



Joseph Horning: *Valerie* (1975). Still courtesy of the curator.

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

**Mon May 3 | 8:00 PM |
ONLINE**

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$10 [members \$8]

For tickets, please visit: [The Girl Can't Help It](#)

The Girl Can't Help It: Trans-Femme Portraits at the Dawn of the Sexual Revolution

Program curated by Dirty Looks' Bradford Nordeen

A platform for queer film, video, and performance founded in 2011 by CalArts alum, writer/curator Bradford Nordeen, Dirty Looks has dug deep into documents of trans history to assemble a program of archival drag and trans portrait films that spool from experimental cinema of the 1970s, activist video, and nightclub documents. Spanning decades of production, illuminating (lost?) queer histories and liminal spaces across America, *The Girl Can't Help It* screens poignant testimonials and early rhetorics of trans-

femme ideation. The centerpiece of the program, Joseph Horning's short film *Valerie*, has not been screened publicly since its inclusion in the 24th Ann Arbor Film Festival in 1975.

This program is not geoblocked. Ticket holders will have 72 hours to view the program once the screening has started.

Program contains discussions of early gender reassignment surgeries, details of police persecution and some brief nudity.

In person via Zoom: filmmaker Susan Milano; other filmmakers TBC; curator Bradford Nordeen

"...a reminder of just how radical queer love, lust, and visibility can be."
- *Hyperallergic*

"In our gay-marriage era, it's reassuring to know spaces like those fostered by Dirty Looks can be a forum for queerer politics to make a comeback."
- Artforum

The Program

Joseph Horning

Valerie, 16 min., 1975

This stunning, verité portrait of a Black transgender sex-worker living as a housewife in Ohio is a remarkable time capsule and a testament to a life of perseverance. The namesake protagonist speaks candidly about her dual life and addresses the prison industrial complex through which she is perpetually churned, as a queer person of color in the Midwest of the 1970s, a sex worker and a transgender woman, during a period when "cross-dressing" was still illegal and punishable with prison time.

Penelope Spheeris

I Don't Know, 20 min., 1970

A truly major work, *I Don't Know* observes the relationship between a lesbian and a transgender man who prefers to identify somewhere in between male and female, in an expression of personal ambiguity suggested by the film's title. This nonfiction film—an unusual, partly staged work of

semi-verité—is the first of director Spheeris’ films to fully embrace what would become her characteristic documentary style: probing, intimate, uncompromising and deeply meaningful. (Mark Toscano)

Preserved by the Academy Film Archive

Daniel D. Teoli Jr.

***Gone! Up in Smoke*, 7 min., 1975**

A student film starring transgender burlesque artist, Barbara LeMay, performing a partial reenactment of her signature act, the “hoochie show.” The film was made as a final project for a beginning filmmaking class at Los Angeles City College, though the professor banned its premiere screening for fear that the department would lose funding over the title’s “lewd” contents. “It was a different world in the 1970s. Almost no one had tattoos or piercings. Being transgender was under the table. Tuition at L.A.C.C. cost \$6.50 a semester and Cal State L.A. was \$63 a trimester. For one tuition fee a student could take as many classes as they liked.” (DDTJr)

Nikolai Ursin

***Behind Every Good Man*, 8 min., c. 1967**

Produced several years before the historic Stonewall uprising, *Behind Every Good Man* provides an illuminating glimpse into the life of an African-American trans woman. In strong contrast to the stereotypically negative and hostile depictions of transgender persons as seen through the lens of Hollywood at the time, the subject of Ursin's independent film is rendered as stable, hopeful and well-adjusted. The resulting intimate portrait serves as a rare cultural artifact of transgender life and African-American life in the US at the mid-century.

Restored digital film courtesy of the Outfest UCLA Legacy Collection. Restoration funding provided by the National Film Preservation Foundation.

Shridhar Bapat, Daniel Landau, Susan Milano, Garret Ormiston and Elyshia Pass

***Transsexuals*, 25 min., 1971**

In 1971, a group of students in New York City learning how to use the nascent technology of portable video interviewed Deborah Hartin for this

documentary short. Having spent 20-plus years trying to conform to life in the body of a man, she followed her destiny all the way to Casablanca to receive the gender affirmation surgery that she had long yearned for and had attempted to self-administer in the past. Along with Esther Reilly (who was recently post-operative) and others in the transgender community, Hartin shares her story, revealing how the procedure had transformed her body, her life and her activism. Technical limitations of that early video format were incompatible with commercial broadcasting requirements, so the program was never distributed and rarely shown publicly. The development of the digital era changed that, and in 2016 the original program was converted so it could be preserved. As such, it serves as an inflection point from which it is possible to spotlight how attitudes, medicine and human understanding of gender have - and have not - changed.

Bios

Joseph Horning (1945 – 1998) was a professor of photography and cinema at the Cleveland Institute of Art, producing a wealth of industrial films, ranging between topics from childrearing, dance to local historiography. He helmed projects (as director and cinematographer) centered around the Moog synthesizer and its musicians, like Pat Pace, and directed two LGBTQ short portrait films, *Bun Queen* and *Valerie*, which screened in competition at the Ann Arbor Film Festival.

In 1971, **Susan Milano** became an assistant to John Reilly, her friend and co-founder of Global Village, where she learned, and then taught classes in video production. At the invitation of Steina Vasulka in 1972, she organized what came to be the first Women's Video Festival, at the Kitchen, and went on to produce numerous iterations of the show in the US and abroad, the last of which took place in 1980. During those years she directed the video program at the Women's Interart Center, a feminist hotbed in Hell's Kitchen, and ultimately took a workshop with Shirley Clarke, who invited her to join the TeePee Videospace Troupe based in Clarke's tower residence on top of the Chelsea Hotel.

Milano went on to create interactive video environments and gallery installations, one of which, *BackSeat*, was a show of video in automobiles which she produced with *Videofreex*, Nancy Cain and Bart Friedman in 1978. Bad habits like food, shelter, and clothing eventually led her to the field of

commercial video production. For more than 20 years she worked for Japanese producers, directors and networks shooting on location all across America.

Often referred to as a rock 'n' roll anthropologist, **Penelope Spheeris** currently lives in Los Angeles. As a child, Spheeris lived with her family in different trailer parks throughout southern California. She spent her teenage years in Orange County, graduating from Westminster High School with a daunting "most likely to succeed" label. Working as a waitress at Denny's and IHOP, Spheeris put herself through film school and worked as a film editor and a cinematographer before forming her own company in 1974—ROCK 'N REEL, the first Los Angeles production company specializing in music videos. Spheeris produced, directed, and edited videos for major bands throughout the '70s and '80s. Her feature film debut was the 1979 documentary on the L.A. punk scene, *The Decline of Western Civilization*, which received stunning critical reviews. Spheeris is a prolific documentarian and feature-film and television director whose credits include the two follow-up installments to her debut: *The Decline of Western Civilization Parts II and III*, as well as the narrative films *Dudes*, *SubURbia*, and *Wayne's World*. Spheeris' daughter Anna Fox produced the DVD/BluRay box set of *The Decline of Western Civilization*.

Daniel D. Teoli Jr. is a self-described, "Curator... Archivist... Historian... World Leader in Circular Fisheye & Infrared Flash Street Photography... Highest Level Candid Photography... Landmark Artist's Books... Underground Social Documentary Photography... Experimental Filmmaker... Audio Archivist... World Record Holder."

Nikolai Ursin was a film student (MFA '71) at UCLA and was partners with artist Norman Yonemoto when he filmed *Behind Every Good Man*. Upon graduation, and under the name of Nick Elliot, Ursin photographed some of the most significant pornographic features produced by key auteurs, like Tom DeSimone, Joe Gage, Fred Halsted, Steve Scott and Matt Sterling. Ursin also produced the features *Two Days in a Hot Place*; Yonemoto's feature, *Brothers* (co-starring Penelope Spheeris in a non-hardcore role); *Three-Day Pass*; *Morning, Noon and Night*; and *Snowballing*, the latter three he also directed.

Curator's Bio

Bradford Nordeen is a writer, curator and the founder of Dirty Looks Inc. He has written for *Frieze*, *Art in America*, *Afterimage*, and *Butt Magazine*, and was a 2018 recipient of the Creative Capital / Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. He was Platinum Programmer for Outfest Los Angeles (2013-2016), and guest curator for the inaugural season of public programs at The Broad Museum. He has curated exhibitions and screenings at ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Film Society at Lincoln Center, Museum of Modern Art, The Kitchen, SFMoMA, and The Hammer Museum. His publications include *Because Horror* (with Johnny Ray Huston), *Check Your Vernacular*, *Dirty Looks at MoMA*, *Fever Pitch*, and the *Dirty Looks Volume* series (editor). Nordeen holds a BFA from CalArts and an MA in Contemporary Cinema Cultures from King's College London.

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