7th House at the Philosophical Research Society, Los Angeles Filmforum, and T.A.P.E. present
***The American Sector,* by Courtney Stephens and Pacho Velez**
Wednesday, April 1, 2026, 7:30 pm
At the Philosophical Research Society

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2026 is our 51st year. www.lafilmforum.org

T.A.P.E. is a Los Angeles-based 501(c)3 nonprofit dedicated to facilitating support for analog media through free digitizing, education, hands-on-training, equipment rentals & volunteer opportunities.

The Philosophical Research Society is a nonprofit institution founded in 1934 by scholar and prolific author Manly Palmer Hall as a repository of multicultural wisdom sources and a center of learning. www.prs.org

Courtney Stephens in person, in conversation with Kellen Lowe

7th House, T.A.P.E., and LA Filmforum co-present Courtney Stephens and Pacho Velez's ***The American Sector***, which follows the filmmakers as they travel through America, documenting sections of the Berlin Wall that have lodged themselves in various American institutions, public spaces, and private dwellings. The film charts the various ways these fragments have become sources of nationalistic pride, personal curiosity, historical record, and, for some, signifiers of political liberation. Through interviews with various characters who own, maintain, and interact with pieces of the wall, the filmmakers offer a window into American culture and the construction of cultural identity.

Through the film, these Cold War relics become a catalyst for exploring how the stories people tell about the imported monoliths become history, at times bonding the past and the present, and other times, for institutions, writing new histories. Just outside of Universal Studios Resort theme park, a young couple is both bemused and excited about the fragment lodged just in front of a Hard Rock Cafe. Elsewhere, at Microsoft Headquarters, a fragment is a reminder of the "free" market's ability to overcome borders. The documentary complicates the notion that history resides in records, artifacts, and objects, suggesting instead that institutional power often dictates the logic by which fact, fantasy, and history are determined. The fragments signal not only how institutions mythologize American cultural history in order to set nationalism in stone, but also how they become canvases on which viewers project aspirations, curiosities, or dreams.

Intercut between interviews and footage of the pieces of the wall, the American countryside is captured from the passenger seat of a car traveling its highways, all cast in the warm saturation of 16mm celluloid. The wide-open landscape reveals, if anything, the arbitrary logic that constructs and imposes borders of any kind. The fragments of the wall are links to a political history that inspires a more measured consideration of how borders are imposed on the land and its peoples. The film's contemporary resonances encourage audiences to consider how the Berlin Wall has been transformed and the ways in which recent history is inscribed in the national imagination.

Courtney Stephens is the director of four feature films. *The American Sector* (with Pacho Velez) follows slabs of the Berlin Wall installed around the US, and was named one of the best films of 2021 in The New Yorker. *Terra Femme*, composed of amateur travel footage shot by women in the early 20th century, was a New York Times critic's pick and has toured widely as a live performance. *John Lilly and the Earth Coincidence Control Office* (with Michael Almereyda) explores the life of neuroscientist and psychedelics pioneer John C. Lilly, and *Invention* is a hybrid fiction film about an esoteric healing device that premiered at Locarno. Her films have been exhibited at MoMA, The National Gallery of Art, The Barbican, Fondazione Prada, Jeu de Paume, ICA London, and film

festivals including the Berlinale, Rotterdam, Viennale, New Directors/New Films, IDFA, Visions Du Réel, Morelia, and the New York Film Festival. Her work has been released theatrically in the US, UK, and France, and she is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright Scholarship, and grants from the Sloan Foundation and the Foundation for Contemporary Art. She has co-curated the miniature cinema Veggie Cloud since 2014, and organized film programs for The Getty, Museum of the Moving Image, Flaherty NYC, and Human Resources. Her writing has appeared in Film Comment, BOMB, Filmmaker, The New Inquiry, and Cabinet.

Pacho Velez is a nonfiction filmmaker born and raised in NYC. His last feature*, They're Here* (2024, co-directed with Dan Claridge) looks at UFO experiencers and the desire for transcendence in Upstate New York. It premiered at Tribeca before going on to play many festivals including Hots Docs (Toronto), Cucalorus (Wilmington, NC) and SXSW Australia (Sydney). His prior film, *Searchers* (2021), is a portrait of The Big Apple as seen through the eyes of lovers navigating the internet in search of intimacy. The film premiered at Sundance before going on to play at many festivals around the world. Pacho also directed *The American Sector* (2020, co-directed with Courtney Stephens), which premiered at the Berlinale. The New Yorker critic Richard Brody included on his list of the best films of 2021. Pacho's earlier features include *The Reagan Show (*Tribeca 2017, co-directed with Sierra Pettengill) and *Manakamana* (2013, co-directed with Stephanie Spray). www.pachoworks.com

Kellen Lowe is a film programmer with T.A.P.E. and an audio-visual archivist working with UCLA's Film and Television Archive and American Cinematheque. As a historiographic researcher he focuses on film archives, documentaries, and home movies.

Screening:

The American Sector
Dir. Courtney Stephens and Pacho Velez
2020, USA, English, digital, color, sound, 69 min.

"The new documentary *The American Sector,* which opens on Friday at Metrograph's virtual cinema, yields extraordinary results through audacious methods—and from the readiness of its directors, Courtney Stephens and Pacho Velez, to challenge their own premises. The conceit of the film risks exhausting itself in its own ironies: Stephens and Velez seek out scores of fragments of the Berlin Wall on display throughout the United States and film them in the context of their often ludicrously incongruous settings. But the film quickly departs from this mission to focus on the filmmakers' wide variety of unexpected encounters on location. The result is a film that powerfully evokes the active presence of history in daily civic life—and reveals the politics that inhere in its commemoration." -- Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/review-the-american-sector-probes-domestic-politics-one-slab-of-the-berlin-wall-at-a-time

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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. We also depend on our members, ticket buyers, and individual donors.

Coming Soon:
Tues April 14, 7:30 pm - Stacey Steers: Alchemical Collages, animator in person at 2220 Arts + Archives
Sun April 19, 1:00 pm – The Films of Gordon Matta-Clark, at 2220 Arts + Archives

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