



Zeinabu irene Davis

• **A Powerful Thang**

Film/Video

January 27

8 PM

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney CalArts Theater

CALARTS

California Institute of the Arts

We gratefully acknowledge that we operate on the traditional lands of the Tongva, Tataviam, and Chumash people including the Gabrieleño, Fernandeño, and Ventureño; members of the Takic and Chumashan language families; and other Indigenous peoples who made their homes in and around the area we now call Los Angeles. We honor their ancestors past, present, and future, and recognize their continued existence and contributions to our society.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This program presents two milestone films in 16mm, the experimental drama *Cycles* (1989) and the narrative film *A Powerful Thang* (1991). *Cycles* situates the Black femme body between Africa, the Caribbean, and the US. *A Powerful Thang* presents the story of Yasmine Allen, a writer and single mother who seeks intimacy and friendship; the film captures Black life in the Southwest Ohio of the 1990s. Davis' grammar is one that foregrounds selfhood, curiosity, self-assuredness, and embodiment. Her films elevate diasporic music and cultural production, and create space for deep citational practice.

Please note: A Powerful Thang contains mature content.

The program includes a post-screening conversation with filmmaker Zeinabu irene Davis and film programmer Jheanelle Brown.

The Jack H. Skirball Series is organized by Jheanelle Brown.

Cycles (1989), 17 min.

Rasheeda Allen is waiting for her period, a state of anticipation familiar to all women. Drawing on Caribbean folklore, this exuberant experimental drama uses animation and live action to discover a film language unique to African American women. The multilayered soundtrack combines a chorus of women's voices with the music of Africa and the diaspora-including Miriam Makeba, acappella singers from Haiti, and trumpete Clora Bryant.

A Powerful Thang (1991), 57 min.

This innovative drama, set in Ohio, traces an African American couple's search for intimacy and friendship. The spirited, African-identified Yasmine Allen is a writer and single mother who has been dating saxophone teacher Craig Watkins for a month. Wishing to end her self-imposed celibacy following her son's birth, Yasmine has reached a turning point in the relationship-but Craig, the Big Lug, wants to take it slow. Sage advice from friends and family members reminds them, "sex is a powerful thang." Like her

highly acclaimed *Cycles*, Davis's film incorporates animation as well as Afro-Haitian dance in a rich exploration of the lives of African Americans.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Zeinabu irene Davis is an independent filmmaker and Professor of Communication at the University of California, San Diego. She works in narrative, experimental, and documentary genres. Her work is passionately concerned with the depiction of women of African descent. Her interests include altering and diversifying the terrain of mass media, film history, world cinema and folklore. She frequently writes and lectures on African and African American cinema.

A selection of her award-winning works includes a drama about a young slave girl for both children and adults, *Mother of the River* (1996); a love story set in Afro-Ohio, *A Powerful Thang* (1991); and an experimental narrative exploring the psycho-spiritual journey of a woman with *Cycles* (1989). Her dramatic feature film entitled *Compensation* (1999) features two interrelated love stories that offer a view of Black Deaf culture. The film was selected for the Dramatic

Competition at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival and won the Gordon Parks Award for Directing from the Independent Feature Project in 1999. *Compensation* was introduced by Academy Museum President Jacqueline Stewart and featured in the Black Independent Film showcase on TCM in July 2022. A restoration and release of the film by the Criterion Collection is in the works for 2024.

Her documentary, *Spirits of Rebellion: Black Cinema from Los Angeles* (2016), won seven awards, including the African Movie Academy Award and the Best Feature Documentary and Audience Award from BlackStar Film Festival. Professor Davis has received numerous grants and fellowships from such sources as the National Black Programming Consortium, Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Davis is currently working on a hybrid documentary, *Stars of the Northern Sky*, which tells the stories of the legal trials of abolitionists Sojourner Truth, Phyllis Wheatley, and Marie Joseph Angelique.

UPCOMING AT REDCAT

Nelson Carlos de los Santos Arias

Pepe

March 3

The first and last hippopotamus killed in the Americas was controversially shot by authorities in Colombia. Dominican filmmaker Nelson Carlos de los Santos Arias presents a film guided by a voice that claims to be from Pepe.

Vertical Blanking

The Video Depositions of Vertical Blanking

March 24

Vertical Blanking, a video art, performance, and experimental music duo consisting of Kamandalu (formerly Kim McKillip) and Michael J. Masucci worked out of EZTV from 1986–1993, creating early examples of what became known as “desktop video.”

REDCAT CREW

Projectionist: Jessica Gonzales

Assistant Projectionist: Jean-Paul Jones

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Jheanelle Brown, Film Programming

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