DEVOTIONAL CINEMA
Films by Paul Winkler, Margaret Tait and Kobby Adi

— organised by Sarah Messerschmidt and Toyah Webb

If cinema has a language, that language might be found in its material. This summer screening brings together a selection of films by Paul Winkler, Margaret Tait, and Kobby Adi, artists whose work and practices find form as filmic alchemy. We borrow the title from Nathaniel Dorsky, who writes that the "union of material and subject" in filmmaking is an alchemical act, that through a fusion of the materiality of film and the transcendent properties of the image, "[filmmaking] is alive as a devotional form."[1]

The emphasis on work – film work, image work, writing work – in these respective practices elaborates Dorsky's premise, by conjuring, through the alchemical "union of material and subject" the essential language of experimental film. This, claims Dorsky, is a language that allows us to "experience what is hidden ...[and] the depth of our own reality." Yet the films brought together here are also alchemical in the ways they invoke the alchemist's obsession – as repetition, devotion, contemplation, and deferral.

Paul Winkler is an experimental filmmaker based in Sydney, Australia. Born in Hamburg in 1939, Winkler moved to Sydney in the 1950s, where he worked as a bricklayer. He began making short, abstract films thanks to the relative accessibility of cameras in Australia versus Germany, and where he joined the artist-led studio-cum-cinema collective, the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op. Completely self-taught, Winkler has described his films as "a synthesis of intellect and emotion, filtered through the plastic material of film". The result is kaleidoscopic and intensely textural, as Winkler refracts pictorial space through colour filters and composite images, producing a type of surrealist collage in motion.

Margaret Tait was a Scottish filmmaker, doctor, and poet. Born in Orkney in 1918, Tait described her moving image works as "film-poems". While the playful scratches on the acetate strips of Colour Poems (1974) evoke the experimental "Studies" of Oskar Fischinger – who viewed film as a "pure and abstract language" akin to music – Tait's affectionate documentation of Scotland's people and places strays from mere formalism, offering a window into her personal and quotidian world. In many cases, this type of visual representation – like a poetic enjambment – begins in language.

Kobby Adi currently lives and works in London, United Kingdom.

1 Nathaniel Dorsky, Devotional Cinema, 2003.

SCREENING LIST:

Kobby Adi, *Cloisters*, 2023-24, 16mm film transferred to 4K video, silent, 155.7 feet / 5: 46 min.
Courtesy the artist and FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna.

Margaret Tait, *Colour Poems*, 1974, 16mm film transferred to HD, sound, 12 min.
Courtesy LUX Moving Image.

Margaret Tait, *Aerial*, 16mm film transferred to SD digital file, sound, 4:13 min.

Paul Winkler, *Elevated Shores*, 1993, 16mm film transferred to digital, sound, 20:50 min.
Courtesy the artist.

Paul Winkler, *Chants*, 1975, 16mm film transferred to digital, sound, 14:34 min.
Courtesy the artist.

Paul Winkler, *Sydney Harbour Bridge*, 1977, 16mm film transferred to digital, sound, 12:37 min.
Courtesy the artist.