

**Los Angeles Filmforum presents  
Vatican to Vegas: Director's Cut  
A live presentation by Norman Klein  
Sunday April 27, 2025, 3:00 pm  
At 2220 Arts + Archives**

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 our 50th year. [www.lafilmforum.org](http://www.lafilmforum.org)

**In person discussion following the screening with Norman Klein and Tom Leiser**

After a dinner break, there will be an associated program of short films with additional guests Courtney Stephens and Chris Peters.

Narratives of distortion are not new. Artists have been using the history of perception to understand their surroundings for centuries. Norman Klein's cult classic *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (2005, 2023) traces this lineage over four hundred years as special effects are seen as narratives of distortion. Klein coined the term scripted spaces to refer to Elizabethan masques, machina versatilis, Rococo Gizmos and Fireworks, 19th-century magic lanterns and panoramas, and Gilded Age amusement parks from Coney Island forward. In this special director's cut, Klein excavates cinema's architecturally engineered illusions and historic CGI effects. Norman Klein's live narrative mines the links between techno illusion and power within Hollywood's dark noir and blockbuster classics such as scenes from the 1995 BBC-TV special *The Mall*, *Killer of Sheep*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *The Crowd*, *Ko-Ko's Earth Control*, *Punch and Judy*, and many more.

Curated by SeeVa Dawne Kitslis.

**Norman M. Klein** is a critic, urban and media historian and novelist. His books include: *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*; *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon*; *The Vatican to Vegas: The History of Special Effects*; *Freud in Coney Island and Other Tales*; *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920-86*; *The Imaginary 20th Century* (also an online site); *Tales of the Floating Class: Essays and Fictions in Globalization and NeoFeudalism*. Both *The Imaginary 20th Century* and *Bleeding Through* were pioneering "database" novels—and docufables-- that now have expanded new editions: *Bleeding Through* and *Vatican to Vegas* available online as well (from Transcript). He also has published numerous essays across the arts, architecture, cultural history; along with museum and gallery exhibitions.

Klein's work centers on the relationship between collective memory distortion and power, especially in cities, entertainment culture, cinema and animation, within the context of national politics-- and the scientific "imaginary." He investigates histories of forgetting, ironic scripted spaces, and social imaginaries. In his docufables, he emphasizes how facts dissolve into fiction in our daily life. is now

completing *Archaeologies of the Present: The Dismantling of the American Psyche*, on the emergent feudal condition brought on by global shocks since 1973. As Klein often points out in lectures, progress keeps running off the rails, but we must avoid any form of nihilism, now more than ever.

**Tom Leeson** is a media artist, curator, educator, and writer. He is the Director of the Center for Integrated Media and he is the Founding Director of the Art and Technology Program at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). Tom received his BFA and MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). His film, video, online work, interactive installations, public lectures and performances have been presented at Navel, Harvestworks, Eyebeam, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, The Echo Park Film Center, The Alabama Center for Contemporary Art, Machine Project, Knowledges at the Mount Wilson Observatory, MassMoca, The Santa Monica Museum of Art, The Fowler Museum at UCLA, REDCAT, The Kitchen, The Millennium, Siggraph, and film and video venues, worldwide, with support from the CalArts Faculty Development Grant, Art Matters, Creative, Time, and the Daniel Langlois Foundation.

Tom Leeson founded the Provisional Collective in 2012 to explore the intra-action between art, life and media in a technological age. The Provisional Collective's intent is to explore collaboration through temporary experimental and networked based projects that can occur in public media spaces and alternative cultural and educational institutions. As a multi-relational practice, the collective has engaged in topics such as climate change, radical pedagogies, cultural memory and speculative futures. He is an editor and producer for the web-based journal and curatorial project [viralnet-v4.net](http://viralnet-v4.net)

**SeeVa Dawne Kitslis** is a curator and artist working in Los Angeles and Athens, Greece. SeeVa is the creator and curator of the Burns Pinon Library Collection at Burns Pinon Reserve and co-director of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts Visiting Artist Lecture series. They are the author of the artist book *south facing- searching for the sun is an elusive practice* and the forthcoming monograph *Desert Rubble* tracing illusionistic effects in art from 1 A.D. to the present. Their larger artistic practice moves fluidly between the realms of the archive, architecture, information studies, and book arts—often with a deep engagement in themes of place and material memory.

### **Screening:**

#### ***King-Size Canary***

Directed by Tex Avery, 1947, color, sound, 8 min.

Produced by Fred Quimby for M-G-M. In 1994, it was voted #10 of the 50 Greatest Cartoons of all time by members of the animation field.

**Vatican to Vegas: Director's Cut**, 50-55min with clips from multiple films  
 Anamorphosis, or De Artificiali Perspectiva (The Brothers Quay, 1991)  
 The Lady from Shanghai (Orson Welles, 1947)  
 Little Fugitive (Raymond Abrashkin (credited as Ray Ashley), Morris Engel, and Ruth Orkin, 1953)  
 Kiss the Girls: Make Them Cry (Dara Birnbaum, 1979)  
 The Shining (Stanley Kubrick (1980)  
 Labyrinth (Jan Lenica, 1963)  
 Killer of Sheep (Charles Burnett, 1978)  
 Punch and Judy (Jan Svankmajer, 1966)  
 Kiss Me Deadly (Robert Aldrich, 1955)  
 Duck Amuck (Chuck Jones, 1953)  
 Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)  
 Ko-Ko's Earth Control (Dave Fleischer, 1928)  
 Dark City (Alex Proyas, 1998)  
 Shopping: The Mall (BBC special, Andy Lambert, 1995)

### ***Design for Dreaming***

MPO Productions, 1956, color, sound, 9:16 min. From the collection of the Prelinger Archives  
 Best-known of the films presenting "Motorama," General Motors' annual traveling automobile and appliance trade show. This example introduces the 1956 automobile models, Frigidaire's "Kitchen of Tomorrow," electronic highways of the future, and GM "dream cars" the Oldsmobile Golden Rocket and the turbine-powered Pontiac Firebird II.

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 Los Angeles Filmforum screenings are supported by the California Arts Council, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, and the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles. We also depend on our members, ticket buyers, and individual donors.

Coming soon:

May 4 - Frances Almendárez (in person!), at 2220 Arts + Archives  
 May 10 (Saturday matinee) - *How to Have an American Baby*, by Leslie Tai (in person!)  
 May 10 (Saturday night) - Community partner for Sarah Maldoror: *Through a Lens of Resistance and Rebellion*, at the UCLA Film & TV Archive  
 May 22 (Thursday) - *Sanctuary Station*, by Brigid McCaffrey (in person!)  
 May 25 - Co-presenting Works by Nam June Paik at the Philosophical Research Center

Memberships available, \$40 Student \$75 Individual, \$125 Dual, or \$225 Silver Nitrate

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