

Stacey Steers / Artist Statement

I CREATE SHORT-FORM ANIMATED FILMS driven by the process of handmaking. My imagery is sourced from early silent cinema I'm drawn to, allowing intuition and the unconscious to play a significant role as I shape a work. I unite elements that do not have an obviously shared context, working with them to create an atmosphere where this non-rational alignment seems natural and poetically sound.

Feeling my way through archival material, I search for a sense of inevitability and emotional coherence in the sequencing of my images. I do not storyboard my films. Their narrative core evolves and becomes a mutable, flowing presence thick with suggestion rather than tied to linear singularity. I'm captivated by moments of ambiguity and intimacy—and actors who have given a role particular psychological complexity. Their performances assist me as I probe aspects of interiority. Over time, my works have developed a gothic sensibility. The mysteries of the night, shadow, and a lurking unknown are integral to their tenor.

I freely edit and alter the performances of “my” actors to call forward a new persona for iconic early film stars like Lillian Gish, Mary Pickford, and Janet Gaynor. As I work with silent-era actors who are nearly always women, I take advantage of their backlit expressiveness and the subtle ways they project emotion without the benefit of voice. I study the telling undercurrents within their enactment of femininity. My films give these women personal agency, empowering them as protagonists whose stories unfold in strange disquiet. By re-contextualizing historical footage and gender, I encourage a feminist reappraisal of film and this historical period when the still undefined cinematic language overflowed with creative expression and experimentation.

I'm curious about the nature of longing—how longing can provoke and mediate experience. Deep yearning carries my heroines toward moments of dismay and self-discovery. For me, they reflect the capacity of nature to act as a vital agent of creation and destruction, embodying both at any instant. My heroines face transitional moments with insight and self-reflection, steeled for endurance. The sound design for each project, created in collaboration with contemporary composers, enhances these anticipatory, pivotal moments.

My films take several years to produce. I construct thousands of individual paper collages, seamlessly combining film images with fragments of 19th-century engravings and illustrations. I photograph each collage onto 35mm film, working sequentially, frame by frame. One second of the film requires eight individual collages. Surrealist collage and montage techniques influence my practice and interest in casting incongruous objects into scenarios that suspend viewers' expectations. Short-form animated film allows for condensed drama and immediacy of immersion that I employ in my experimental rendering.

I explore installation formats for my films, collaborating with fabricators to design free-standing objects that mirror key elements in a film—a house, a tower of antique beds, and a laboratory instrument. The structures serve as miniature screening “rooms” for looped sections of my animations. Viewing at small scale extends the metaphorical power of a film, confusing fictive and real space. They allow me to question scale and play with visual distortion and presentation. As a viewer peers into one of these structures, as if through a keyhole, it changes the psychological and bodily relationship to the film, compounding the experience by enacting voyeurism and fantasy.