

Artist Lecture Series Vienna

Philipp Fleischmann

Artist Lecture Series Vienna
presents

Philipp Fleischmann

Film Sculpture

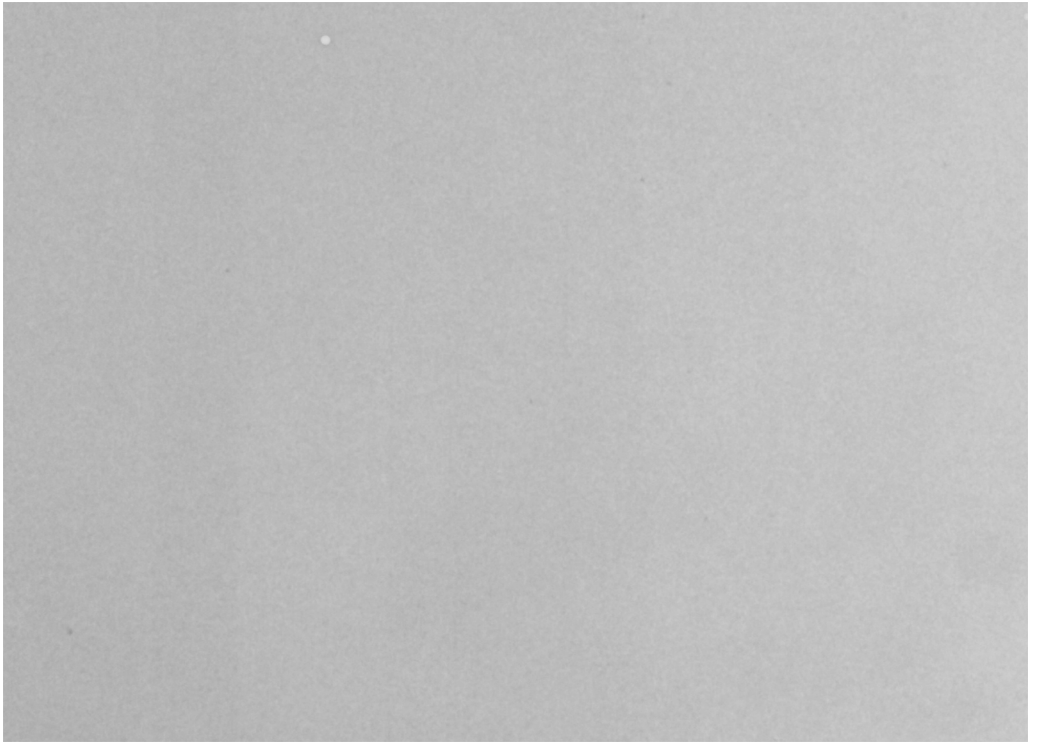
4. November 2025
Skulpturinstitut, Paulusplatz 5, 1030 Vienna
6 p.m. – Lecture

1

Opening: Single Projection on 16mm of

Film Sculpture (9)

16mm film, color, silent aluminium, polyoxymethylene



Fiery Orange
Film Still, Film Sculpture (9), 2025

We just saw one of my film sculptures, the most recent one – Film Sculpture (9) from 2025. Yet, we haven't seen it at all. All of the filmic content was present. The entire filmstrip did run through the projector, the images were to be seen on the wall, the projection speed was correct, colors and shapes were in focus. But still, the actual work didn't unfold at all.

In this presentation, I'd like to introduce you my current series of film sculptures. Trying to tackle what they are, what I want from them and how they did develop within my broader practice working with film.

2

First step: Try to find a term

When I began working on this series, I noticed that I had no fitting term for what I was doing.

Film stands for movement, temporal unfolding. Sculpture, on the other hand, stands for something spatial, static, and assertive. These opposites — the temporal and the spatial, the moving and the static — interest me, fascinate me. So, by addition, I simply invented the term “Film Sculpture” to better grasp and talk about my practice.

3

One step back: Camera as Tool/Object/Sculpture

It might make sense to briefly take a step back. In a way, and without consciously thinking of it as such, I have always treated the filmic camera as a sculptural entity, which crosses notions of

architecture, objecthood, tool and - of course - apparatus, able to inscribe light onto a light-sensitive material.

Since my very first filmic work in 2009, I do not work with an existing and industrial camera apparatus, but I'm creating my own devices, specifically thought and designed for each individual project.

Though this notion of thinking of the filmic camera as a flexible and adjustable entity, and not as a standardized and supposedly neutral point of departure, didn't really come about, because I thought of clarifying terms. At least, not in the beginning. Rather, it started with quite a personal experience that shaped me a lot. In my adolescent years, I was acting in a national entertainment TV series. For five years, the filmic camera (Arri, Super-16) had been pointed at me. I found the process of being made into an image and placed in a narrative that was not my own to be highly intrusive.

I suddenly realized: I'd like to make films myself, and I thought, «What if I switch sides and stand behind the camera?» But that also felt wrong. Why should I do to others what I did not want for myself? The analogue film medium finally showed me a way out. And I realized that I didn't have to put the film material into a pre-made camera. This way, I could escape the logic of representation inscribed in the camera and the power structures connected to it. I wanted to disempower the camera—simply by not using it.

For my first films (Cinematographie, Main Hall), I thought of my own cameras as a tool, which enabled me to think and create a different filmic perspective. For example, the point of view of architecture. In the next step, I cared more about how they looked, and I thought of

the camera as an object that also had the possibility to gaze. (Untitled (Generali Foundation Vienna) (Hello Minimal Art, how's it going?). Later on, I thought of my cameras more like site-specific sculptures being placed within a certain setting. (Austrian Pavilion, Untitled (34bsp)).

Yet, to this point, the actual artwork that an audience could encounter, were filmic projections, mostly in a cinema setting. My own cameras offered a different filmic point of view and arguably a different aesthetic because how they function. But the actual tool/object/sculpture was never to be exhibited, and existed only as a conceptual remark or, maybe, as a photographic documentation.



Camera Sculpture Austrian Pavilion, 2019

Photo: Susanne Miggitsch



Production Still, Film Shooting Untitled (34bsp), 2021

Photo: Bruna Canepa

4

Wishes, Wishes, Wishes

If one is lucky, one could succeed artistically. (Meaning: one has the feeling of succeeding). Those are somehow rare, but great moments. Sometimes, one is afraid to repeat oneself and get stuck. Those moments are always around the corner and are pretty annoying. Therefore: Wishes, Wishes, Wishes. I sometimes go back to the beginning - in my case, wanting to work with film- try to anchor myself within that foundation of interest and throwing myself in a different -to me rather unknown- direction, and connecting this with some wishes along the way.

Wish 1: I want the sculptural aspect to be the center of the art piece

Wish 2: I want the film sculpture to perform and discuss in space (and not in the cinema)

Wish 3: I want the analog 16mm film strip to exhibit its frameless nature

5

Insert: No Frame, All Glory

I always thought that the single frame is the smallest unit in analog filmmaking, or, to be more precise, I was told it would be. One tiny little picture within a rectangular frame. If there are 24 consecutively shot images, we have one second of 'movement' in the sense of representational cinema. («Cinema is truth 24 times a second.» - Jean Luc Godard). If we set aside the idea of representational logic and recognizability entirely, and instead work with singular frames — one

after the other — we enter the realm of the consecution of cinematic events. (“It’s between frames where cinema speaks.” Peter Kubelka)

Quoting two men, because I disagree with both of them.

In both cases, the unit of the single frame is accepted as the smallest component in filmmaking, either bringing us to the ontological truth or to the formal structuralism of the film avant-garde. However, once I started to work with film, I realized that the filmstrip isn’t divided into frames as such. The filmstrip is, by nature, blank. It is an empty strip that can be inscribed with various recording concepts.

It is the existing camera apparatus that shamelessly imposes its concept — even its addiction — to representation and recognizability, onto the film strip.

The single frame is not some radically discovered, deconstructivist unit of articulation. No: the single frame, as produced by the camera, is the root of the problem.

It is the first trace of the operation of normalization. An attempt to standardization. A forced control of light. A curse of visual culture.

Therefore, since my first film back in 2009, I wanted my filmstrips to carry no frames at all. My own camera apparatuses — based on the principle of the camera obscura — managed to break out of the frame line and still produce images. Images that can be recognized, but that resist clarity and control.

However, the filmstrip was never to be seen by an audience — it remained hidden in the projector booth or wound up on a looping device.

Therefore, back to wish 3: I want the analog 16mm filmstrip to exhibit its frameless nature, and to let it speak as a material artifact.

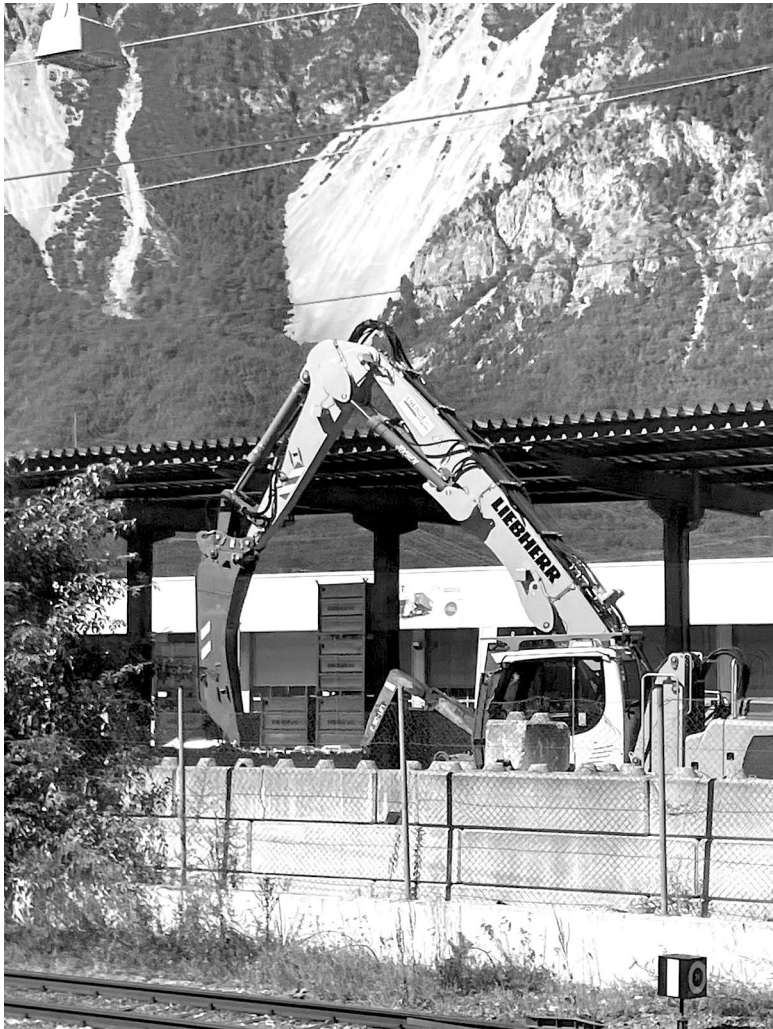
6

Putting the Sculpture together

The actual premise is quite simple. I start with shapes that interest me and which can function as looping devices. For the first Film Sculptures, I was inspired by harps I have seen in the historical musical instrument collection here in Vienna. For the latter ones, I look at excavators as models.



Harp, Picture taken 2022



Excavator, Picture taken 2024

The width of the sculpture is quickly decided. 16mm would be ideal — exactly as wide as the filmstrip. Well, that's not entirely possible, but it points in the right direction: as narrow as possible to guide the filmstrip and illuminate it from behind.

The body, so far made out of aluminum, is a static form in space — decided and built.

The next question is where to place the projector. The projector serves two purposes. First and foremost: to transport the filmstrip over the constructed aluminium form and its lightbox. Second: the projector can also project an image. The projector can either stand on the floor or have its own pedestal integrated into the aluminum structure. The projected image can be displayed onto an existing wall or a specially made screen, also incorporated and supported by the aluminium framework.

The actual placement and the precisely known distances are crucial for the next step. I now begin to think about animating the static shape of the aluminum form with the 16mm filmstrip. It somehow feels like tailoring a custom-made garment. I have various fabrics in different materials, colors, and patterns — 16mm filmstrips of various shapes, tones, and densities — and I try to create a piece of clothing that carries a specific character. But, this garment is animated because the 16mm projector continuously moves the filmstrip through the existing aluminum form.

At this point, distances and lengths become decisive. I — the tailor — know exactly what will be visible and what won't, both on the lightbox and in the projection, at any given moment. Now, I begin to edit —

this time as a filmmaker — always keeping the overall impression of the Film Sculpture in mind: form in space, illuminated filmstrip, projected image. It becomes a question of bringing colors, shapes, and rhythms into balance. Technically speaking, are these three layers of visibility — the sculptural form, the lit film material, and the projection — homogeneous, complementary, or contrasting? Monochrome, flickering, or abstract animated forms?

This is the moment when the film sculpture appears as a negotiating presence — where internal tension and contradiction come to the surface. A complexity of identity emerges: neither just projection, nor pure material fact, nor solely conceptual idea — but something shaped through affective moments, through openness to shifts and deviations.

7

Visual Abstraction / QUEER ABSTRACTION

In contrast to the works I mentioned earlier, where I built my own cameras and focused on institutional exhibition spaces, the filmstrips used in the film sculptures carry no lens-based images (in my case, no pinhole-based images either). Rather, they carry color, shapes, forms, rhythm — and therefore various modes of intensity. They work with the notion of visual abstraction, one could say.

I never thought I'd be interested in abstraction. Somehow, this changed. I now want to find out what abstraction could be about, and what, in particular, queer abstraction might mean.

Two things brought me there.

One

I wanted to cut with my series of site-specific films, where cameras were responding to — and specifically made in response to — the architecture of art institutions. This series started with a notion of appropriation, trying to challenge the idea of when and how an artist has access to an institution and its history. I didn't have it. I wasn't officially invited or part of the program. Rather, I asked from the outside if I'd be allowed to work on site for one or a couple of days between their shows.

What began as a somewhat naive mistake with my first attempt (Main Hall, 2013), I eventually adopted as a meaningful position: the requester and self-inviter. I made four more films like this and ended the series with Austrian Pavilion (2019).

After that, I was unexpectedly invited to repeat this approach at the Bienal de São Paulo in 2021. I accepted the invitation, was happy to work officially and have access to the institution's resources, to be part of an actual show, and I managed to «not do the same.» I found the differences between the context of working in Austria (the country I was born in and whose citizenship I carry) and Brazil (a context and country where I can only speak from the position of a humble guest).

FEAR!

That said, I was afraid that this might actually work — that I might be seen as a “critical portraitist” of art institutions. My nightmare. Maybe totally farfetched, and maybe nobody would have actually invited me again — but that doesn't matter when it comes to the feeling of fear.

In order to protect what I'd done, I decided to end the series and stop working with self-made cameras.

Two

I wanted the film sculptures to be exhibited in shows — solo or group — but I didn't want them to be about the institution. Therefore, no images are taken on site.

In general, there's a simple observation when watching images in exhibitions:

If they're lens-based (photography or film), there's always the impulse to trace them back to another place and time. That can be powerful, of course. But I started to think that there shouldn't be much to trace with the film sculptures once someone encounters them. Not to be pulled somewhere else. Not to be easily read and deciphered. Just to be encountered — right here, right now — completely in the present.

Like meeting a person for the first time, well, it's obviously not a person, and it's a different kind of communication. But I like to think there is some kind of communication. A mutual moment of looking, of being seen — and of not fully grasping one another. Even though the actual duration of the 16mm filmstrip being exhibited is only about 1.5 to 2 minutes, the time people spend with the work usually exceeds that — if they're interested. Again, it's like meeting a person for the first time. Am I satisfied reading the person with my general, pre-existing knowledge (even if well-intended), categorizing them, nodding affirmatively, and moving on? Or do I simply take some time to experience the person, sticking around until a different aspect slowly

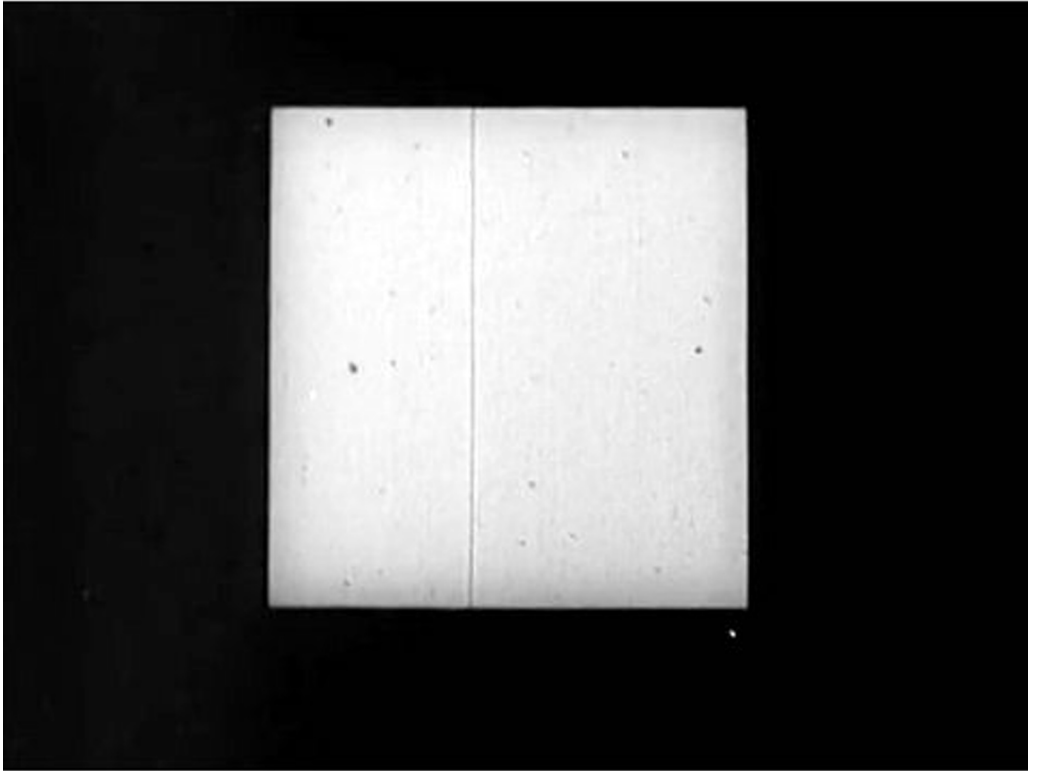
reveals itself and some kind of relationship begins to form? (Even if it's just for 10 minutes — we all have our lives to live, I know.)

QUEER ABSTRACTION

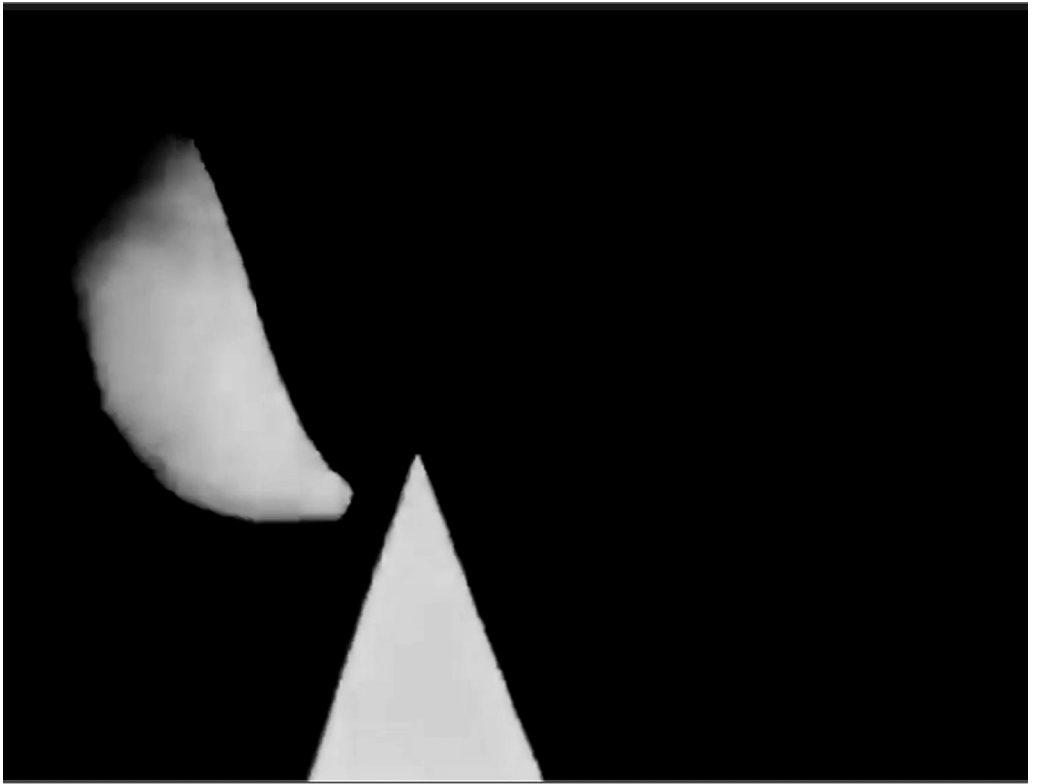
QUEER ABSTRACTION in all caps — because it annoys so many people. Even in the art world. Who would've thought?

Queer Abstraction is a theoretical term by historian David J. Getsy, meant to get closer to artistic practices working from a queer perspective using the means of abstraction. It deals with ideas like Abstraction and Resistance, Ambiguity & Openness, and more. I highly encourage you to type it into your next online search. His Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction is a wonderful entry point. Much more useful than me trying to summarize it.

I actually stumbled across Getsy's theory through an online search. After I decided I wanted to work with abstraction for the first time, I went back to what I already knew in terms of film and abstraction: the traditions of Abstract Film, Absolute Film, and artists like Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, and Walther Ruttmann.



Rhythmus 21, Hans Richter, 1921



Opus 1, Walter Ruttmann, 1921

Especially rewatching Ruttmann's Opus series (also called Absolute Film) triggered me — and freaked me out. I remembered experiencing a kind of sexual undertone when I first watched them in my early twenties. Now, watching them again twenty years later, I perceived them as deeply sexist works, operating within a binary, classical power structure — from the male perspective in control, capable of violating at any moment. Besides being totally angry, I thought: if that is possible to achieve — just by watching shapes and forms move across a flat screen in a specific rhythm — then there **MUST** be abstraction in film with a queer sensibility.

Abstraction + Queer. Search done.

I don't use the term Queer Abstraction to label what I'm doing. But it gave me clarity — and the much-needed push to pursue my own little journey with the film sculptures. I tend to mention it as a sort of reference point. A suggestion. Something to dig deeper into, if anyone feels the impulse to.

Although I've identified as a queer person for a long time, *queer* was never part of my vocabulary — nor a term others used to describe my work. Encountering the concept helped me understand something I had been doing all along: the motivation at the core of this hard-to-pin-down artistic energy. For example, I can now see my battle against the single frame being fueled and motivated by a queer understanding of things.

It's an interesting experience to shift gears and add another aspect to one's own practice. Of course, there's some resistance from the

outside — “But that’s not how you work!” — or subtle insinuations: “Does everything really have to be queer now, even abstraction?” But to me, that’s just the door to more freedom within art-making.

If the film sculptures have anything to do with queerness, it’s not because they depict anything recognizably queer, but because they perform materials in a queer way. Queerness doesn’t operate from a fixed, safe, or accepted state. It’s a negotiation — sometimes euphoric, sometimes painful, sometimes demanding — of one’s own existence and collective actions.

8

The End

These are two pictures of the Film Sculptures (9), which we watched at the beginning. Of course, we still can’t really see them nor experience them. But this is how they look like. This is how you might recognize them, if you ever happen to run into one someday. If you do, please say hi.

Philipp Fleischmann





Installation Views, 13 Film Works, fjk3, 2025

Photos: Lisa Rastl

(c) 2025 Artist Lecture Series Vienna

Organized by Ezara Spangl and Rainer Spangl

Text and Images copyright Philipp Fleischmann

Cover by Neue Satz Wien

Layout by Isabella Kohlhuber

Artist Lecture Series Vienna publication are printed with the financial support of.
Die Publikationen der Artist Lecture Series Vienna werden finanziell unterstützt von

di:'angewandte
Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien
University of Applied Arts Vienna

ISBN 978-3-903288-28-7

<http://artistlectureseriesvienna.com/>

