

Los Angeles Filmforum presents:
Anal Shah: Observational Poetry
Online, Sunday October 25, 2020, 7:30 pm

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

In Person via Zoom: Anal Shah, with curator Madison Brookshire

At the very beginning of Anal Shah's *Chalchitra Railyatra* (2014), an essay on Indian railways, cinema, and their interrelationship, he narrates, "Perhaps it is the dream of every still image to become cinema." This profound connection between photography and cinema animates much of Shah's documentary work. For Shah's films rely on the indexical power of the image to record as well as its yearning to move in a double sense, that is, to move *as image* and to move us *as viewers*, to produce affect. Thus, in *Chalchitra Railyatra*, we meditate not only on travel, borders, and migration, but also transitions through affected states—a double movement, so to speak, through States and states. Trained as a photographer and a filmmaker, Shah's work—which he describes as focusing on issues of "identity, migration, and other things... usually 'lost in translation,'"—occupies a hybrid mode between visual art, documentary, and essay. Working in a tradition of observational cinema and focusing on his travels in India, Shah's films are replete with careful looking and quiet beauty intercut with raucous surprises. Such is the case in *Kalaripayattu* (2017), where tender images unexpectedly surface among long sequences of often percussive martial arts practice, which over time comes to appear almost choreographic. Shah's project could be described as poetic ethnography, although this would not necessarily mean that he makes lyrical documentaries, but rather lovingly presents documentary artifacts as poetry in and of themselves. —Madison Brookshire

Screening:

Chalchitra Railyatra

2014, Digital, color, sound, 42 minutes

Seamlessly weaving archival footage of trains in Indian cinema with the filmmaker's own images and reflections, *Chalchitra-Railyatra* is a meditation on the parallels and intersections between railways and films in India. Trains have been an integral part of the Indian imagination in movies. Together they transcend cultural boundaries and helped create a new sense of nationhood. At the core of this lies the journey from the village to the city and the return back to the village. It is this journey that becomes the departure point for the film exploring multiple metaphors that the train creates in the history and practice of cinema in India.

Kalaripayattu

2017, Digital, color, sound, 28 minutes

Woven from observational footage shot at various Kalaris (martial arts gyms) in northern Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* is an ethnographic portrait of the ancient south Indian martial art—Kalaripayattu, which is often regarded as the ‘mother of all martial arts’. The film offers no subtitles to its Malayalam language, nor provides any explanation via narration, thus encouraging the viewer into an unfiltered sensory experience. Symphonic in its form, the camera’s response to the high paced action of the martial arts sequences transform the movement into a dance, while the dynamics in editing, sometimes synched with traditional drums give the film a percussive effect. Ultimately, the film becomes an immersive meditation on the human body in motion.

Biography:

Anal Shah is an Indian filmmaker and photographer. As someone who straddles multiple cultures between his academic and creative practice, Shah’s work explores issues of identity, migration, and other things that are usually "lost in translation." His work has been shown at venues such the Vienna International Film Festival, Ann Arbor Film Festival, The Portland Documentary and eXperimental Film Festival, and Detroit Docs among others. Shah received both his undergraduate and graduate education at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), and serves as faculty in the Department of Visual & Media Arts at Grand Valley State University in Michigan.

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, the Wilhelm Family Foundation, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, and the American Cinematheque. We also depend on our members, ticket buyers, and individual donors.

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