*She helped me see it*

The camera peers down to the street below, tracing the movements of an elderly man dressed in a white shirt and fedora sifting through rubbish. Another man, pacing a nearby street corner observes him, seemingly irritated. A woman walks by. She minds her own business. A sex-worker talks to the driver of a car as they wait for the traffic lights to change. The camera cuts between bodies walking up, down and across the city streets to building facades and shop fronts: the details of everyday life and survival in Lower East Side, New York City in 1981.

*How She Sees It By Her* (1981) is a film – part documentary, part performance, part piece of poetry – that intimately observes a period of time through the eyes and words of artist Arleen Schloss. The film is structured around Arleen's 58-page poem of the same title. Spoken out aloud by the artist throughout the film, the poem guides the viewer through deeply personal diary entries, marked by dates and times.

Her camera turns in on itself, pressing against Arleen's painted face, framing her left eye, shifting the external gaze of the previous scenes, inwards. Her voice is high; she talks fast, informing us that it is "3pm on June 6th, 1981". On this day he told her to "forget about that sweet fuck baby…" as he "kiss[ed] her and cut her throat simultaneously". Descriptions of emotional abuse, insecurity and physical pain are all placed within the messy and addictive category of love. Reminded at one point that vulnerability is strength, this work touches on what it feels like to be dependent on someone, paralleled with mundane observations and often unjust realties of life in New York City.

Interpreted as a 'public-personal-multi-media journal' the film is a montage of documentation of Arleen's body and the bodies of her friends and collaborators, alongside samples of super 8 film, painting, video, text and audio. Included are a range of participants who were, and still are, active in cultural and political spheres in the city and beyond, from Tomiyo Sasaki, Buster Cleveland, Kwok Mang Ho, Ernie Gusella, Ginny Lloyd, Linda Burnham, David Mora Catlett and Lona Foote to name only a few. Their music, voices, bodies and camera direction shift in and out of frame.

Arleen describes herself sitting in a Chinese restaurant "feeling like moderate shit", in the same breath she observes workers struggles at a local publishing house that she might, herself, need to work with but "the staff want to unionise, and are anti the publisher." She looks to her infected foot and ruminates on who and what can take care of her. Her voice-over reminds us that only the poor stay in the city in the summer while images of her face performing, lips out-of-sync with the audio, fill the screen. In this work she seems to speak to a necessity to manage expectations, as well as face life's many contradictions without giving way to complicity. Life is both "warm and fun but also cold and political". A little high, she watches "destressing news from the Middle East crisis on television". The summer continues.

Towards the end of the film, we shift from the streets of Lower East Side to abstract, undefined spaces, well-lit artist studios and the sea, perhaps on-route to Coney Island. The camera now held by another, observes Arleen's relaxed body. I pause Vimeo and stare at her. Younger than I ever knew her, she is lying down with her leg's balanced in the air. She is wearing light blue trousers and a white t-shirt; her hair is mattered. She looks happy.

This image prompts a memory from 2005: Arleen and I are lying with our backs on the floor, our legs straight up in the air, supported by the walls of her immense studio. We are surrounded by papers, books, dust, plants, film reels, pens, glasses of water and left-over food. Whenever she felt us getting tired, stressed, or anxious with the archiving of her past she would pause us for this leg elevation rest. In these moments of recess, she would tell me, or perhaps encourage me, how to see it through my eyes.

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