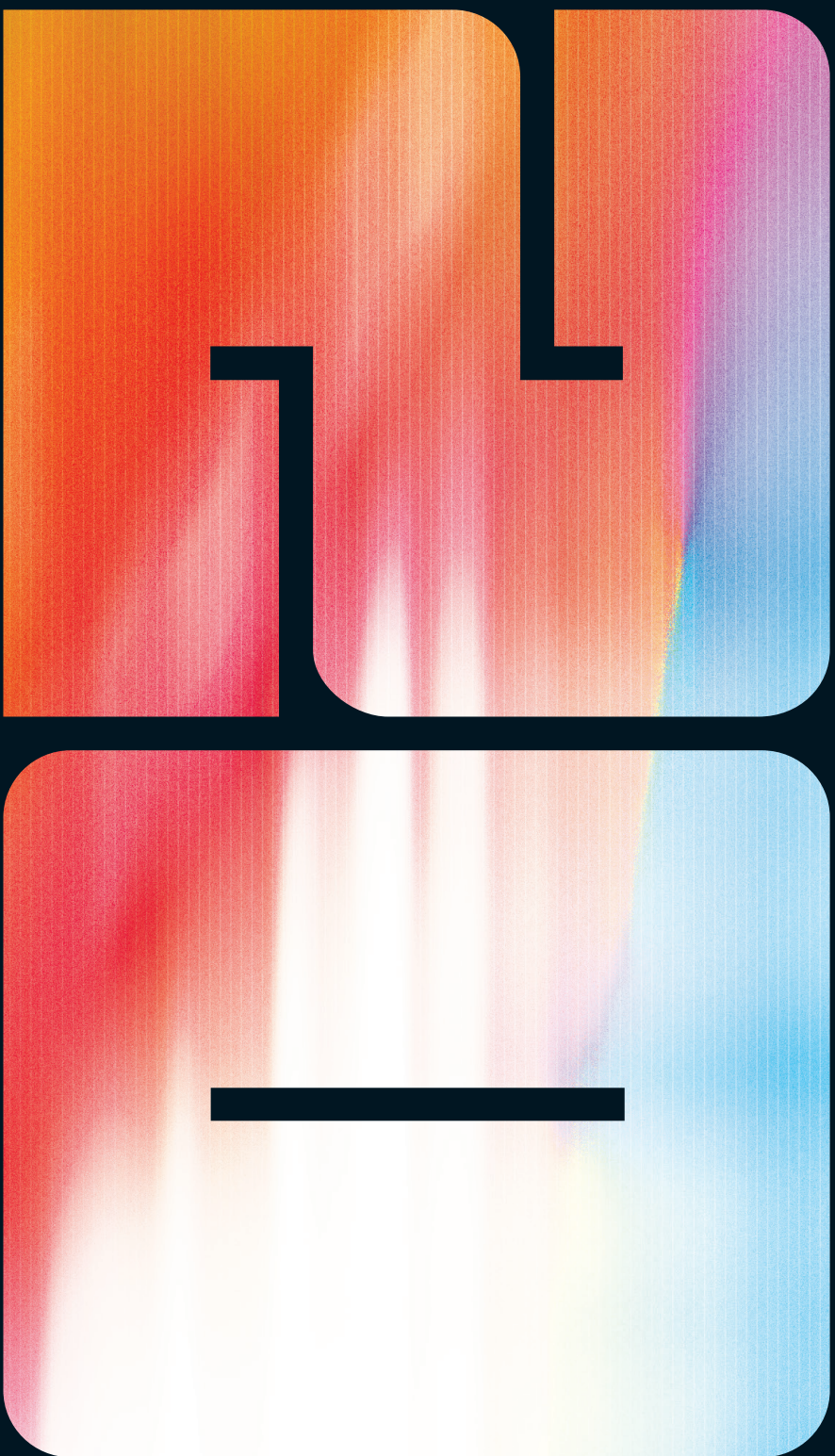


58TH ANN ARBOR FILM FESTIVAL



Filming in the Dark: Early Experiments from Taiwan

Curated by Markus Nornes and Wood Lin

Brought to the AAFF with support from the Taiwan Film Institute and Taiwan Docs

Filming in the Dark: Early Experiments from Taiwan consists of a selection of newly discovered experimental films from 1960s Taiwan. Modernity hit different parts of Asia unevenly. In the art world, its full force was blunted first by prewar colonialism and then by postwar dictatorships. When the American experimental scene was lively enough to support the creation of a festival like AAFF in 1963, Taiwanese artists were under the grip of martial law and knew of these developments only through reading, word of mouth, and travel. Inspired by the countercultures they only heard about, groups of young artists began creating an experimental film culture constructed from their imaginations. They made experimental documentaries about their world, animated films, fictional features, and even expanded cinema works using multiple screens and helmet-mounted projectors. Most of these films are lost. However, through the concerted effort of the Taiwan International Documentary Film Festival (TIDF) and the Taiwan Film Archive, a sampling of these early experiments was recovered from closets, garages, trunks, and dusty shelves. The Ann Arbor Film Festival is proud to present a sampling of these long-lost films. Wood Lin, programming director for TIDF and one of the leaders of the team that researched this unknown history, introduces the program.

Markus Nornes is a professor of Asian cinema at the University of Michigan. Most of his work is on Japanese cinema, particularly the documentary tradition. He has published widely on the Japanese pink film, Korean *Hallyu*, Taiwanese cinema, Chinese film festivals, and film translation. His latest book is a co-edited reader of Japanese film theory.

Wood Lin was born in Taiwan in 1981, and earned his master's degree in sound and image management at the National University of Tainan Department of Fine Arts in 2006. He has been a juror for many international film festivals, including DMZ International Documentary Film Festival (South Korea), International Film Festival Rotterdam (The Netherlands), Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival (Czech Republic), Dokufest (Kosovo), Hong Kong International Film Festival, Golden Horse Film Festival and Awards (Taipei), and Taipei Film Festival. He has worked at the Taiwan Film Institute as program director of TIDF since 2013.

SPECIAL PROGRAM



The Archer

Richard Yao-chi Chen

USA/Taiwan | 1963 | 5 | DCP from 16mm

1 The first experimental animation film in Taiwan, *The Archer* is based on the ancient Chinese legend of Houyi, who shoots nine suns from the sky but leaves the tenth. The soundtrack features a telling of the tale by American children after hearing the director tell it once. They reprocess the story, folding it into domestic sensibilities ("king" thus becomes "president"). Chen's animation echoes this blending of China and America.

Through the Years

Richard Yao-chi Chen

USA/Taiwan | 1964 | 11 | DCP from 16mm

2 A grizzled old man in the deserts of California relates some local history, including the lore that every mile of train track cost the life of a Chinese migrant worker. Richard Chen combined studio-bound fiction with vérité sequences shot between Lone Pine and Death Valley. A desert place inviting metaphors and tall tales, the once-lively scene is now dominated by empty space and ghost towns trapping tourists.

The Mountain

Richard Yao-chi Chen

Taipei, Taiwan | 1966 | 19 | DCP from 16mm

3 Returning to Taiwan after graduating from UCLA film school, Richard Chen found a home in the emergent experimental theater and film scene. Lovingly shot, *The Mountain* is a documentary centering on three art students (Huang Yong-song, Mou Ten-fei, and Huang Gui-rong) who would later become major artists. Here they discuss their views on modern art, the Vietnam War, life under the dictatorship, and their inner dreams—including the California dream.

Modern Poetry Exhibition/1966

Chang Chao-tang

Taipei, Taiwan | 1966 | 12 | DCP from 8mm

4 By the mid-1960s, a new wave of modernism in the art world was butting up against the conservatism of martial law. This is a fragmentary document of an incident where a group of new artists each chose their favorite modernist poem, transforming it into an installation. The exhibition was to open in the bustling center of Taipei. However, police forced it to move to National Taiwan University's Fu Bell, where it was closed again, ultimately ending up in a field.



Today
Han Hsiang-ning
Taipei, Taiwan | 1965 | 4 | DCP from 8mm

5 Han Hsiang-ning's short is a headless doll film. The sensuous figure of the doll plays in the waves, gets beached, and constantly strikes sculptural poses for the camera. The headless figure is beaten by the waves, rolling in the sand and surf in an endless space where sea and sky join as one. It flickers in and out of view between the waves until her arms stretch out from the vast emptiness and she is cleansed.



Run
Han Hsiang-ning
Taipei, Taiwan | 1966 | 5 | DCP from 8mm

6 On a fine morning in 1966, director Han chased Xi De-jin around an empty traffic circle with an 8mm camera. The runner, racing towards some unknown finish line, finds himself engulfed in motorcycles. His visage is doubled and temporally warped along the way. The director moved to New York City the following year, making 8mm films and later becoming a renowned artist of photorealistic paintings.



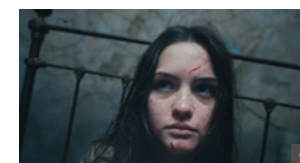
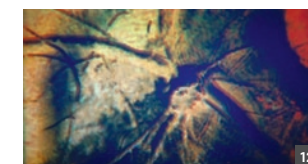
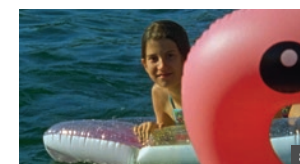
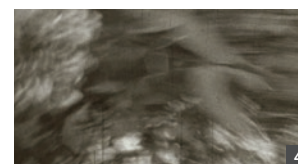
Alienation
Chiu Kang-chien
Taipei, Taiwan | 1966 | 6 | DCP from 8mm

7 A naked boy jerks off, accompanied by lines of poetry and a caterpillar on the wall. Director Chiu was a famous screenwriter and one of the founders of *Theater Quarterly*. Regarding this film, he recalled, "A young intellectual sees a man in a construction site trying with all his might to push a cart. He wants to help but is unable to, and can only watch from a distance. I am interested not in the act of masturbation, but in his self-reflection, his privacy, his thought of sex after he returns home."



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14 | Films in Competition



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SPENCER'S SLIGHTLY IMPERFECT PEEP SHOW
AKA MICRO-BURLESQUE

Gary Schwartz
Detroit, MI | 2019 | 2 | digital

WORLD PREMIERE

1 Two obsolete and forgotten microscopes make one last fling at fame and fortune on the tawdry burlesque stage.

Cage Match

Bryan Lee
Walnut, CA | 2019 | 9 | DCP

2 A businessman enters the elevator for another day at work.

The Deepest Hole

Matt McCormick
Spokane, WA | 2020 | 12 | DCP

3 While the Space Race, the Arms Race, and a myriad of other Cold War competitions are common knowledge, few know that the United States and Soviet Union also faced off to see which country could dig the deepest hole. This lack of public awareness is particularly surprising, seeing that one of the countries may have inadvertently discovered Hell in the process.

The Lilac Game

Emma Piper-Burket
Detroit, MI | 2019 | 4 | DCP

4 This film is a celebration of springtime and an interactive game the audience is encouraged to play. Volume one of *Films for a Future*, a series of handmade and hand-processed 16mm nature films, is intended for future viewers living in a time when the natural world no longer exists as it does today.

I Want

Anne Isensee
Berlin, Germany | 2019 | 2 | DCP

5 "You can't always get what you want..." sang the Rolling Stones once upon a time, though they consistently proved the opposite. A young

woman wants a whole lot too. Being heard would be pretty nice for starters.

Tokyo Story

Hal Torii
Shibuya, Japan | 2019 | 2 | digital

WORLD PREMIERE

6 The starting point for this film was the question, "Should I become a parent?" Having come from a troubled home, and never having felt loved by his father, the director wonders what kind of father he would be. Or if he should even become one. A *shajo* (young girl) gives birth, despite never having given motherhood a thought. Indifferent, she leaves her breasts behind, forcing her son to fend for himself. Desiring love, the man-boy sets out in the sampled city to find his mother, who gives him an icy-cold greeting before self-destructing. These are the experiences of fear, desire and loneliness of young people in Japan. This is their Tokyo Story.

Three considerations before choreographing the End

Chele Isaac
Madison, WI | 2019 | 10 | digital

WORLD PREMIERE

7 This meditative and impressionistic narrative contemplates a journey towards, and the possible transcendence of, losing one's mother.

Respiration

Sasha Waters Freyer
Richmond, VA | 2018 | 4 | 16mm

8 An experimental, feminist collage of river naiads and backyard deities; nothing noticed is lonely. From inspiration to expiration, breathing is the only work to be enacted now.

Witch Trilogy 13+

Ceylan Özgün Özçelik
Istanbul, Turkey | 2019 | 15 | DCP

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

9 A fourteen-year-old girl communicates with a spider in a dark basement without knowing the time and place.

Scenes from the Periphery

Derek Taylor
Middlebury, CT | 2019 | 3 | digital

10 An aerial survey of the filmmaker's place of origin, this film is a frame-intensive search for home, place, and direction. Edited in-camera on Super 8, changing position two frames at a time, the movements of lines and masses offer a renewed look at this once lost but now rediscovered locale in a continuing quest for a sense of provenance.

Leaking Life

Shunsaku Hayashi
Osaka, Japan | 2019 | 15 | DCP

11 Thousands of them are packed in a bag. The hand dragging the bag has never been seen from their angle. The track on sand is easily erased by waves. Touching the surface of the sea, they grow a new skin.

Spectral Landscape

Luis Macias
Barcelona, Spain | 2019 | 25 | live cinema performance

12 A landscape. Without color and movement. Only a landscape. At that beautiful moment between reality and dreaming, an incorporeal animal emerges from the darkness and light. Dark, violent, and self-assured, it shares its fears of nature's despair. But don't be afraid—it's an animal just like you. Did you see it? Wake up and open your eyes.

FEATURE IN COMPETITION

Dream Journal 2016–2019

Dream Journal 2016–2019

Jon Rafman
Montreal, QC | 2019 | 94 | digital

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

This single-channel video explores the effects of technology and information overload on the contemporary psyche. Set in a virtual tech-noir urban space populated by strange hybrids of non-humans and augmented people, part of the expansive, fractured narrative focuses on the continued adventures of Xanax Girl and her search for her companion—a hybrid dog/seal with the head of a boy—who has been abducted. The film, which arose from the artist's daily practice of animating his dreams using hobbyist 3D software, weaves together deep-web imagery with hardboiled detective story tropes and repressed libidinal fantasies to create a nightmarish vision of an internet addict's unconscious. The film features an original score by Oneohtrix Point Never and James Ferraro.



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11pm–1:30am | Free Blue LLama Jazz Club

Featuring local musicians from Blue LLama Jazz Club and visuals by David Olson



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