

Stand in the Stream

By Stanya Kahn ©2017HD 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, death, the inextricability of the personal from the political and the primacy of the image. 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 (but no found footage), 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. Interlacing a broad spectrum of imagery, the film both reflects our daily image world and also asks us to consider how we consume information, how we distinguish high stakes from low in a digital world that threatens to equalize everything in a currency of clips and clicks.

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, 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. 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.) 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.