

Los Angeles Filmforum presents
**Experimentations: Imag(in)ing Knowledge in Film Program 6:
Documentary and Science Fiction:
Locating the Uncanny in 1980s Chinese Films**
Sunday, October 27, 2024, 7:30 pm
At 2220 Arts + Archives

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2024 is our 49th year. www.lafilmforum.org

Experimentations: Imag(in)ing Knowledge in Film is Filmforum's expansive film series and upcoming publication that investigates the ways that experimental and scientific films produce and question the visualization of the world. Combining artist films utilizing scientific imagery, science and natural history films, and films of indigenous and traditional knowledge, the series examines how science, nature, and technology films shape our understanding of humans, nature, gender, knowledge, and progress. The multi-venue public screening series presents analog and digital time-based media incorporating diverse scientific and experimental film traditions from across the globe. The series will include eighteen screenings between September 2024 and February 2025, with films and digital works from 1874 to today from around the world, multiple guests, panels and wonderful collaborations that will reveal the possibilities and circumstances of cinema in this realm.

Experimentations: Imag(in)ing Knowledge in Film is among more than 70 exhibitions and programs presented as part of PST ART. Returning in September 2024 with its latest edition, PST ART: Art & Science Collide, this landmark regional event explores the intersections of art and science, both past and present. PST ART is presented by Getty. For more information about PST ART: Art & Science Collide, please visit: pst.art.

Major support for *Experimentations: Imag(in)ing Knowledge in Film* is provided by the Getty Foundation and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional Support from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, and the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles.



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DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
City of Los Angeles

Experimentations: Imag(In)ing Knowledge in Film, Program 6
Documentary and Science Fiction: Locating the Uncanny in 1980s Chinese Films

Discussion after the screening with Curator Zoe Meng Jiang and Prof. Jenny Chio

Showcasing three short films made by the Chinese state in the 1950s and 1980s, this program ventures into the uncanny field between documentary and science fiction. As the socialist country stumbled into capitalism, nonfiction films gave forms to alternative epistemologies that reconfigure bodies, medicine, military, and education. The boundaries between documentary, science education film and fiction genres were constantly shifted according to specific political campaigns, resulting in hybrid and often experimental practices and the construction of a new national subjectivity that transcended modern western science. Through this double engagement with both form and content, this program does not produce yet another exceptional account of Chinese media and science, but rather sheds light on the necessary political, medical, and scientific conditions of truth claims.

Curated by Zoe Meng Jiang.

Thank you to Zoe Meng Jiang and Mengyao Mia Zhang for subtitling.

Zoe Meng Jiang is a PhD candidate at the Department of Cinema Studies at NYU. She has published in English and Chinese in the areas of media theory and history, social practice, gender and feminism, and moving-image arts. Her recent publications appeared in *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, *Chinese Independent Cinema*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Artforum China*, and *LEAP*, among others. She is the co-editor of the “Chaotic Formats” issue of *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, and was the assistant editor of the journal *World Records*, published by UnionDocs Center for Documentary Art. From 2018-2019 She was the chief curator at SLEEPCENTER, an independent non-profit art space in New York City.

Jenny Chio is Associate Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Anthropology at the University of Southern California. She researches social transformations and cultural practices in ethnic minority regions of southwestern and western China, with a current focus on vernacular video making, documentary film, and the persistence of the rural in Chinese modernity. Her recent publications include a multimodal essay on race, gender, and labor in China and a conversation on futurity and political imagination in *Made in China Journal*, as well as a commentary on the documentary film *The Thirty Boys* (2020, dir. Mukaddas Mijit) in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*.

Screening:

Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir (August First Film Studio, 1958, 16mm transferred to digital, color, sound, 26:31 excerpt)

This excerpt from a socialist "artistic documentary" envisions a commune twenty years into the future, where every member achieves self-fulfillment through advanced technology and heightened class and gender consciousness. While many consider the film to be the first Chinese sci-fi, some critics argued it was still a documentary, as the genre reflects the present, and the communist present was already a harbinger for the future.

Do You Believe? (Central Newsreel & Documentary Film Studio, China, 1980, 16mm transferred to digital, color, sound, 35:30)

In 1979, less than one year after China entered its reform era, reports surfaced nationwide about children allegedly possessing extrasensory powers. The Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio, the only state film studio dedicated to nonfiction filmmaking, set out to investigate these superpowered children. It is the only film titled with a question mark in the studio's history.

Interviewing Qigong Masters (August First Film Studio, China, 1989, 16mm transferred to digital, color, sound, 21:00)

Originally a breathing exercise dating back 2,000 years in China, qigong experienced a surge in national popularity during the 1980s, taking on new significance. This film features qigong masters who can breathe messages onto leaves, restore mobility to paralyzed legs, and generate infrared energy. In a way, these masters also helped reconfigure the documentary genre, blending science with fiction, and tradition with modernity.

Los Angeles Filmforum screenings are supported by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles. We also depend on our members, ticket buyers, and individual donors.

Coming soon to Los Angeles Filmforum:

Nov 3 – Experimentations 7: Carolina Caycedo: *The Lives of Rivers*, with VPAM, at 2220 Arts + Archives

Nov 10 – Experimentations 8: *Beautiful Science*, with “Sanctus” by Barbara Hammer and “Minute Bodies: The Intimate World of F. Percy Smith,” directed by Stuart A. Staples, at 2220 Arts + Archives

Nov 15 – Co-presenting *Seeing Is Not Believing: Tribulation 99 / Save the Green Planet!*

At the UCLA Film & Television Archive

Nov 17 - *Then<·>Now: Taiwan Experimental Film and Video Arts, Part 1*, at 222- Arts + Archives

Nov 24 - Experimentations 8.5 - Co-presenting David Lebrun: *Proteus*, and *Transfigurations: Reanimating the Past (2018–2024)*, At the UCLA Film & Television Archive

Memberships available, \$40 Student \$75 Individual, \$125 Dual, or \$225 Silver Nitrate

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