

## Local Spotlight

Su Friedrich's new film premieres at MadCat



Su Friedrich's *The Odds of Recovery*

Everyone knows what it's like at the doctor's office, where you undress, then sit in the drafty room for 30 minutes waiting for the doctor to show up. Everyone complains about it, too, but New York-based filmmaker Su Friedrich, who has a long history of medical problems, found something to do during that seemingly interminable wait. Armed with a Hi-8 camera, Friedrich has been clandestinely shooting her doctors' visits since 1998. "[The wait] gave me ample time," she says, "to study the room and figure out the optimal place to set up the camera."

This footage became the basis for Friedrich's first film since 1996's *Hide and Seek*, her award-winning exploration of growing up lesbian. *The Odds of Recovery*, which makes its world premiere this month in San Francisco at the MadCat Women's International Film Festival, traces Friedrich's personal medical history from knee surgery through the removal of her spleen to a long-overdue diagnosis of a hormone imbalance.

Although she eventually obtained signed releases, Friedrich hopes the implicated doctors never see the film. "I caught a few damning moments on camera," she says. Like the time after painful breast surgery when her physician has to be reminded about Friedrich's previously diagnosed high prolactin levels—a condition the doctor is just now linking to the need for the procedure. "I told her this already!" screams the superimposed title.

The film, however, is not merely an indictment of the healthcare system. It is also a journey through Friedrich's attempts to heal herself. "I was learning to garden, to do *t'ai chi*, to cook, and thereby eat better at home," she says. Friedrich shot 16mm footage of seasonal changes in her urban garden, the preparation of a shrimp curry dinner, and, through a series of intertitles, shares bits of *t'ai chi* wisdom. She also filmed the progress of a two-year embroidery project she sewed specifi-

cally for the film. Weaving these elements with the clandestine video of her doctors' visits—and transferring it all onto 16mm—Friedrich created a film that is part exposé, part advice, part meditation.

Friedrich, who has completed all but one of her works on film, describes herself as a "snob/traditionalist" regarding the differences between film and video. "[Video] simply doesn't look good enough—and it ends up costing more than we were led to believe," says Friedrich. She even ended up shooting the 250 intertitles in *The Odds of Recovery* on 16mm. "It was a ridiculous amount of work and time and headache. But since the intertitles were a substantial visual element throughout the film, I felt they needed to look as sharp as possible."

This perfectionism has always distinguished Friedrich's work, but, to a certain degree, has also contributed to her poor health. "After 25 years, I'm less interested in working around the clock, knocking myself out so utterly in order to get the work done." The process of making this film and the discoveries she made along the way have helped her feel better and taught her how to take it a little easier. "I stop and make dinner; I stop and hang out; I stop and garden," says Friedrich. "I'd like to continue learning how to be productive without taking down the whole ship in the process."—Shari Kizirian

Read excerpts from the interview with Su Friedrich at [www.filmarts.org](http://www.filmarts.org).

### MadCat Highlights

The sixth annual festival of women's experimental film hosts several world premieres, including Cade Bursell's *Test Sites*, made by scotch-taping found footage of atomic bomb tests onto 35mm stock. Making their Bay Area premieres are puppeteer and filmmaker Nancy Andrews's *The Reach of an Arm* and Natalija Vekic's lush fable *The Girl with the Pearl Suspended*, which screen as part of "Getting There," a program accompanied by live musical performances.

In recognition of the one-year anniversary of 9/11, MadCat pays homage to New York in "NYC, Just Like I Pictured It," featuring photographer Helen Levitt's *In the Street* and Abigail Child's *Some Exterior Presence*. Other programs include "Big Cities, Short Stories," films shot in hot spots around the world, and "This Crazy Thing Called Love," featuring Jen Sachs's *The Velvet Tigress*.

Su Friedrich attends the world premiere screenings of *The Odds of Recovery* on September 23 at the San Francisco Art Institute, in co-presentation with San Francisco Cinematheque, and again on September 26 at Berkeley's Pacific Film Archive.

For venues, dates, and program details, visit the Web site at [www.somaglow.com/madcat](http://www.somaglow.com/madcat).