

The wounds of seeing, the traumas that can imbue objects with a fantastical power. These private glances, collected in small rooms, spin a tale of family and borders, a curious private/public embrace showing the enduring cost of surviving. In her note about the film, the artist quotes Canadian poet Anne Carson who writes, “A wound gives off its own light.” Here, the wound stretches across a whole country. It is the filmmaker’s duty to follow it, to create a world of elegy and grieving that is also a hymn to new ways of seeing.

Erica Sheu names herself an “experimental filmmaker,” a term many use to denote a historical period in the 1970s and 1980s. She’s part of the Rearflex Taiwanese Film Collective, where friends hang out and present work. The first program was called “Making Kin(o),” imagining that making films is also a way of making community, of bringing lives together. Their manifesto is filled with evocations of self-care, the need to take it slow, emphasizing that artists should be free to form other groups and alliances if they want. The whole approach is a soft touch, a fluffy blanket of invitation. The group shares works-in-progress, along with movies by analog film labs and traveling filmmakers. Sincerity, youth, belief, collective aspirations. Even the manifesto arrives with a parenthetical question mark. Here there is a need not only to make work, but to create a context for it, to make a group out of the radical interiority of each of its members. Here, in the shadow of one of the world’s great superpowers, even friendship has become political, even outmoded ways of making film, and sharing them. If filmmaking is necessarily film exhibition, community cannot be separated from the subjectivity it helps create, and the art that nourishes it.

### Transcript by Michael Sicinski

*The following is an excerpt of a capsule originally published by MUBI Notebook, September 9, 2019*

There may not be a more delicate, unassuming film in the Wavelengths series this year, but *Transcript* is striking nonetheless. It is essentially a still life, although part of what makes the film unique is its tendency to vibrate under the energy of an unseen wind. Sheu gives us close-ups of baby’s breath, its branches and buds gently bobbing within the frame of reference against a blue background. The images are a careful study of light and shadow.

But then, at the end of the film, we see that the blue paper that was serving as a backdrop is actually photosensitive. Sheu’s manipulation of the lights has actually been creating a physical transcript of the film she has been making, a series of Rayographs documenting the production process like blueprints. So in a way, Sheu’s film is not merely painterly by description. It is actually producing effects halfway between painting and photography, a quite literal drawing with light. What a delightful film. ♦

### Coming soon to Acropolis

- *Henry Fonda for President* (Dir. Alexander Horwath, 2024)—April 9 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with Horwath and Regina Schlagnitweit in person!

- *Love Hotel* (Dir. Shinji Sômai, 1985)—New restoration, April 23 at 2220 Arts + Archives

# Acropolis Cinema presents:



March 18, 2025 – 2220 Arts + Archives

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# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The path of making abstract cinema with intimate personal matters and/or cultural and historical content can be a tug of war between the explicit and implicit. What does a safe space look like? What boundaries can be set for one's vulnerability? Guided by instincts, Erica Sheu's films do not look for solutions but instead find answers along the way.

Acropolis Cinema is pleased to host an evening of Sheu's short films, many on 16mm, bookended by a pair of expanded cinema experiences (the second featuring live musical accompaniment by Shrine Maiden). Looking at her filmography from 2017 to present, we see cross-cultural collisions on a New York subway to the gentle observations of interior living, triggered by the pandemic, to intimate collaborations in a post-COVID world. *In person: Erica Sheu, Shrine Maiden. TRT: 55 min.*

Program:

*A Short History* (Erica Sheu, 2017)

2 x 16mm projection, silent, color and b&w, 3 min

An anonymous narrator reflects on their national history as it forms and collapses their identity. They shift back and forth between two reels of 16mm found footage.

*the way home* (Erica Sheu, 2018)

super 8 to digital, sound, b&w, 3 min

On the subway, a woman asked me how to go home. Distantly, we talked about our home on our way home.

*transcript* (Erica Sheu, 2019)

35mm to digital, silent, color, 3 min

A film on intimacy. The filmmaker transcribes feelings on film and cyanotype paper with baby's-breath flowers, their shadow, and old love letters from her father to her mother.

*pài-lak ē-poo* (Erica Sheu, 2020)

16mm, optical soundtrack, color, 2 min

A half-moon on the blue sky. A quiet offering connects the unreachable world with the physical earth. A Japanese childhood song comes in the wind. In Taiwanese, we promised Grandma that the next time we visit is Saturday afternoon. *pài-lak ē-poo* means Saturday afternoon in Taiwanese Holouē.

*birthday song* (single channel) (Erica Sheu, 2021)

16mm, digital stereo sound, color, 3 min

I wanted to make a film for my birthday / I wrote down as many notes as I could / until I couldn't keep up / I started to film but nothing interested me / I decided to print and cut / and thought of Interior Scroll / I pulled a long strip out / and used it as a bookmark

*off* (*I don't know when to stop*) (Erica Sheu, 2021)

super 8 to digital, sound, color, 3 min

Day after day, bars of sunset pass the kitchen. Lamps carry on when the sky gets dark. The frame finds its balance. Life in work and work in life.

*Grandma's Scissors* (Erica Sheu, 2021)

super 8 to digital, silent, color, 6 min

Guided by the words of her grandmother, the filmmaker explores the synesthetic properties of memory. Images give way to haptic experience via a range of textures—of sea, celluloid, paper, and pencil traces, of raindrops drifting in and out of focus—linking the arts of textiles and montage into a shared artisanal tradition.

*Fur Film vol.2: mirror mirror* (ЯeaRflex, 2022)

Super 8 and 16mm to digital, sound, color and b&w, 16 min

"Fur film" is literal translation from 毛片, which means dailies/footage. This is an exchange diary between tz, jc, es of ЯeaRflex, a taiwanese experimental filmmaker group.

*It follows It passes on* (Erica Sheu, 2022)

16mm to digital, sound, color and b&w, 5,5 min

This film creates a container for a private ritual to reconnect to Kinmen, a Taiwanese island, during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in the 1960s. The filmmaker reimagines her father's childhood war experience with the sparse memories he shared with her. The light was reenacted, and the spirits were summoned. A tender gaze attempts to look through and experience beyond the light glares as if understanding a silent parent in the crack of the historical events.

*False Expectations* (Erica Sheu, 2023)

3 x 16mm, digital stereo sound, color and b&w, 10 min

False Expectations is a 3-channel 16mm expanded cinema with a scored live noise performance. Finding and preserving memories of connections and tenderness in dead flowers, in between blinds, slants of shadows and hand-processed film frames. *Featuring live musical accompaniment by Shrine Maiden.*

## It follows It passes on by Mike Hoolboom

*The following is an excerpt of a review originally published by Panorama-Cinema, October 23, 2023*

*It follows It passes on* by Erica Sheu is a grainy 16 mm miniature. Set to the trill of a softly broken circuit with occasional guitar strums (as if the player was distracted, multitasking, adrift), the camera pans in close-up over a series of mysterious objects, parts of a hidden world, beneath notice and before language. Abstract shapes slowly throb, the artist plucks a film frame from a field of oatmeal with the finger of a giant. A candle, an aluminum scrap reflecting light, a riot of lens flares. Shadows cross suddenly flowing surfaces. Many of these encounters offer a rippled edge, as if each was a pointer signaling the right direction. It feels that the camera is not directing, but following the trail. And how do you make a trail? You walk the walk. You touch it and let it touch you.

The movie opens with a golden candle holder glimpsed through refracting glass. Brief titles appear noting the Taiwanese island of Kinmen, where a family walks across a beachfront, after the war, no longer needing to hide from bombs. These brief passages provide a frame for the soft abstractions that follow, marking them as moments of trauma and restoration, a world of charged supernal objects, containing family histories of death and nation.

The Chinese Civil War ended after decades of fighting in 1949, when the old leadership retreated to form a new government in Taiwan, while the Communist Party took control over mainland China. But the war has had a long tail, with smaller wars breaking out across the decades, along with the persistent threat of invasion. The war that endures after the war is over is the subject of this film.