EN

Solveig Qu Suess
RED. A Love Letter
16.10.–28.11.2026

With *RED. A Love Letter,* Stadtgalerie Bern presents the first institutional solo exhibition by Swiss-Chinese artist and researcher Solveig Qu Suess. Expanding on her video *Litte Grass*, she develops an immersive installation spanning the gallery's three exhibition spaces.

The exhibition centres on Solveig Qu Suess's sensitive exploration of her mother Xin Li's life tracing a biography that remains only partially accessible. Due to a state-imposed confidentiality agreement, little is known about her mother's past working as an optical engineer in China in the 1980s. Drawing on letters, historical documents and optical lenses that refract light and distort images, Qu Suess uncovers new perspectives on her family history and its political and social contexts.

In *RED. A Love Letter*, Solveig Qu Suess explores how surveillance, state structures and technologies shape our perception and influence our understanding of our own histories. What do we remember, and what stories can we tell? What remains invisible? How might we rethink our identities beyond established facts and fixed narratives?

Room 1

The exhibition opens with a shifting play of light created by spotlights and optical lenses. The installation, entitled *Through and Through,* projects moving images reminiscent of those formed on the retina or captured under a microscope.

A monitor screens a promotional film produced by Carl Zeiss AG in the 1990s, *Semiconductor Technology Business Group, Division Semiconductor Optics*. Images of lenses, refracted light and futuristic-looking animations illustrate the emerging semiconductor industry and the manufacture of computer chips and optical devices. The film shows how the German technology company positioned itself as part of the international precision optics industry, highlighting both the meticulous work of its employees and the importance of global collaboration.

Both the light installation and the promotional film reference the professional environment in which the artist's parents met. Refraction is a recurring motif throughout the exhibition, suggesting that what we see is always shaped by the conditions under which we see it. For Solveig Qu Suess, lenses are not merely instruments of recording and control; they also evoke ruptures and shifts in perspective. Just as light changes direction as it passes through a lens, her relationship with her mother is shaped by gaps in the historical record and by different ways of seeing and remembering. The attempt to understand her mother's story and her own moves between personal memories and official state historical accounts, opening onto experiences of migration and the different ways in which truth is defined.

Room 2

Solveig Qu Suess' video work *Little Grass* lies at the heart of the exhibition, unfolding across two parts in the second and third exhibition spaces. Made while mother and daughter were living together during the pandemic, the film weaves this period of shared life into the artist's research into her mother's past, their different relationships to China and Switzerland, and the conditions that have shaped their lives across both places.

The film's personal quest begins with a question: how can she tell her mother's story when much of it remains inaccessible under a state-imposed confidentiality agreement, which her mother continues to respect? The daughter's desire for a coherent narrative is repeatedly frustrated by her mother's insistence that – to paraphrase – "It's not what you think it is."

Rather than resolving these uncertainties, the film traces the life of a woman who reflects on her role as a mother, her familial and social conditioning, and the life she built in Switzerland on her own terms. Bringing together family photographs, images from corporate archives, recorded conversations and quiet moments from their shared everyday life, Qu Suess creates a fragmentary love letter. Her efforts to make the archival material speak gradually turn into a conversation with herself. The film explores what it means to accept and understand one another across generations, while reckoning with family trauma and cultural difference.

The camera is central to this exploration of identity and family history, both as a tool behind the film and as a presence within it. It serves as a means of communication between mother and daughter, a way for the father to document family life for relatives abroad, and a surveillance device in the moth-

er's home. The camera captures both intimacy and estrangement; a family's desire to shape and stage its own image sits alongside a fragile relationship oscillating between trust, suspicion and control.

This interplay between documentation and fiction, between truth-seeking and speculative imagination, continues in the exhibition space. On a large magnetic wall, Solveig Qu Suess assembles her mother's letters, photographs, notebooks and archival materials from her years as an optical engineer. The documents open a window onto the correspondence with her parents following her move to Switzerland, the workings of Chinese bureaucracy and the social climate in Switzerland in the late 1980s.

On the opposite wall, photographic negatives from the family archive hang as though they had just been developed and left to dry. The artist's mother developed them herself in a makeshift darkroom in her apartment. They capture everyday life in Beijing, from spontaneous moments to carefully staged scenes, set against the turbulent backdrop of the revolutionary period.

Red-filtered light evokes the atmosphere of a photographic darkroom. The colour red is also often associated with passion and fear, two emotions that run through the film. As the colour with the longest wavelength in the visible spectrum, it also alludes to the optical phenomena that recur throughout the exhibition.

As a Swiss-Chinese filmmaker for whom identity has never been a given, Solveig Qu Suess gathers the historical traces that have shaped her life. Drawing on Julietta Singh's "No Archive Will Restore You", she explores how archives record, exclude and silence. Diaspora becomes an investigative method for tracing connections between migration, technological exchange, race and gender. By bringing family materials into conversation with corporate and official records, she questions their authority and opens possibilities for telling histories that remain incomplete.

Room 3

Soft, subdued light filters through window films that shift through the colours of the rainbow. Beanbags invite visitors to settle in and watch the second part of *Little Grass*.

The seating objects *A Certain Shape* are made from second-hand clothing that Solveig Qu Suess collected from Chinese thrift stores. They refer to a scene in the film in which Xin Li tries on her clothes while reflecting on their role in shaping her identity. Clothing is framed as a way of expressing belonging and asserting autonomy, but also a means through which social norms are imposed and negotiated.

One Hundred Keys brings together a selection of keys that belonged to the artist's grandmother. The work recalls a scene in the film in which Xin Li describes how her mother kept things locked away. Gathered here, the keys invite other associations. Possible openings, unexpected connections and passages yet to be found. Objects once used to secure boundaries become an invitation to imagine what might open.

Text: Eva-Maria Knüsel

EVENTS

Figures: Absent, Disparate, Close By
Sat/Sun, 17/18 October, 7 pm

Film screening featuring films by Reece Auguiste, Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi, Valentin Noujaïm, Christopher Radcliff, Lynne Sachs, Fiona Tan and Jiajia Zhang, curated by Solveig Qu Suess

This two-part film series expands on the exhibition's questions through cinematic perspectives on family and belonging. The selected works explore how cinema attempts to make family relationships and figures visible and comprehensible—and how this attempt often fails. Family emerges not as a clearly defined constellation, but as something at once familiar and foreign: emotionally charged, multifaceted and often difficult to grasp.

Starting from mother-daughter relationships, racialised and diasporic experiences, stories of exile and incomplete archives, the films explore how moving images express the desire to come closer to and better understand those nearest to us. Through the interplay of memory, performance and fragmentary storytelling, they examine the boundary between what images can make visible and what resists clear representation.

Languages: Original languages with English subtitles

Guided Exhibition Tour with Sign Language Interpretation
Thu, 5 November, 6 pm

Eva-Maria Knüsel, Director of Stadtgalerie, will lead a tour of the exhibition. Sign language interpreter Janet Fiebelkorn will provide simultaneous interpretation into sign language. Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing visitors are all warmly welcome!

Languages: German, sign language

Archives of Longing
Sun, 29 November, 2–6 pm

Workshop and conversation with Solveig Qu Suess and Suvi Rautio

What do family histories allow us to make sense of? Do they do more than respond to a longing and yearning for something we may no longer be able to grasp? Participants are invited to bring photographs, objects, moving images or other fragments from their family archives. Approaching diaspora as a form of investigation, we will consider how images move across generations and geographies, carrying fragments of relationships, political histories, silences and distances for which there may be no clear inventory. Through cutting, rearranging, writing, subtitling and sequencing, participants will experiment with images inherited from others.

No prior artistic experience is required. Please bring a small selection of materials, preferably copies of anything that should not be altered. The workshop concludes with a conversation between artist Solveig Qu Suess and anthropologist Suvi Rautio, followed by an informal sharing of participants' work.

Limited to 15 participants.

Registration is required by 22 November 2026 at stadtgalerie@bern.ch

Language: English (German translation available on request)

TEAM

Director and Curator: Eva-Maria Knüsel
Administration: Andrea Bracher
Technical Support: Verena Dietze
Exhibition Assistance: Christoph Studer, Milush Holzer, Urslé von Mathilde

Graphic Design: Amanda Haas
Photography: Cedric Mussano
Translation: Kate Whitebread

CREDITS FILM / EXHIBITION

Film: Solveig Qu Suess with Xin Li
Exhibition Design: Xiyun Dai and Meiqing Le
Research and Production Assistance: Zhixian Zhang
Music: Flora Yin Wong
Seating Production: Toni Tongyu Zhao

Exhibition Installation: Malin Dietze, Phil Flach
Video Support: Videocompany

Archives and Footage Courtesy of:
ZEISS Archives
Xin Li
Peter Suess

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Eva-Maria Knüsel, Andrea Bracher, Verena Dietze, Malin Dietze and Phil Flach; Hiob Brockenhaus, Bern; Moritz Hossli and Dimitri Fischer (Videocompany).

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SWISSLOS Kultur Kanton Bern
STANLEY THOMAS JOHNSON FOUNDATION
VIDEO COMPANY

Werkliste / List of Works

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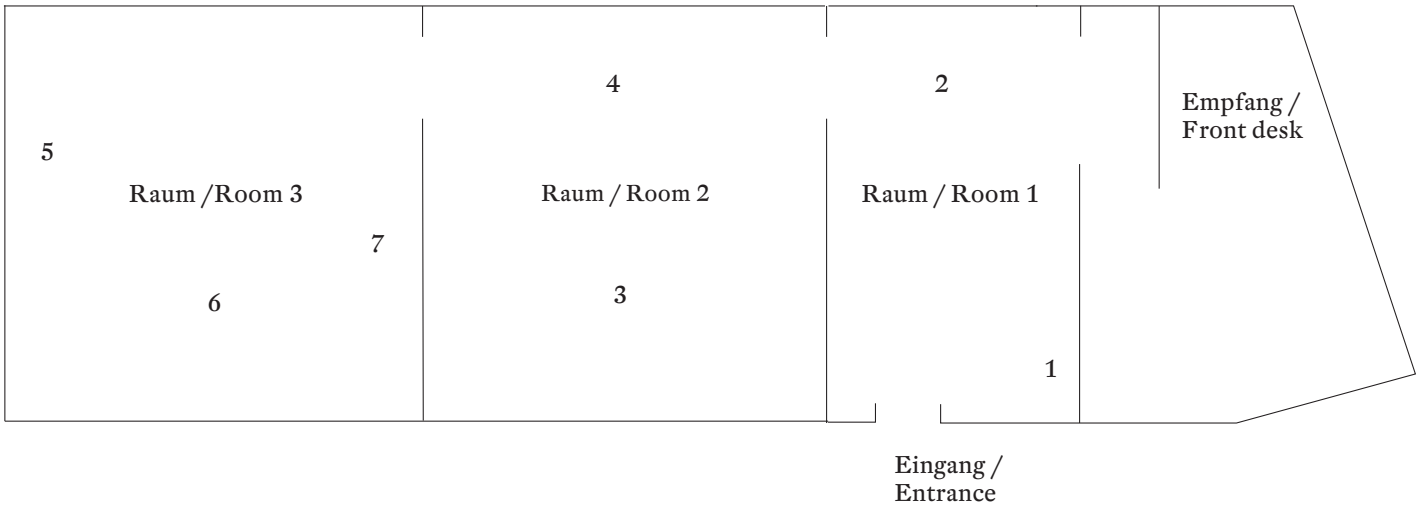

Raum / Room 1

1
Carl Zeiss AG
Semiconductor Technology Business Group, Division Semiconductor Optics, 1994
Produktion: N/W/F, Düsseldorf
SD Video, Stereosound, 21:56 min

2
Solveig Qu Suess
Through and Through, 2026
Hängende Installation mit chinesischen optischen Industriekomponenten (Linsen und optischen Planplatten), Aufhängungsdrähten und gerichteten Scheinwerfern / Suspended installation with Chinese industrial optical components (lenses and optical parallel flats), suspension wires, and directed light

Raum / Room 2

3
Solveig Qu Suess
Little Grass, Teil 1, 2026
HD Video, Stereosound, 34:52 min

4
Archivmaterial aus dem Besitz von Xin Li / Archival materials courtesy of Xin Li

Raum / Room 3

5
Solveig Qu Suess
Little Grass, Teil 2, 2026
HD Video, Stereosound, 34:52 min

6
Solveig Qu Suess
A Certain Shape, 2026
Drei textile Sitzskulpturen aus Secondhand-Kleidung, die in China gesammelt wurden, entstanden in Zusammenarbeit mit Toni Tongyu Zhao / Three textile seating sculptures made from second-hand clothing sourced across China, produced in collaboration with Toni Tongyu Zhao

7
Solveig Qu Suess
One Hundred Keys, 2026
Installation mit Schlüsseln aus Peking und aus dem Nachlass der Grossmutter der Künstlerin / Installation with keys sourced from Beijing and inherited from the artist's grandmother