

June 12 – Aug. 02, 2014:

**Not a curse, nor a bargain,  
but a hymn**

Ursula Mayer

---

Audain Gallery

# Artist Talk: June 11, 7pm

## Opening: June 11, 8pm

---

### Events

**Opening Reception:**

Wednesday, June 11, 8pm  
Audain Gallery

**Artist Talk:**

*Ursula Mayer*  
Wednesday, June 11, 7pm  
Djavad Mowafaghian World Art Centre

**Screening:**

*Ursula Mayer: House of Mirrors*  
Monday, June 16, 7:30pm  
DIM Cinema at The Cinematheque

**No Looking After the Internet:**

*Laura Marks: Affective Analysis*  
Wednesday, July 9, 6pm  
Audain Gallery

**Exhibition Tour:**

*Amy Kazymierchyk*  
Saturday July 19, 1pm  
Audain Gallery

For more information about the events, please see the inside back cover, or visit our website at [www.sfugalleries.ca](http://www.sfugalleries.ca).

Audain Gallery is part of Simon Fraser University Galleries and a vital aspect of the Visual Art program in the School for the Contemporary Arts.

Encouraging conceptual and experimental projects that explore the dialogue between the social and the cultural in contemporary artistic practices, Audain Gallery's mission is to advance the aesthetic and discursive production and presentation of contemporary art through a responsive program of exhibitions.

Audain Gallery staff are Melanie O'Brien, SFU Galleries Director; Amy Kazymierchyk, Curator; and Brady Cranfield, Gallery Assistant.

For more information, please contact: [audaingallery@sfu.ca](mailto:audaingallery@sfu.ca).

*Not a curse, nor a bargain, but a hymn* is presented with support from The Austrian Federal Chancellery, Division II: Arts.

## ***Ursula Mayer: Not a curse, nor a bargain, but a hymn***

Ursula Mayer's practice is grounded in the semiotics of cinema. Her single and multi-channel films are crystalline circuits of images composed of signs borrowed from architecture, fashion, literature, politics, mythology, geology and visual art. These references cross multiple periods, locations, figures and works. Mayer uses the grammar of cinematography and montage to excavate how spatial composition, human choreography and narrative construction inform each other.

In her most recent body of work, Mayer also extends this grammar off screen. *Not a curse, nor a bargain, but a hymn* is a solo exhibition composed of two films, photographs, glass sculptures, fabric screens, collages and neon. The objects are displayed with the same attention to staging, framing and lighting that is evident in the films, creating a cinematic set in the gallery.

In these works, Mayer traces narratives on individualism, personal freedom and consumerism through pre-modern, modern and post-modern periods. She highlights Medea, Ayn Rand and Margaret Thatcher as symbolic figures from these periods, whose ideologies have accumulated in our increasingly individuated, neo-liberal ethos.

Mayer is also attuned to perceptions and representations of these figures' femininity, sexuality and power. The exhibition's title is borrowed from Mayer's film *Gonda* (2012). It is excerpted from a rhetorical question *Gonda* poses about the existence of an ideal woman like herself. To address the role that images play in the construction of private and social identity, Mayer composes reflexive loops between the gaze and gestures of the image and spectator.

Mayer enlists a number of theoretical, structural and material frameworks to parse the construction of visual language and its impact on social formation, including Patricia MacCormack's proposition for cinesexuality; Maria Fusco's liquification of grammar; Pier Paolo Pasolini's vision for a cinema of poetry; Gilles Deleuze's formulation on the crystals of time; Donna Haraway's cyborg manifesto; and Bruno Gironcoli's modernist sculpture. Mayer synthesizes these conceptual forces to transfigure the curse of idealism into a hymn.



## Looking at Ursula Mayer

Amy Kazymierchuk

At the entrance of the gallery you encounter an accretion of artifacts conserved in glass: newspaper clippings, black and white photographs, paperback books and stones. The images and objects in Ursula Mayer's *Revision in Power* (2013) are overlaid like the strata of organic and mineral deposits that cement over time to form sedimentary rock. Sediment that accrues in an environment has weathered from forms in various locations. Likewise, the elements in the vitrine have been culled from multiple sources and contexts. The matter and processes that compose sedimentary rocks are legible in their features, making them a key source of residual knowledge about the earth's history. What does Mayer's conglomerate of detritus in this work tell us about human history? The media, style and vernacular of the objects signify English culture in the twentieth-century. What does the repetition and obfuscation of Margaret Thatcher and Ayn Rand's portraits and texts say about modern and post-modern conditions? As you consider this, you hear a script spoken from further inside the gallery. The words settle like alluvium over the composition.

The alternating texts belong to two films projected on either side of a suspended screen. Neither the projection nor the audio of each film is self-contained; both spill out over the gallery and the other works. Actors, props and colour palettes from the films also emerge in Mayer's photographs, sculptures and collages.

JD Samson, the actor from Mayer's film *Medea* (2013) and Valentijn de Hingh, the actor from *Gonda* (2012), meet in the photo series *The Unbegotten* (2013). *Medea's* glass orb and necklace are staged amongst the collage tableaux, and the vivid colour fields in *Gonda* echo in the silk screens *Cave of Heart* (2013).

Cinematic gesture and grammar are operative throughout the exhibition, imprinting the gallery as a cinematic set. The *filmic* in Mayer's work is not restricted to moving images, but resonates in still images and objects, and their staging, lighting and framing. Roland Barthes observed that an expanded sense of the filmic could be read in the film still<sup>1</sup>. He suggested that the gravity of a filmed image (particularly its most "obtuse" or indescribable meaning) is more resonant in an apprehended frame than in a moving picture. Barthes reasoned that because he wasn't forced to look and read at the speed of the film's logical time, he was able to focus on the composition of time within the single frame. He didn't view the film still as a partial fragment from the whole of the film, but as a palimpsest of the whole film—the single celluloid frame bears the residual imprint of the entire sequence. Particularly because Barthes' reading of cinema is informed by his attention to photography, the relationship between Mayer's cinematic, photographic and material works

Opposite: *Revision in Power*, 2013. Books, newspapers, minerals, various dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.

can be viewed in a similar fashion. Her glass and polyester sculptures titled *Visceral Flowers* (2013) can be read as forms that bear traces of the films and their meaning. As Mayer is equally interested in the influence of cinematic language on real life gestures and vice versa, she composes a complex stratum of palimpsests, in which film props and historic artifacts are imprinted with each other's narratives.

Barthes' notion of film as a palimpsest can also be applied to how time and history figure within Mayer's films<sup>ii</sup>. In *Gonda*, derived from Ayn Rand's 1937 play *Ideal*, Hollywood actress Kay Gonda's quest for the ideals of personal strength, independent fortitude and individual prosperity are excised and de-constructed; yet the aura of Rand's objectivist philosophy is residually present in representations of contemporary fashion and commodity fetishes. In *Medea*, the myth of the Golden Fleece, a foreboding parable on greed, secularism and imperialism, resounds in images of contemporary war in the Middle East. As you watch Gonda

fall on her knees into the black ash of Mount Etna, you recall Maria Callas in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Medea* (1970) sinking her knees into foreign terrain and calling out, "Speak to me Earth, let me hear your voice. Can I no longer hear your voice? Speak to me Sun!"

Aggregating Barthes ideas on cinema with Henri Bergson's before him, Gilles Deleuze pictured the crystal and its multi-faceted structure as a simile for cinematic images that possess multiple perceptual and temporal perspectives, which he called "crystals of time"<sup>iii</sup>. He identified their prevalence in post WWII European cinema, which had shifted from action- to perception-driven narratives, catalyzed by the war's rupture of continuities and certitudes pertaining to the body, morality, faith and identity. In films of this post-modern era, time, movement and perception became tangled to form complex circuitries of waking life, dreams, recollections and premonitions; layered sheets of past, present and future; and dual facets of virtual and actual





representations. Films such as Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* (1975) are composed of crystals of time.

These films, which are the structural antecedents to Mayer's work, emerged parallel to Ayn Rand's literature (1936-1982), Margaret Thatcher's political career (1950-1990) and Bruno Gironcoli's sculpture practice (1951-2010), which together compose the conceptual bedrock of the work in *Not a curse, nor a bargain but a hymn*. Giorgio Agamben reflected back on the century in which these personas, ethos and practices emerged as the age that had lost its gestures<sup>iv</sup>. Agamben's gesture is the body's natural and fluid movement and its external expression of becoming, which succumbed to the restraints of the early twentieth-century, but was rescued by the emergence of cinema. Agamben articulated cinema as a sequence of gestures rather than images, which he

reasoned situated the medium in the realm of ethics and politics, rather than aesthetics. As the new sphere of gesture, cinema possessed the capacity to express the pure "being-in-language" of humanness—or embodied acts beyond psychology and speech, which life had been reduced to. Following Deleuze, Agamben articulated the emergent cinema as a movement-image of enacted gestures. However, just as modernity paralyzed corporeal gesture, post-modernity crippled cinematic gesture, transfiguring the movement-image into a time-image, and deflating the political potential of the gesture to the aesthetic allure of an image.

Poised at the edge of a grotto, Medea's gaze reaches out from a cold, hermetic eternity and catches yours. It has been caught before by the eye of Valentin de Hingh,

Opposite: Ursula Mayer, *Gonda* (detail), 2012. 16 mm HD transfer. Colour, sound, 28.05 min.

Above: *Medea*, 2013. 35 mm HD transfer. Colour, sound, 13.44 min.

Both courtesy of the artist, Juliëtte Jongma Gallery, Amsterdam; Krobath, Vienna/Berlin; Monitor, Rome.



reclining (in defiant pleasure against industrial, technological and fascist pressures on the body) on Bruno Gironcoli's sculptures in *The Unbegotten* photographs. Their bodies gaze out from the constraints of the aestheticized image. Mayer attempts to reclaim the politics of cinema by cultivating their gestures. In particular, her figures enact the political by defying the manners of categorical genders and sexualities. She is also conscious of the grammar of cinematography, which is the ethical act of translating gestures to an audience, and inciting the political in spectators.

Mayer's grammar is greatly influenced by Pasolini. In *Medea* (1970), he repeatedly shot Maria Callas in close and medium shots to emphasize her focus, intensity and passion. He regularly framed her in profile to highlight the duality of her regal stature and her beguiling vehemence. In these images, you can see Medea's eyes directly communing with the spirit of the old-world from which she sought guidance, in resistance

to the profane imperialism of the Argonauts—which Pasolini framed as an allegory for English consumer ideology bombarding Italy in the 1970s'. In *Revision in Power*, the endurance of Medea's wisdom is imbued in the stones and crystals that crush the portraits of Thatcher and Rand.

Patricia MacCormack, who wrote *Medea's* (2013) screenplay, is hopeful that we can reclaim our gestures and “in-language” humanness, as spectators of cinema. In particular she is interested in the “in-language” of desire and pleasure. In her writing on cinematic spectatorship, she is excited by gestures that extend beyond the continuums of masculine-feminine and heterosexual-homosexual into territory that is inhabited by asemiotic bodies with molecular sexualities. In this territory, which she calls cinesexuality, you are as crystalline as the images you are viewing<sup>vi</sup>.

Though you are inclined to be attracted to descriptive bodies and gestures of desire, cinesexuality appeals to your sensorial rather than interpretive experience of cinema. It suggests that expressive elements of cinema—light, colour, framing, pacing and sound—are equally arousing. By attuning to the visceral pleasure you experience when viewing aspects of cinema that are abstract, or asemiotic (without attributed meaning), you begin to

Above: *Prosthetic Kiss*, 2013. 3 glass/polyester objects, 40 x 25 cm each. Courtesy of the artist.

Opposite: *The Unbegotten (Discursive machine)*, 2013. Colour photographs, framed, 100 x 150 cm. Photography: Hannes Böck. Courtesy of the artist, Juliette Jongma Gallery, Amsterdam; Krobath, Vienna/Berlin; Monitor, Rome.

relinquish your private and social definitions and affinities. Your crystallization emerges through the erosion of your identity's bedrock, which has determined your body for production and reproduction. What pleasure do you derive from a staccato sequence of tri-colour fields, or the slow modulation of the colour spectrum? As you consider this, do you consider how your pleasure is political?

As cinesexuality is also a way of attuning to the filmic aspects of cinema, it further expands upon Roland Barthes' strategy to excavate film's indescribable meaning. Rather than attempt to describe the indescribable, Mayer suggests you relent to your awe—and allow it to become you.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills," *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977) 52-68.

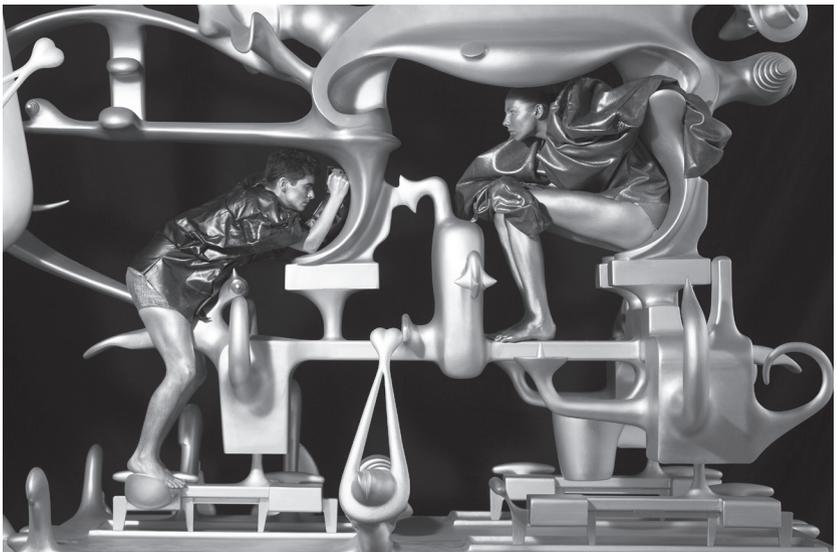
<sup>ii</sup> To construct these layered works, Mayer invited the collaboration of writer and art critic Maria Fusco to write the screenplay for *Gonda*, and feminist film theorist Patricia MacCormack to write *Medea*.

<sup>iii</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "The crystals of time," *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: Athlone, 1989) 68-97.

<sup>iv</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1992) 49-62.

<sup>v</sup> Colleen Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred: Women in the Cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 67-75.

<sup>vi</sup> Patricia MacCormack, *Cinesexuality* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008) 1-38.



## ***Ursula Mayer Biography***

Ursula Mayer is an Austrian artist who lives and works in London. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, and at Goldsmiths College, London. She has exhibited in major art festivals and institutions, such as Moderna Musset, Malmö; 21haus, Vienna; Ursula Blickle Foundation, Kraichtal; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Tramway, Glasgow; Performa 11, New York; 11th Baltic Triennial at CAC Vilnius; 2nd Athens Biennale; The Banff Centre; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunstverein Hamburg; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Whitechapel Gallery, London; MoMA PS1, New York; and Kunsthalle Basel.

## ***List of Works***

*Gonda*, 2012.

16 mm HD transfer. Colour, sound, 28.05 min. Courtesy of the artist, Juliëtte Jongma Gallery, Amsterdam; Krobath, Vienna/Berlin; Monitor, Rome.

*Medea*, 2013.

35 mm HD transfer. Colour, sound, 13.44 min. Courtesy of the artist, Juliëtte Jongma Gallery, Amsterdam; Krobath, Vienna/Berlin; Monitor, Rome.

*Revision in Power*, 2013.

Books, newspapers, minerals, various dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.

*Best Client*, 2013.

Newspaper collage, framed, 62 x 40 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

*Servant and Master*, 2013.

Newspaper collage, framed, 44 x 34 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

*Fire gleamed on the Altars*, 2013.

Newspaper, plexiglass, 5 parts, 30 x 40 cm each. Courtesy of the artist.

*Watcher & Participant*, 2013.

Original poster (mounted), plexiglass, 103 x 143 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

*Cave of Heart*, 2013.

Digital print on fabric, 6 banners, 346 x 140 cm each. Courtesy of the artist.

*Golden Fleece*, 2013.

Textile print, metal frame, glass, dimensions variable. Textile designed with Trine Hav Christensen. Courtesy of the artist.

*Prosthetic Kiss*, 2013.

3 glass/polyester objects, 40 x 25 cm each. Courtesy of the artist, Krobath, Vienna/Berlin.

*Visceral Flowers*, 2013.

2 glass/polyester objects, 47 x 15 cm, 32 x 20 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

*Forgotten Mistress*, 2013.

Neon, 245 x 195 cm. Designed with A Practice for Everyday Life, London. Courtesy of the artist.

*The Unbegotten*, 2013.

Series of color photographs, framed, 4 of 6 parts: Anti-species, 100 x 150 cm; Conceptual flesh, 150 x 100 cm; Discursive machine, 100 x 150 cm; Dying without Death, 150 x 100 cm. Photography: Hannes Böck. Courtesy of the artist, Juliëtte Jongma Gallery, Amsterdam; Krobath, Vienna/Berlin; Monitor, Rome.

## Events

### Opening Reception:

Wednesday, June 11, 8pm  
Audain Gallery

### Artist Talk:

*Ursula Mayer*  
Wednesday, June 11, 7pm  
Djavad Mowafaghian World Art Centre  
Simon Fraser University  
149 West Hastings Street

### Screening:

*Ursula Mayer: House of Mirrors*  
Monday, June 16, 7:30pm  
DIM Cinema at The Cinematheque  
1131 Howe Street  
[dimcinema.ca](http://dimcinema.ca) / [thecinematheque.ca](http://thecinematheque.ca)

Further unfolding the cinematic grammar of Ursula Mayer's films *Gonda* (2012) and *Medea* (2013), *House of Mirrors* is a survey of her cinematic work from 2005-2010, featuring *Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight* (2009), *The Lunch in Fur/Le Déjeuner en Fourrure* (2008), *The Crystal Gaze* (2007), *Interiors* (2006), *Portland Place 33* (2005), *Keeling House* (2006) and *Villa Mairea* (2006). Co-presented with DIM Cinema and The Cinematheque.

Christine Evans will introduce the *House of Mirrors* screening. Evans is a sessional instructor in Film Studies at the University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on the intersections between love, universality, Lacanian psychoanalysis and film theory.

### No Looking After the Internet:

*Laura U. Marks: Affective Analysis*  
Wednesday, July 9, 6pm  
Audain Gallery

Laura U. Marks will facilitate an open reading of Ursula Mayer's images using affective analysis, a method that postpones thinking in order to attend to affective and bodily responses and perceptions. *No Looking After the Internet* prompts the open reading of images and objects, and encourages visual literacy through sustained private and public attention in the gallery.

Laura U. Marks is a scholar, theorist and programmer of independent and experimental media arts. She teaches in the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University.

### Exhibition Tour:

*Amy Kazymierchuk*  
Saturday July 19, 1pm  
Audain Gallery

Join us for a tour of the exhibition led by curator Amy Kazymierchuk. Afterward, walk with us to the Satellite Gallery for a 2pm tour of *Welcome to Screenland* by guest curator Carolyn Jarvis, then continue to Contemporary Art Gallery for a 3pm tour of exhibitions by Kelly Richardson and Steffan Bruggemann led by director Nigel Prince.

SFU

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Audain Gallery

Simon Fraser University

Goldcorp Centre for the Arts

149 West Hastings Street

Vancouver, BC, Canada V6B 1H4

Tues. – Sat. 12–6pm

[audaingallery@sfu.ca](mailto:audaingallery@sfu.ca)

[www.sfugalleries.ca](http://www.sfugalleries.ca)

---

SUPPORTED BY:

BUNDESKANZLERAMT  ÖSTERREICH

KUNST