Poststructuralist filmmaking, as a project, should allow us access to the techniques that constitute the composition and materiality of film. Dara Friedman's mid-career survey “Perfect Stranger” abandons the radically possible within the medium in favor of non-sequal affect-driven desire. As I entered through velvet pink curtains, the sounds of running projectors, slamming doors, lashing whips and firing guns filled my ears. Friedman's films before 2005 were neatly presented in this first room as a key to the themes of her subsequent work.

Throughout the exhibition, violent and aggressive acts were subverted into seductive gestures of materiality, without necessarily interesting results. Whip Whipping the Wall (1998–2002), for example, in which “the artist repeatedly lashes a wall with a bullwhip,” leaves the viewer instead with unsettling questions about Friedman's motives. PLAY (Parts 1 & 2) (2013) is possibly the most ambitious film presented, from scenes of couples and individuals and referencing all of Friedman's material, styles and motifs. As scenes collide with one another, several films come to mind: Agnes Varda's Lons Love (... and lies) (1956), Max Reinhardt's A Midsummer Night's Dream (1935), David Lynch's Inland Empire (2006) and Brian De Palma's Body Double (1984). PLAY takes its viewers on a ride that explores the tropes and motifs of the LA movie, yet falls to deliver any real substance. Friedman's rules — never directly stated — don't help us understand either the function of abstraction within the filmmaking process or the empathy described at every turn in the exhibition's wall text and promotional material.

But all is not lost. The 16-mm film Tigrerat (2007) was the most seductive and complex in the exhibition. It demonstrates a mastery of the medium's physically by projecting a small flame on the wall, causing the lens to reflect just outside the projection field. The film successfully deconstructs the didactic film genre into a series shots, sounds and experiments in order to do something outside of genre itself.

by Domingo Castillo