

Stand in the Stream

By Stanya Kahn ©2017

HD digital video with sound, TRT: 60:24.

Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

“The dialectical image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast—as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability.”

—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

Stand in the Stream is a fast-paced digital film about life and death and the inextricability of the personal from the political. Made over the course of six years and shot on multiple camera formats to reflect our screen-saturated contemporary perspectives, it captures candid moments in online chat rooms, in the home, in the wild, in the streets, following the arc of a mother's deterioration and death amidst shifting political and digital landscapes. From the birth of a child to the onset of dementia, from Tahrir Square to Standing Rock and Trump's inauguration, *Stand in the Stream* is an urgent contemporary ode and call to action.

Made from live action footage interwoven with live video captured from online streams, *Stand in the Stream* is dense with years of footage and edited with the speed and intensity of its pulsing soundtrack, echoing the accelerated rhythms of contemporary life. Following narratives of change, the film documents the deterioration of the filmmaker's “worker/activist mother,” her own role as a mother, and the tactics, demands, and modes of visibility linking resistance movements across the globe.

Set within the context of Kahn's persistent shooting of daily life and screen recordings of live-stream events online, the intimately personal is woven with the radically public, caught with various devices, mirroring our increasingly blended onscreen and IRL lives. History here is speeding and dynamic, a storm to be watched and catalogued, even while it resists categorization. Personal life here is inextricable from politicized being. Varying stakes in participation and accountability move in and out of focus as we slide from the tangible world to comment feeds, to independent live-streams and back.

While the landscape of the computer screen and its vortex of windows is a recurring location, and all interactions are mediated by a lens, *Stand in the Stream* returns to the body (human, animal, plant, the artist's.) The film is shot from the maker's perspective and rhythmically edited with footage from Kahn's cumulative index (the film contains no found footage). From the mundane to the uncanny, from wilderness to cities, from the home to the agora, *Stand in the Stream*'s footage remains pressing and current, ending in the midst of protests against Trump's presidency.

Kahn's sound design includes original compositions by Kahn and by the musician/composer Alexia Riner (a solo artist and half of the duo Madame Gandhi.)

The title, *Stand in the Stream*, comes from the Bertolt Brecht play *Mann ist Mann* (*Man Equals Man*). The play is about the forcible transformation of an ordinary citizen (Galy Gay) into a soldier: the pliability of identity in the post-industrial West and the possibility, as Brecht suggested, that people are like machines and can be dismantled and rebuilt. In a brief interlude in the play, the character Widow Begbick tells the audience that “Herr Brecht hopes you will feel the ground on which you stand, slither your toes like shifting sand so that the case of Galy Gay the porter makes you aware life on this earth is a hazardous affair.” Then a voice is heard declaring the start of war. The Widow Begbick sings:

Don't try to hold onto the wave that's breaking against your foot.
So long as you stand in the stream, fresh waves will always keep
breaking against it.

Stanya Kahn received an MFA from the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard the University Galleries of the University of Illinois, Normal, IL; Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK, Marlborough Contemporary, NY and Weiss Berlin, among others. Kahn's work has been featured in exhibitions at the New Museum, New York, NY; the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway; Museum of Contemporary Art, Lyon; the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA; the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, MO; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA among many others. Kahn was included in the 2010 Orange County Biennial and the 2008 Whitney Biennial (with collaborator Harry Dodge). Kahn's works with Dodge showed widely, including exhibitions and screenings at the Getty Center/LA; the Hammer Museum/LA; the Hayward Gallery/London; ZKM Karlsruhe; and the Sundance Film Festival, amongst others. In 2012, Kahn won a Guggenheim Fellowship for Film/Video. Her work is in many public and private collections including the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; the Goetz Collection, Munich, Germany; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY.