Well, everyone...this past weekend CCA had a triumph with the 35mm screenings of *Oppenheimer*! We SOLD OUT ten screenings in a row of Christopher Nolan’s remarkable film.

Meridel Rubenstein’s art exhibit *Critical Mass*, her multi-media masterpiece about the Manhattan Project, was installed for the premiere and is officially open to the public! Click [here](#) to view schedule when the CCA Galleries will be open over the next three weeks for you to see it. More about that in the Newsletter.

I have decided to hold over our audience favorite – *The Miracle Club* with the Dame herself, Maggie Smith! And on Friday, July 28, I am opening *Afire*, the new film by the acclaimed German director Christian Petzold.

**A blockbuster debut!**

So, this past Friday night at CCA, we held a party to celebrate the opening of *Oppenheimer*, the re-birth of CCA, and the opening of Meridel Rubenstein’s great multi-media artwork *Critical Mass*, followed by a screening of Christopher Nolan’s film to a packed house.

I found the film to be a powerful and complex portrait of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the race to beat the Nazis to build the first nuclear bomb, and the US government’s shocking persecution of one of WWII’s great heroes. It’s filled with memorable sequences. For me, the most powerful one was the lead up to and the detonation of the test bomb at the Trinity site on July 16, 1945, followed by
the astonishing scene of the scientists joyously celebrating their achievement while Oppenheimer himself falls into a deep ambivalence about what he has unleashed. Cinematically, it’s brilliantly constructed and may be the best piece of filmmaking Christopher Nolan has ever created.

But the most striking element for me was the extremely high level of acting Nolan coaxed out of his cast throughout the film. A nearly unrecognizable Robert Downey, Jr. gives the performance of a lifetime as Oppenheimer’s nemesis, Lewis Strauss. Emily Blunt as Oppie’s wife Kitty and Florence Pugh as his mistress, Jean Tatlock, each only have a handful of scenes, but both capture and convey the essence of their characters in quick, impactful strokes. It’s almost like some new form of haiku acting, saying so much with so little.

Even small roles like Alden Erhrenreich as Strauss’s Senate confirmation coach portrays the arc of his character from cheerleader to disillusioned enemy with total conviction and command of his craft. Overall, it’s as cohesive a piece of ensemble acting by a large cast as any I’ve ever seen.

Not to mention the stunning central performance of Cillian Murphy as Oppenheimer. I’ve watched and admired this remarkable actor from his early days in supporting roles to his breakout performance in the TV series Peaky Blinders. In this film, he too, like Robert Downey Jr, reaches a pinnacle of acting that is astonishing. I’d be willing to predict that Cillian Murphy will be this year’s Oscar winner for Best Actor.

By and large, the CCA audience has exited this film, expressing how deeply it affected them and finding it so complex and thought-provoking that they wanted to see it again. I felt the same way. There will be ample opportunity as we will be showing Oppenheimer at CCA for the next two weeks (until August 10).

Last chance for Past Lives

The usual quick reminder: if you haven’t yet seen the popular Past Lives, you have only two more days to see it – Wednesday, July 26 and Thursday, July 27. I have only heard absolute raves about this film from you all as you leave the theater.
I have been so busy the past few weeks getting ready for *Oppenheimer* and *Critical Mass* that I’ve barely had time to breathe, let alone see a movie. But this week, I’m going to steal a couple of hours to see this film that you all love! I think I’m the only person in Santa Fe who hasn’t yet seen *Past Lives*!

**Critical Mass on view at CCA!**

I’ve written extensively about *Oppenheimer* in my previous newsletters, so this week I really want to urge you to come to the CCA Galleries to see Meridel Rubenstein’s *Critical Mass*. I have created a viewing schedule and a flyer that you can download. Many of the viewings are tied to the screenings of the film either before or after you come to view *Critical Mass*.

I chose to show Meridel’s multimedia art installation in conjunction with *Oppenheimer* because her work tells a different side of the Oppenheimer/Manhattan Project story. The angle of this exhibition is more human, civilized, and spiritual. What is the other side of this epic story of destruction, but everyday joys of domesticity and living well through the story of Edith Warner, her teahouse at the Otowi Bridge near Los Alamos, and the interaction among the atomic scientists and the people of the San Ildefonso Pueblo. Edith is the central figure of *Critical Mass*, just as Oppenheimer is the central figure of the film.

Meridel created this stunning multi-media work between 1989 and 1993 in collaboration with Ellen Zweig and video artists Woody and Steina Vasulka. This monumental work is composed of many parts, but Santa Fe has only seen only bits and pieces of *Critical Mass* here and there over the past thirty years. CCA’s two-gallery installation is the most comprehensive showing of this work in a very long time. I think it’s one of the great masterworks of the past century, our three-week exhibition at CCA is one opportunity to see *Critical Mass* almost in its entirety. Don’t pass up this chance. It’s ONLY up for three weeks, so don’t wait.

Here’s what renowned art critic Lucy Lippard wrote about it: *Critical Mass* has all the global/local ingredients that enrich such a project, and they were skillfully structured around one woman and her simple adobe on Pueblo Indian land near the bridge over the Rio Grande. From 1942 until
well after the war had ended, Edith Warner’s house at Otowi Crossing was the site of encounters between Los Alamos’s all-star cast of international nuclear physicists and the land based indigenous people of San Ildefonso Pueblo. It became a unique vortex between the first world – a “relaxed, nature centered, and spiritual environment” – and the potentially final world – an “intense, experimental, and secret” technology... The meeting point would have been primarily practical and metaphorical had it not been for the woman at Otowi Crossing.

In 1922, at the age of thirty, Edith Warner, a Quaker, visited the Parajito Plateau to regain her health. J. Robert Oppenheimer (who said that his two loves were physics and the desert country) first arrived in this area the same year for the same reason.

Like so many independent women before and since, Edith fell in love with the place. She chose to live alone in the crumbling adobe at Otowi Bridge in view of the sacred Black Mesa, and immediately made friends with her neighbors at the San Ildefonso Pueblo. Warner made a precarious living with a tearoom that featured her famous chocolate cake. By that time, she shared her home with Tilano Montoya, the former governor of San Ildefonso.

In 1942, her friend Robert Oppenheimer suggested that Warner serve weekend dinners for his Manhattan Project scientists, who were getting stir-crazy in their top-secret “prisons.” This is how Edith became the medium through which the two communities interacted socially. After the War, Edith and Tilano had to move out of their home, but their friends from Los Alamos and the Pueblo helped them to build a new one.

**Critical Mass** is a collaborative photo/text/video/performance installation that evokes the worlds of scientists and Native Americans who intersected at Edith Warner’s home.

Seventy-nine years later, the forces of nuclear destruction, which could vanquish domestic safe havens and the feminine power these works evoke, have only grown. Since Albert Einstein created the Doomsday Clock in 1947, we are now 90 seconds from Midnight.
Meridel Rubenstein began her professional career in the early 1970s. She evolved from working as a single-image photographer to an environmental artist creating extended photographic works, and then went on to create multi-media installations and social practice that examines natural and cultural intersections as they relate to ecological and social imbalance. Since 1975, Meridel has maintained a studio in here is currently represented by Santa Fe’s Turner Carrol Gallery.

Honestly, folks, this is a prime opportunity – possibly a once in a lifetime – to experience Critical Mass. In the past, I’ve said that CCA’s gallery viewing schedule allows you to see the art before or after the film, but I would actually recommend seeing the film first, absorbing it for a day or two, and then coming back to see Critical Mass. The film is so overwhelmingly powerful that I’d recommend taking time later with a clear mind to absorb the contemplative spirituality of what Meridel has created. The exhibition is a perfect antidote to Christopher Nolan’s harrowing story – an opposing, healing vision compared to the bomb’s destruction.

European cinema’s Afire!

Christian Petzold’s Afire is set against the backdrop of a German Riviera seaside town that is threatened by encroaching wildfires. But make no mistake – it’s a dramedy! Petzold calls it a “summer movie” – a breezy, often funny, but emotionally layered melodrama about the creative and romantic insecurities of a group of disparate people.

Afire centers around Leon (Thomas Schubert), a disgruntled novelist struggling to finish his manuscript. Petzold wouldn’t be Petzold if his film didn’t show love for this annoying character!

While vacationing by the Baltic, Leon and his photographer friend Felix (Langston Uibel) are surprised by Nadja (Paula Beer), a mysterious young woman staying as a guest at Felix’s family’s summer home. Nadja distracts Leon from finishing his latest novel and with brutal honesty, forces him to confront his caustic temperament and self-absorption. As Nadja and Leon grow closer, tensions escalate with two new arrivals – a handsome lifeguard and Leon’s tight-lipped book editor – all while an encroaching forest fire threatens everyone.
July 24, 2023

*Afìre* was the winner of the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize at this year’s Berlin International Film Festival.

CCA has shown many of Petzold's films, and you may remember *Barbara, Phoenix, Transit*, and his last *Undine*. He’s probably the best known among the Berlin School of German filmmakers who all studied film at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (*dffb*). The group's mentors included filmmakers, media artists, and media theorists Harun Farocki and Hartmut Bitomsky, who are known for their non-narrative films, video work, and museum and gallery film installations. When he was at *dffb*, Petzold appeared in Thomas Arslan's *19 Porträts*, a 16-millimeter black-and-white experimental film in the tradition of Andy Warhol's famous *Screen Tests*.

Although the Berlin School is often associated with a new turn towards realism and political cinema, Petzold's films address issues of work and employment in addition to conflicts between life and death.

Critic Glenn Kenny wrote this about *Afìre*:

>Petzold has been quietly and industriously building one of this century's most consistently impressive filmographies. The compulsively literate (and literary-allusive) dialogue here, combined with the precise but unshowy *mise-en-scène* and editing, may, for some, call to mind the late, great Eric Rohmer. But Petzold, while not without humor, is a generally graver filmmaker than Rohmer, and the way this film steers into tragedy is wrenching. It leads to a conclusion that in some respects could be called pat, but it also justifies itself well enough —largely due to the exceptional work of the actors, particularly Schubert and Beer... Like all of Petzold's recent pictures, *Afìre* draws you in confidently and prepares its knockout emotional punch with scrupulousness and a vivid sense of surprise.

If you haven't seen a Christian Petzold film before, come and experience the vision of a truly original filmmaker.
Lots going on at CCA!

So, we have quite a varied lineup at CCA this week – Oppebeiner, The Miracle Club, and Afire. All are different, and all are worth seeing.

Meanwhile, Chatter will have its weekly Saturday morning concert at 10:30 in the Munoz/Waxman Gallery, and Exodus is preparing its new play Jayson and working on upcoming performances of a recent theater piece, ZERO. Stay tuned for announcements!

It’s most exciting for me to offer you the chance to see nearly the entire body of work Meridel Rubenstein created for her great Critical Mass.

So many Santa Feans have worried about the loss of the visual arts as a part of CCA’s programming. Well, this show proclaims the visual arts are alive and well at CCA! Come see it and be prepared to be astonished by its depth, beauty, and power.

All the best,

Paul Barnes
General Manager, CCA Cinemas