

FILM FRIENDS



SEASON 1

Film Friends

Season 1

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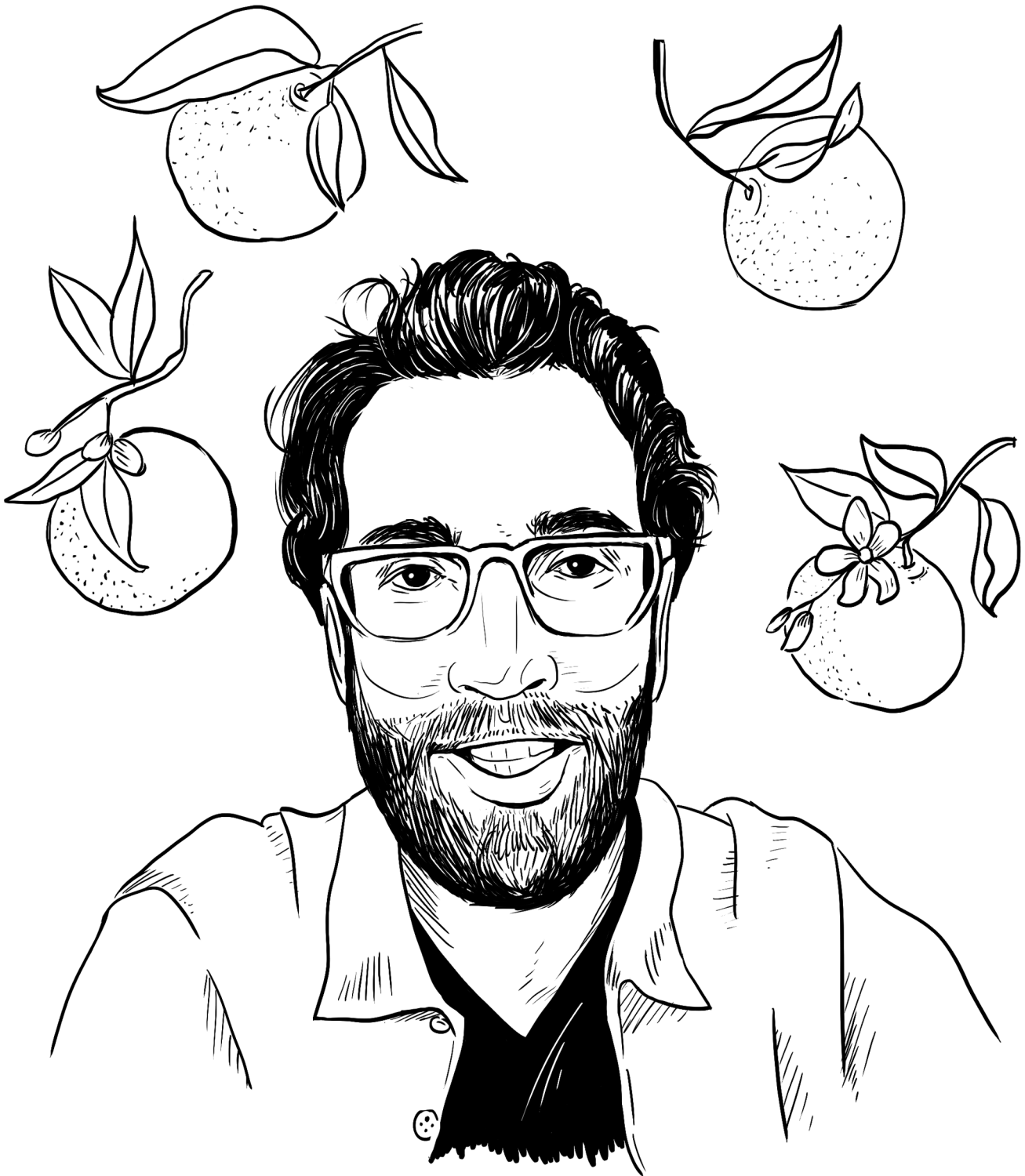
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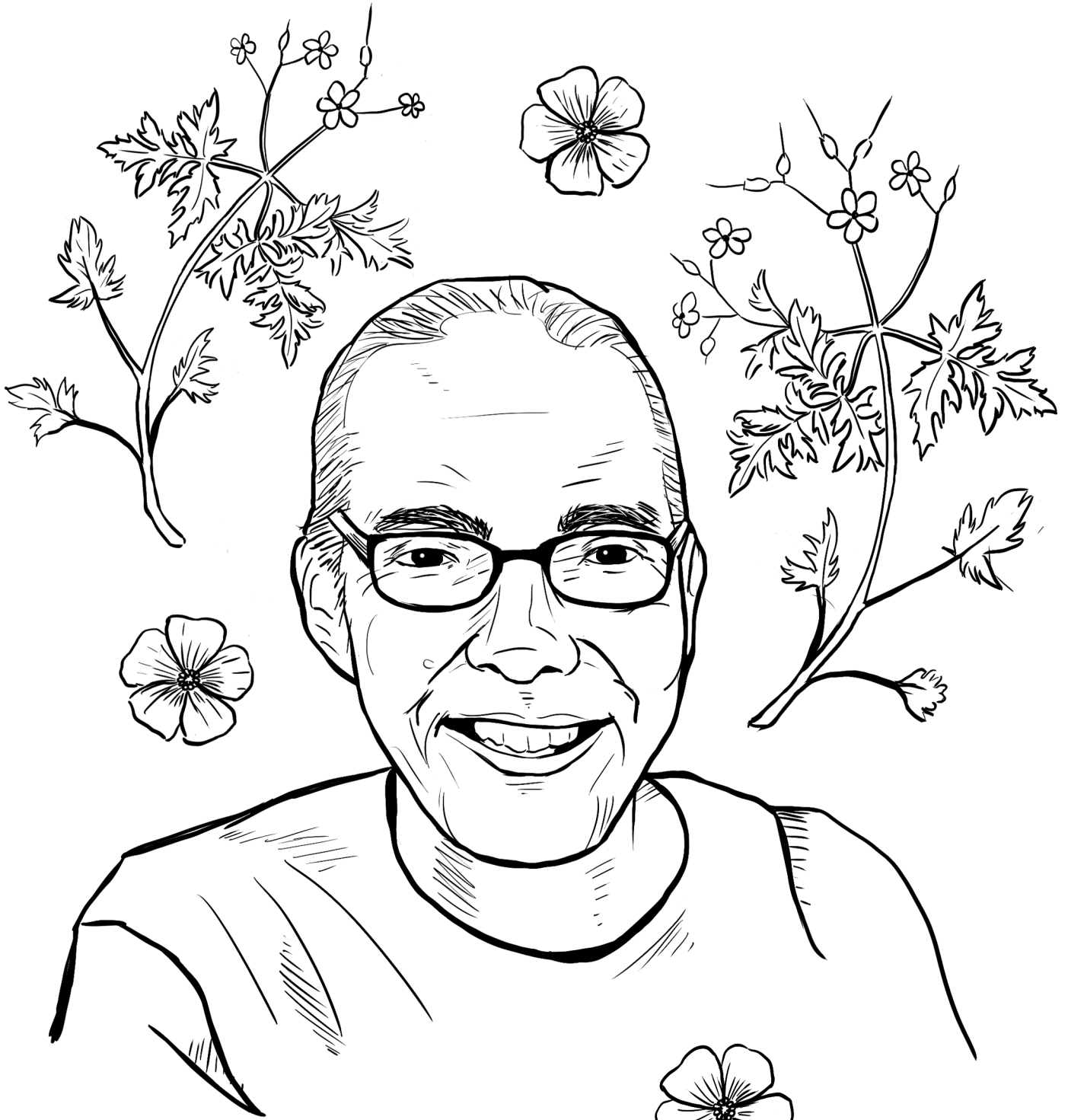
Dagie Brunderi



Meg Rofison



General Treggan



Karel Doina



Eva Kolcze



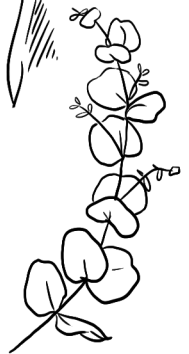
Terra Long



Zoë Heyn-Jones



TJ Ediger



F4A COLLECTIVE



ADRIAN COUSINS



Robert Schaller



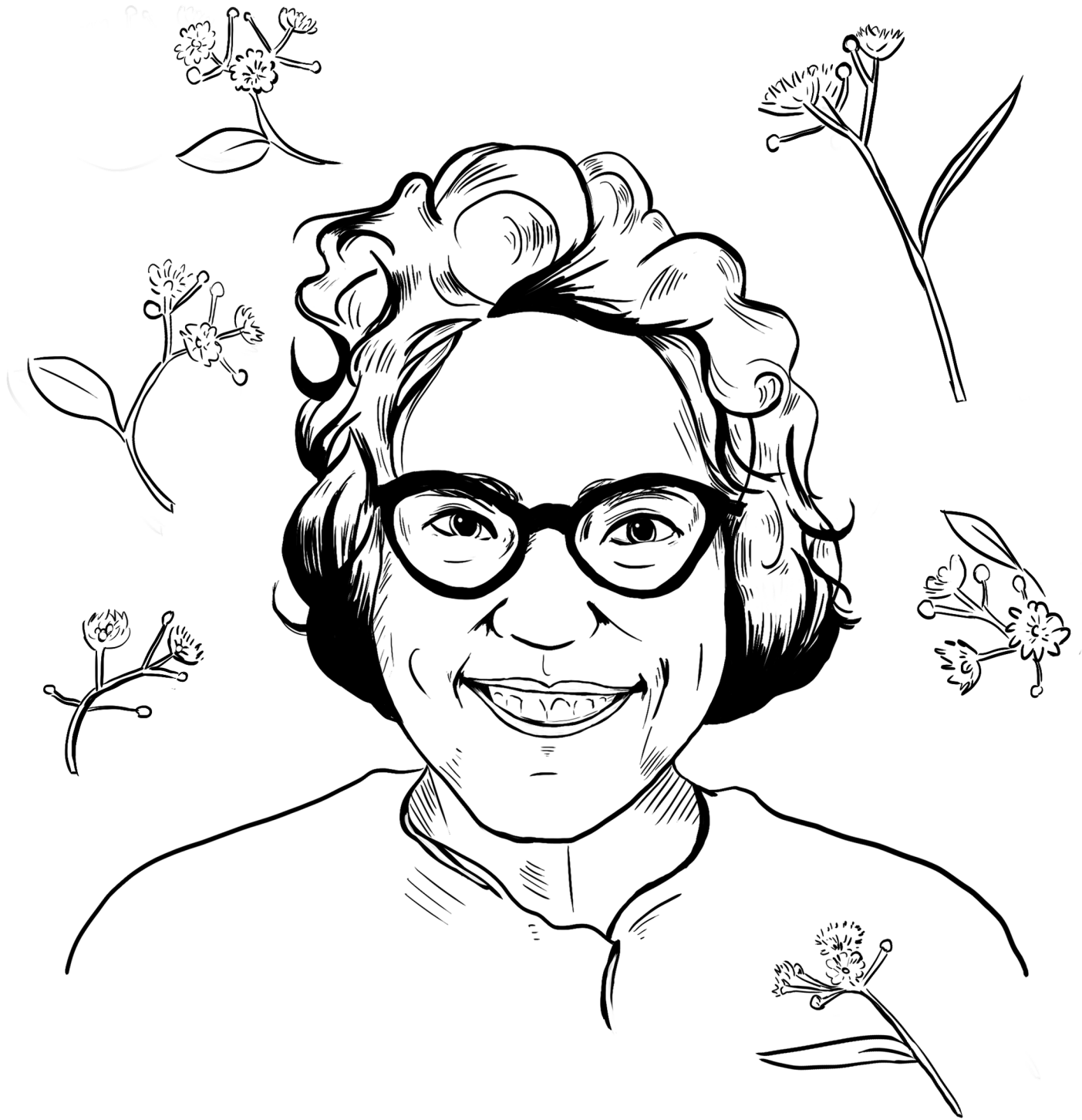
Caryn Cline



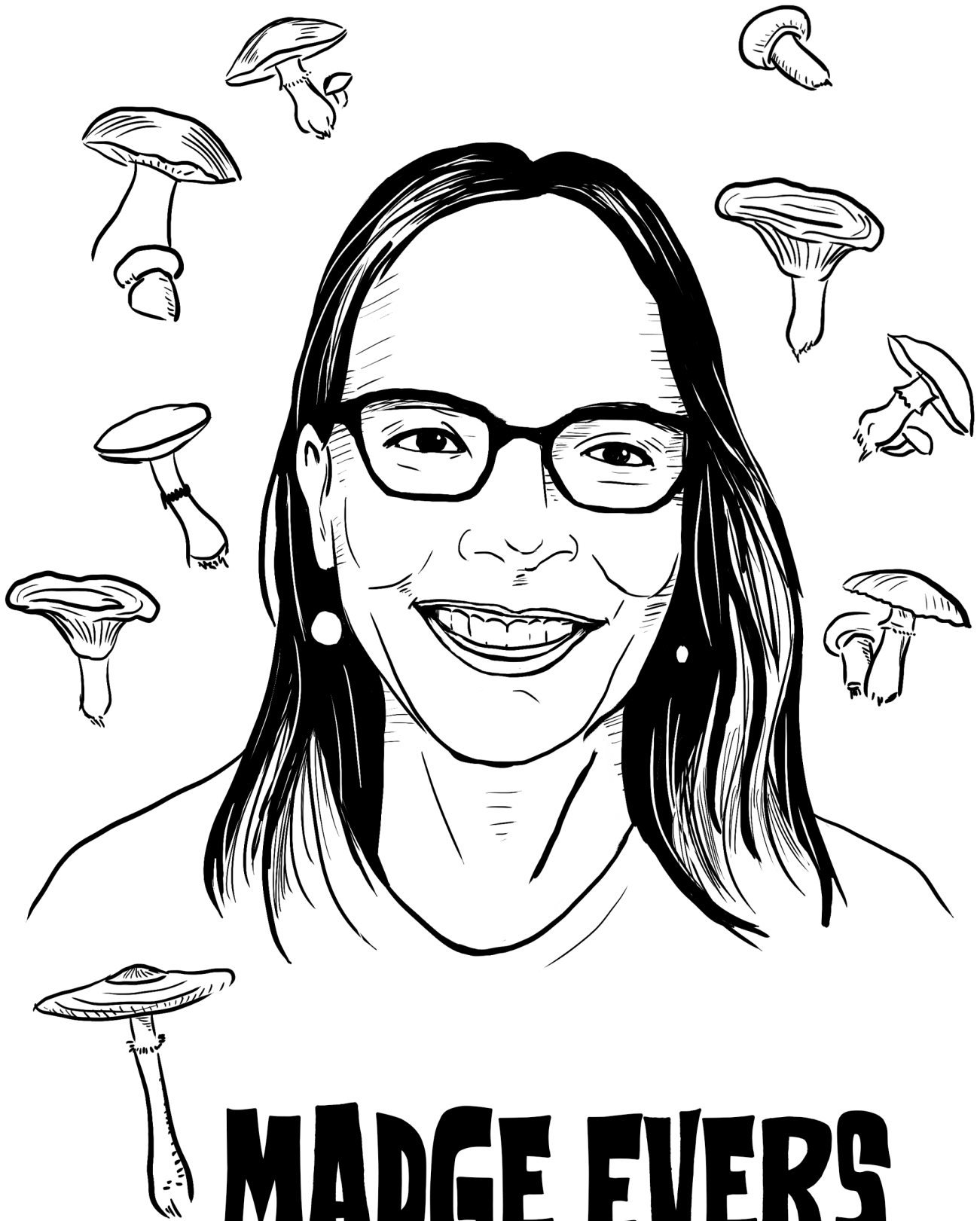
Cherry Kino



RICARDO LEITE



Naomi Uman



MADGE EVERS

Echo Park Film Center Film Friends I: A Season of Love

Hello friends!

In the fall of 2020, the Echo Park Film Center launched a series of monthly presentations dedicated to handmade filmmaking, showcasing artists whose work celebrates artisanal, eco-friendly, and adamantly experimental processes. The 12 talks in some ways cheerfully surfed a wave of publications dedicated to process-oriented filmmaking from the previous year or two – I’m thinking of books like *Process Cinema: Handmade Film in the Digital Age*, *The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-based Animation and Cultural Value*, *Reset the Apparatus! A Survey of the Photographic and the Filmic in Contemporary Art*, and *Film in the Present Tense: Why Can't We Stop Talking About Analogue Film?* Plus, *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* by Kim Knowles and *Making Images Move: Handmade Cinema and the Other Arts* by Greg Zinman were on the verge of hitting bookshelves in the coming months. This flurry of activity around experimental film, especially with a focus on the handmade, felt unprecedented and exciting. So much to read! So much to discover! So many new techniques to try!

However, it’s also important to remember that we were six months into a global pandemic, and a world rife with unrest, loneliness, and confusion. Reading and watching and making alone is fun only for so long. So Film Friends, offered by EPFC with characteristic brio and an invitation to gather together to hear from filmmakers about their work, was so very welcome, rich succor to the despondent and isolated. And although we were all still learning to Zoom and mute and share screens with some skill, EPFC was not in any way new to sensing an urgently felt need and responding. After two decades tenderly engaging the local Echo Park community, as well as the broader city of Los Angeles, Lisa Marr and Paolo Davanzo, along with the entire dedicated EPFC team, deeply intuit when and where art can bolster a sense of connectivity. Plus, in this case, they were able to quickly shift to a worldwide purview, zooming in from far-flung locales themselves to create and hold a space for us to share, reflect, and learn, this time as a global community.

Film Friends launched on September 16, 2020, with Berlin-based filmmaker Dagie Brundert, who in many ways set the tone for the conversations to come: her talk was whimsical, delightful, informal and yet informative, with a profound awareness of film in relation to the world, the body, the earth, and the elements. Dagie described discovering the magic of Super 8 filmmaking as a student, and a career devoted to a wabi-sabi working method in which there’s no pre-planned outcome but instead, a commitment to experimentation. After a general overview, she described some specific methods that are attentive to the earth. “Ten years ago,” she said talking a mile a minute in her German accent, “I stumbled upon Caffenol because I was really fed up with all the chemicals and toxic shit and I found out, okay, there are ways to do more, to live healthy, because this is exactly what we and our planet need.”

Caffenol was developed in 1995 as an alternative to traditional film processing, which uses toxic chemicals that are bad both for humans and everything else. Combining instant coffee crystals, washing soda, and vitamin C powder creates a solution that will process film footage without the toxicity. Dagie went on to explore other processing techniques, using various juices, flowers, and seaweed. “There is so much power and beauty,” she said, “and the whole world of plants is just only revealing itself to me.” She noted that humans are a little late to the party, citing the fact that we’re just now beginning to understand how trees and mushrooms communicate collectively. “Humans are so old and have lived here forever and don’t have the slightest idea about what the hell is going on. I mean, come on!”

Dagie went on to discuss her current fascination with anhotypes, which are made by creating an emulsion from plants and flowers and making prints using sunlight. Dagie showed images made with avocado and noted that pictures of naked people work well because the intimacy of the process aligns nicely with the intimacy of the image. After showing her gorgeous, colorful films and welcoming a glass of wine from her boyfriend, Dagie wished us well. And Dagie’s final advice? Have an open heart! Embrace small things! Fuck money! Love is the answer! Indeed.

The plant theme continued in the second Film Friends conversation with Baltimore-based filmmaker and curator Margaret Rorison, who focused primarily on her work with cyanotypes, many of which feature plants and flowers. “I’m obsessed with Queen Anne’s Lace,” Meg sheepishly admitted as she showed a series of her gorgeous prints. “They have beautiful silhouettes. I love their fragile stems, and their petals.” She also showed images made with Goldenrod and Sea Oats, which remind her of Cape Cod and time spent with her uncle when she was a child. “I love plants. I usually collect plants when I’m traveling and then I’ll press them and make prints with them. They’re like odes to, or memories of, places I’ve been.”

Meg went on to describe how to create cyanotypes on 16mm film stock. If you’ve ever tried to paint cyanotype liquid onto clear leader, you know that it simply doesn’t stick! Instead, Meg explained that you need a binding agent. She suggested placing expired, unprocessed 16mm film in fixer for 10 minutes; this removes the emulsion but leaves behind a binding agent, which then allows the cyanotype emulsion to adhere. She then showed snippets of 16mm with cyanotype imagery and noted that Rooibos tea will help tone the film. The film strips she shared with the group were a brilliant, Prussian blue, with delicate images of the hands and eyes of her mother and sister. Magical!

Meg also talked about her love of fabric and textiles, gleaned in part from her mother, who is a textile artist, as well as the urge for handmade practices. “I really love working with my hands and the more I’m in front of a computer the more I have that urge,” she said. “When I work with my hands there’s a different thought process that I think allows me to explore ideas better.”

Next up was General Treegan, whose official name is Andrés Pardo; he hails from Cuernavaca, Mexico. He picked up the thread related to Caffenol started by Dagie and described a rather systematic attempt

to create an organic film developer over the last two decades or so. He presented a fascinating historical timeline that begins in 1931 with developers made with dehydrated lemons, moving up to the present and the creation of his own developer recipes, namely the Simple Caveman, Simple Caveman: Citric Version, Simple Caveman V2, and Simple Caveman Plus Chia.

The first recipe features only three elements: water, soda, and ascorbic acid. The second, inspired by *Caveman Chemistry*, a fascinating book about the evolution of basic chemistry by Kevin Dunn, introduces potash into the developer. The third recipe included clementine peel powder. “I dry the peels in the sun,” Treegan explained. “They take two or three days to dry. Then I put them in a grinder to obtain the powder from the vitamin C.” And so it goes. Treegan is at once deeply knowledgeable about the chemicals and open to whatever is handy and available for experimentation.

Treegan went on to discuss the chemical composition of rainwater in different cities, and how to borrow techniques from Ayurvedic medicine for cold extraction, which is a process of using almost no heat to get phenols from flowers. “It’s really amazing,” he says. “These dudes were doing this before Christ! They just heat all the things to 80 degrees and then let it rest. Then the next day, they heat it again and let it rest. And heat it again and let it rest four or five times.” He explained that contemporary Western science is just beginning to understand the wisdom of these ancient methods.

Summing up, Treegan explained, “I do this because it’s really fun. I enjoy sharing this kind of stuff and thinking of new ways of performing what I love, that is to take pictures and process them. I’m quite amazed when I hear people from places in Asia or Latin America saying that there are no chemicals here so we cannot process or shoot. And I say, there are other ways to process film.”

Karel Doing joined Film Friends to present his work in December 2020, and, like so many others, said that he began his filmmaking activities by making short Super 8 animations. He went on to highlight his time working at a film museum in Amsterdam with a focus on restoration, and his appreciation for the ways in which deteriorating film has its own special beauty. Noting that many experimental filmmakers explore the demise of the image, he wondered about moving in the opposite direction. “Is it possible to grow an image?” he asked himself. “I tried to work with microorganisms like bacteria and fungi, with some interesting results but it didn’t really lead to this idea of growth,” he says. “At some point, I started using plants and got some interesting results. The plants are soaked in the same solution as Caffinol but without the coffee. The plant basically replaces the coffee, and then when you bring it into contact with photographic emulsion, you can render an image.” This marked the birth of the phytogram process, which Karel has gone on to champion in many arts centers and filmmaking workshops around the world since.

Karel described visiting Phil Hoffman’s Film Farm in 2018, and showed a new step in his phytogram process. He first shot a film and then processed it in a normal reversal process, but then applied plants as a second layer in development. “I liked combining a camera image with phytography,” he says. Karel went on

to show clips from some of his films, including the mesmerizing *The Mulch Spider's Dream* (2018), as well as images from the dozens of workshops he's hosted to share the phytogram process. Thank you, Karel!

January 2021 brought the Toronto-based F4A (Film for Artists) collective. Zoë Heyn-Jones, Eva Kolcze, Terra Long, and TJ Ediger presented the history of the creation of the collective, beginning with its founding in 2015, and its gradual evolution. "How can we think about making films about place in a deeper way?" asked Zoë, describing the desire to grapple with the relationship between filmmaking and site. The group continued to focus on public programming and site specificity as they evolved, and this focus took a turn when their 2017 residency was cancelled due to rising sea levels and a threat to the Toronto Islands where they had formed a collaboration with Artscape Gibraltar Point. "Places are not only beautiful and steeped in history, but also precarious and subject to change," explained Zoë.

In 2018, the collective travelled to Anima Casa Rural in San Isidro Mazatepec, Jalisco, Mexico, for a two-week residency. They also really began to focus on plant-based processing. Terra described the abundance of plants, especially eucalyptus tree, kale, lavender, and much more. "Everything was in bloom and everything worked beautifully and so quickly," Terra explained. "We were shooting on the high-con stock 3378, which has a faster developing time than a lot of other films. So we were six minutes in the developer, and we had a chance to experiment and get the recipes right. We also had a chef in residence, and it was my first time eating and developing with what I was eating, and feeling like I was part of an entire ecosystem, that my body and the films that we were making were entangled in this way." She also described making an eco-bleach, with a bubbly result, made with peroxide, vinegar, and water, which created images with tiny spots of light. The group continued to highlight the incredible processes, residencies, and films that have emerged from their shared efforts, and what came into view was the growing sense of relational interconnectedness uniting filmmaking processes, the earth, and humans.

Adrian Cousins, a filmmaker based in South London, joined Film Friends in February to talk about his work, and began by highlighting his support for the philosophy espoused by Dagie Brundert, namely a dedication to imperfection. "The slogans from Kodak are about ease," he said. "It's simple. 'You press the button, we do the rest.' This is the opposite. There's a real risk. So that is a philosophical approach to your work that is actually very liberating." Adrian then walked us through a series of experiments with Caffinol, different film stocks, and the Citric Peroxide Bleach formula that was created by Ricardo Leite (another Film Friend!).

With his most recent work, Adrian has shifted to using beer, or more specifically, waste beer. "If you've ever worked in bars or pubs, certainly in Britain, the amount of waste beer is phenomenal. You're pulling the pint, and it overflows into the drip tray, and all through the night, people are chucking these things down the drain." Adrian noted that although Caffinol is not toxic, it does use coffee crystals, which are not waste, but instead a product bought to use. "But with waste beer, it's real waste. It will go down

the drain. It's a product of normal human life, at least in Northern Europe. And the little packets of salad that you get with your curry that you never eat? That's waste. And if we can make developers out of waste, that is interesting to me." With his attention to re-use, Adrian furthered a theme that threaded throughout all of the Film Friends presentations so far, namely an interest in both an eco-friendly approach to film processing, but focused greater attention on the idea of reusing and recycling that was exciting. And beer!

Robert Schaller, speaking from Colorado, described the evolution of a new project, which began with the desire to consider the relationship between the rhythms of music and those that might structure a film, and then how the two might go together. He wrote a piece titled "Sonata for Film and Piano," explaining "My idea was to write a piece of music that would stand on its own but which had a certain rhythmic regularity to it that would work well for counterposing visual rhythms against." He continues, "I had a recording of the music and I basically transcribed the music onto a spreadsheet at key points. And then I had a way to notate visual rhythms in this numerical fashion." Robert then wrote a program to visualize the black and white frames in a series of rhythms." He explained that, after creating the computer-based test, he had intended to go back to make a film. But he had a deadline, the project was performed in Vancouver, and that seemed to be the end of it.

At some point, feeling a bit stuck with his work, Robert said he had the good fortune to read *Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*, by David Bayles and Ted Orland, published in 2001. "It had this great advice," Robert explained. "If you listen to your work, your last piece will tell you what your next piece should be." Robert's last piece was a film about a flood near his home titled *Three Years On* (2016), shot with a pinhole camera and having a few seconds of scratched footage near the end. "I realized that that was my work talking to me."

Robert also explained that he had grown profoundly sick of computers and craved being outside. "One of the things I enjoy about filmmaking, and the pinhole camera has been a tremendous success as a piece of technology in this regard, is being outside. The things we humans create are cool, but they're very limited. The thing that created us is so much more amazing, so much more diverse, so much more subtle, it's infinite in a way that we only approximate." All of this – the last film, the advice, a desire to be outside – led to a filmmaking process involving painting on clear leader with black gelatin. This in turn required the design and construction of a special desk featuring two large drums on which to wind the film, a narrow strip of Plexiglass with a lamp below to use as a light table, and some scratching tools. And what would he scratch? Sections of *Gilgamesh!* In cuneiform! "Gilgamesh: it's the oldest story," explained Robert. The cuneiform couldn't simply be random marks, either. "In order to make something, I need to believe in it," he explained. The presentation ended with a recorded performance of the music and the first movement of scratched film. And it was dazzling!

April brought Seattle-based filmmaker Caryn Cline to Film Friends. She began by talking about

growing up in Missouri with a family of gardeners, and while she wasn't entirely excited about plants as a child, they have since become a major focus in her filmmaking practice. In describing the evolution of her filmmaking, Caryn said she left Seattle to study filmmaking at the New School in New York at a time when many people were fixated on digital tools, leaving her to work with analog techniques. Citing Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963) and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981) as big influences, Caryn noted that in the later film, Brakhage moves back and forth between clear and black backgrounds, which was a technique she found inspiring.

After making several films using flowers, Caryn came up with a term to describe her process, namely "Botanicollage," which she defines as "a direct animation technique that involves collaging plant materials onto film." As she continued to make films with flowers and to further explore ways to adhere the plant material to film, she realized that the films were essentially experimental documentaries, with a direct link between what is being seen onscreen and the material that creates the image.

Caryn went on to further describe her process. "One of the things I like about Botanicollage is that it's really easy to get started without much material." She listed clear or black leader or found footage; 12mm transparent tape; non-toxic glue; a razor blade; scissors; a window; and semi-transparent plants as the key elements; from there, people can augment in any imaginable way. Finally, Caryn talked about the more recent power of collaboration. "This has been my response to Trumpism," Caryn explained, "which is to work with other filmmakers, to support their work, and to try to bring that common joy back into the world."

Moving into May, Film Friends welcomed Martha Jurksaitis (aka Cherry Kino) who came to the conversation from a small town in the south of Portugal. "I lived here about seven years ago, before I had my child," Martha explained, "in an olive field in a tiny wooden cabin that was smaller than the room I'm in now. Something about this land really, really calls to me." After offering a general reflection on serendipity and the impact of chance occurrences, Martha zeroed in on her main topic: "What I'd like to tell you about is – well, I had this all written in a kind of poem but it's becoming free-flowing now – my filmmaking and my sexuality are really, inextricably connected." She went on to explain that this connection became apparent after the birth of her child, Luca. "My sexuality and my sensuality, it really changed after having a baby, for the better, and I feel really blessed by that." She continued, "I discovered a new sensitivity, a new pleasure in slowness, and a new respect for my body. It was really like a flowering for me."

Referencing *Slow Love: A Polynesian Pillow Book*, by James N. Powell about Polynesian lovemaking techniques, Martha went on to describe a new filmmaking practice she is creating called Nectarella. "It's a way of trying to bring together female sensual pleasure and filmic creativity," she explained, adding that she has struggled in the past to bring the two together. "I didn't quite know how, partly because the camera, to me, felt so controlling, framing, capturing – I hesitate to say masculine, because it's not exactly that, but it was a kind of separateness, like I'm here and you're there and I'm filming you." Martha's goal

is to find ways to heighten sexual energy and sensuous presence during the actual filmmaking process that in turn catalyzes a more embodied, sensual, tactile form of image-making.

Martha also described a beautiful editing process, which she characterized as a way of getting back to basics. “I watch the film in the projector, I watch it a number of times and I make some notes, but the notes I make are sort of like poetry.” She said that she names each section of footage, using poetic phrases. “Then I watch the film again, and at this point, I cut it as it comes out of the projector and stick a label to the beginning of the shot and stick it on the wall, and I write that poetry on that shot. And then when I come to edit the pieces together, I edit with poetry. I remember what the shot is by the poetry written on it. I love that way of editing.” I’m sure I wasn’t alone in wanting to read some of that poetry!

For the June Film Friends gathering, filmmaker Ricardo Leite, known for his work over the last decade creating recipes with plants and household ingredients to make less toxic developing agents, presented a live demo. “In the morning, I grabbed some apple mint,” he explained, showing a bag full of bright green mint leaves that he’d plucked from a field near his home. “Today was the first time I have used apple mint. Usually I use a different mint.”

Working with Kodak 3378 high contrast 16mm footage that he had shot of his kids, Ricardo walked us through the process for creating the developer and processing the film. “Here I’m weighing the mint and that’s what I usually do. I take the leaves off, and this is about 300 grams of mint – oh, there is a spider coming out! But normally I use 300 grams of mint to 3.5 liters of water. During the boiling process, it loses around half a liter of water.” Ricardo explained that he lets the mint boil for 35 minutes, and afterwards, strains the mint leaves out to create two liters of powerful mint tea. He measures the pH and then adds vitamin C or ascorbic acid. “The mint tea is very alkaline, at around 6.6, so it’s not like coffee, which is 3 or 3.4. With the vitamin C, it goes to 1.9, which is very acidic. And here I added the sodium carbonate, 85 grams, and here the pH goes up to 10, because the developer works better between 10 and 12; it shouldn’t be lower or higher.”

Ricardo then bleached a small strip of film. “This is the hydrogen peroxide with acetic acid. I’m going to bleach a small strip of film that I processed. I wear gloves. Peroxide is good for cleaning the nails but it is better if you don’t touch it for too long. The bleach is at 38 degrees C.” The bleach worked quite quickly, and about ten minutes later, he was rinsing the film strip and adding to the mint tea developer. And a little while after that, he showed us all a strip of images.

Ricardo ended his presentation by offering tips on how to shoot if you know you will be using an alternative developing technique. “If I’m planning to process with plants or coffee, I normally over-expose one stop or more. I may be adding brown, or yellow, or green – it depends.” Ricardo’s method is at once fairly precise and deeply casual. When asked about tracking his findings in a lab book, he was modest. “I do keep a book. But it’s chaos. I’m pretty bad at that.”

American and Mexican filmmaker Naomi Uman joined Film Friends in July to present her work and ideas related to connections to land and food. She began by explaining that her films are not necessarily documentaries in the traditional sense of the word but instead documents that record her interactions with a rural place and the people who live there. “Part of my work is going to places where I don’t belong, where I’m a stranger,” Naomi explained. “I insert myself into these worlds.”

Naomi described the great knowledge held by those who live in these places far from cities, knowledge of how to grow things, raise animals, and more. “I make a long-term commitment to my subjects,” she continued. “I’m going back to Aguascalientes, Mexico, where I made *Leche* (1998). That family has become my family. I just recently filmed them killing a lamb and making birria for the grandfather who is 96. I’m a city person, but I’m fascinated by rural life.”

Naomi went on to discuss her film titled *Kalendar*, which is a silent, 10-minute 16mm film made in Ukraine. Naomi had been studying Ukrainian and said that her teachers were trying to teach her about time and the calendar, and someone pointed to a tree where they were studying outside. “She showed me the leaves they were drying, and she physically showed me the connection between what she was trying to teach me about time and what was happening in the backyard. I knew what film to make at that moment.”

Naomi also shared work from a film titled *Free Until Dawn* that she was making about a rural village in Northern Albania. “It talks about the role of women in the community and my interaction with this community,” she explained. “I wound up really falling in love with the place”

In August, 2021, Madge Evers brought the first year of Film Friends to a close with her talk about mushroom spore prints. The Massachusetts-based artist said that she began her practice in 2015; earlier experiences in photography did not inspire her, in part because she disliked working the darkroom with all the chemicals. However, her experience with photography did have an impact when, in 2015, she planted a bed of mushrooms in her garden and, once she had some mushrooms, decided to make some spore prints, initially as a way to identify a mushroom. “I made the spore print, and it totally blew me away,” she explained, adding that the print was a mix of photography and sculpture due to both the image and the sense of depth created by the spores. “I also loved the colors. I decided I would try to experiment with it, and get nice paper, and I did. I started experimenting.” She went on to explain that in the gills of each mushroom are thousands of tiny spores. “I just put the mushrooms down and they release their spores. It’s a collaboration.”

Madge decided that she wanted to have a bit more control in the process, and so she began making stencils and placing foraged material on top of them. Her practice now combines collecting plants and labeling them, and sometimes making cyanotypes with the material she collects. “It’s really accessible,” Madge says of her process with cyanotypes. “You just get the chemistry, mix it up in subdued light, and you too can make these insanely appealing images. Then I realized I could layer things; so this is a cyano-

type with Queen Anne's Lace, along with the spores." Madge took us out into her workspace, showing several works-in-progress. She ended by reflecting on the significance of her home in her method. "I feel like my art is based in the home. Do you call that domestic?"

Whatever you call it, we were all delighted to visit Madge's studio space, to see how and where she makes her incredibly beautiful prints. And like every single person who presented for Film Friends, Madge was incredibly generous in sharing her techniques, humble in regard to the relationship she holds with her awesome materials, and filled with a sense of gratitude for what her practice gives to her.

Indeed, these qualities – a sense of humility in relation to the earth and its plants, animals, and elements; an honoring of site and its specificity; curiosity about possible new directions; and generosity in sharing concepts, processes, materials, and knowledge; and finally love – all of these marked the year's 12 Film Friends conversations. They are a testament to the kind of community Echo Park Film Center has created and sustained, even in the midst of lockdowns and quarantines. Having basked in the glow of community and love for a year, I think I speak for all who attended the Film Friends talks: We love you, EPFC!

Holly Willis

February 14, 2022

Full List of Talks

Dagie Brundert
September 16, 2020

Meg Rorison
October 14, 2020

General Treegan
November 18, 2020

Karel Doing
December 16, 2020

F4A Collective
January 13, 2021

Adrian Cousins
February 17, 2021

Robert Schaller
March 17, 2021

Caryn Cline
April 14, 2021

Cherry Kino
May 12, 2021

Ricardo Leite
June 16, 2021

Naomi Uman
July 14, 2021

Madge Evers
August 11, 2021

**Film Friends Season 1 May be Viewed on Echo Park Film Center's Vimeo Page:
[Vimeo. Com/Showcase/7576892](https://vimeo.com/showcase/7576892)**



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