

# The Nation.

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## FILMS.

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By the time this appears, the Second New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival will have ended its run in Manhattan. But since there will be other showings—at Pittsburgh Filmmakers in October and at Hallwalls in Buffalo in November—a quick review might be in order.

I say “quick” because, of the films I’ve seen, most are candidates for conversion into guitar picks. Even if you love experimental films—and people have told me, often with a hint of condescension, that I have more tolerance than most—you’re likely to find the series a depressing affair. There are political films with all the nuance of a tantrum, formal essays with no sense of form, diary films by people who lead stunningly dull lives. Even George Kuchar, one of the filmmakers closest to my heart, falls flat this time. But before this starts to sound like a reactionary rant, let me point out two truly good films in the program.

The first is a revival of *je tu il elle*, a 1974 feature by Chantal Ackerman. Made at the beginning of her career, it is a slow, deliberate, studied film, organized neatly into three sections, each with its particular setting, action and personal relationship. The remarkable thing about *je tu il elle*, however, is not the dispassionate clarity of its form but the explosive power of its climax. The twin themes of this film, obsession and alienation, emerge in the first section, as the protagonist, alone in an all-but-unfur-

nished room, writes a letter to her absent lover while eating piles of sugar out of a brown paper bag. This goes on for quite a long time; but the attention one expends on this first sequence is more than repaid in the film’s final section. The protagonist connects with her lover—connects so thoroughly that audiences usually leave the theater a little glassy-eyed.

The second film worth noting is Su Friedrich’s *Gently Down the Stream*, which can be described about as easily as you can hold on to a handful of water. I cannot tell you what it’s about. I suspect Friedrich can’t, either, although she has tried honorably at times. Suffice it to say that she has an artist’s instinctive sense of film—she expresses herself in it with a freedom and rightness that strike the viewer immediately. When the last image leaves the screen, you may not be able to say what you’ve seen, but you know what you’ve felt. □