

CAMERA FEMINA

Su Friedrich | TODAY
DCTV Firehouse Cinema | March 17-23

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Su Friedrich, TODAY. Image courtesy Icarus Films.

One of the pleasures of *Today* is seeing, through the lens of a fellow New Yorker and Bed-Stuy neighbor, highlights of the years just prior to the pandemic lockdown — shots of our city's fresh outrage at the 2016 election, wonderment at the 2017 eclipse, and mobilizing of local social justice groups pre-George Floyd, all feel like a time-capsule uncovered from a long ago-recent past. Time, and its passing, is at the heart of Friedrich's new slices-of-life film, by turns a personal memoir, tender portrait of a neighborhood, and moving commentary on aging and loss. We open with the calendrical – marking dates in a wall calendar – and see the recurring motif of a whirring ceiling fan, often abstracted to look horological. The film diaristically documents the next six years, a timespan marked out by significant deaths: between 2016 and 2018, the director loses her father, her mother, one of her best friends, and even her cat.

While illness and dying are the constants in the film, these deaths happen off-screen in a blink-and-you'd-miss-it way that reveal a clear-eyed recognition of life's cyclical processes rather than an eliding of its darker truths. Friedrich never shies away from looming mortality and the abjection and fragility of the aging body: the film opens on a truncated shot of a bed-ridden

convalescing foot, a recurring motif, alternating with her invalid father's Schiele-like emaciated limbs and her mother's knotty, wrinkled, liver-spotted hands. The director's unsparing eye fearlessly confronts these facts, documents them with dignity, then jauntily moves on. Jaunty may seem an odd descriptor for a film scored by so much personal loss, but the jubilation is resolutely threaded throughout as bright warp against the darker weft: block parties, flowers, birthday celebrations. And through it all, so much dancing — hula-hoopers, strip-teasers, block partiers, Zoom deathbed dance sessions, and even an astonishingly agile street marionette.



Su Friedrich, TODAY. Image courtesy Icarus Films.

Today's video images may initially seem far afield from Friedrich's early 16mm films; her medium has evolved, but she remains consistent in her experimental strategies: text overlaid on screen, jump cuts, freeze frames, the radically personal subjectivity punctuated with dry humor. Particularly poignant are moments of occasional dissonance between cheery onscreen conversations with her declining mother juxtaposed with the more somber interior monologue ("How much longer will she last?").

This sense of incongruity is captured in less moribund scenes that pinpoint the wacky and unexpected moments of contemporary life: on a street in Germany, pedestrians oblivious to marvelously gay traffic signals; on a beach in Greece, two cats, each coyly perched on the lounge chairs of the filmmaker and friend, gazing out at the sea. Friedrich is the master of the close-up, often in ways that render faraway places as very local: beach scenes on the Adriatic, a Black musician in a Chicago airport or a Romani musical trio on a German street, all seem like they could have been captured in Brighton Beach or Bed-Stuy.

These joyful moments of escape, whether as actual vacations or folded into more funereal itineraries, color the film in the luminous hues of a quasi-perpetual summer. Beach balls, balloons, kites, the circus, and pony rides with kindly cowboys evoke an Americana of a reassuringly nostalgic past whilst remaining grounded in gritty urban realities of the present. This ability to nimbly navigate both, like a high-wire artist in the film’s Ringling Circus scene, is one of *Today’s* many triumphs and feels perfectly in tune with our emergence from the dark ages of a pandemic. During her visits with her father in his dying days, he movingly recites to her Robert Frost’s “Come In.” Like the poem’s narrator, who is peering into a woods at night, Friedrich refuses to succumb “to the dark and lament” and decides instead, “*but no, I was out for stars.*”



Su Friedrich, TODAY. Image courtesy Icarus Films.

Today by Su Friedrich, 2022, US, 57 mins. (plus additional short film) in a limited run [March 17-23 at DCTV Firehouse Cinema](#). NYC premiere. Each screening is paired with one of Friedrich’s short films (along with director Q&A on March 17 and 19).

[Camera Femina review of Today by Su Friedrich](#)

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