitled *For Life Against the War . . . Again* (US, 2007), currently distributed by the FMC (fig. 2 and 3 *For Life Against the War . . . Again* photos); a PS1/ MoMA children’s film series entitled “Cinema of the Unusual,” curated by Maya and Noa (fig. 4 and 5 “Cinema of the Unusual” with Maya and Noa Street-Sachs photos) in 2008 and 2009; and many FMC benefits at locations like the then crumbling nineteenth-century synagogue at the Angel Orensanz Foundation in the East Village (fig. 6 and 7 Film-Makers’ Cooperative Benefit photos) and other venues around town. Together in the Coop office on Leonard Street or later on Park Avenue South, we toiled over grant applications, usually meeting their deadlines with only minutes to spare. In 2009, I co-edited the 51<sup>st</sup> issue of *Millennium Film Journal* (fig. 8, 9, and 10 *Millennium Film Journal* photos) which featured writing on the then burgeoning genre of experimental documentary and included Serra’s essay on her film *Chop Off* (US, 2008).



Figure 1. “For Life Against the War . . . Again” Film-Makers’ Cooperative, programmed by Lynne Sachs and MM Serra, exhibition poster, 2006.

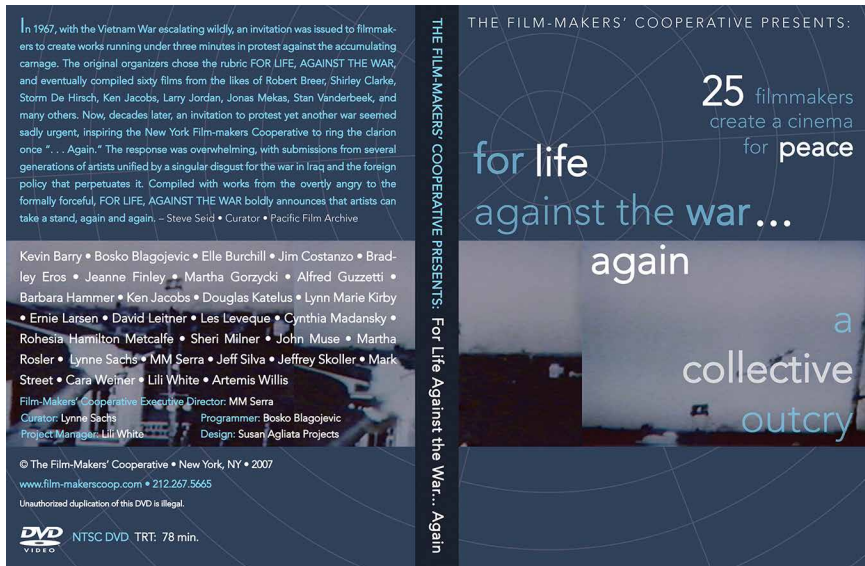


Figure 2. “For Life Against the War . . . Again” Film-Makers’ Cooperative DVD, curated by Lynne Sachs and MM Serra, 2006.

for life against the war...again	TRT: 78 minutes	for life against the war...again	TRT: 78 minutes
[1] <b>The Scream: 21st Century Edition</b> • Jim Costanzo • 3:00 min. As in the Edward Munch painting, the artist expresses anger and frustration at America's illegal war and the attack on our civil liberties.		[13] <b>Description of a Struggle</b> • Bosko Blagojevic • 2:55 min. Remembering the 90s, distracted, a single articulation, a way in.	
[2] <b>PSA # 11 Fallout</b> • Cynthia Madansky • 3:00 min. This public service announcement is part of a series of 15 short films that speak out against the American occupation of Iraq and the act of war.		[14] <b>The Small Ones</b> • Lynne Sachs • 3:00 min. A portrait of Sachs' cousin, Sandor Lenard, a doctor who reconstructed the bones of dead American soldiers during World War II. Composed of abstracted war imagery and children at a birthday party.	
[3] <b>LOST</b> • Jeanne C. Finley & John Muse • 3:48 min. Audio diaries of Chaplin Major Eric Olson combine with a single landscape shot. The implications of an Iraqi's death reveal the complications and tragedy of war.		[15] <b>Untitled</b> • Kevin Barry • 1:33 min. Poem on culture clash in Iraq, inherent racism and our own indifference as we use the resources gathered during the conflict.	
[4] <b>Graven Images</b> • Sherry Milner & Ernie Larsen • 4:31 min. The artists' ongoing "Sight Gag" series views patriotism (particularly post-9/11) as a form of hysterical blindness.		[16] <b>STOP THE WAR</b> • Les LeVeque • 3:00 min.	
[5] <b>Words on PEACEpiece</b> • Lili White • 1:33 min. Only by dealing with one's "shadow" can one arrive at peace; a flower chain made by children during "Culture Day" — in Slovenian, a national holiday.		[17] <b>PEACE in order to achieve PEACE</b> • MM Serra • 3:00 min. My reflections on the regime of George W. Bush.	
[6] <b>Our Grief Is Not A Cry For War</b> • Barbara Hammer • 3:45 min. October 11, 2001, Times Square. An ad hoc artist group, puts on a silent demonstration for peace in a time of national war hysteria. Lecturer Louise Richardson, Harvard University.		[18] <b>Mutable Fire!</b> • Bradley Eros & Erotic Psyche • 4:00 min. Totems of destruction & desire, torn between the ecstasy that propels and the horrors that paralyze, we reveal erotic love to be a resistance to tyranny.	
[7] <b>Unfurling</b> • Martha Gorzycki • 3:00 min. Images from visual culture scroll in a mesmerizing rhythm synonymous with the hypnotic effect of endless consumption, inviting viewers to question their own relationship to consumerism.		[19] <b>The Weather is Clearing Up!</b> • Jeffrey Skoller • 3:42 min. In the midst of war, Ho Chi Minh has a vision of happiness — 180 seconds shot in Hanoi 62 years later contain the image of its actualization.	
[8] <b>Night Vision</b> • Alfred Guzzetti • 2:32 min. Iraq: an apocalyptic landscape.		[20] <b>PEACE IS...</b> • Rohesia Hamilton Metcalfe • 3:03 min. Texts returned by a 9/20/04 Google search for the text "peace is" as a meditation on the consciousness of the crowd at this moment in time.	
[9] <b>Shot a Spider</b> • Elle Burchill • 2:40 min. Caught in action, a late-night contemplation.		[21] <b>Sacco and Vanzetti</b> • Douglas Katelus • 3:00 min. Summer in NYC. One just might stumble across a bit of anarchy at Union Square: "know that I love you...know that I love you."	
[10] <b>Star Spangled to Death</b> • Ken Jacobs • 2:00 min. Excerpt from 440 minutes shot from 1956 to 2004.		[22] <b>War Montage</b> • Cara Weiner • 3:00 min. Altered images of Iraq and war in general merge to create a visual experience.	
[11] <b>For Life / Against War</b> • Mark Street • 2:37 min. Sometimes only flowers will do — pressed against 35mm film emulsion and exposed to the light — to give an unexpected respite from world horrors.		[23] <b>Ashes, Ashes...</b> • Jeff Silva • 5:00 min. Using personal and archival footage to ruminate on the subject of war, the residue of past violence permeates into the present.	
[12] <b>Prototype: God Bless America!</b> • Martha Rosler • 1:09 min. A fragment of simulated glee produced by a bouncy robot with prosthetic legs, a movie-villain helmet, a brass trumpet — all with "made-in-China" plastic features.		[24] <b>Peace and Pleasure</b> • Artemis Willis and David Leitner • 4:00 min. Performance artist Larry Litt leads "A Peace and Pleasure Talisman Charging Ritual" with Santeria drummers and a Vodoun priestess to confuse and repel evil "Foxy" media demons.	
		[25] <b>Requiescat</b> • Lynn Marie Kirby • 4:00 min. 1000 Xs scratched on film become prayers for persons killed in Iraq. Puncting the machine during video transfer makes a glitch — marking each death anew.	

Figure 3. “For Life Against the War . . . Again” Film-Makers’ Cooperative DVD participants and films, curated by Lynne Sachs and MM Serra, 2006.



**WACK! JR.: FLOWER POWER FLICKS FOR KIDS!  
CAFÉ CINEMA: CINEMA OF THE UNUSUAL  
SUNDAY, MAY 4, 3:30 P.M.**

AVANT-GARDENERS MAYA AND NOA STREET-SACHS CELEBRATE SPRING WITH A 16MM FILM PROGRAM ACCOMPANYING WACK! ART AND THE FEMINIST REVOLUTION. THE YOUNG CURATORS HARVEST A CROP OF FUNNY, FAR-OUT, SUPER-COLORFUL KIDS' FLICKS BY FEMALE FILMMAKERS. COPRESENTED WITH THE FILM-MAKERS' COOPERATIVE. FREE WITH P.S.1 ADMISSION.

FOR INFORMATION ON UPCOMING PROGRAMS AT P.S.1, VISIT [WWW.PS1.ORG](http://WWW.PS1.ORG).

Figure 4. “Flower Power Pics: Cinema of the Unusual” children’s film festival at PS1/ MoMA, Queens, New York. Curated by Maya and Noa Street-Sachs from the collection of the Film-Makers’ Cooperative, poster, 2008–2009.



**CAFÉ CINEMA CINEMA OF THE UNUSUAL  
MATINEE MOVIES MYSTERY, MAGIC, AND MARIGOLDS  
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27, 4:00 P.M.**

CAFÉ CINEMA DEBUTS WITH A HALLOWEEN-THEMED FILM PROGRAM CURATED BY TWELVE- AND TEN-YEAR-OLD MAYA AND NOA STREET-SACHS, DAUGHTERS OF AVANT-GARDE FILMMAKERS, WHO HAVE CHOSEN SEVEN SPOOKY AND SURPRISING SHORT FILMS FROM THE FILM-MAKERS' COOPERATIVE. CHILDREN ARE ENCOURAGED TO COME IN COSTUME! TREATS WILL BE PROVIDED.

UPCOMING AT CAFÉ CINEMA DECEMBER 1, 4:00 P.M.  
ONE MAN SHOW WITH SPECIAL GUEST FILMMAKER/VIDEO ARTIST JUD YALKUT  
FOR INFORMATION ON UPCOMING PROGRAMS AT P.S.1, VISIT [WWW.PS1.ORG](http://WWW.PS1.ORG).

**P.S.1** MoMA 22-25 JACKSON AVE. AT 46 AVE. LONG ISLAND CITY (718) 784-2084 [WWW.PS1.ORG](http://WWW.PS1.ORG)

PUBLIC PROGRAMS AT P.S.1 ARE MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY THE NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS, A SERVICE CENTER, THE ROCKAWAY FOUNDATION, INC., AND THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. SPECIAL THANKS TO GUS - GROWN-UP SOCIAL.

CHAMPAGNE AT DATES MAYA AND NOA STREET-SACHS, 2008. PHOTO COURTESY OF LYNN SACHS

SUPPORTED BY **TimeOut** New York

Figure 5. “Halloween Movies: Cinema of the Unusual” children’s film festival at PS1/ MoMA, Queens, New York. Curated by Maya and Noa Street-Sachs from the collection of the Film-Makers’ Cooperative, poster, 2008–2009.



The Second Annual

**FILMMAKERS COOPERATIVE**

Tuesday  
SEPTEMBER  
27  
2005

Doors open at 7:00 pm  
CONCERT BEGINS  
AT 8PM SHARP

Tickets  
\$40

Tax deductible  
Contribution

Cash & Credit Cards  
ACCEPTED

Tickets may be purchased at the door, through Ticket Web, or by calling  
the Film-Makers' Cooperative's office at (212) 267-5665

ANGEL ORENSANZ FOUNDATION for the ARTS  
172 NORFOLK STREET (between Houston St. and Stanton St.) NEW YORK CITY

**BENEFIT CONCERT**

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SUE GARNER, TODD REYNOLDS, MARK STEWART,  
PATRICK WATSON, ELLIOTT SHARP,  
TIM BARNES, ALAN LICHT, LEE RANALDO

Performing LIVE with FILMS by  
KEN JACOBS, HARRY SMITH, EMILY HUBLEY,  
BILL MORRISON, DONNA CAMERON,  
JENN REEVES AND RON RICE.

and... **SILENT ART AUCTION**

Funding for this event was made possible by generous donations from Cinema Arts, Colorlab, Glass Eye Pix, Lab Link,  
The Maya Stendhal Gallery, New York State Council on the Arts, The Orphan Film Symposium  
and the Board of Directors of the Film-Makers' Cooperative.

Figure 6. 2nd Annual Film-Makers' Cooperative Benefit, Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk St, New York City, poster design by Bradley Eros, 2005.

**FILM MAKERS COOPERATIVE**

Summer Benefit

**CONCERT**

ANGEL ORENSANZ  
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

THURSDAY  
**JULY 1** 172 NORFOLK  
8PM BETWEEN HOUSTON + STANTON ST.  
NEW YORK CITY

**\$35**

PHILIP GLASS W/ A FILM BY HARRY SMITH

"DAZZLER FOR TWO ANALYTICS" BY KEN JACOBS

REBECCA MOORE & THE PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS  
W/ FILMS BY JOEL SCHLEMOWITZ

VIDEO BY CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN • A FILM BY JEFF SCHER  
LEE RANALDO • TIM BARNES DUO "TEXT OF LIGHT"

MICHAEL GORDON BAND W/ FILMS BY BILL MORRISON

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this event made possible with public funds from The New York State Council on the Arts - a state agency  
and a generous donation by The Maya Stendhal Gallery

Figure 7. Film-Makers' Cooperative Summer Benefit, Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk St, New York City, poster design by Laurie Olinder, 2004.

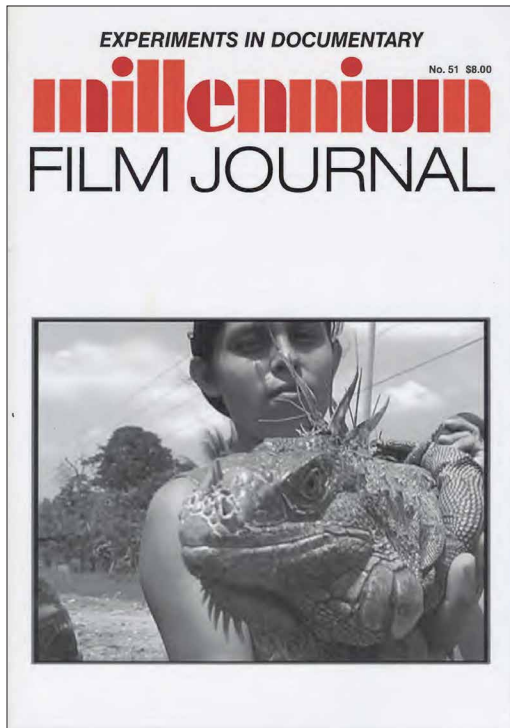


Figure 8. Millennium Film Journal Vol. # 51 “Experimental Documentary,” Editors: Lucas Hilderbrand and Lynne Sachs, cover, 2009.

**M.M. SERRA**

*Art(core)* is the explicit in the cinematic body and the name I give to my working process. I am M.M. for Mary Magdalene, and I make work that expands and explores the abject body in all its messy physical glory—in its pleasure and its pain. I am a sideshow fan, relishing Coney Island sword-swallower Insectavora or the burlesque strippers who survive on the fringe of our society. I remember with delight the fear I felt at the traveling circuses that my father took me to as a child in Pennsylvania; that world was filled with sensuous, dirty, spectacular men and women who were different in every way from the routine to which I was accustomed. My artistic obsession has grown and evolved since that time, sustaining my very artistic existence.

In 1992, I made *L'Amour Fou*, a cine-meditation on the pleasures and terrors of sadomasochism in which my interviews with enthusiasts collide with porn clips, Fleischer cartoons, and Hans Bellmer puppets. Since then I have produced 17 short experimental films that focus on the body and its senses, each in its own way embracing an alternative perspective on gender and sexuality. In this spirit, I made *Chop Off*, my latest film, exposing the dark, fearful recesses of the human psyche by filming the body modification of performance artist R.K. Literally risking “life and limb,” R.K.’s body is his medium and amputation is his art. The very act of filming him often stimulates a cascading range of emotions for me, from disgust to fear to dread.

M.M. SERRA, *Chop Off* (2009)  
VIDEO IMAGE CAPTURE, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. CHOP OFF SCREENED AT THE SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL IN 2009.

MILLENNIUM SURVEY 43

I first met R.K. in the East Village at Clayton Patterson’s gallery during a crowded opening night for Charles Gatewood’s fabulous black and white circus photos. Surrounded by portraits of San Francisco vampires celebrating blood sport in all its sensuous gore, Clayton introduced me to R.K. I reacted with a shocked, light-headed dizziness after touching him and confronting the exquisite awareness of his missing fingers. R.K. had a huge, generous, full-faced smile, and my initial alarm quickly transformed into fascination. I immediately bombarded him with questions.

“Are you a psychoanalyst?” he responded.

“No, I am a filmmaker.”

R.K. suggested that I interview him, and soon after I started work on my epic six-minute exploration of the abject body as ritualized, sculpted form and as a spectacle. *Chop Off* begins as a nightmare, in darkness. Grainy images move slowly, revealing the exotic circus performer Insectavora. The Latin mantra, “I am a human being, so nothing human is alien to me” appears superimposed over her covilting tattooed and pierced face. Then a montage combines various images from the Coney Island Sideshow Circus and clips from Todd Browning’s two deliciously bizarre early films *The Unknown* and *Freaks*. Tightly woven into the tableau are downtown performance artist Kembra Pfahler, the parading Karen Black girls, and carnivalesque texts that question the power of bodily difference and its effect on the viewer. Haunting music, circus sounds, and street noises merge on the sound track, then evolve into R.K.’s voice. I ask him, “How do you feel when people stare? Is it empowering to hold others’ gaze while feeling their fear—their pity or perhaps disgust? Do you have a ritualistic methodology? Are you sexually aroused after the amputation of your limbs?” He replies, “It’s like a power I have over people when they stare.” While his practice at times defies representation or verbal articulation, R.K. challenges an audience that would normally do everything possible to turn its head away to look and to see beauty differently. Viewers might be resistant to accepting this man’s impulse to claim body modification as body beautification. Embodying both Michelangelo and his *David*, R.K. assiduously carves away at his own stone—his body—in search of a core that shakes me, as his pliant voyeur, to my very core. R.K. not only tests the boundaries of art and the body, but he also, in turn, inspires my practice and poshles limits of documentation.

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Figures 9 and 10. Millennium Film Journal Vol. # 51 “Experimental Documentary,” Editors: Lucas Hilderbrand and Lynne Sachs, Essay on *Chop Off* and *Art Core* by MM Serra, 2009.



Equally important to my life have been my deeply personal engagements with Serra as a friend. I will never forget the time she brought me chocolates and spent the night with me in 1997 just a few days before the birth of my second child, Noa, or the weekend she came to Baltimore, where we were living, to be a featured artist at the Maryland Film Festival in 2000. Since 2005, I have had the honor to sit side-by-side with Serra either in my home or at Ludlow House near her apartment, listening to her recount her life story. She would speak, we would then converse, I would type, I would read to her what I had come up with, then we would develop and revise. We drank many cups of tea, imbibed quite a few glasses of wine, and shared a sandwich or something far more “divine.” I experienced a profound gift during these many hours together with Serra as she would grapple with the complexity and richness of her life as a woman, an artist, and a leader in the avant-garde film community in New York City, the United States, and around the globe.



Figure 11. MM Serra and Lynne Sachs, 2011.





Figure 12. MM Serra and Lynne Sachs, 2024.

## MM Serra

The search for personal expression through visual languages, whether it's photography or moving image making, has defined my life's journey. This drive is like my need for air, water, or food. It's part of my physical being.

My earliest memory of the importance of communication started in first grade in Jeanette, Pennsylvania. My teacher requested that each student select a poem and recite that poem in front of the class. At home, I searched for one that I was already familiar with, and I memorized it. I was terrified. Then I realized how much I enjoyed it, how important the language itself was to me. Standing

in front of my fellow first-graders, closing my eyes, trying to communicate what I had memorized, it was a transformative experience for me. When I let go of this fearful space, I let go of myself! Wait, I was too young to have a “self.” Clearly, this moment marks the beginning of my development as an individual. Outside the family, outside the church, outside of Catholicism. I sang this ditty wearing my Five and Dime Store cotton dress:

*“Mairzy doats and dozy doats and liddle lamzy divey.  
A kiddley divey too, wouldn’t you?”*

I knew that these weren’t really words, but this did not matter to me. I recognized that they were something more, that their very sounds were a form of poetry.

“Mares eat oats and does eat oats and little lambs eat ivy. A kid’ll eat ivy too, wouldn’t you?”

My entire childhood was spent in southwest Pennsylvania, a part of the state that was considered successful and productive. But Jeannette was a manufacturing town where the air was always polluted. One of its five factories made rubber tires, and depending on which direction the wind blew, the air stank. Jeannette was a very hilly town. We were at the bottom of the hill near the factories. At the top was the professional class, doctors and lawyers. We were in factory housing, like the workers in the film *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, US, 1927). We, the working families of mostly Italian heritage, were the engines of society. We contributed to the community by forming unions which in turn helped secure affordable housing and healthcare for all of us.

Let me be clear, there was not a single museum in Jeannette, Pennsylvania. The nearest one was the Carnegie Mellon Museum of Art an hour away in Pittsburgh. I saw art only in churches. One day, the nuns at Saint Xavier Academy, my Catholic girls finishing school, rented a bus for a field trip to the Carnegie. As we got off the bus and walked to this phenomenal building, I felt I was approaching a shrine. On either side of the stairs were these big bronze sculptures of lions, which gave the impression that you were entering a temple to creativity and imagination. These were similar to the marble Beaux-Art lions leading up to the New York Public Library in New York City. They are named Patience and Fortitude. Years later, when I was standing at the bottom of these majestic stairs on 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, I marveled at this temple to learning through books. It reminded me of the building in Pittsburgh that I had visited as a 16-year-old girl.

Decades later, the Carnegie built the Sarah Scaife Galleries. In 2016, the museum presented the first retrospective of Alison Knowles, a brilliant sound

artist who was part of the Fluxus group but was written out of their history. While visiting the museum, I happened to enter Knowles's dark, interactive wood installation. There were all of these children in what I thought was a sand-box but was actually a wooden box full of white navy beans, which were a common element in her work and a reflection of actual food from her childhood. You had to take your shoes off to get inside and have the full tactile experience. The beans made electronic sounds that were activated by your feet. Every time you touched the beans, they created sounds that I experienced as music. Using my iPhone, I recorded her "Bean Garden" (1976–2017) as I moved through the piece. I also recorded the haunting sounds of the children laughing in the room, waiting for their turn in the bean box. My main interest was to record the sounds of my own movements, my hands and my feet.

The film I was constructing at the time was about a building that had been an early twentieth-century Italian morgue in the Lower East Side. I was thinking about how I could create the feeling of a haunted space in a gutted, empty structure where the ground itself was full of yellow mud because the boiler had been taken out. I was feeling the haunted presence of ghosts, but it evolved into a film that presented the Biblical Mary Magdalene through fractured mirrored *female* reflections. The soundtrack contains the traces of the children laughing and running around and my bodily movements within Knowles's "Bean Garden." I titled this film "Mary Magdalene 2017." The ending of the film includes this text scrolling on the screen: "'It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,' said the Queen to Alice."

Lewis Carroll wrote *Alice in Wonderland* for a child, but we read and re-read it as adults. These words sum up how my own memories are woven together in my imagination. They come together like a spiral, reflecting on my childhood and my evolving desire as an artist to expand identity, making it more elastic in the way that it merges the past, the present, and the future.

My mother Josephine hated her name because there was an ad on television for Josephine the Plumber, which made her name common rather than sacred. For her, reading the Bible was a prayerful, religious experience, and the antique gold-leaf Italian Bible in our home, with stunning reproductions of the Sistine Chapel and paintings by El Greco and Leonardo da Vinci, was extremely important to her.

My mother had a cedar chest with a lock and key, and she put treasures like her Bible inside. If I were very good, she would open the chest and let me look at the gorgeous pictures by these Renaissance painters. I absolutely loved them. One of my first desires was to be Michelangelo, so I could sculpt and paint these divine voluptuous bodies. For me, this book revealed a world of miraculous *visual* experience. I didn't yet understand the stories, but its



representations of agony and ecstasy infused my passion to create and tell my own stories.

I was also moved by El Greco’s paintings of dark, elongated, and distorted bodies. I wondered about his life and began to question the nature of an artist’s experience. What events in El Greco’s life led him to create such a stormy vision of the heavens? My mother’s Bible was, however, locked away in that chest, and I did not have access to it. It was a sacred object—for my mother, something that she saw as her connection to *her* Roman Catholic God. I would beg my mother to let me see and touch it. I knew it was precious. The few times that she allowed me to view this Bible were profound experiences.

My mother Josephine named me Mary Magdalene (MM). I think she was kind of prescient; she knew deep down that Mary Magdalene had a double life. For many Christians, MM has a reputation as both a repentant prostitute and a disciple of Jesus. I have been inspired by this dichotomy throughout my life. As a girl growing up in a small, factory-based town in the mid-twentieth-century, I realized that my name was iconoclastic. My name propels me to stand outside, to face and confront what poet Adrienne Rich and theorist Judith Butler have defined as the *heteronormative* system. By resisting conventional paradigms for the art I should create, the clothing I should wear, the films I should watch, the food I should eat, and the life I should lead, I am shaping my existence as a woman and an artist using my own terms and initiatives.

I began accumulating these thoughts around the female form when I was four years old. I read the encyclopedia and found no reference to who I was. I knew that my mother Josephine had bought these multi-volume educational books over time (it was expensive for a working class person!) for my brother’s edification, not mine. But I looked in them for a word that would somehow identify who I was. I soon discovered that in our language there was, and still is, a gap, that the traditional female portrayal was, and still is, either a wife or a whore.

When I was three, a retired factory worker and family friend would babysit for me when my mother was not around. He seemed to give me the attention no one else would. He talked to me, and I thought, “I have a friend.” So, this “friend” started to undress me, pull me across the sofa, put me on his lap, bounce me up and down, really hard, playing horsey. I thought the horsey was getting out of control. Then he picked me up and brought me into a dark room, and that dark room had a bed. I could not see over the bed because my head was level to the bed. I knew I was in danger. He did things that I thought were strange and scary. Later, my mother was bathing me, and I told her that he had done this to me. And my mother immediately started screaming, “Mary Magdalene, you’re damaged!”

And I kept saying, “Why, why?”

And she said, “He is a man. He has a penis. Promise you won’t tell Daddy or anyone else. No one is going to marry you.” Right then and there, I knew I never wanted to marry. I say this now with knowledge and defiance, not regret. Still, I kept my promise to my mother and never told anyone, at least in explicit terms. Instead, I tell my stories kaleidoscopically, through my own multi-faceted artistic practices.

That was the end of my childhood and the beginning of my search for that word—the word for penis. I was afraid of the word and the feelings it evoked. I thought it was like cursing to ask. I started looking through the encyclopedia, but I did not know how to read yet. It had pictures. And I thought I would find it there. I also snuck into the library. I thought I would find an answer, and I felt that I had to come up with my own language for these weird, intimidating sensations. If I could do that, I could make myself safe. With more knowledge, I would be able to control my environment.

Spiraling forward, the driving force behind my early photography and filmmaking has been an interest in depicting the body—my own and then later those of women friends, and eventually the bodies of gay men. By the 1980s, I realized that creating work that is graphic, explicit, and vulnerable does not propel you into the mainstream. Furthermore, I had no interest in going the conventional route. What I desired was a visibility for the work I was creating that was uncensored, transcending the limitations presented by the established, institutional, patriarchal paradigms. On May 11, 1991, I was invited by filmmaker Saul Levine to be on the board of directors of the New American Cinema Group/Film-Makers’ Cooperative. I accepted. At the same time, the current executive director had become ill, so I stepped up to fill the gap in order to keep the organization functional. This gave me the opportunity to view works by radical, experimental filmmakers such as Barbara Rubin, Carolee Schneemann, Jack Smith, and Tom Chomont. After watching films by these pioneering artists, I realized that I wasn’t alone in my celebration of art that includes the explicit body without negation and censorship. By 1998, I was teaching, making films, running the Film-Makers’ Cooperative, and using the term Art(core) to describe all of the work that I was doing.

Over the years, students and audience members have asked me, point blank, “What is wrong with defining your work as pornography?” The answer is simple. Pornography is a line of work in which sexual desires are exploited by a commercial industry. The main emphasis is on marketing and money within the commodity fetish culture. What I wish to do with Art(core), in contrast, is create an expansion of language that recognizes the full array of sexual desires through history and new forms of visual representation. From the current

Fourth-Wave feminist movement to the conservative religious right, there is still a complex stigmatization around the inclusion of sexual fantasies that I see as cathartic and empowering.

With this in mind, I produce, curate, and advocate for cinematic works where the artist depicts the body explicitly as a means of personal expression in the creative process. Over the last four decades, I have discovered that experimental filmmakers, in particular, are using innovative formal strategies to represent or reframe erotic content, approaching the body from an alternative aesthetic perspective. Art(core) does not, however, distinguish itself exclusively as a platform against pornography but rather against censorship that represses explicit content in all its various forms.

My Art(core) journey towards a definition of terms began in 1991 when I first screened the films of artist Tom Chomont at the Millennium Film Workshop on East 4th Street in New York City. Tom had run the Filmmakers' Cinematheque in the 1960s and was a well-known downtown gay experimental filmmaker. As the recently hired director of the Film-Makers' Cooperative, I wanted to screen his film *Razor Head* (US, 1984) during our end-of-the-year gala. At that show, I noticed the audience's disturbed reaction while watching Tom's brother Ken Chomont methodically embark upon a homoerotic bondage shaving. Using multi-layered imagery, *Razor Head* went beyond even this open-minded audience's exposure to the representation of the body. There, on vivid 16mm Kodachrome, Ken ties a submissive man to a chair, then pulls his head back and begins to shave it with a straight edge blade. He shaves in patterns, and then moves down the body to the man's chest, removes his pants, and shaves his genital area. Tom shoots the live performance and simultaneously weaves in images of a monitor that reveal the same shaving action. Through this mise-en-scène, we see the entire film production—cameras, cords, and cables. By making the ingenious decision to reveal the creative process, Tom, as filmmaker, subtly moves his process into an expanded and self-reflective form.

After the screening, I asked Tom if I could interview him and his brother. I wanted to investigate their creative process in relation to their sexual practice as gay men involved in sadomasochism. This conversation became the key structure for one of my earliest experimental documentaries, *L'Amour Fou* (US, 1992), which was inspired by a Surrealist concept for mad love or love without moderation. My film begins in total darkness with the sounds of a man screaming “Stop, stop, stop—please stop!” As the image fades in, the shadow of a man suspended on a rotating wheel, his arms, legs, and waist tightly bound with leather straps, appears as the camera crawls up and down his muscular body. Ken, as a dominant black-leather-garmented master of ceremonies, repeatedly burns his groin with white hot wax as he screams and bounces with pain and



pleasure. A critical part of the film is my conversation with Ken speaking to the camera and wearing his leather cap and chaps. I not only wanted to see his sexual practice but also to hear his interpretation of what arouses him about his sexual preferences.

In the process of making *L'Amour Fou*, I examined the practice of a mad love, a ritualized, passionate performance theater that explores the limits of bodily boundaries. The film premiered at the Harvard Film Archive in 1992 based on a rough cut I shared with the curator. A month before the screening, I went to DuArt Lab to request my first release print, but the film technician, a Born-Again Christian, deemed my 20-minute film pornography and refused to print it. Rather than printing my “pornographic” film, he offered to assist me in my own salvation by inviting me to his prayer group. After much discussion, the president of DuArt herself insisted that the technician run my negative through the machines. I picked up the print on a Friday, took the train to Boston, and presented the film Saturday night at the Archive. Since then, *L'Amour Fou* has screened in Paris at the Cinémathèque Française and at New York’s Mix Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. In 2015, it was included in a 40-Year Retrospective on Cinema and Sexuality in São Paulo, Brazil. In 2022, the Buttocks Film Festival in Paris, organized by women, showed the film in a theater in the Latin Quarter. My film was almost silenced, but I realized its importance as a part of queer culture, so I persevered. Thus began my Art(core) trajectory.

I quickly realized that I would need to create a support structure that included five critical elements: production, exhibition, distribution, preservation, and publication. I wanted to give visibility not only to my own work but also to that of other artists who are creating explicit and iconoclastic media. This is an ongoing process I have been able to facilitate through my participation in arts exhibitions as the director of the Film-Makers’ Cooperative and in the academic community as a teacher. In the early 1990s, I enrolled in the Cinema Studies graduate program at New York University, which specifically allowed me to study with Professor Chris Straayer in his PhD course on sexual representation. Reading texts by Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Donna Haraway, Robert Stoller, and Linda Williams was pivotal to the development of my critical thinking. Aware of my commitment to exploring the “production of sexuality” within our culture, Professor David Slocum, the Chair of Media Studies at the New School for Social Research, invited me to design a curriculum around sex, gender, and media. Intimidated yet also thrilled by the idea of teaching on such a topic, I accepted the challenge and threw myself into creating a syllabus that would embrace this radical direction in higher education.

I approached filmmaker Michelle Handelman, whose documentary *Blood Sisters* (US, 1995) takes an in-depth look at the San Francisco leather dyke scene. I asked her to collaborate with me on the creation of my class, “Imaging Her Erotics,” which was inspired by pioneer feminist artist and long-time friend Carolee Schneemann’s eponymous oeuvre exploring female sexuality in her art. While our first 1997 class had only six women, I soon discovered that I could expand the appeal of the course by including Queer, Trans, Bisexual, and Cis themes that were beginning to emerge in our culture. This shift in my approach made for a more diverse—in terms of gender—student body in the class, which was extremely important to me in terms of my ability to reach a wider audience through my teaching. For 18 years, I taught cinema and sexuality with various course titles such as “Imaging Her Erotics,” “Sexual Personae,” and “Art(core)” to undergraduates. Each semester, I heard stories of censorship and abuse from my students that confirmed the importance of the exploration of the body in language and media. In 2015, the New School department administration capitulated to the new trigger warning culture, from both the left and the right, which reflects our current fearful climate. They eliminated classes that would have offered a comprehensive, historical overview of the representation of the body and sexuality in cinema because they were concerned about the political climate and the repercussions that might arise.

Let’s spiral back to some more pivotal figures from my past. While living in New Mexico in the 1970s, I studied photographic history and nineteenth-century techniques with Beaumont Newhall. At that time, I began to read about and explore hand-processing, gum bichromate, and how to create daguerreotypes. I discovered Gary Doberman’s experimental film series at the university in Albuquerque. My car had broken down, so one evening I talked a friend into driving me to the movies. It was there that I first saw Paul Sharits’s *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (US, 1968), where the filmmaker aggressively utters the words “Destroy, destroy, destroy.” The visuals are flash-frame head shots of a man in red and green intercut with close-ups of scissors appearing to cut his tongue. This is followed by the image of the long red nails of a female hand scratching his face. We also saw Sharits’s *Epileptic Seizure Comparison* (US, 1976) which is composed of nineteenth-century medical footage of a man hooked to an apparatus that monitors his epileptic seizures. The form of the film and the moans and groans of the soundtrack mirror his out-of-control body—black and white, white and black—so that the pulsating body ties to the structure of the film itself. While these films were playing, the audience started yelling to turn the projector off, and most of them got up and left and demanded that they get a refund. Sadly, my friend became an ex-friend when I refused to follow her out

of the theater. Over the next few months, every time she saw me at a party, she would yell to everyone, “You would not believe the kind of films MM likes to see!” pointing an accusatory finger at me, as if I relished watching explicit forms of torture. These films had a profound influence on my own aesthetic practice. When I saw that every excruciating Sharits film frame was intertwined with his formalistic and conceptual vision, I knew that I had discovered a new muse for my own work. I was forever changed.

On another evening in this series in Albuquerque, Doberman invited Austrian *materialaktion* filmmaker Kurt Kren, who was at that time touring the United States with film documentation of explicit performance art that used the body as a canvas in a way that I had never seen. In his *September 20: The Eating, Shitting, Pissing Film*, Kren foregrounds our bodily functions. At the beginning, Kren’s camera looks out a top floor window at a community garden. We see an older woman lift up her dress and relieve herself. This feels voyeuristic, of course, but it also raises the question: “Is she aware of the camera?” Later, we see a man who is more clearly performing for the camera, drinking and eating to excess. Kren uses extreme close-ups of shit coming out of his asshole as if it’s directly on us as spectators. It’s very confrontational! The film ends with several young women going into the same garden, lifting their dresses, and going through the motion of defecating once again. Kren emphasizes the universal human in all of us; we all eat and eliminate waste. He breaks down class, ethnicity, and gender. From a biographical point-of-view, it was meaningful for me to know that as a Jewish child in the late 1930s, Kren was forced to flee the Nazi invasion of Austria and had to move to England. His art, for me, was a response to the systematic forms of repression he experienced during this torturous period of his youth. This is something I could identify with from a deeply personal place.

In the mid 1980s, I started attending films in Los Angeles at the LA Filmforum. I decided to volunteer there because I wanted to see more experimental films and be exposed more directly to the filmmakers. In a live performance there, I saw an amazing, long-legged filmmaker who hung strips of film on the wall and then projected *Fuses* (US, 1964–67), the most personal, intimate sexual film about love-making I had ever seen. Of course, this was Carolee Schneemann. Her film was explicit; it was graphic. She treated the emulsion itself as a filmic body that she painted, scratched, and stamped upon. The “filmic body” became a performative surface in much the same way that Kurt Kren had also done in his own *materialaktion* films. It took me time to recognize that an artist who painted the surface of the film was involved in a ritualistic and romantic form of expression. Through her images, Schneemann explores her sexual pleasure in a way that is fierce, fearless, and vivid for all to share and see. In the film,



I saw her decoupage walls, plank wood floors, and her mattress—revealing a domestic space in a way that merged her private and public personas.

Around this time, I was working in an administrative job at UCLA where I was organizing tenure preparation papers for the Academic Senate, which gave me access to some very important and confidential documents, including those of Angela Davis, who had been denied tenure a decade earlier for her political beliefs. Reading about her trajectory as an outspoken feminist freedom fighter transformed me. While on campus, I also discovered that New York filmmaker Shirley Clarke was teaching film production at UCLA. Because I was employed at the university, I had the right to enroll in a class, but Clarke’s was already overflowing with students. Nevertheless, I talked her into letting me audit and use the production equipment. I knew Clarke’s work because I had gone to a theater in L.A. where she was screening her films with Warhol’s. She was such a dynamo in terms of her articulation of her ideas on filmmaking and her passion for politics. She was a socialist who believed that the best way to make your work visible was to be part of a creative, activist community. I told Shirley that I needed to study with her because I had my own narratives to tell and for me she had a unique way of telling stories that I had never seen before. In the class, all of the students were required to create five one-minute films around a theme that the class would choose. It is a challenge to make a one-minute film, because you need to know the essence of what you want to say. Shirley Clarke said, “If you can make a good one-minute film, you can make a feature.” She showed us her own collection of three-minute films titled *Brussels Loops* (US, 1957), which had been featured in the American Pavilion of the Brussels World’s Fair in 1957. These short films revealed a jazzy rhythm and fluid sense of form that captured the essence of the American spirit in an incredibly brief time frame. These exercises in brevity and precision have influenced all of my subsequent filmmaking. To my surprise and joy, these six “exercise” films from my early life as a filmmaker were preserved in 2015 by Anthology Film Archives in their “Re-Visions: American Experimental Film 1975–90” series.

One of Clarke’s most powerful films that moved me to tears and was censored when it was supposed to premiere at the New York Film Festival was *Portrait of Jason* (US, 1967), a feature-length experimental documentary starring Jason Holliday, a gay African American making his living as a male prostitute working in the lobby of the Chelsea Hotel, where Clarke actually lived. What was fascinating to me was how Shirley described Jason telling her his stories about his life as a hustler, as a cook, and servant for upper-class women on Park Avenue. She would walk by and talk to him. He told her tales from his life every day, right in that very lobby. He wanted to be in cabarets and movies, and Shirley said, “Come to my apartment. I will film you.” Shirley interviewed Jason,

and the way that she foregrounded the cinematic apparatus in the film really inspired me. For example, you see the camera running out of film in the middle of one of Jason's stories, and we hear Shirley directing, "Keep sound rolling, even if the camera is out of film." You also see the chemical flares. You hear her and Carl Lee interviewing and interacting with Jason; and I felt that this was a new way of creating documentaries. You also hear drinking. These days, with all of the morality and judgment censoring this kind of behind-the-scenes partying, talk like this between a director and her subject would not be included in the final cut of the film. Listening to Shirley Clarke speak in my class about making the film, I thought it was more of a party atmosphere than exploitation. I also felt that it was significant that Jason was able to talk about class and race from his own perspective. In addition, she actually paid Jason royalties, and this is critical to know because now there are some people who think that she took advantage of him for her project, but they never heard her speak about the film, as I did. By the way, Shirley was also the first person to tell me about The Film-Makers' Cooperative in New York City, which would ultimately make all the difference in my life.

We are going to travel back in time to 1987, when I moved from Los Angeles, California, to New York City where I found an apartment at 143 Ludlow Street. I had decided to study Cinema at New York University—sex and gender, not production. I wanted to study how to articulate my thoughts about experimental cinema. It was the late 1980s, after I had studied with Shirley Clarke. I had read so much about Jonas Mekas, living in New York, and his journals. I began to investigate the possibilities of moving to New York City. I found out about a room to rent. Once in New York, I started going to the Millennium Film Workshop and Anthology Film Archives. I met Jonas Mekas. The area downtown below 14<sup>th</sup> Street was dynamic and many artists lived there. The neighborhood was so scary. At that time, the drugs of choice were crack and heroin. There was graffiti inside the building. The first week I lived on Ludlow, I went to work as a temp worker. I always needed a job. The job was in advertising. One of the clients was Donald Trump; he was such a tyrant, then as he is now. He bullied everyone. I would hear him yelling and screaming on the phone. And I would say, thank God almighty that I don't have to deal with that man. I had to move six times in one year. For the first week I would go to work, come home, and never go out at night, even to screenings or out to dinner. I would run down the dark street, with no street lights, with my key in my hand, hoping not to get knifed or attacked. Drug dealers lived in my building and sold drugs, so that sometimes they would stand in the entrance and I would ask the taxi driver to drive round and round to see if they would leave. When I would

get home, I would wait for an opportunity to slide in my building, run up the flight of steps, and into my apartment where I still live today.

At that time, the neighborhood was Dominican, and I used to buy things from the grocer across from my building. One day, the Dominican tailor said to me, come into my shop and hide, because there was a gunfight in the grocery. The drug dealers were having a shootout. When I went to the street, there he was, the owner of the bodega, staggering out and falling to the ground. He was shot, bleeding everywhere. The ambulance pulled up, they pounded on his chest, packed him with ice, and while they were putting him in the ambulance, he died. It was shocking to me, but I was impressed that the medical team tried so desperately to keep him alive. Next door to me there was a restaurant, a Cuban Latino restaurant that was filled with canned foods in the windows. And I thought, I am going to try this Dominican restaurant for the first time. I went inside. There was no kitchen. No tables. It was a cover for drugs, so I spun around, went outside, and my neighbors told me, stay out of there! I was so naïve. And New York was tough, dark, and dirty, like an underground world, but also perking with creativity and creative artists, because the rent was affordable.

My favorite graffiti was by Ray Johnson. His Ludlow Street bunny, which was painted over by big developers in 2012, is briefly present in my film *Darling International* (US, 1999, with Jenn Reeves). One of the distinguished artists who lives in the neighborhood is Clayton Patterson, whom I met because I was interested in Charles Gatewood, the San Francisco photographer and filmmaker who had a show in Clayton's Outlaw Gallery on Essex Street. I went to the gallery, and Clayton said to me, “I want you to meet someone that I think you would be interested in filming. His name is Chop Off.” When he introduced me to this man with a big smile, I grabbed his hand to shake it and realized that he was missing many digits on his. I promptly got dizzy and light-headed, and asked him if cutting off his fingers was a form of castration. Chop Off replied, “Are you a shrink?” because I was analyzing him. I said no, I am a filmmaker, and he said, “Make a film about me.”

I had friendships with people in the early 1980s who were part of the drug and punk culture and were also creative. Performance artist, musician, and writer Anne Hanavan, for example, survived ten years of drug addiction and prostitution on the Lower East Side. She was truly part of the underground filmmaking scene that included renowned cult director Abel Ferrara and Zoë Tamerlis, the star of his film *Ms 45* (US, 1981). It was Tamerlis who so poetically declared, “Vampires are lucky. They feed on others. We feed on ourselves until there is nothing left but appetite. So they say why, why, why do you do it? You



just have to, and in the end no one cares.” In my film *Bitch Beauty* (2011), I wanted to honor Anne’s recovery through the catharsis of her creative process. Anne said that Zoë could create when she was high on heroin, but only through recovery could Anne be creative. In *Bitch Beauty*, she reenacts her stories as a part of reclaiming her life with her band Transgendered Jesus. In 2008, I started going to Anne’s readings about her addiction and was impressed by her ability to regurgitate, in a profoundly visceral way, her painful decade on the streets of New York City. In my film, Ann reads about this period in her life. Her voice is very soft and low. At times, she is crying. In order to emotionally express Anne’s haunting memories, around Halloween time I walked into a big old Victorian haunted house at the Henry Street Settlement, carrying a hidden Zoom recorder in a shopping bag. Everyone who entered was told that we were not allowed to record anything. Nothing! It was meant to be a direct experience; you walked into a simulation of a nineteenth-century house where each room has a different theme, from a child’s bedroom to a recreation of the first surgery room as depicted in a Thomas Eakins painting. But I had every intention of recording, of course. The room that fascinated me the most was the child’s bedroom, with haunted dolls and creepy men crawling from under the bed. There was this music box playing Stephen Foster’s “Beautiful Dreamer Wake Unto Me,” so I immediately recorded that. It’s a Victorian song because Anne had had near-death experiences. The music box brings this kind of other-worldliness, not at all contemporary.

*Bitch Beauty*’s imagery includes appropriations from Ferrara’s *Bad Lieutenant* (US, 1992), Zoë shooting up heroin, Anne reading her published writing on addiction, and Anne’s reenactments of being raped and abused as a junky on the street. I also filmed at a Halloween party where some of the costumes included death masks and skulls. I was building a vocabulary that visually expressed being near death, like death-dancing back and forth. At the end of this portrait of Anne, we see her singing in a winged phoenix bird stage costume from Transgendered Jesus, shot on my Barbie Doll video camera. As the credits roll, I include Zoë’s poetry on addiction. Zoë never found the ability to recover and died in Paris in 1999 from long-term cocaine and heroin abuse. But my film is a celebration of Anne, a woman warrior who is called “bitch” because that word means a strong woman in our society, an Amazon, and “beauty” because of her life and her ability to inspire others.

Not until 1992 would I have the chance to meet Carolee Schneemann through my work at the Film-Makers’ Coop, when I co-curated with Maria Beatty, Ellen Cantor, and Carolyn Koebel the exhibition “Coming to Power: 25 Years of Sexually Explicit Art by Women” as part of the Women’s Action Coalition at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York City. We screened her

film *Fuses* (US, 1964–67) with work by Lynda Benglis, Barbara Rubin, Peggy Ahwesh, and even Italian porn star turned artist and politician La Cicciolina. As curators, we also chose to include our own creative work in this show. It was our goal to make women’s art more prominent and visible in the patriarchal gallery world.

What is film? When Chop Off asked me to make a film about him, the question was why. What I found in thinking about this man is that he was using his body like Michelangelo used marble, he was sculpting his body. To me he was an underground artist, like in a circus, like in a sideshow. Also, I related to him because of how his family responded when he started this chopping of his body, this ritualistic, erotic alternative process that made him outside the heteronormative family. His wife divorced him. His daughters wanted nothing to do with him. He’s Jewish and the Jewish religion states that you do no harm. You don’t tattoo yourself. So he’s full of tattoos and he has this alternative artistic practice. I related to him because I feel that I am outside the normative family. He has created an alternative community for himself.

Late in 2004, I discovered a box of short 16mm nudie films sitting on the sidewalk outside an adult bookstore that was closing on 42nd Street. These films, created cheaply in 1954 for use in coin-operated peep show booths, were some of the final remnants of Manhattan’s disappearing sex district. A decade later, New York filmmaker Josh Lewis was driving a cube truck from Cleveland to New York with a salvaged 16mm contact printer in tow—itsself a discard from film’s waning material existence. These two acts of reclamation prompted a collaboration between myself and Lewis, beginning a year-long process of duplicating, reprinting, and chemically altering the films into various states of abstraction. In June of 2015, Josh and I were awarded a collaborative fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts to complete a film.

*Enduring Ornament* (US, 2015, with Josh Lewis), named after a found-object artwork by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, is our immersive film that transforms the content, aesthetics, and viewership of the original 16mm peepshow films. Historically, these films were a form of male entertainment that featured short, soft-core clips watched through a viewing slot or in an individual curtained room. Taking found-footage porn and giving voice to the actresses in these stag films was critical. Our film takes what was vulnerable for me as a young girl in Jeannette, Pennsylvania, and offers strength. It represents a reclaiming through expanding language, sound, and image. This project articulates what Art(core) is all about, the ability to assemble, subvert, and reappropriate the hidden and violated body. Through all of my work as an artist, curator, teacher, I am contributing to society as a feminist, a queer woman, a woman with an alternative life and vision.

**MM Serra** is a filmmaker, curator, author, and professor at Parsons at the New School. For 32 years, she was the Executive Director of the Film-Makers' Cooperative, the world's oldest and largest archive of independent film.

On March 16, 2024, the Society of Cinema and Media Studies hosted a roundtable Celebration & Reflection on Filmmaker, Curator MM Serra's 30+ Years as Executive Director of Film-makers' Cooperative.

She was awarded the Emily Harvey Foundation Venice Residency from April 17 until May 13, 2023. On May 27 Millennium Film Workshop organized a retrospective by Erica Schreiner titled "Experi-mental Woman," which was a curation of five rarely seen films by the renowned New York filmmaker and art star MM Serra.

In 2022, Serra's newly discovered film *Jack Smith's Apartment* premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, also screening at RISD, Sculpture Center in Brooklyn, and Cooper Union. In April–June 2016, Serra's first five films (*Nightfall*, *PPII*, *NYC*, *Turner*, *Framed*) were preserved and digitized by Anthology Film Archives and screened in the program "Re-Visions: American Experimental Film 1975–90," spotlighting the generation(s) of experimental film artists. In 2012, her films were screened at various international festivals and venues including the Louvre in Paris and The Museum of Modern Art in New York, including a retrospective in Sixth and Avenue B Community Garden entitled "MM Serra: Portraits" curated by Devon Narine-Singh.

In 2024, Serra received a New York State Council on the Arts Individual Artist grant for her project titled "Turtles, Ponds, Community Gardens: Urban Ecosystems," and in 2016, a NYSCA grant and a NYFA grant for "Endless Possibilities: Jack Waters and Peter Cramer." Serra has received two Kathy Acker Lifetime Achievement Awards for "Avant-Garde Filmmaking." She curated a 60-year online exhibition entitled "New York Pavements" for the National Gallery of Art. In 2025, Serra is curating a series titled "The Queer Censored Body."

As the Executive Director of Film-Makers' Cooperative from 1991 to 2023, she oversaw hundreds of restorations of independent media, including Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen Living Gods of Haiti*, 14 titles by Stan VanDeerBeek, Ed Owens films, *Lupe* by Jose Rodriguez Soltero, *The Match That Started My Fire* by Cathy Cook etc.

Serra lives and works in New York, where she continues to curate programs, make films, and work in community gardens.

**Lynne Sachs** is an experimental filmmaker and poet living in Brooklyn, New York. She has produced over 50 films as well as numerous live performances, installations, and web projects.

Since the 1980s, Lynne Sachs has created cinematic works that defy genre through the use of hybrid forms and cross-disciplinary collaboration, incorporating elements of the essay film, collage, performance, documentary, and poetry. Her highly self-reflexive films explore the intricate relationship between personal observations and broader historical experiences. With each project, Lynne investigates the implicit connection between the body, the camera, and the materiality of film itself. Lynne discovered her love of filmmaking while living and studying in San Francisco, where she worked closely

with artists Craig Baldwin, Bruce Conner, Barbara Hammer, Gunvor Nelson, and Trinh T. Min-ha. During this time, she produced her early, experimental works on celluloid, which took a feminist approach to the creation of images and writing—a commitment that has grounded her body of work ever since.

From essay films to hybrid docs to diaristic shorts, Sachs has tackled topics near and far, often addressing directly the challenge of translation—from one language to another or from spoken work to image. Over her career, Sachs has been awarded support from the Guggenheim Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Jerome Foundation. Her films have screened at venues such as the Museum of Modern Art, Wexner Center for the Arts, the Walker and the Getty, and at festivals including New York Film Festival, the Sundance Film Festival, Punto de Vista, DocAviv, and DocLisboa. Retrospectives of her work have been presented at the Museum of the Moving Image, Ambulante (Mexico), Sheffield Doc/Fest, Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema, Cork, Costa Rica IFF, Cámara Lúcida (Ecuador), Festival Internacional Nuevo Cine in Havana, and China Women’s Film Festival. Both the Edison Film Festival and the Prismatic Ground Film Festival awarded Lynne for her body of work in the experimental and documentary fields. In 2019, Tender Buttons Press published Lynne’s book *Year by Year Poems*.

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