

Friedrich

the two women is not adroitly handled. Dede's decision to let Jane have Fred is not clearly dramatized; in fact, a number of scenes that begin with some promise of illuminating the similarities and differences of the two women end confusingly. Lacking the essential Aristotelian elements of a linear movement toward a conclusion and clearly drawn characters, the film becomes tedious and pointless; it is not rescued by an improbable conclusion and out-of-place melodramatic touches along the way. If Foster's point is to make some point about a mother's need to combine career aspirations for her child with unconditional elemental love and respect, the film only confusingly endorses such a position.

Foster waited four years before directing her follow-up effort, *Home for the Holidays*, in 1995. Continuing with the theme of parent-child relationships, the film stars Holly Hunter as the estranged daughter of a dysfunctional family who returns home to attempt to make peace. *Home for the Holidays* received mixed reviews, with some critics praising its dark humor and on-target picture of family life, while others claimed that the repeated clashes between parents and siblings made it difficult to watch. At any rate, the release of the film demonstrated that the multitalented Foster does intend to continue her pursuit of a directorial career.—R. BARTON PALMER

Friedrich, Su

American director

Born New Haven, Connecticut, 1954. **Education** Attended the University of Chicago, 1971-72; Oberlin College, art and art history, B.A., 1975. **Career** 1976—moved to New York; 1978—made her first film, *Hot Water*; part-time teacher of film production at the Millennium Film Workshop, New School for Social Research, and New York University; films have been the subject of retrospectives at numerous venues, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, National Film Theater (London), Stadtkino (Vienna), American Cinematheque (Los Angeles), and Anthology Film Archives (New York); active in many film-related and feminist endeavors. **Awards** Special Merit Award, Athens Film Festival, for *Cool Hands, Warm Heart*, 1979; Best Experimental Film Award, Athens Film Festival, and Best Experimental Narrative Award, Atlanta Film Festival, for *Damned if You Don't*, 1987; Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, 1989; Golden Gate Award, San Francisco Film Festival, Gold Juror's Choice Award, Charlotte Film and Video Festival, and Grand Prix, Melbourne Film Festival, for *Sink or Swim*, 1990; Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, 1990; National Endowment for the Arts grant, 1994; Best Narrative Film Award, Athens International Film Festival, and Outstanding Documentary Feature, Outfest '97, for *Hide and Seek*, 1996; Alpert Award, 1996. **Address** 222 East 5th Street, #6, New York, NY 10003, U.S.A.

Films as Director: 1978: *Hot Water* (short) (+ sc, ph, ed). 1979: *Cool Hands, Warm Heart* (short) (+ sc, ph, ed); *Scar Tissue* (short) (+ sc, ph, ed). 1980: *I Suggest Mine* (short) (+ sc, ph, ed). 1981: *Gently down the Stream* (short) (+ sc, ph, ed). 1982: *But No One* (short) (+ sc, ph, ed). 1984: *The Ties That Bind* (+ sc, ph, ed). 1987: *Damned if You Don't* (+ sc, ph, ed). 1990: *Sink or Swim* (+ sc, ph, ed). 1991: *First Comes Love* (short) (+ sc, ph, ed). 1993: *Rules of the Road* (+ sc, ph, ed); *The Lesbian Avengers Eat Fire Too* (video) (co-d with Baus, + co-ed). 1996: *Hide and Seek* (+ co-sc, ed).

Su Friedrich is a New York-based independent filmmaker whose work is intensely personal and often centers around issues of feminism, gender, identity, family, body politics, and

sexuality. Her work comes out of several key traditions within the American avant-garde such as structural, poetic, and autobiographical film. Friedrich's earliest short films in the late 1970s often revolved around specific female rituals such as shaving, or were primarily formal explorations concerned with the materiality of film. Friedrich achieved a certain maturity as a filmmaker with *Gently down the Stream* (1981), a film that combines formal experimentation and sophisticated film techniques with provocative subject matter. The film includes hand-scratched material (poetic text that was taken from a dream journal kept by the filmmaker over a period of several years), and photographed imagery that makes extensive use of the optical printer and rephotographed images. The film is primarily concerned with the emotional conflict between the filmmaker's Roman Catholic upbringing and her lesbian desires.



Su Friedrich. Photograph by James Hamilton.

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The hand-scratched poetic text and the lack of a soundtrack make watching *Gently down the Stream* a highly individuated experience since reading each word of scratched text as it is projected is an essential part of the viewing experience. The film is related in some ways to earlier structural films of the late 1960s and early 1970s by filmmakers such as Hollis Frampton and Owen Land (George Landow) whose films also contained rigorous structures and often involved the active participation of the viewer in similar forms of direct address. Friedrich's film has the added appeal of working with very emotional and intense subject matter. *Gently down the Stream* breaks new ground in its formal experimentation and the way it encourages a kind of cinematic stream of consciousness. This creates a particularly subjective film experience that also links Friedrich to Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage, who pioneered the experimental poetic form and also explored dream states in their films.

Friedrich's autobiographical explorations can be seen most clearly in *The Ties That Bind* (1984), one of her most well-known, longer-form films. This film is an evocative examination of the filmmaker's relationship to her mother. The film's structure revolves around Friedrich's mother answering the filmmaker's questions about her life in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The questions are once again scratched onto the celluloid. The photographed imagery not only includes footage of the filmmaker's mother at the present moment but images made while the filmmaker traveled in Germany, as well as footage from an antinuclear demonstration at a U.S. army base, archival war footage, home movies of Friedrich's parents together, footage from an early silent film, and other kinds of visual material. The sheer variety of photographed images in the film is astounding and is skillfully edited into a complex shape with the addition of the voice of the filmmaker's mother and scratched text. The complexities of the film extend to include an analysis of the filmmaker's views about war and the nature of human conflict, the positioning of women in society, and an examination of the filmmaker's German identity. The film is also

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significant within Friedrich's oeuvre in that the material is fairly accessible to an audience not necessarily familiar with or particularly interested in avant-garde cinema. But as Friedrich has stated, she herself enjoys "films that are both sensual and entertaining, that engage me emotionally as well as intellectually. I'm so bored by most films that are made in response to current film theory, and I've never felt obliged to use that sort of language in my own work."

Damned if You Don't, another key film from the 1980s, once again examines the filmmaker's Catholic upbringing and lesbian sexuality but in a more analytical way than the earlier films. It incorporates images from Pressburger and Powell's *Black Narcissus* (1947), one of the most sumptuous films made in the 1940s that, to some extent, depends on its extraordinary color photography for its aesthetic effect. Friedrich chooses to deliberately cut in black-and-white images from the film that have been transmitted on a television screen, thus neutralizing the aesthetic power of the Pressburger/Powell film almost entirely. The effect of this strategy is to allow Friedrich to explore the world of nuns in a more critical way and create her own discourse revolving around lesbian desire, the church, repression, and sexual politics. It is also a film that has a fair degree of humor in it, something absent from Friedrich's earlier work. The film offers the unstartling observation that some nuns suffer from sexual frustration and are attracted to other women. Whatever one may feel about the politics of the film and its critique, there is no denying that Friedrich created one of the most controversial and complex avant-garde films of the 1980s. Friedrich returned to specifically autobiographical investigations in one of her most recent long-form films, *Sink or Swim*, which is concerned with her relationship to her father. Once again Friedrich works with highly structured, rigorous forms, but as with all her work, the emotional, highly charged material makes watching the film a more engaging experience than earlier structuralist films.

Su Friedrich has undoubtedly created one of the most impressive bodies of work in recent years. Her explorations into cinematic form include exploring the film frame and screen surface, layering of the image and soundtrack, complex editing patterns, and the rhythmical possibilities of cinema. What sets her work apart, however, is that she never sacrifices emotional content in creating these complex forms. She is a filmmaker of great integrity and skill who continues to experiment with the film medium in ways that continually surprise and astonish audiences.—MARIO FALSETTO