

NARRATIVE ACCOUNT OF CAREER --- Janis Crystal Lipzin -----

My artistic practice is centered on lens-based media where light and photo-chemistry collide and conspire to reveal aspects of our world deserving of more careful scrutiny. I approach the materials of cinema as media to be manipulated and shaped, just as a painter takes on pigment, and a sculptor marble or clay. I regard light-sensitive film to be a medium to be worked, marked, chemically altered, and affected by light both within and exterior to a camera. My initial training as a painter influences this approach to filmmaking as a handmade object — frame by frame. Process is key to my investigations which extend my practice to incorporate digital, synthetic precision in dialog with the unpredictability of the film emulsion's reaction to light and chemicals, while moving in time. I seek to disclose and engage with the themes and concerns of contemporary life which I address from a critical, aesthetic, and personal perspective, to create sensually rich and conceptually resonant experiences that amplify the contours of what is possible in film and video. I have used the moving image as an art medium since 1973.

Born in Colorado and raised near Buffalo, NY, I received early recognition at the age of 8 when I appeared on a local TV program for children called “Fun to Learn About Art” conducted by Howard Conant, the future Chair of NYU's Art Department. Every Wednesday, for a year, I made things on camera and admonished young TV viewers never to use a coloring book.

I entered Ohio University in 1963, an explosive year in the Civil Rights Movement which I immediately joined as a teen-age photographer and volunteer in SNCC's (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) historic Voter Registration Drive in the segregated American south. In more recent years, my social activism led me to the Labor Movement where I have been a visible labor leader, forcefully defending the rights of college students and teachers as a Founding Member the eminent California Association of University Professors and frequent President of the Faculty Union of the San Francisco Art Institute.

Moving to New York in 1965, I pursued a career in painting while a student at New York University and regularly attended experimental film screenings by Andy Warhol at the legendary St. Marks Cinema. However, it wasn't until the early 1970s when I was living in Pittsburgh, that I fully recognized the creative potential of experimental filmmaking at a stunning lecture/screening by the renowned Stan Brakhage. Encouraged by classes at the lively Pittsburgh Filmmakers Workshop and in-depth discussions with visiting filmmakers hosted by the Carnegie Museum's Film Section curator Sally Dixon, I was privileged to know and work with the luminaries of the avant-garde film movement at its peak: James Broughton, Bruce Baillie, Carolee Schneemann, Joyce Wieland, Hollis Frampton, Scott Bartlett, Ondine. In this environment of intense incubation, I made my first films two of which were purchased by the **Carnegie Museum** in 1977: *Visible Inventory 1: Flapping Things* and *L.A. Carwash*.

Provoked by a growing awareness of the inequity faced by women artists, I curated the film/video section of the **The First Juried Exhibition of Pennsylvania Women Artists** which took place at Carlow College in Pittsburgh in 1974. This early curatorial success led to a life-long

commitment to promoting and advancing the work of marginalized film artists . When I moved to San Francisco, I founded **Eye Music: Filmworks Series**, in 1975, an influential forerunner to the current microcinema movement. With grants from the **National Endowment for the Arts** and the **California Arts Council** (1977 and 1983) Eye Music produced media events at 80 Langton Street, the acclaimed **Exploratorium Museum**, and the California Gallery where I brought moving image art into startling and diverse contexts with other art media and scientific disciplines. Eye Music received prominent recognition in 2010-11 in the Pacific Film Archive's historic book and exhibition, ***Radical Light: Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area 1945-2000***. Eye Music is presently the subject of an on-going study of artist-run micro-cinemas by Tanya Zimbardo, Film Curator at **SFMOMA**. When I moved to Ohio in 1976 at the invitation of Tony Conrad to succeed him as Director of the Film/Photography Program at **Antioch College**, I organized and co-directed the Miami Valley Home Movie Festival, a lively community screening that received grant support from the **Ohio Arts Council** in 1977 . Back in San Francisco, I sustained rewarding collaborations with the **San Francisco Cinémathèque** with whom I curated a range of noteworthy shows including the ground-breaking film/performance series "Perforated Spaces" in 1984 [with support from the **San Francisco Arts Commission**], "Homage to James Broughton" in 1999, and the "Oppositional & Stigmatized Cinema" series in 2007 .

During the past two decades, I have taken advantage of opportunities to present avant-garde cinema programs in some unusual international contexts. In 2003 I was invited to the **Experimental Film Today Conference** at the **University of Central Lancashire**, England, to present Selections from the **Seoul Festival of Experimental Super-8 Film** which I had curated for the **Ilju Arthouse** in Seoul. In 2004 I revived and directed the mordant **International SFAI Film/Video Festival** for two years, during which time I curated programs from this festival for the **Busan Asian Short Film Festival** in South Korea. That year I was invited by the **Cineteca Bologna Offi Cinema Festival** in Italy to curate a program of works from the San Francisco Art Institute. In 2007 I traveled to Southeast Asia by invitation from the grass-roots **Notthatbalai Arts Festival** in Kuala Lumpur. There, in addition to presenting a solo screening of my films, I curated two film shows for enthusiastic audiences and conducted an intense workshop in hand-made filmmaking for a group of 40 local artists in a steamy Malaysian warehouse. In 2010, in addition to exhibiting several of my films in the Pacific Film Archive's **Radical Light** series, I presented a film screening by essential yet marginalized women artists: "Women of the West: Bay Area Experimentalists of the '70s" at **Artists Television Access** in San Francisco's Mission District. In 2013, I co-curated the show "Exceptions to the Rule" at the **Kadist Foundation** in San Francisco, a "pop-up" show that argued for the relevance and visual experience of film in a networked future.

While I was in graduate school at the San Francisco Art Institute, my films began to receive notice and in 1976, ***The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar***, a film from my Masters Thesis, received an Honorable Mention in the venerable **Bellevue Film Festival** in Washington. Soon afterward, Larry Kardish, then Film Curator at the **MoMA**, said of another of my Master Thesis films, ***L.A. Carwash***, "a cinematic subject finally gets its due." And in his inimitable style,

Hollis Frampton quipped: “Lipzin’s films are just what the doctor ordered!” **The National Endowment for Arts** awarded me a Fellowship in 1983 to support the making of *Other Reckless Things* which, in the words of Steve Anker, Cal Arts Dean Emeritus of the School of Film/Video, “is a breakthrough work of the eighties that with unprecedented candor confronts the physical and emotional pains accompanying childbirth and the childbirth process in modern society.” *Other Reckless Things* won awards at the **Black Maria Film Festival** in 1987, the **Experimental Film Coalition Film Festival** in 1985, and the **San Francisco Art Institute Film Festival** in 1985 and was selected for the first **Parabola Arts Foundation** pioneering avant-garde film distribution project. To date this film has received screenings in more than seven countries and is a subject of a 2011 dissertation by Shira Bat-Ami Segal, “Home Movies and Home Birth—The Avant-garde Childbirth Film and Pregnancy in New Media” published by **Indiana University Press**. Segal is Director, Film Studies at SUNY Albany.

Since the 1980s my work has been part of an avant-garde art practice that sought to stretch the margins of film possibilities on two fronts: the overt content of the work and in the context in which it appears, creating contexts that altered the normal boundaries of engagement with the viewer. I broke out of the usual confines of cinema and took it to the street, the storefront windows, and an abandoned naval shipyard. In 1986 the **National Endowment for the Arts**, **California Arts Council**, and **American Film Institute** jointly awarded me a **Western States Regional Media Arts Fellowship** that supported my creation of the first of several viewer-activated window installations in urban settings. *Remote Sensing* was installed in a downtown San Francisco storefront in 1986 and resembled an archaeological site in the process of being excavated incorporating an embedded video loop of the abandoned Wigwam Motel, a construction of concrete teepees. At any hour of the night, groups of viewers—from tourists to homeless—gathered on the street to view this work. My viewer-activated film installation, *Cracks Between the Stones* was situated in a storefront and projected a super-8 film loop which questioned our assumptions about the role that evidence plays in forming our conclusions about human history. This project was supported by a travel grant from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1991 during which time I researched ancient megaliths and architectural ruins in Brittany. I later expanded the film component of this project to make a longer self-contained film of the same title, that premiered at my **solo Museum of Modern Art (NY)** show in 2000 and, along with my other small-gauge films, formed an essential part of the major retrospective, **Big As Life: An American History of 8mm Film** curated by Jytte Jenson at MoMA from 1998-2000. In 2006, the film, in a newly revised form, won a **Director’s Citation at the 25th Annual Black Maria Film and Video Festival**. Also that year, the film was the focus of a panel discussion at the **Slade College of Art** in London at their Topos 3 Symposium : “The Moving Image Between Art and Architecture.” British film scholar, Helen Horgan, is analyzing *Cracks Between the Stones*, as a case study for her DFA dissertation at the **University of Hertfordshire**, UK.

In 2001, the **San Francisco Cinémathèque** commissioned me to create an outdoor film work to commemorate this distinguished organization’s 40th anniversary. In response I created *Naval Compression*, a site-specific digital video that recalled the site’s forgotten history and was projected onto a 20-foot- high wall of a former power substation at Hunters Point Naval

Shipyard, the hazardous waste site. This popular community-wide event, **Sink or Swim** was attended by thousands of Bay Area spectators. My art practice has recently re-engaged with expanded and live cinema events by way of several commissioned projects. In 2014 **Mission Eye & Ear** in San Francisco approached me to create a work to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the legendary **Artists Television Access** (ATA) to be presented with live music performed by jazz composer Lisa Mezzacappa. In our collaboration, **Found and Lost**, found materials (home movie footage, Victrola recordings, promotional films) reflect on lost time and lost technologies. The success of this creative venture led Mezzacappa to commission me to make 4 films for her ambitious evening-long live event, **Glorious Ravage**, featuring a 14-piece improvisational orchestra and films by 4 makers which addressed the adventures & writings of women explorers of the early 20th century. My **Shut Out the Sun** and **Taxonomical** featured prominently in this noteworthy event performed in Los Angeles, Brooklyn, and San Francisco between 2015-2017. Los Angeles' **Echo Park Film Center** commissioned me to make a work for their 14th anniversary in 2015 for which I created **Covert Ciné**, a video reverie prompted by the sale of my father's final home on Covert Lane, created from hand-processed super-8mm film and cell phone video. Just before the pandemic struck in 2019, John Davis, Bay Area composer-filmmaker, invited me to participate in his novel interdisciplinary project, **Gravity Spells II**. This complex undertaking with 8 artists consists of a publication and a performance series and takes form as a collection of DVDs, LP records, and live cinema events. The live component was displaced from its original venue at **SF MoMA** by the pandemic and is now scheduled to occur in spring 2022 at The Lab in San Francisco. In this unique live series, my 20-minute film **Some Mistakes I Have Made** (silent version) will be paired with an improvisational composer/musician and coordinated with the publication to be disseminated by Bimodal Press next year.

In 1989, as land-use controversies erupted near my home and studio in rural Sonoma County in Northern California, my work began to investigate indigenous agricultural controversies and definitions of place. These concerns are reflected in my film **Seasonal Forces** which was funded in part by a 1990-1991 **National Endowment for the Arts/New Genres Individual Artist Grant** in conjunction with the **Sonoma County Foundation**. In this work, natural disasters and epiphanies in nature coexist on the skeletal remains of a film material which had a life time of only 30 years: super-8mm film stocks. Utilizing a medium considered obsolete in the age of digital imaging, brought to mind Aldo Leopold's 1949 memoir, *A Sand County Almanac*, in which he posed: "We face the question of whether a still higher standard of living is worth its cost in things natural and free," an observation which informs this work which was premiered at the **De Young Museum** in the show "Facing Eden: 100 Years of Landscape Art in the Bay Area." **Seasonal Forces** was prominently included in **"Big As Life: An American History of 8mm Films"** at the **MoMA, NY**, in 1998. In 1995 a sculptural offshoot from this film was acquired by the **Pamela Z Collection**. **Improbable Hybrids** my latest photographic series, which I launched during the current pandemic, visually merges unlikely varieties of plants in seductive ways to create mysterious images that question the genetic modification of nature.

<http://www.jclvision.com/photo-work.html>

In addition to my focus on alternative filmmaking, from the mid-1970s my work has followed a parallel track of making static images which was born when I began exploring the nature of light, color, and motion in the “Starflex Series” named for the amateur Kodak Brownie Starflex camera. This unpredictable tool allowed me to enter into a kind of conspiracy between film’s serendipitous response to light and unconventional photochemical processes. This work was featured in **The New Museum of Contemporary Art’s** 1980 “Outside New York” exhibition and was thusly described in *Artweek*: “... striking, dense, color fields and consecutive images printed seriatim which suggest a very slow cinematic experience... reminiscent of memorial events; Proustian in feeling; recalling the late Monet.” A work from my “Starflex Series” was acquired by the **C. Richard and Pamela Kramlich Collection of Media Art** (San Francisco) in 1984. I received funding for this work in the form of Fellowships and Individual Artists Grants from the **Ohio Arts Council** in 1979, 1981, and in 1980 with an **Antioch College Faculty Fund Grant**. In 1992, the **Di Rosa Foundation**, a major collection of California art, acquired my *Journey to Giverny*, a photo-based work that employed an atypical use of hand-applied photographic emulsion and was inspired by my research at Monet’s Gardens. During much of 2018 and 2019 I found myself completely absorbed with sequencing still images that I formed into a dozen hand-made artist books. Two of these books preceded and were later adapted into videos: *Las Manos* a celebration of farmworkers’ labor as exemplified in their well-worn work gloves, and *Some Mistakes I Have Made*, a reimagined record of ‘mistakes’ as evidenced by reels of typewriter correction tapes saved for 30 years. These and my other artist books were exhibited at the **Exploratorium Museum** in San Francisco in 2019 and in the Content international artist book exhibit at **Artery Gallery** in Davis, CA. in 2020. <http://www.jclvision.com/artist-books.html>

Recognizing the dearth of writing about avant-garde film, I have, since the 1980s, written more than 40 essays on alternative media for the *Cinemanews*, *Antioch Review*, *San Francisco International Film Festival Catalog*, *Cinezine*, *Idiolects*, *Millennium Film Journal* including four years’ work as Contributing Editor on Film for *Artweek*. In 1996, I published an exhibition catalog essay for the **Vacaville Museum’s** “Vaca Valley Visions: A Sense of Time and Place,” and *Some Thoughts on Super 8 at the Close of the 20th Century* for London’s “Viva 8 Festival,” catalog. I also wrote two catalog essays for the 1999 and 2000 “Small Windows International 8mm Film Festival” at **Yerba Buena Center for the Arts**, San Francisco. In 2003 I served as a consultant to Iris Nowell for her biography of my friend, *Joyce Wieland, a Life in Art*. My insider historical analysis of filmmaker/lab relations, “Why Didn’t I Work in Granite?,” commissioned by the **Pacific Film Archive** was published in 2011 in the book, *Radical Light: Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area 1945-2000*. Between 2009 and 2014 I served as Humanities Consultant [under a grant from the **California Council for the Humanities**] for the important documentary film project, *The Big Joy*, based on the life and work of my late friend and influential poet/filmmaker James Broughton. In 2011 I was invited by the **Konstmuseum** in Sweden to write a catalog essay entitled “Time Present” for Gunvor Nelson’s solo exhibition “alltintill/Near” which is also available online at www.agnesfilms.com. In 2012 I contributed an invitational essay entitled *A Materialist Film Practice in the Digital Age*, for *Millennium Film Journal’s* issue titled *Material Practice from Sprockets to Binaries*

and wrote a tribute to Jud Yalkut for the journal's 35th anniversary issue the next year. In recent years, I have been gratified that a number of international publications have sought my written contributions. Two such favorite experiences have been writing a foreword, "Making Films for Art's Sake," to Tony Wu's comprehensive book, *West of Taiwan/East of Asia: A Study of Asian Experimental Film*, published in Chinese in 2016 and consulting with Nicky Hamlyn & Al Rees on their exhaustive book, *Kurt Kren: Structural Films*, published in the UK by Intellect Press in 2016. However, my very favorite recent writing, "Thoughts on Meeting Bruce Baillie as a Young Film Artist" appears in *Bruce Baillie: Somewhere from Here to Heaven*, the bilingual English/Spanish tribute to my late friend Bruce Baillie, edited by Garbiñe Ortega, published in Mexico by Enterior XIII (2017). As my varied history of publication should indicate, I have been a zealous advocate for enlarging the understanding of and audience for experimental film for more than 40 years.

Critical writing about my media work has appeared from 1978 to the present in the *Village Voice*, *Art in America*, *San Francisco Examiner Datebook*, *West Magazine*, *Yesterday, Today, & Tomorrow: California Women Artists*, *Blimp Film Magazine (Vienna)*, *Independent America: New Film 1978-1988*, *Field of Vision*, *Soundings*, *Big As Life: An American History of 8mm Film* (MoMA), *The Film Appreciation Journal* of The Chinese Taipei Film Archive, *The Chicago Reader*, *Cinema Journal*, *Crossroads* by Robert Haller, and *Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film since 1965* by Paul Arthur and many online sources. Several European film scholars have taken keen notice of my work as evidenced by published studies that include German film scholar Jordis Lau's 2021 book *Appropriations of Literary Modernism in Media Art* which devotes a chapter to my film *Visible Inventory 6: Motel Dissolve*. Kim Knowles, Curator at the Edinburgh Film Festival, has discussed my films *Other Reckless Things* and *De Luce 1* and *2* in her 2020 book *Experimental Film and PhotoChemical Practices* and in her 2013 article "Blood, sweat and tears" in *Necrus European Journal of Media Studies*. My *De Luce 1* and *2* were again featured in the 2017 issue of Spain's *8 Super 8 Mostra de Cinema Periférico* and a collage from my film *Visible Inventory 9: Pattern of Events* was commissioned for and featured in *Canyon Cinemazine 6: Missed Connections* in 2019.

Between 1978 and 2009, it was my privilege to teach Filmmaking and Interdisciplinary studies to generations of students at the **San Francisco Art Institute**, one of the founding schools of 20th century media art, where I served as **Chair of the Filmmaking** Department for 12 terms. Scores of the aspiring artists whom I have nurtured and mentored in this influential program have won recognition in international media circles, several winning support from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation including Lynne Sachs, Laura Poitras, Scott Stark, Peggy Ahwesh, Joe Gibbons, Nina Fonoroff, and Jennifer Montgomery. Another former student, Rick Bahto, has created a film tribute entitled *12 Bagatelles for Janis Crystal Lipzin* which was projected continuously at the **Huntington Museum** in southern California throughout 2015. In 2016, I was honored that another former student from 1983, Rob Stephenson, (writer, composer, artist) dedicated his photo show at the **Maison De L'Université** in Rouen, France to me. In 1981, I taught in **San Francisco State University's** innovative Graduate Center for Interdisciplinary and Inter-media Arts. In 1994 I established the S.F. Art Institute's Interdisciplinary Program and was appointed the first **Associate Dean of the Undergraduate**

Studio Programs. By the turn of the 21st century, students were increasingly re-discovering the intimacy and rewards of hand-on physical processes in a world dominated by computers. Concurrent with these developments, I fashioned a bold and democratizing curriculum at the SFAI's Film Department. This student response to my **Subversive Cinema** course in hand-processing was typical: "It was like forging a sword to empower myself...Film is an art form like printmaking and painting. It is stronger, more powerful when it shows the trace of the artist's hand."

My 2009 digital film, ***De Luce 1: Vegetare***, created from painstakingly hand-processed super-8 film, grew out of years of aesthetic photo-chemical investigations with my students in these classes. ***De Luce 1: Vegetare*** blends my enduring interest in nature's volatile events with my sympathy for film's unpredictable response to light. By using darkroom processes I produced outcomes that allude to but don't truly describe color in the natural world vastly expanding Kodak's palette of color. This film has garnered international exposure with more than 33 screenings in 8 countries at many prestigious venues since it was released in 2009. It earned the **Director's Choice Award** in the **29th Black Maria Film + Video Festival** and was an Official Selection of both of the acclaimed **Edinburgh** and **San Francisco Film Festivals**. It was selected to commemorate **Canyon Cinema at 50 Years** at the **Havana (Cuba) Film Festival** and even traveled to Lithuania for the **Kaunas Biennial**.

During the subsequent decade, these deepening investigations into film's tactility and artisanal esthetics led to my creation of ***De Luce 2: Architectura, Micro-Celluloid Incidents in 4 Santas***, and ***Some Mistakes I Have Made. Micro-Celluloid Incidents in 4 Santas*** won the 2nd Jury Award at the **Montréal Underground Film Festival** and a Director's Choice Award at the **32nd Black Maria Film Festival** both in 2013. Generous support from the **Center for Cultural Innovation's Artist Grant** in 2014 supported the tools I needed to further innovate and develop this rigorous cinematic grammar. ***De Luce 2: Architectura*** was featured in the 2017 "Dreamlands" show at the **Whitney Museum**.

In 2010-11 my decades of activism in filmmaking community in the San Francisco Bay Area was chronicled in the historic Pacific Film Archive publication and exhibition, ***Radical Light: Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area 1945-2000***. In 2011 the **Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive** acquired my photo-work: "Time Line: Eye Music" for the Museum's permanent collection. In 2016 I spoke at the "Tribute to Roger Jacoby" at the Pacific Film Archive recalling our formative years as film artists in Pittsburgh in the '70s. The **Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive** has invited me to speak about and present the world premiere of my film ***Some Mistakes I Have Made***, on December 1, 2021, in conjunction with the museum's current ambitious exhibition "**New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century**." In this film, I ask the questions: "How often do we get to see our mistakes in life graphically recorded? Do these recordings of past failures reveal any new meanings?" ***Shut Out the Sun***, my 2015 film re-imagining the exploits of Louise Boyd's 1928 expedition to the Arctic, also will be screened next month in this groundbreaking exhibition.

For the past several years, I have undertaken some significant preservation projects with support from the **Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC)** and the **National Endowment for the Arts**'

Preservation Access Program with which I restored my 50-minute 1976 half-inch video, *Franz Liszt (Friends' List)* to a modern digital format in 2013. Then in 2016, the **Carnegie Museum of Art** made digital preservation copies of 2 of my 16mm films in their collection: *Flapping Things* (1974) and *L.A. Carwash* (1975). I received support from the Interbay Cinema Society in 2019 with a Lightpress Grant which allowed me to digitize four 16mm films from the 1970s and 1980s: *Periodic Vibrations in An Elastic Medium*, *Visible Inventory 6: Motel Dissolve*, *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar (11.83 min. Version)*, and *Visible Inventory 9: Pattern of Events*. This grant finally made these films available in a contemporary digital format that is accessible to viewers and scholars globally and particularly facilitated the research for Jordis Tau's study of *Motel Dissolve* for her 2021 book: *Appropriations of Literary Modernism in Media Art*. The most obvious result of the digital conversion of these seven works has been to broaden the available audience for this pivotal period in my work from 1974 to 1981. Moreover, I've been excited to participate in two curated on-demand film distribution initiatives that have further re-energized appreciation of film as an art form. This year my video *Micro-Celluloid Incidents in 4 Santas* began streaming on the [kinoscope.com](https://www.kinoscope.com) platform and twelve of my films have been available online to diverse college and library audiences worldwide at [kanopy.com](https://www.kanopy.com) since 2015.

Canadian film artist, Joyce Wieland once observed that my work "pushes the boundaries of the subject to the limits of truth and echoes the work of Goya." Rather than acknowledge her words solely as evidence of some past accomplishment, I prefer to regard them as an aspiration for reimagining my future art practice, moving at full speed in unpredictable and transformative directions and never stopping.