



**CURATED BY  
KALPANA SUBRAMANIAN**

**FILMS BY  
ALEXANDRA GUESTA  
CRYSTAL Z CAMPBELL  
ERIN ESPELIE  
GARINÉ TOROSSIAN  
MTL COLLECTIVE  
SKY HOPINKA  
SONALI GULATI  
SUNEIL SANZGIRI**

**CINEMA OF BREATH:  
POETICS OF MIGRANCY**

**DECEMBER 2, 2021**

## *Cinema of Breath: Poetics of Migrancy*

December 2, 2021

Does cinema breathe?

Can we understand migration through cinematic poetry?

Curated by Kalpana Subramanian, *Cinema of Breath: Poetics of Migrancy* brings together a series of cinematic experiments that range across registers of the personal, collective, scientific, and archival. Together, these short films explore ideas of home and mobility, exile and displacement, and memories of place.

*Cinema of Breath* is based on Subramanian's doctoral research in Media Study at the University at Buffalo. Her research into experimental film draws from breath practices in Yoga and Buddhist philosophy. Through this lens, "breath" can be thought of as the creational force of cinema that brings it to "life."

Presented by New York Immigration Coalition  
with Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center

Organized by Bryan Lee  
Special thanks: Ekrem Serdar

## Program

Erin Espelie, *A Free Inquiry Into Air: 110721*

3 min, silent, 2021

Gariné Torossian, *Girl from Moush*

5:37 min, sound, 1993

Sonali Gulati, *Miles and Kilometres*

2:50 min, sound, 2021

Gariné Torossian, *An Inventory of Some Strictly Visible Things*

6:51 min, sound, 2017

Alexandra Cuesta, *Recordando El Ayer*

9 min, sound, 2007

Crystal Z Campbell, *Future for Failures*

1 min, sound, 2011

MTL Collective, *Unsettling (Work in Progress)*

11:30 min, sound, 2021

Sky Hopinka, *When you're lost in the rain*

5:35 min, sound, 2018

Suneil Sanzgiri, *Letter From Your Far-off Country*

17:33 min, sound, 2020

Kalpana Subramanian, *Incantation*

8:15 min, sound, 2021

Erin Espelie, *A Free Inquiry Into Air: 110721*

3 min, silent, 2021

...

what am I to do with my imagination—& the person in me  
trembles—& there is still

innocence, it is starting up

somewhere

even now, and the strange swelling of the so-called Milky Way, and  
the sound of the

wings of the bird as it lifts off

...

what is coming, what is true, & all the blood, millennia, drained to  
stave off

the future, stave off,

& the armies on the far plains, the gleam off their armor now in this  
bird's

eye, as it flies towards me

then over, & the sound of the thousands of men assembled at

all cost now

the sound of the bird lifting, thick, rustling where it flies over—only  
see, it is

a hawk after all, I had not seen

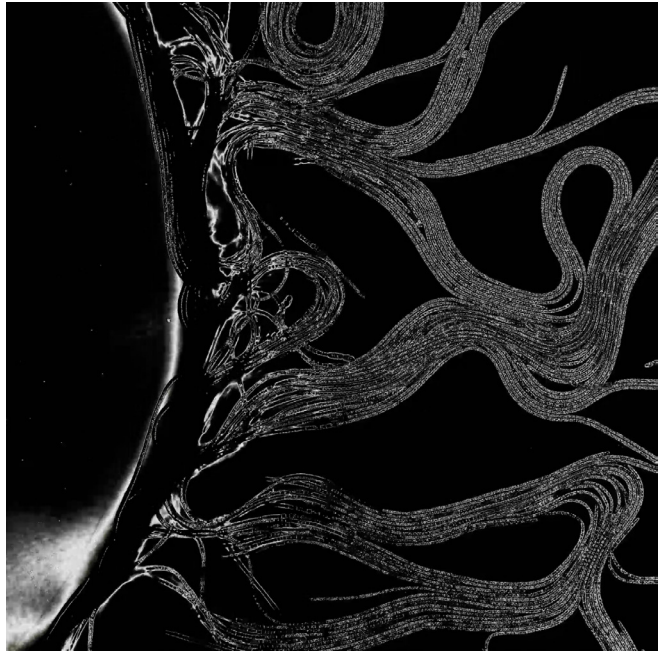
clearly, it has gone to hunt in the next field, & the chlorophyll is  
coursing, & the sun is

sucked in, & the chief priest walks away now where what remains  
of

the body is left

as is customary for the local birds.

—Jorie Graham, "Embodies" (excerpt)



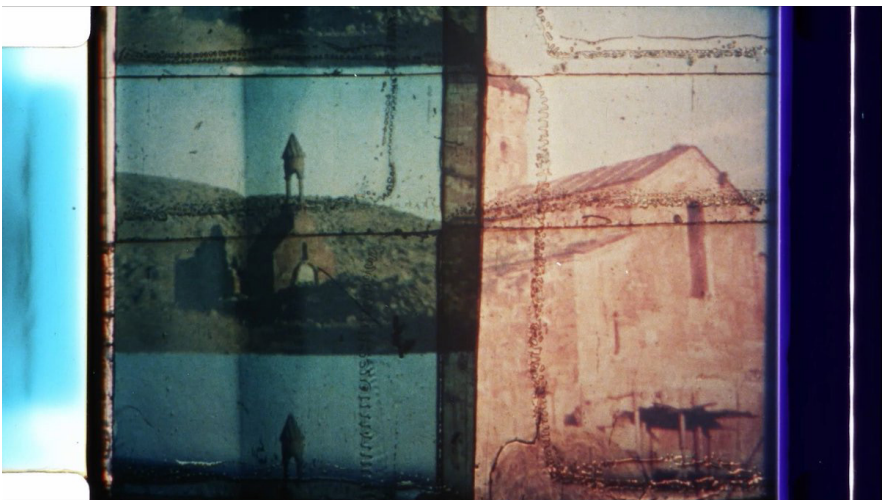
*Erin Espelie, a filmmaker based in the Rocky Mountains, is currently collaborating with the Cameron Biochemistry laboratory at the University of Colorado Boulder to film growth and death patterns of cyanobacteria. Espelie's films have shown at the New York Film Festival, the British Film Institute, the Natural History Museum of London, Whitechapel Gallery, Crossroads (San Francisco), the Rotterdam International Film Festival, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Full Frame Documentary Festival, and more. With a degree in molecular and cell biology from Cornell University and an MFA in experimental and documentary arts from Duke University, Espelie taught courses in environmental issues and the documentary arts from 2012 to 2015 at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies, the Nicholas School of the Environment, the Department of Evolutionary Anthropology, and the Program in the Arts of the Moving Image. She now has a joint appointment at the University of Colorado Boulder in the Film Studies Program and the Department of Critical Media Practices.*

Gariné Torossian, *Girl from Moush*  
5:37 min, sound, 1993

*Girl from Moush* is a poetic montage of the artist's journey through her subconscious Armenia. It is not an Armenia based in a reality, but one which appears, like the mythical city of Shangri-La, when one closes one's eyes. Rooted in what Carl Jung may call a "communal consciousness," her Armenia appears on film as a collage of myth, legend, experience and immigration.

In her memoir, Gariné reveals a longing which is visualized but yet never solidly based in our reality. Icons of Armenia appear on the screen for only a second, and then disappear from both the viewer's and artist's minds. The world of the traveller is filled with uncertainty and fascination. As viewers we are engaged and forced through uncharted landscapes that have been traditionally been restricted to the mind of the artist. Projected into proportions which are larger than life, the viewer is forced to confront and assimilate all that s/he views and perceives.

*Born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1970 to Armenian parents, Gariné Torossian moved to Canada at the age of nine. After studying photography and film at York University in Toronto, she first worked as a photographer before turning her focus to film. After her first 16mm film, Visions, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, her second film, Girl from Moush, screened in the 1994 Panorama. Her short films also screened at the Berlinale in 1998, 2000, and 2002 before her debut feature film, Stone Time Touch, premiered in the 2007 Forum. Retrospectives have been devoted to her work in Canada, London and Berlin. Her films focus on themes of memory, longing and identity, often in connection with her Armenian heritage.*



Sonali Gulati, *Miles and Kilometres*  
2:50 min, sound, 2021

A lingering haiku poem of migration, separation, dislocation, and exile.



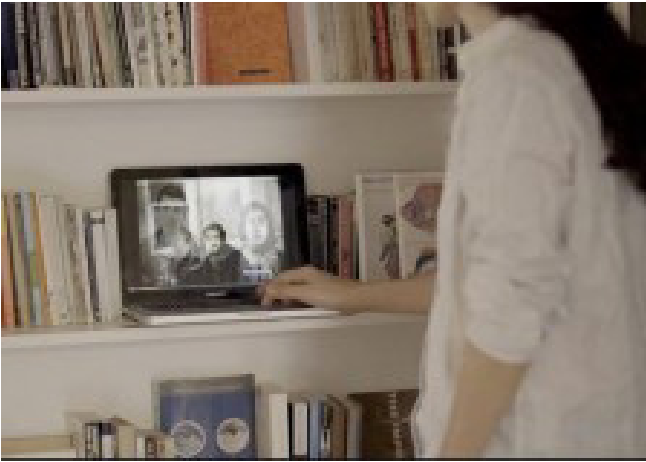




*Sonali Gulati is an independent filmmaker, a feminist, a queer rights activist, and an educator. She teaches film at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of the Arts in the department of Photography & Film. Her films have screened at venues such as the Hirshhorn Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, and at film festivals such as the Margaret Mead Film Festival, the Black Maria Film Festival and Slamdance Film Festival. Gulati's award-winning documentary film I Am was broadcasted on public television and cable TV in the U.S. and Portugal. Her documentary film Nalini by Day, Nancy by Night, was broadcast on television in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South Asia, and North Africa. Gulati is a Guggenheim Fellow in the area of film and has received support for her work from the Creative Capital Foundation, Center for Asian American Media (CAAM), Third Wave Foundation, Tribeca All Access, and World Studio Foundation. She's also won awards and recognition from the Robert Giard Memorial Fellowship, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship, the Theresa Pollak Prize for Excellence in the Arts, and VCU School of the Arts Faculty Award of Excellence.*

Gariné Torossian, *An Inventory of Some Strictly Visible Things*  
6:51 min, sound, 2017

Exploring an emotional detachment to one's surroundings, the filmmaker uncovers an intersection of identity, memory, the subconscious, and the power of image. Inspired by the work of French novelist George Perec.



*Born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1970 to Armenian parents, Gariné Torossian moved to Canada at the age of nine. After studying photography and film at York University in Toronto, she first worked as a photographer before turning her focus to film. After her first 16mm film, Visions, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, her second film, Girl from Moush, screened in the 1994 Panorama. Her short films also screened at the Berlinale in 1998, 2000, and 2002 before her debut feature film, Stone Time Touch, premiered in the 2007 Forum. Retrospectives have been devoted to her work in Canada, London and Berlin. Her films focus on themes of memory, longing and identity, often in connection with her Armenian heritage.*

Alexandra Cuesta, *Recordando El Ayer*  
9 min, sound, 2007



*Recordando El Ayer* is a portrait of Jackson Heights, a condensed area of Queens, New York that has become home for a high concentration of Latin American immigrants. This is an effort to document this space, in this specific moment in time, and to make it visible.

I was struck by the physical manifestation of a city landscape that has been slowly modified and reconstructed to resemble another. The neighborhood with its streets and textures and sounds, becomes a mirror not just of another place but also of another time, and of a past that is built upon collective memory. Beneath this reflection, the space remains an unfamiliar environment to its inhabitants and questions the meaning of 'home.'

*Alexandra Cuesta (b.1980) is an Ecuadorean filmmaker whose films combine experimental film traditions with documentary practices, and investigate the reciprocity of the gaze in time-based representation. Her images often depart from the public sphere, and highlight the poetics of the common experience. Her work has been presented in a number of festivals, museums, galleries, and cultural institutions, such as the New York Film Festival, Cinema Du Réel, FIDMarseille, BFI London, Oberhausen, Courtisane, FICValdivia, Viennale, Anthology Film Archives, Image Forum Tokyo, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Bienal de Arte Contemporáneo de Cuenca, Fronteira Festival Internacional Do Filme Documental E Experimental in Goiania- Brazil, Punto de vista, Festival de Nouveau Cinema, Art of the Real at the Lincoln Center, among others. She received her MFA in Film and Video from the California Institute of the Arts and a BFA in Photography from Savannah College of Art and Design. In 2018, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.*

Crystal Z Campbell, *Future for Failures*  
1 min, sound, 2011

An exhalation of social and architectural failures under the guise of possible futures.

*Crystal Z Campbell (they/them/theirs) is a 2021–22 UB Center for Diversity Innovation Distinguished Visiting Scholar, multidisciplinary artist, experimental filmmaker, and writer of Black, Filipino, and Chinese descents. A 2021 Guggenheim Fellow in Fine Arts, Campbell finds complexity in public secrets—fragments of information known by many but undertold or unspoken. Their archive-driven work in film/video, performance, installation, sound, painting, and text, has been exhibited at Drawing Center, Nest, ICA-Philadelphia, Studio Museum of Harlem, SculptureCenter, and SFMOMA, amongst others. Honors and awards include the Pollock-Krasner Award, MAP Fund, MacDowell, Skowhegan, Rijksakademie, Whitney ISP, Franklin Furnace, Tulsa Artist Fellowship, and Flaherty Film Seminar. Campbell's writing has been featured in World Literature Today, Monday Journal, GARAGE, and Hyperallergic. Campbell was a Harvard Radcliffe Film Study Center & David & Roberta Logie Fellow in 2020–21, and is founder of the virtual programming platform archiveacts.com.*



MTL Collective, *Unsettling (Work in Progress)*

11:30 min, sound, 2021

*Unsettling* is a possible story that weaves together the fractured Palestinian landscape and insurgent voices and sounds in an unfolding reorientation that provides a deeper understanding of colonization and thinks with the Palestinian people about the future and possibilities of anti-colonial struggle and liberation today.





*Nitasha Dhillon has a B.A. in Mathematics from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York and School of International Center of Photography. She holds a Ph.D. in Media Study from the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. Amin Husain has a B.A. in Political Philosophy, a J.D. from Indiana University School of Law, an LL.M. from Columbia Law School, and teaches at New York University. Together, Nitasha and Amin are MTL, a collaboration that joins research, aesthetics, and action in its practice. MTL is a founding member of Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy and Anemones, two in-print movement-generated theory magazines; Strike Debt and Rolling Jubilee, Direct Action Front for Palestine; Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.); and most recently MTL+, the collective facilitating Decolonize This Place, an action-oriented movement that blurs the lines between art, organizing and action around six strands of struggle: Indigenous struggle, Black liberation, free Palestine, global wage worker, de-gentrification, and dismantling patriarchy. At present, in addition to being involved in Strike MoMA working group of the International Imagination of Anti-national and Anti-imperialist Feelings (IIAAF), MTL is in post-production on a feature-length experimental documentary about land, life, and liberation in occupied Palestine.*



Sky Hopinka, *When you're lost in the rain*  
5:35 min, sound, 2018



In this video, drawing from Bob Dylan's song "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," layers of experiences circling loss and longing are overlaid between images of landscapes and movement. In the song by Dylan, a stranger's listlessness and exhaustion are woven through and around Juarez, Mexico, and so too in this video are these stories woven around colonial discontent and uncertainty as they move through an uneasy negotiation with the strangeness of the American pioneer spirit.

Commissioned by Brianna Matzke for The Response Project

*Sky Hopinka (Ho-Chunk Nation/Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians) was born and raised in Ferndale, Washington and spent a number of years in Palm Springs and Riverside, CA, Portland, OR, and Milwaukee, WI. In Portland, he studied and taught chinuk wawa, a language indigenous to the Lower Columbia River Basin. His video, photo, and text work centers around personal positions of Indigenous homeland and landscape designs of language as containers of culture expressed through personal and non-fictional forms of media.*

Suneil Sanzgiri, *Letter From Your Far-off Country*  
17:33 min, sound, 2020

Shot with 16mm film stock that expired in 2002—the same year as the state-sponsored anti-Muslim genocide in Gujarat—and filmed amid the anti-CAA protests in Delhi, the filmmaker traces lines and lineages of poetry, history, songs, and ruins through a multitude of digital interventions, found footage, and more.

A search for solidarity in the sounds and colors of the spontaneous Muslim women led Shaheen Bagh movement in Delhi, in the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali, the song of Iqbal Bano, the theater of Safdar Hashmi, and images of B. R. Ambedkar—the radical anti-caste Dalit intellectual and founder of the Indian constitution—all surrounding a letter addressed to the filmmaker’s distant relative Prabhakar Sanzgiri, who wrote biographies of Ambedkar and was a Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader in Maharashtra.

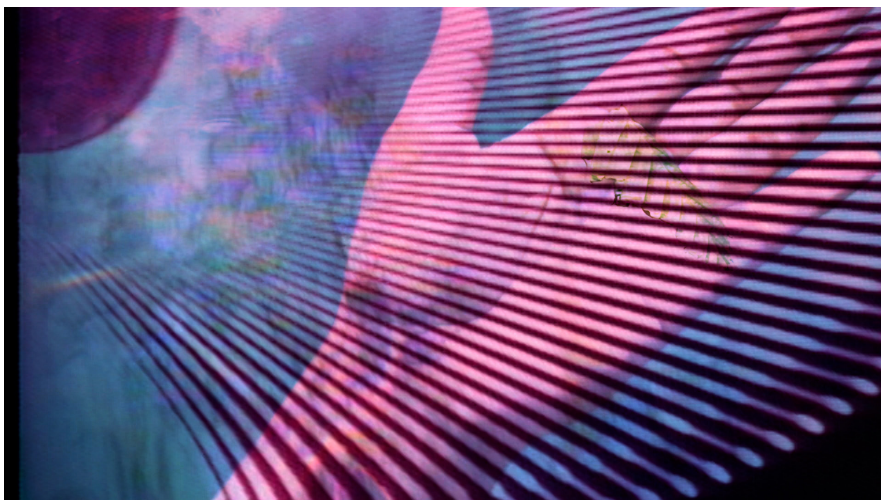
*Suneil Sanzgiri is an artist, researcher, and filmmaker. His work spans experimental video and film, essays, and installations, and contends with questions of identity, heritage, culture, and diaspora in relation to structural violence. He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with a Masters of Science in Art, Culture and Technology in 2017. His films have screened extensively at festivals nationally and internationally, including International Film Festival Rotterdam, New York Film Festival, Sheffield Doc/Fest, Hong Kong International Film Festival, Camden International Film Festival, IndieLisboa, DocLisboa, Punto de Vista, Viennale, LA Film Forum, e-Flux, 25 FPS festival, and has won awards at BlackStar Film Fest, Open City Documentary Festival, VideoEx, Images Festival, as well as Special Jury mentions at the European Media Arts Festival and Iowa City Docs. Sanzgiri was a 2016 resident of the SOMA program in Mexico City, a Flaherty NYC co-programmer in 2020–21, a resident of the Pioneer Works Studio Residency in Spring 2021, an inaugural recipient of the Line of Sight Fellowship, and will be a MacDowell Fellow in Winter 2021. He was named as one of the “25 New Faces of Independent Film” in Filmmaker Magazine’s Fall 2021 issue.*



Kalpana Subramanian, *Incantation*

8:15 min, sound, 2021

A serendipitous encounter one winter in New York, with reels of 16mm film shot in Delhi, India in 1952. Dislocations in time and space, an incantation to liminal spaces of freedom and belonging. The film reels were salvaged from an antique store in Owego, NY by video artist and engineer, Dave Jones, who collaborated with Subramanian on analog video experiments with the footage.



*Kalpna Subramanian is an artist-filmmaker, educator and Ph.D. candidate in Media Study at the University at Buffalo. Her research investigates the poetics of breath in film and media using a trans-cultural, interdisciplinary and practice-based framework of inquiry. She was a Fulbright Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Fellow at University of Colorado Boulder in 2015-16 and a UK Environmental Film Fellow in 2006. Her films have been screened at several international film festivals including the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Interfilm Berlin, Toronto International Film Festival, Antimatter Media Arts (Canada), Olhar de Cinema (Brazil), Digital Anthropologies (France) and Wildscreen (UK) among others. She has received various honors including a Jury's Special Mention at the CMS Vatavaran International Film Festival (2007), Audience Award at the Documentary Festival of History and Archeology in Italy (2015), awards for Creative Approach, Cinematography (2003) and Conservation (2005) at the Montana CINE International Film Festival. Her recent films include the five-part series Light Mediated (2016), Tattva (2018) and Woolgathering (2020). Subramanian is also a vocalist and author of four children's books.*





IMAGE: DETAIL FROM ERIN ESPELLE, *A FREE INQUIRY INTO AIR*: 110721, 2021

DESIGN: BRYAN LEE



**NYC**

Squeaky  
Wheel