

ONWARD! The 70th Flaherty Film Seminar

Surprises in Time, a bonus program from USC School of Cinematic Arts and the Center for Ethnographic Media Arts (CEMA), in collaboration with Los Angeles Filmforum

Program 6 | Sunday June 29 2025, 7:00 pm

The Idea of North (1995)

Rebecca Baron, USA, 14'

In the guise of chronicling the final moments of three polar explorers marooned on an ice floe a century ago, Baron's film investigates the limitations of images and other forms of record as a means of knowing the past and the paradoxical interplay of film time, historical time, real time and the fixed moment of the photograph. Marrying matter-of-fact voiceover and allusive sound fragments, evidence and illustration, in Baron's words, "meaning is set adrift".

Eyes of Summer (2020)

Rajee Samarasinghe, Sri Lanka, 15'

The Eyes of Summer was shot in the filmmaker's mother's village in southern Sri Lanka in 2010, immediately after the civil war. Together with family members, he developed an improvised story around a shy girl who becomes friends with a spirit, based on similar encounters from his mother's childhood. A story from a repressed community that doesn't seem to draw defined boundaries between life and death.

The Spectre Watches Over Her (2016)

Rajee Samarasinghe, Sri Lanka, 14' A reaction to the groundbreaking text by Swiss anthropologist Paul Wirz entitled "Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon," this silent and hand processed film considers a history of colonialism and ethnographic practices in South Asia. At his mother's village, Samarasinghe restaged an exorcism once performed on her in the early 1960s when she was a little girl. Possessed by the lecherous entity known as the Kalu Kumara, the Sanni Yakuma healing ritual was performed over a 12-hour period.

Excerpt from a work in progress (2025)

Rebecca Baron, USA, 2 ½'

Little Boy (2025)

James Benning, USA, 74'

A film looking at the past to warn about the future, from a little boy's point of view. A companion to 'American Dreams (lost and found)' (1984)

ARTIST BIOS

Rebecca Baron

Rebecca Baron is known for her essay films concerned with the construction of history, with a Bio: Rebecca Baron is a filmmaker, educator and sometimes programmer based

in Los Angeles. She is best known for her essay films that explore the changing nature of image-making and the construction of history. She is particularly interested in the politics of archives and in still photography's relationship to the moving image. In collaboration with Doug Goodwin, she has recently been investigating the roles and vicissitudes of AI, machine learning and database design in relation to cinematic expression. Her award-winning films have screened widely at international film festivals and media venues including Documenta 12, New York Film Festival, the British Film Institute, Centre Pompidou, Anthology Film Archive, Toronto Film Festival, London Film Festival, Viennale, Pacific Film Archive, Flaherty Film Seminar and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Major grants and fellowships include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study Fellowship, and a City of Paris Artist Fellowship.

She has been a faculty member of the CalArts School of Film/Video since 2000.

James Benning

Making the first of his avant-garde works in 1972, James Benning shortly thereafter started to produce longer experimental films. Between 1978 and 1985 he realized numerous projection and computer installations. From 1977 to 1980 he taught at the Universities of California and Oklahoma. Since the end of the 1980s he has lived in Val Verde, near Los Angeles. He teaches at the California Institute of the Arts where, through his works, he continues to greatly influence younger generations of artists. One particularly important aspect of his oeuvre is his engagement with the American landscape. Using durational, fixed-frame shots, Benning's films often study nature and humankind's encroachment on the world.

Rajee Samarasinghe

Rajee Samarasinghe is a filmmaker born and raised amidst the decades-long civil war in Sri Lanka. He recently completed his debut feature film, *Your Touch Makes Others Invisible*, which had its world premiere at the 2025 International Film Festival Rotterdam. Named one of Filmmaker Magazine's 25 New Faces of Independent Film in 2020, Samarasinghe was also awarded a MacDowell Fellowship in 2023, a Yaddo Residency in 2024, and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2025. He has had solo shows at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA - Modern Mondays), the Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival, and Los Angeles Filmforum, among others.

Program 6 | Facilitator: Michael Renov

Michael Renov, the Haskell Wexler Endowed Chair in Documentary, is a Professor of Cinema and Media Studies in the School of Cinematic Arts and SCA's Vice Dean for Academic Affairs. He is the author of *Hollywood's Wartime Woman: Representation and Ideology* (1988) and has edited or co-edited six other books. Renov co-founded Visible Evidence, an international documentary studies conference that has been held annually on five continents since 1993.

The Center for Ethnographic Media Arts (CEMA) is a recently established research center at the University of Southern California, dedicated to fostering advanced and critical research-creation at the intersection of documentary, hybrid media arts practices, and ethnography. Recognizing media-making as a core research methodology, CEMA's mission is to foster the creation of new works that emerge from deep engagement with communities. Through the center's annual fellowship program, CEMA provides resources and opportunities for project development to USC graduate students who are working on innovative media arts projects, such as short films, feature films, and installations, as part of their course of study. CEMA welcomes collaboration and frequently partners with the School of Cinematic Arts, the Department of Anthropology, other universities, and community arts organizations. Most of CEMA's screenings, artist talks, and workshops are free and open to the public. At its core, CEMA is committed to demonstrating the value of critical nonfiction media art for original thought and transdisciplinary research, and to nurturing the next generation of critical media-makers.

USC School of Cinematic Arts The University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts is one of the leading media schools in the world. Founded in collaboration with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1929 over 90 years ago, the USC School of Cinematic Arts has fueled and mirrored the growth of entertainment as an industry and an art form. The School offers comprehensive programs in directing, producing, writing, cinema and media studies, animation and digital arts, production, interactive media and games, all backed by a broad liberal arts education and taught by leading practitioners in each field. Its more than 17,000 alumni are among the world's most distinguished animators, scholars, teachers, writers, directors, producers, cinematographers, editors, sound experts, video game designers and industry executives. Since 1973 not a year has passed without an alumnus or alumna being nominated for an Academy Award or an Emmy. <https://cinema.usc.edu/>

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest-running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2025 is its 50th year. www.lafilmforum.org. 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. This activity is supported in part by the California Arts Council, a state agency. Learn more at www.arts.ca.gov. We also depend on our members, ticket buyers, and individual donors.