

Document Citation

Title	Chick Strand: Seeing in between
Author(s)	Chick Strand Irina Leimbacher
Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive</i>
Date	1994 Mar
Type	press kit
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	5
Subjects	Strand, Chick (1931), San Francisco, California, United States
Film Subjects	By the lake, Strand, Chick, 1986 Fake fruit, Strand, Chick, 1986 Anselmo and the women, Strand, Chick, 1986 Coming up for air, Strand, Chick, 1986 Guacamole, Strand, Chick, 1976 Loose ends, Strand, Chick, 1979 Mujer de milfuegos (Woman of a thousand fires), Strand, Chick, 1976 Po zakonu (By the law), Kuleshov, Lev, 1926 Cosas de mi vida (Things in my life), Strand, Chick, 1976

Anselmo, Strand, Chick, 1967

Mosori Monika, Strand, Chick, 1970

Artificial paradise, Strand, Chick, 1986

Pacific Film Archive Presents

SEEKING IN BETWEEN CHICK STRAND

March 1 Mexican Visions

March 15 Speaking Of/From the Body *Chick Strand in Person*

April 12 In Search of Non-Sense

April 26 Celebrations of Spirit

"We are left with ourselves, and it's only ourselves who make the visions and fulfill them. It is the image of the elasticity, tenacity and majesty of the human spirit that is the true romance for me." —Chick Strand

Chick Strand is a major voice in lyrical, experimental filmmaking whose work spans 25 years and whose 18 films — with several more on the way — range from intimate, poetic documentaries to surreal dream visions to found-footage collage films.

Strand was raised in Berkeley by politically conservative but atheist parents and studied anthropology at U. C. Berkeley. Her baptism into experimental cinema came through her friendship with Bruce Baillie, with whom she co-founded Canyon Cinema in the early sixties. Canyon's eclectic screenings of underground films took place first on a sheet in Baillie's backyard in Canyon, California, then in an anarchist restaurant in Berkeley (where sometimes one set of customers would have to pay their bill so food could be bought for the next ones), a private girls' school (which subsequently closed its doors to Canyon because it didn't like the sound of 'underground'), the Coffee Gallery in San Francisco, Ernest Callenbach's backyard, Strand's house, and the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. The tri-weekly screenings were enlivened by wine, popcorn, pillows, chairs borrowed from a nearby mortuary, and Strand in costume, collecting \$1 donations or IOUs in a sewing basket at the door and then, with Baillie, raffling off door prizes (including Baillie's homebaked pies) in the intermission. The screenings subsequently led to the creation of a filmmaking workshop and, with Ernest Callenbach and others, the publication of *Canyon Cinemanews* which included Baillie's recipes as well as information about film festivals and articles on film. At the same time as devoting herself to Canyon, Strand was studying and working two jobs, one of which she quit after being told to take off her peace button and lengthen her skirt. It was Baillie who taught Strand how to use his Bolex, and her first film, *Eric and the Monsters*, was shown at a Canyon screening.

Strand was thirty-four, twice married, and a mother of two when she left Canyon and the Bay Area to study filmmaking at UCLA. It was there, as part of the fledgling Ethnographic Film Program, that she made her early films combining her interest in anthropology and her passion for experimental cinema. Several of her stylistic and thematic interests are already evident in these early works which include her personal collage poem *Waterfall*, her lyrical, optically manipulated *Anselmo*, and her first documentary portraits *Mosori Monika* and *Cosas de Mi Vida*.

A busy teaching schedule has resulted in a mode of working that often involves many summers of shooting followed by a summer of simultaneous editing and completion of several films. Strand's distinctive camera style entails being very close to her moving subjects — about six feet on extreme telephoto with no depth of field. The editing process

in which Strand chooses her images and juxtaposes them with each other and with her sound is an essential moment in Strand's creative process. Strand says that she often treats her own footage in a similar way to the found footage she sometimes works with, weaving elements together into a collage form and creating new meanings not necessarily planned at the outset. Her exuberance about the filmmaking process is great: "I love making films! Getting into it! I just love shooting. I love looking at the rushes and figuring out the sound! It's incredible!... I am obsessed. I can't stop... I love it so much."

Strand doesn't justify or explain her work theoretically, and she often refers to intuition when speaking about her process. "I do it as I feel it" she says. "It's some sort of obsession to me to make films and I'm convinced that it works out... I guess it's sort of a Zen attitude. Not to push too much. It'll come." And yet the trust in the intuitive, the commitment to an intensely personal vision, and the refusal of conventional means of representation when dealing either with lyrical descriptions of inner states or with the lived experiences of herself or of others, results in a unique way of seeing and speaking about the world which challenges fixed notions of objectivity, identity, narrative, and sensuality. Her camera is constantly questioning, constantly mobile, constantly gesturing towards an elusive and ambiguous space of becoming. Journeying between a quest for seemingly unmediated sensuous images and a critical, reflective stance which challenges and explores the representational process, her work is an exuberant celebration both of human dignity, strength, and transformation, and of the transient, protean, shifting place that is life.

Strand has taught filmmaking at the Otis Art Institute and the California Institute of the Arts, and continues to teach at Occidental College in Los Angeles where she is the director of the Film Program. Her films have shown in international film festivals all over the world including London, Teheran, Leningrad, Cannes, Zacatecas, Oberhausen, Edinburgh, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as in the Whitney Museum Biennial, the Maison des Beaux Arts in Paris, the London Filmmaker's Cooperative, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Oakland Art Museum, the San Francisco Cinematheque, and numerous other museums and cinematheques. The Pacific Film Archive has shown many of Strand's films in the past and has eight prints in its permanent collection. These have been preserved with funding from the AFI/NEA Film Preservation Program, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Strand says that the greatest influence on her work has been her late husband and partner, painter Neon Park. She now has four films in progress, all shot in Mexico, which she will begin editing this summer. —Irina Leimbacher

Chick Strand's Filmography

(all films 16mm, all distributed by Canyon Cinema)

Angel Blue Sweet Wings, 1966, 3 minutes, Color
Anselmo, 1967, 4 minutes, Color
Waterfall, 1967, 3 minutes, Color
Mosori Monika, 1970, 20 minutes, Color
Cosas de Mi Vida, 1976, 25 minutes, Color
Elasticity, 1976, 25 minutes, Color
Guacamole, 1976, 10 minutes, Color
Mujer de Milfuegos, 1976, 15 minutes, Color
Cartoon le Mousse, 1979, 15 minutes, B&W
Fever Dream, 1979, 7 minutes, B&W
Kristallnacht, 1979, 7 minutes, B&W
Loose Ends, 1979, 25 minutes, B&W
Soft Fiction, 1979, 54 minutes, B&W
Anselmo and the Women, 1986, 35 minutes, Color
Artificial Paradise, 1986, 12.5 minutes, Color
By the Lake, 1986, 16mm, 9.5 minutes, Color
Coming Up for Air, 1986, 26.5 minutes, Color
Fake Fruit, 1986, 22 minutes, Color

Chick Strand: You know we really are still beginners... that's the urgency. Realizing that we have twenty pieces, twenty films together, all together, big deal! We are still just beginning... just learning.

Gunvor Nelson: But think how many frames!

Strand: That does help.

This project is made possible through the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Museum Collections Accessibility Initiative.

Chick Strand: Seeing in Between

April 12: In Search of Non-Sense

“Amnesia is not knowing who you are and wanting desperately to know. Euphoria is not knowing who you are and not caring. Ecstasy is knowing exactly who you are and still not caring.” —from *Elasticity*

Elasticity (1976, 25 minutes, Color)

This film is autobiographical in the sense that its elements stand for things that have been important in my life. The “Amnesia / White Light” section represents those things in the past that have almost retreated from memory. The hopeful girl on the traveling bars, the talk about the crumbs of three marriages ... a sort of jestful statement about the intensity and importance of these relationships lost again in the past ... a confused part in my life ... thoughts of youthful suicide ... lots of lovers, their faces receding from memory like the far-away universes escaping so their light reaches us millions of years in their past. This is where I pack for the quest for “finding” myself. The “Euphoria / Dreams of Meditation” section is the quest ... the journey in search of knowledge. Amelia Earhart represents the traveler. Many paths are started ... oriental philosophies, strange cults, organized magic, fast living. The beatnik house represents a resting place and the end of restless search. The end of the sequence is the acceptance of self, and also indicated is a discovery that a human in our society must stand alone and unaided, naked, raw, strong, independent, and still able to cry. The “Ecstasy / Memories of the Future” section is a confrontation with the idea of death and accepting it... The last scene indicates hope and optimism for the future. —Chick Strand

Loose Ends (1979, 25 minutes, Color)

Loose Ends is a collage film about the process of internalizing the information that bombards us through a combination of personal experience and media in all forms. Speeding through our senses in ever-increasing numbers and complicated mixtures of fantasy, dream and reality from both outside and in, these fragmented images of life, sometimes shared by all, sometimes isolated and obscure, but with common threads, lead us to a state of psychological entropy tending toward a uniform inertness... an insensitive uninvolved in the human condition and our own humanity. —Chick Strand

Coming Up for Air (1986, 26 minutes, Color)

A “new narrative” film based on the visions of magic realism in an Anglo context. This is a gothic mystery that explores a reckless pursuit of interchangeable personalities and experiences. Whether experience is first hand, read, remembered from a conversation during a chance encounter, heard of from all possible sources of information, whether fact or fiction, the “experiences” become ours; reinterpreted, reconstructed, and restructured, finally becoming our personal myths, and the source of our poetry and dreams. The sources for this film include night dreams, the idea of holocaust, the exoticness of the Mideast, the sensuality of animals, the explorations of Scott in Antarctica, and a film I once saw, entitled *The Son of Amir Is Dead*. —Chick Strand

Chick Strand: Seeing in Between

April 26: Celebrations of Spirit

“‘No closeups please,’ they say. ‘It is not the normal way of seeing.’ But it is normal for an infant to be close to the face of the mother, normal for a lover to be close to the body of the beloved, normal to face a friend eye-to-eye a foot away and talk intimately and normal for that person to see only the face of the friend and not his or her own face. ‘No fragments of movement,’ they say. But it is normal for a child sitting beside women grinding corn to see only their hand movements, normal to catch fragments of the costume of the person dancing next to you out of the corner of your eye, normal to see only the flank of a cow when you are milking her. Maybe it is normal for the anthropologist to be so far removed, but not for the people living in the culture.”

—Chick Strand, “Notes on Ethnographic Film by a Film Artist,” *Wide Angle*, 1978

Mosori Monika (1970, 20 minutes, Color)

This is an ethnographic film about two cultures that have encountered one another. The Spanish Franciscan Missionaries went to Venezuela in 1945 to “civilize” the Warao Indians, who live in the swamps on the Orinoco River Delta. Before the missionaries came, the Waraos lived in relative isolation and were little affected by the outside world. The relationship between the Indians and the missionaries is simple on the surface, but it is manifested in a complex change of techniques, values and life style which have indelibly altered the Warao vision of life. The acculturation is presented from two viewpoints. A nun tells how the Indians lived when the missionaries arrived and what the nuns have done to “improve” conditions, both spiritually and materially. An old Warao Indian woman tells what she feels have been the important experiences in her life. The two viewpoints are structured in counterpoint so that the deeper aspects of the juxtaposition of the modern culture over the old becomes apparent through the revelations of the two women. —Chick Strand

Anselmo and the Women (1986, 35 minutes, Color)

Continuing the life of Anselmo, a Mexican street musician, and his life-long struggle to make a good life for his children. This film focuses on his relationship with his wife Adela and his mistress, Cruz, and theirs with him. In a society where traditional gender roles are separate and sharply defined, the number of children defines male identity and keeps the women at home and dependent. Poverty makes daily survival a desperate struggle. Both men and women must cooperate, the men to provide food and shelter and the women to raise and care for the large family. However, the cooperation is often superficial, with very little communication in terms of inner emotional needs. Relationships become economic in essence in which both men and women perceive themselves living in an emotional desert. The film is about lives in conflict from three points of view as told by the people involved. —Chick Strand

Fake Fruit (1986, 22 minutes, Color)

In the town where I spend my time in Mexico, I had an American friend, a man who was a painter. He married a Mexican woman and had three children with her... For years he tried to think of schemes which would make him money so he wouldn't have to be a yo-yo [going back and forth between Mexico and the U.S.]... He started making paper mache fruit and vegetables to sell to local tourist stores. They became very popular, and before he could think twice, the whole operation grew to the extent that he had to rent a factory, and hire people to make unpainted pieces in their homes... Well, after about three years he started getting rich ... but he got bored with the whole thing. This is a film about the women who worked for him. —Chick Strand

March 1 Mexican Visions

Comments by Chick Strand

Guacamole (1976, 10 minutes, Color)

Poetic surrealism. A film about the loss of innocence and the search for the essence of the human spirit. As children we are innocent... As we develop we are taught by our culture that which is ideal, and in our society what is ideal is based on a humanistic philosophy. In order to survive psychologically, we learn to accept that it is impossible to maintain this ideal humanistic behavior in our own lives and thoughts.

Mujer de Milfuegos (1976, 15 minutes, Color)

Not a personal portrait so much as an evocation of the consciousness of women in rural parts of such countries as Spain, Greece and Mexico; women who wear black from the age 15 and spend their entire lives giving birth, preparing food and tending to household and farm responsibilities. *Mujer de Milfuegos* depicts in poetic, almost abstract terms, their daily repetitive tasks as a form of obsessive ritual.

Anselmo (1967, 4 minutes, Color)

A symbolic reenactment of a real event. I asked a Mexican Indian friend what he would like most in the world. His answer was, "A double E flat tube." I thought it would be easy to find one at the Goodwill very cheap. This wasn't so, but a sympathetic man in a music store found a cheap but beautiful brass wrap-around tuba. I bought it, smuggled it into Mexico and gave it to my friend in the desert. The film is a poetic interpretation of this event in celebration of wishes and tubas.

Cosas de Mi Vida (1976, 25 minutes, Color)

Expressive documentary about Anselmo, a Mexican Indian who lives on the central plateau. It is a film about his struggle for survival. He was born in a remote Otomi-speaking Indian village. Orphaned at age seven in a small but modern town where his parents had gone, he was the sole support of himself and his baby sister who eventually starved and died in his arms. Totally uneducated in a formal way, he taught himself how to play a horn and when he became a man he started his own street band. The film was started in 1965 and finished in 1975. During the ten years, I saw the physical change in Anselmo's life in terms of things he could buy to make his family at first able to survive, and during the last years, to make them more comfortable. I felt a change in his spirit from a proud, individualistic and graceful man into one obsessed with possessions and role-playing in order to get ahead and stay on top, but one cannot help but admire his energy and determination to succeed... The big problem making the film was to get the right voice. I tried about twenty over a period of two years. None worked, so I returned to Mexico and taught Anselmo how to say his own words in English. This film is a tribute from one artist to another.

By the Lake (1986, 9.5 minutes, Color)

A sort of collage film, using images shot for other films that somehow never were finished. The sound comes from various sound gathering adventures. An Anglo woman's interpretation of magic realism.

Artificial Paradise (1986, 12.5 minutes, Color)

Aztec romance and the dream of love. The anthropologist's most human desire, the ultimate contact with the informant. The denial of intellectualism and the acceptance of the romantic heart, and a soul without innocence.