

May – Jul

2018

Projection Series #10

Glitch Envy: Experimental Films

by Jodie Mack



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Glitch Envy: Experimental Films by Jodie Mack
12 May – 21 Jul 2018
Approximate running time: 45 min.

This programme may potentially trigger seizures for people with photosensitive epilepsy. Viewer discretion is advised.

Curated by Paul Brobbel
Essay by Jennifer Stob
Catalogue edited by Paul Brobbel

Presented in association with the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's exhibition, *Free Radicals: Cinema on the Wrong Side of the Tracks*, 12 May – 21 Jul 2018.

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The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre's state-of-the-art 62-seat cinema encourages audiences to experience the films of Len Lye and the wider world of local and international cinema. We welcome you to see historical experimental film, contemporary artists' moving image and regular film festival programming. At the heart of the Len Lye Centre's cinema programme is the Projection Series, our regular film programme surveying the landscape of historical and contemporary fine art filmmaking.

Cover:
Unsubscribe #3: Glitch Envy 2010

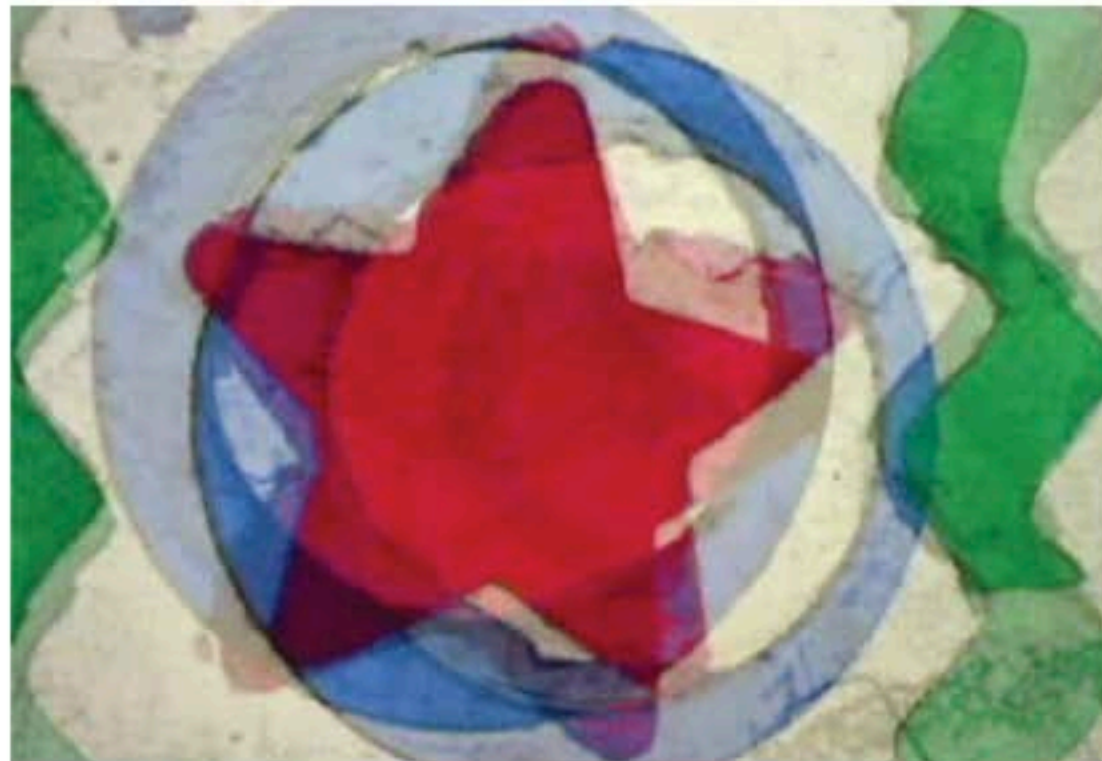
Len Lye Centre Cinema
Photo: Patrick Reynolds

Curator's Foreword

Paul Brobbel Len Lye Curator,
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Projection Series #10 marks three years of our Projection Series, reintroduced to the Govett-Brewster's programme with the opening of the Len Lye Centre in 2015. It is fitting that we celebrate with a programme dedicated to the films of Jodie Mack whose work exemplifies the energy, exploration and sheer thrill that we've come to know through the legacy of Len Lye. *Glitch Envy* is the first survey of Mack's work presented in Aotearoa New Zealand and a longstanding Gallery ambition.

To accompany this programme we have commissioned a short essay on Mack's work from film scholar Jennifer Stob.



All Stars 2006

Archive Fervor

Jennifer Stob,
Texas State University

"Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic," wrote Stan Brakhage in 1963.¹ For more than fifty years, that idea was foundational for Brakhage's gaze-obsessed artistry. Thanks to his films and *Metaphors on Vision*, his manifesto that opens with those lines, Brakhage's imagination has become equally foundational for film art at large. It has made him one of the most influential experimental filmmakers of the twentieth century.

We glimpse that romantic influence in one of the early films of Jodie Mack. *Ebullition* (2004) is an abstract, cameraless film that bathes our eyes in ribbons of rainbow color. Bubble bursts of clear acetate punctuate our sensation of slipping and sliding around in the film, with no foreground or background for orientation. Brakhage, too, gave us hand-painted colourfalls. Like his moth wings, neon lights, tangled limbs, and treetops, Mack's *Ebullition* defies compositional logic in every film frame.

As meaningful as Brakhage is for experimental filmmaking, Mack has never mistaken his direction for destiny. She has found a number of his experimental film peers just as meaningful. Filmmakers like Mary Ellen Bute, Len Lye, Norman McLaren and Marie Menken were just as eager as Brakhage to imagine unruly eyes, but they did so with quite different formal means: stencils and stamps, rotoscoping and stop-motion cinematography, percussion and melody. In recent years, these experimental filmmakers have enjoyed newfound prominence in festivals, exhibitions and anthologies. For Mack, their work represents an alternative way to treasure fragments of the everyday in the medium of celluloid film.

The selection of her films included in the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's *Glitch Envy* form a clever survey of the ways Mack carries forward the traditions of visual music, animation and collage. Like her forebears, Mack supports, but also inverts Brakhage's suggestion that experimental film should be an "adventure of perception".² Her films emphasize the perception of adventure in all of the materials that surround us. *A Joy* (2005) and *All Stars* (2006) are good examples of this spirit of discovery amidst the quotidian. By way of direct animation,



stained glass contact paper and hole punches yield bright, shivering stars and numbers. These films bring to mind the marquee lights of movie palaces, or the excited proclamations of party banners. Any of the objects that populate our city blocks and shopping carts hold similar promise, similar visions.

Sometimes Mack's perception of adventure takes the form of homage: *Posthaste Perennial Pattern* (2010) lovingly revisits the raucous, nonstop birdcalls and floral close-ups of Marie Menken's *Glimpse of the Garden* (1957). If Menken's film raises the suspicion that there is something artificial in her superficially cheery pans over Dwight Ripley's blossoms and succulents, Mack confirms it with flowers printed on polyester. *Posthaste Perennial Pattern* reminds us of our distance from the natural world, even if we love it enough to cover our blouses and dresses with its shapes. These notes of discord that both women introduce into their garden glimpses are slyly feminist. Shot in her husband's lover's garden, Menken's film created space for her within her domestic partnership as well as within the boy's club of late fifties independent film in New York City. Mack's film celebrates vintage culture – particularly its feminine side – by overwhelming us with its vibrant, psychedelic depth.

Left: *A Joy* 2005

Right: *Blanket Statement #1: Home is Where the Heart is* 2012



Films like *Razzle Dazzle* (2014) and *Blanket Statement #1: Home is Where the Heart is* (2012) continue this affirmation of women's play and women's work in their close-ups of cheap, sequined discowear and patchwork quilts, respectively. Here again, the edited footage encourages our gaze to knock around, investigating optical depth, refracted light and illusion with a material basis and a casualness largely absent from lyrical film. Consequently, most of Mack's films don't skip over the collective self in their oscillation of sights for our inner and outer eyes; lyrical film often does.

Mack's strategy of appropriation ensures that film viewers always know her fabrics and papers had a use value and exchange value before they were encountered in projection. We are always left wondering what their original context might have been. This knowledge and curiosity brings us closer together as materiality's subjects, even if it may also provoke us to split into factions of pop culture admirers and pop culture detractors.

That split is clearest in *New Fancy Foils* (2013), made with booklets of embossed paper samples. The film is another razzle-dazzle pleasure for the eyes, full of paisley and shine, but Mack is careful to divulge the serial numbers at the margins of these sheets. The serial numbers invite us to contemplate these samples as emblematic of industrial capitalism's fully outmoded systems of order placement and fulfillment. Samples and swatches may still be around in physical form, but we capitalists in 2018



nearly go cross-eyed from the abundance of unsystematic, algorithmic, online applications now available to help us find commodities, organise them, compare them, and purchase them. These implicit associations in *New Fancy Foils* leave some audience members with a kind of dizziness that has more to do with the rapid change of consumer technologies than with the rhythmic counterpoint of flashing images.

Mack herself doesn't take sides. She chooses kitschy stuff to work with, then treats it with both ironic standoffishness and sincere affection. For her, what matters most is the rush that comes from putting together sound, image and object archives across commercial, chronological and functional boundaries. It's a rush alluded to with a fair measure of chagrin in a song by the band Roommate called "Curses", for which Mack has made a video: "I'm trying to protect my possessions, counting blessings and losing track again / I'm ransacking the past for believable masks of irredeemable men", Kent Lambert sings.

Just after this couplet, the flickering marbled paper featured in the video morphs from wispy, screensaver light beams into two dancers. Shot for shot, *Curses* (2016) reproduces moves from Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse's iconic dance sequence in the musical, *Singin' in the Rain* (1952).

New Fancy Foils 2013

Charisse's long scarf winds around Kelly in swirling silhouette, newly tangible and intangible at the same time. It is as if Mack has transported both Roommate's art pop and Stanley Donen's melodrama into the Gasparcolor universe of Len Lye's *Rainbow Dance* (1936). The five-minute video is straightforwardly catchy and emotionally tangled – as you like it, Mack suggests.

Inflecting 16mm filmmaking with new humour, new complexity, and, of course, the new visual vocabularies of digital life, Jodie Mack's work is in synch with an era in which many experimental filmmakers buy their celluloid stock on eBay, its thumbnail image displayed alongside used Fitbits and cubic zirconia earrings. Witness *Unsubscribe #3: Glitch Envy* (2010): in this film, snail mail and email ventriloquize each other. Advertisements are laboriously cut up, pasted together, and rearranged in the pixelated, multicolored format of malfunctioning digital images. Mack's voice thrums on the soundtrack, imitating the choppiness of a dropped cellphone call or badly loaded video in layered sound collage.

Film's ability to mix and match from both material and virtual archives only stokes what we can call Mack's archive fervor – her gusto for making sense and sensibility from material culture at hand.³ With archive fervor, there is no accounting for taste, and that suits Mack fine. It opens her films and her films' audiences further to more laughter and more philosophy. It is clear that her creations to come will continue to globalise and deterritorialise this love of archiving in both on- and offline worlds. Born a bit too late to be part of Generation X and a bit too early to be a Millennial, she was made for this. She is right at home in our strange, hand-glitched, tragicomic in-between.

1. Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*. Edited and with an introduction by P. Adams Sitney. (New York: Film Culture Inc., 1963), 28.
2. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, 28.
3. For more on "archive fever", the concept that my term playfully modifies and appropriates, see Jacques Derrida *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).



A Joy
2005

digital video (16mm original)
colour, sound, 3 min.



Razzle Dazzle
2014

digital video (16mm original)
colour, silent, 5 min.



**Posthaste Perennial
Pattern** 2010

digital video (16mm original)
colour, sound, 3:38 min.



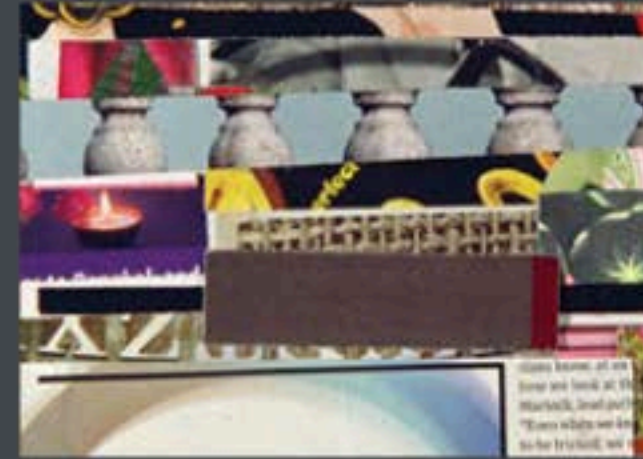
All Stars 2006

digital video (16mm original)
colour, sound, 0:24 min.



Curses
2016

digital video (16mm original)
colour, sound, 5 min.



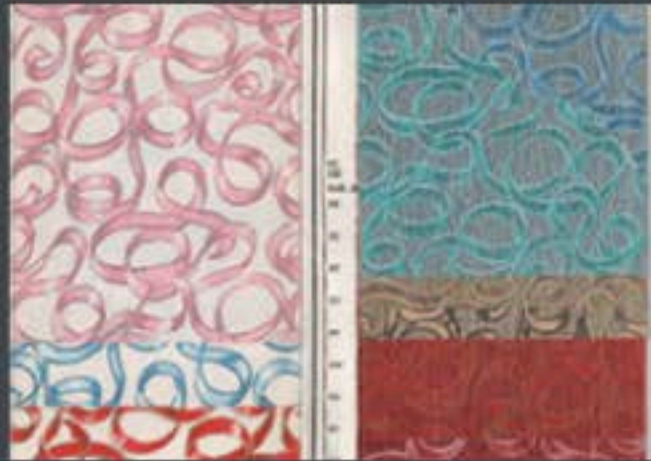
**Unsubscribe #3:
Glitch Envy** 2010

digital video (16mm original)
colour, sound, 5:45 min.



**Blanket Statement #1:
Home is Where the
Heart is** 2012

digital video (16mm original)
colour, sound, 3 min.

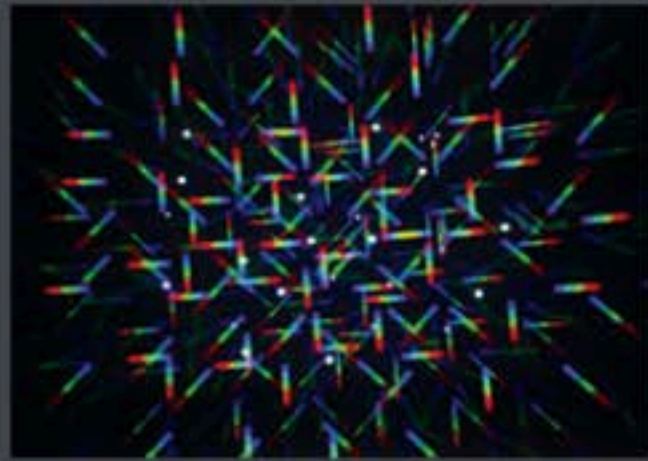


New Fancy Foils

2013

digital video (16mm original)

colour, silent, 12:30 min.



Holographic diffraction glasses
are provided for viewing this film.

Let Your Light Shine

2013

digital video (16mm original)

colour, sound, 3 min.

Unsubscribe #3: Glitch Envy 2010

