

Jeff Preiss

Orchard Documents

In collaboration with Moyra Davey (with Isaac Preiss and Barney Simon), Josiah McElheny, Andrea Fraser, Nicolás Guagnini, Anthony McCall, and Christian Philipp Müller

Opening Wednesday 7th October, 6pm-9pm

8th October-13th December 2026

Thursday-Sunday, 12-6pm

Introduction

Jeff Preiss's *Orchard Documents* are a series of experimental film collaborations the filmmaker made with other members of Orchard, a cooperatively run gallery that operated on New York City's Lower East Side between 2005 and 2008. Filmed within the context of exhibitions organised by the gallery's members, each document employs unique cinematographic techniques and formats to convey Orchard's activities over its three-year lifespan. The resulting films are more than an exhibition history, instead positing that documentation itself, through various forms, can be generative rather than purely representative.

For Preiss, the gallery was a studio and contained within it the raw material from which to generate moving image works that fall somewhere between experimental film and documentary.

Already a seasoned filmmaker and cinematographer by the time Orchard was founded, he was one of twelve members who co-ran the space. The other members included Rhea Anastas, Moyra Davey, Andrea Fraser, Nicolás Guagnini, Gareth James, Christian Philipp Müller, R.H. Quaytman, Karin Schneider, Jason Simon, John Yancy, Jr., and one anonymous member.

Together they operated and organised the gallery, with each individual eventually curating one exhibition of their choosing and another framing their own work. The programme reflected their diverse interests, which

encompassed painting, cinema, and post-conceptual practices.

To some extent, Orchard's collective structure had a direct and intentional lineage to historic film cooperatives, such as The Film-Makers' Cooperative and The Collective for Living Cinema. Yet the gallery was also established as a for-profit limited liability company (LLC) under the name Art Sales and Services, or ASS; a sardonic nod to the many woes of running a so-called alternative space in the market-dominated art world of NYC.

In the mid-2000s, during George W. Bush's second term, American politics was marked by intensifying ideological polarisation, growing public outrage over the Iraq War, and increasing concerns about the administration's commitment to democratic principles and constitutional constraints. Formed as an act of resistance to Bush's re-election as president, Orchard's three-year lease on an empty property in Manhattan was timed to expire at the end of his presidency in late 2008; a year which also saw the onset of the global financial crisis.

While the broader socio-political context in the US was the catalyst for the group, the gallery was firmly entrenched in its own locality, often confronting its own role in the gentrification of the area. When Orchard started, the Lower East Side had already begun to attract a new generation of downtown galleries and

art spaces, including Reena Spaulings Fine Art and Participant Inc., who were among the first to establish themselves there. In 2007, the New Museum reopened nearby on the Bowery. By 2008, the neighbourhood had become a primary destination to see art.

All seven *Orchard Documents* are presented at Cell Project Space, along with a sculptural film installation Preiss first made for a group show at Orchard. Since the *Orchard Documents* are not historical records in the traditional sense, the show also resists historicisation, or the chronological convention of retrospective exhibition-making; Preiss filmed consecutively with Orchard's exhibitions, and either made, or even remade, the documents during or after the gallery's run. Temporary walls pay homage to Orchard's original exhibition architecture, where sheetrock only partially covered the crumbling plaster at 47 Orchard Street.

Each of the *Orchard Documents* varies in style, in accordance with their respective collaborator and associated exhibition. Preiss's virtuosity as a filmmaker is present throughout, pulling from the conventions of home movies, the constraints of structural film, and techniques of classical filmmaking. While experimental in nature, the documents can also be seen as counterpoints to an increasingly prevalent condition within contemporary art; whereby installation views that circulate online flatten exhibitions into images. Whereas documentation today often functions as a form of publicity, Preiss's films expand upon the exhibition as a

medium from which to generate new material.

While not strictly documentation of Orchard's programme, the *Orchard Documents* reveal aspects of artistic practice and exhibition-making that typically remain unseen, such as the people involved and their personal lives. In Preiss's own words: "All documentation faces the question of whether to reveal itself as an outer layer of perspective. It is within the framework of that question where I open space for other narratives."

Curator Saim Demircan

Jeff Preiss is a New York-based filmmaker, cinematographer, and visual artist active since the 1980s. A founding member of the experimental gallery Orchard and former co-director of Films Charas, Preiss's work spans narrative and experimental cinema, with films preserved by Anthology Film Archives and the Andy Warhol Foundation. His projects have been shown internationally at venues including ICA, London and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and have involved collaborations with artists such as Joan Jonas, Andrea Fraser, Josiah McElheny, and Anthony McCall. He was Director of Photography for Bruce Weber's 'Let's Get Lost' (1989), and his 2014 feature Low Down won the Sundance Cinematography Award. Currently on the board of Light Industry, his film 'The Secret World' (2023), made in collaboration with the artist Josiah McElheny, was screened at MoMA in 2024.



1. Jeff Preiss, *Flicker/Dissolves* 2016 - Ongoing

Two works displayed in Cell Project Space's reading room provide the first insight into the experimental nature of Orchard. Preiss's *Flicker/Dissolves* is a seemingly endless film. Edited from thousands of stills taken from footage of the gallery originally produced as a method of generating superimposed images for an unpublished book, the work acts as a distillation of several approaches the filmmaker developed over the years. Preiss uses techniques synonymous with historical schools of filmmaking; for example, the flicker effect is epitomised by Tony Conrad's *The Flicker* (1966), while the slow dissolve transition is a familiar tool in film editing.

Flicker/Dissolves stitches together a deliberately incomplete collage of Orchard, through which the lives of those who ran the gallery are rendered visible alongside its programme. Throughout Preiss's film, friends and family members are often seen amongst images documenting installs, openings, and exhibitions.

2. Jeff Preiss with Christian Philipp Müller, *Orchard Document: Around the Corner* 2006

Exhibited alongside *Flicker/Dissolves* is *Orchard Document: Around the Corner*, which Preiss made in collaboration with fellow gallery member, artist Christian Philipp Müller. Müller organised *Around the Corner* at Orchard in 2006; an exhibition which included work by Zoe Leonard and Petra Wunderlich, as well as weekly tours led by Müller himself. The show centered on the Lower East Side and its shifting identity as seen through Leonard's images of storefronts and Wunderlich's medium format photographs of Synagogues. *Around the Corner* also included a screening of Ken Jacobs's renowned documentary *Orchard Street* (1955).

Preiss compiled and looped footage of and around Müller's walking tour of the Lower East Side, adding unedited audio from one of the tours. Before setting off, Müller talks about Orchard, the exhibition, and the works by Leonard and Wunderlich. His narration serves as an introduction to Orchard and its corresponding locale, while Müller describes how his tours aimed to "relate the white cube to the street".

In this sense, the repetition of Preiss's footage reinforces Orchard's position

within the neighbourhood. As Müller notes, the gallery was a storefront "blending in or standing out" among the surrounding businesses, many of which occupied the ground floors of tenement buildings that historically housed Jewish immigrants who had fled Europe during the Second World War. At one point, Müller mentions that certain buildings, including the one the gallery occupied, include a Star of David as an architectural feature.

3. Orchard Door Sign

4. Christian Philipp Müller, *Gertel's Bakery, Maxwell* 2006-2021

Several of Müller's photographs are also included in the show, such as *Gertel's Bakery, Maxwell* (2006-2021); a portrait of the kosher bake shop on Hester Street before it was demolished and replaced by a building where the gallery Maxwell Graham / Essex St relocated. Preiss can be seen in the corner of the image with his Bolex camera in hand.

5. Jeff Preiss with Moyra Davey, Isaac Preiss and Barney Simon, *Orchard Document: High school am over/gin crash* 2008

Artist and Orchard member Moyra Davey curated the 2008 exhibition entitled *Calendar of flowers, gin bottles, steak bones*, which included her own work alongside Claire Pentecost and James Welling. As a strategy for their collaboration, Preiss and Davey invited their respective children, Isaac Preiss and Barney Simon – friends since early childhood – to make a film within the context of the show. Isaac and Barney pretend to get drunk, ridicule the exhibition to the point of critique, and inadvertently document it in the process.

Filmed using a laptop webcam, the footage was intended as a diary entry for what was at the time Isaac's groundbreaking YouTube channel GLBTQ Community, where he shared the experiences of his transition; one of the first of the video diaries to be made from such a young perspective. Preiss then filmed the YouTube episode streaming from a computer screen, situating the work within this emerging mode of digital address.

6. Jeff Preiss, *Temple* 2006

Reality/Play was the first exhibition that Davey organised in 2006: a group show that included Preiss's work *Temple*. A simple wooden structure houses angled mirrors that reflect footage playing on small monitors to create a stereoscope. *Temple* is mounted low on the wall and accompanied by kindergarten chairs for viewing the work.

Originally, Preiss's footage featured a young Isaac watching a scene from the 1940 fantasy film, *The Blue Bird* in which a twelve-year old Shirley Temple argues over presents with her character's brother. For Preiss, his footage captures a formative moment for Isaac who, gleaning the film's queer potential, identified with the siblings as a single reflection of himself.

When he adapted *Temple* for the group exhibition, *There Were Gardens* at Kings Leap in New York City earlier this year, Preiss added documentation of artist Dara Birnbaum chairing a panel with her former assistants at Orchard. The talk was her contribution to *11 Sessions*, a series of presentations that took place at Orchard in 2008 organised by member Karin Schneider. In this instance, *Temple* is shown beneath a framed print of the flyer Birnbaum designed for her screening as part of the 2007 exhibition, *On the Collective for Living Cinema*. Birnbaum, who was a friend and mentor to Isaac, passed away in 2025.

7. Jeff Preiss with Andrea Fraser, *Orchard Document: May I Help You?* (text 1991) 2005

Left monitor:

Like many of Orchard's members, Andrea Fraser already had an established practice when she joined the group; her work was emblematic of Institutional Critique in the 1990s. *May I Help You?* (1991) was one of her earliest works, originally performed by actors posing as gallery staff at American Fine Arts as part of an exhibition by Allan McCollum entitled *Plaster Surrogates*.

In 2005, Preiss's film *Orchard Document: May I Help You?* documents Fraser performing the piece herself for the first time as her contribution to Orchard's inaugural exhibition, *Part One*. This group show featured work by all of the gallery's members alongside several pieces by their contemporaries, including a series of McCollum's original *Plaster Surrogates*.

Originally written as a monologue by Fraser, *May I Help You?* critiques class through a range of perspectives on art, spanning the registers of connoisseurship to hostile reception. Fraser's script pulls from a variety of sources including interviews in Laura de Coppet and Alan Jones's seminal *The Art Dealers* (1984) and case studies

from Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984).

At Orchard, Fraser greeted unsuspecting visitors as they entered the gallery, immediately drawing them into her performance in a somewhat disorientating, confrontational manner. Preiss filmed Fraser performing *May I Help You?* on 16mm over the course of the exhibition's closing day. The footage was then combined with material that he had previously filmed of the performance to create one continuous monologue. As such, Fraser's performance is seen from multiple timeframes, captured both from inside and outside the gallery at different times of day.

Preiss's film reveals the precision of Fraser's method; a consummate performer, her delivery of *May I Help You?* is akin to an actor repeatedly walking out onto a stage, reciting lines and hitting their marks on cue each time. This became apparent to Preiss after he synced the audio recording of one performance with the non-chronological edit and found that it matched seamlessly.

8. Jeff Preiss with Nicolás Guagnini, *Orchard Document: Discharge* 2005/06

Right monitor:

Preiss made *Discharge* with Nicolás Guagnini after the last day of Fraser's performance *May I Help You?* (2005). Lying on a piece of foam in the window of the gallery, Preiss filmed Guagnini as he underwent a Reichian therapeutic technique designed to produce intense, unfiltered emotion; in his case, it was anguish. The exercise itself involved rapidly moving one's eyes back and forth, a motion which mirrored a style of filming that Preiss was developing at the time.

As Preiss commented in an interview: "The idea of shooting such a private aspect of Nicolás's treatment came out of our discussion about the relationship between the language of film and the psyche" (*frieze*, 2022).

9. Jeff Preiss,
*Orchard Document:
Spring-Wound*
2005-2008

Centre monitor:

Orchard Document: Spring-Wound compiles 16mm footage that Preiss filmed within the timespan of Orchard's three-year programme, "between the time [he] first set foot in 47 Orchard Street and the last." The document consists entirely of manually operated reverse direction panning shots moving from right to left to right; a technique Preiss first developed while working on a film commissioned by architect Rem Koolhaas in 2004. Preiss has used this custom 'spring wound' technique in his work ever since. Layered over the film is audio of a slowly turning millstone, taken from Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1932 film *Vampyr*, that adds an aural sense of dragging to the viewer's constantly scanning eye movement.

Displayed in 2008 as part of Orchard's concluding exhibition *Spring Wound*, the document was shown as part of a triptych with Guagnini and Fraser's aforementioned contributions. The panning shots in *Orchard Document: Spring Wound* oscillate between *May I Help You?* and *Discharge*, and function, in a sense, as an interlocutor between their differing theoretical positions.

10. Christian
Philipp Müller,
*Orchard, May 19th,
2005 (I-III), 2005 -
2021*

This photograph triptych captures Fraser performing *May I Help You?* in front of Louise Lawler's work *The Princess, Now the Queen* (2005).

11a. Jeff Preiss
with Anthony McCall,
*Orchard Document:
Five-Minute Drawing*
2008

Two performances took place at the opening of the exhibition *Spring Wound*, one of which was Anthony McCall's *Five-Minute Drawing* (1974-2008). McCall originally performed it at Art Meeting Place in London in 1974, as part of an evening of five-minute presentations.

In 2008, McCall reperformed the work, which consisted of him striking five pieces of paper pinned to the wall, with charcoal-coated string. Preiss filmed the performance with a handheld digital camera, and two others fixed on tripods on either side of the wall. The footage alternates between these three perspectives at precise five second

intervals to geometrically map the space.

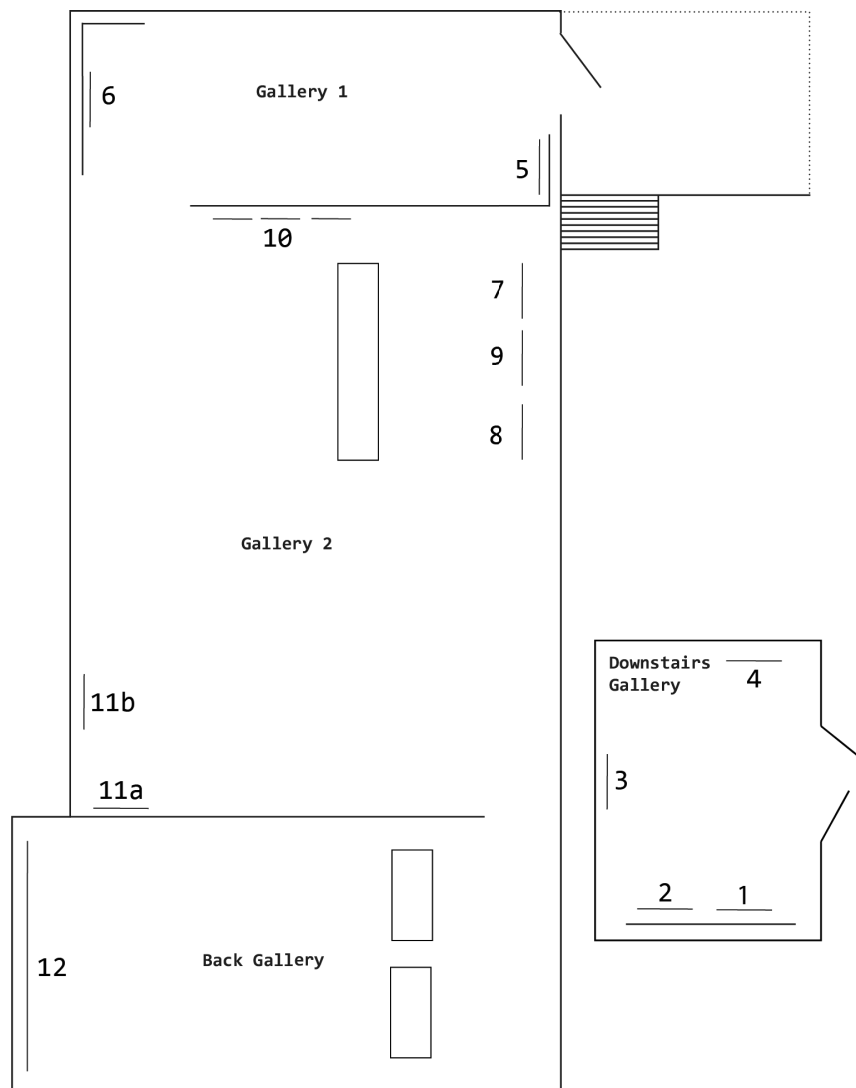
11b. Jeff Preiss
with Anthony McCall,
*Five-Minute
Drawing (for e-flux
Performance)*
2025

Preiss subsequently reworked the footage for another performance of *Five-Minute Drawing* in 2025 at e-flux in Brooklyn. By decoupling and time-delaying the RGB channels, he creates a multicoloured version of the original document that draws on artist Dan Graham's notion of the 'near-future' and the 'near-past' (as demonstrated in much of his own work such as *Present Continuous Past*, 1974).

12. Jeff Preiss with
Josiah McElheny,
*Orchard Document:
Light Club*
2008

Before *Five-Minute Drawing* was performed at the opening of *Spring Wound*, Josiah McElheny staged live readings of Paul Scheerbart's 1912 novella *Das Lichtklub von Batavia* (*The Light Club of Batavia*). During the show, McElheny and Preiss re-arranged glass columns that McElheny had used in an installation in Orchard's window to form a circle the diameter of Orchard's floorspace. Inside the circle, Preiss filmed a 360-degree panning shot with his Bolex camera set on its side. When projected, the resulting footage creates what appears to be a descent, mirroring Scheerbart's story about a spa for light bathing at the bottom of a mine shaft.

Like many of the *Orchard Documents*, the film is an abstracted schematic of the gallery. Here, however, the space itself is barely discernible; a brief glimpse of colour from neon signage across the street seen through the distorting lenses of McElheny's glass columns creates an intentional tribute to Stan Brakhage's *The Text of Light* (1974). The document features audio recordings of new translations of Scheerbart's text McElheny commissioned as a play, a poem, and a short story, read by Martin Beck, Andrea Geyer, Ulrike Müller, and Barbara Schroeder.



Downstairs Gallery

1. Jeff Preiss, *Flicker/Dissolves*, 2016 - Ongoing
16mm digital transfer
02:22:08

2. Jeff Preiss with Christian Philipp Müller, *Orchard Document: Around the Corner*, 2006
16mm digital transfer
01:52:36

3. Orchard Door Sign, 2005
Vinyl, plastic
2.5 x 7.5 cm

4. Christian Philipp Müller, *Gertel's Bakery, Maxwell*, 2006-2021
Digital C-type print
43.5 x 33.5 cm

Gallery 1

5. Jeff Preiss with Moyra Davey, Isaac Preiss and Barney Simon, *Orchard Document: High school am over/gin crash*, 2008
Webcam recording
00:28:30

6. Jeff Preiss, *Temple*, 2006
16mm digital transfer, Marshall monitors, plywood, mirrors, framed flyer (exhibition copy), kindergarten chairs
Dimensions variable

Gallery 2

7. Jeff Preiss with Andrea Fraser, *Orchard Document: May I Help You?* (text 1991), 2005
16mm digital transfer
00:14:02

8. Jeff Preiss with Nicolás Guagnini, *Orchard Document: Discharge*, 2005/06
16mm digital transfer
00:08:02

9. Jeff Preiss, *Orchard Document: Spring Wound*, 2005-2008
16mm digital transfer
01:49:37

10. Christian Philipp Müller, *Orchard, May 19th, 2005 (I-III)*, 2005 - 2021
Digital C-type print
(36 x 42 cm) x 3

11a. Jeff Preiss with Anthony McCall, *Orchard Document: Five-Minute Drawing*, 2008
HD video
00:07:34

11b. Jeff Preiss with Anthony McCall, *Five-Minute Drawing* (for e-flux Performance), 2025
HD video
00:09:19

Back Gallery

12. Jeff Preiss with Josiah McElheny, *Orchard Document: Light Club*, 2008
16mm digital transfer
01:10:24

Saim Demircan is a curator and writer. In recent years, he has curated solo shows with Malcolm Mooney at Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf (2024); Thomas Bayrle at Pinacoteca Agnelli, Turin (2023); Fausto Melotti at Hauser & Wirth, London (2022); Cy Gavin at Aspen Art Museum (2021), and Rachel Rose at Fridericianum, Kassel (2019). He was the 2017 recipient of the Goethe Institut New York's curatorial residency program, Ludlow 38 in New York City. Between 2012 and 2015 he was a curator at Kunstverein München in Munich. Previously, he curated a two-year program of off-site projects at Focal Point Gallery in Southend-on-Sea, as well as an exhibition of work by Kai Althoff. He is currently Artistic Director of INCURVA in Trapani, Sicily and a PhD candidate at Kingston School of Art.

Cell Project Space
258 Cambridge Heath Road
London E2 9DA
+44(0)207 241 3600
info@cellprojects.org
cellprojects.org



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