

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

BAY AREA REPORTER

Vol. 32 • No. 38 • 19 September 2002



James Hamilton

Filmmaker Su Friedrich

Friedrich lays odds

World premiere at MadCat Film Fest

by Jenni Olson

Who says we don't have glamour and cinematic excitement here in San Francisco? Fuck Hollywood, we've got the MadCat Women's International Film Festival, running now through September 29 at a cool, funky film venue near you (including Artists Television Access, the back patio of El Rio, SF Art Institute and the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley).

If you only get to see one of the 50-plus films and videos on view at this year's MadCat Festival, be sure you make it to the September 23 world premiere of Su Friedrich's *The Odds of Recovery*. In this intimate experimental feature, Friedrich documents her years-long struggle with various health problems and her personal exploration of both Western and Eastern medicine. Friedrich will be in attendance at the screening (at the San Francisco Art Institute) and also at an encore screening on September 26 at the Pacific Film Archive.

One of the most esteemed experimental filmmakers working today, Friedrich, who happens to be a lesbian, has for the most part avoided making films "about" being a lesbian. And yet she always manages to have a uniquely queer perspective on her ostensibly "straight" topics. Her work continues to defy traditional genres, falling to rest in a hybrid genre of "personal films."

In a phone interview from her home in Brooklyn, New York, the 47-year-old Friedrich describes her vision for the film as a catalyst for people's own perspectives and emotions.

"While my particular story shapes the film," says Friedrich, "it's less important than the experience of the viewer, who should be free to remember his or her own stories, disapprove of, argue with, or identify with my experience."

"The film evolved over a three-year period, and it portrays very directly the complicated web of emotions that attend any medical problem — from fear and denial to diligence and faith," says Friedrich.

Bringing her Hi-8 videocamera along to her doctor's appointments, Friedrich documented her journey through the Western healthcare system. Correspondingly, she utilized 16mm film to explore Eastern medicine, martial arts and gardening.

The film is much more than an exploration of medical issues,

though, as Friedrich explains, "It's also about facing middle age and menopause, and about the fear of death."

Friedrich is a self-taught filmmaker who typically writes, produces, directs, shoots, and edits all of her films — and *The Odds of Recovery* is no exception (though she did have some assistance from cinematographer Joel Schlemowitz).

Bay Area queer audiences are most familiar with Friedrich's work from the Gay & Lesbian Film Festival. Frameline has shown all of her films over the years, including such highlights as her innovative and award-winning lesbian nun film, *Damned If You Don't* (1987), and Friedrich's poignant exploration of lesbian childhood, *Hide and Seek* (1996).

Over the years, Friedrich has blazed a path for a different kind of filmmaking — and a different kind of filmgoing experience. Lyrical, poetic, passionate and innovative, Friedrich's films are among the most rewarding cinematic delicacies you'll ever find. *The Odds of Recovery* continues on this path as Friedrich uses her own intimate personal experience as a lens for us to examine our lives, and experience our own vulnerability.

The Odds of Recovery screens at the San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut St., on Sept. 23 at 8 p.m.; and at the Pacific Film Archive, 2575 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, on Sept. 26 at 7 p.m. Su Friedrich will be in attendance at both screenings.

Tickets are \$7 and available at the door. MadCat Women's International Film Festival screenings are taking place throughout the month of September at four Bay Area venues: Artists Television Access, San Francisco Art Institute, El Rio and the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley. For more information, call the Madcat Hotline at (415) 436-9523, or visit www.somaglow.com/madcat. ▼