Women's Experimental Cinema

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Women’s Experimental Cinema provides lively introductions to the work of fifteen avant-garde women filmmakers, some of whom worked as early as the 1950s and many of whom are still working today. In each essay in this collection, a leading film scholar considers a single filmmaker, supplying biographical information, analyzing various influences on her work, examining the development of her corpus, and interpreting a significant number of individual films. The essays rescue the work of critically neglected but influential women filmmakers for teaching, further study, and, hopefully, restoration and preservation. Just as importantly, they enrich the understanding of feminism in cinema and expand the terrain of film history, particularly the history of the American avant-garde.

The essays highlight the diversity in these filmmakers’ forms and methods, covering topics such as how Marie Menken used film as a way to rethink the transition from abstract expressionism to Pop Art in the 1950s and 1960s, how Barbara Rubin both objectified the body and investigated the filmic apparatus that enabled that objectification in her film Christmas on Earth (1963), and how Cheryl Dunye uses film to explore her own identity as a black lesbian artist. At the same time, the essays reveal commonalities, including a tendency toward documentary rather than fiction and a commitment to nonhierarchical, collaborative production practices. The volume’s final essay focuses explicitly on teaching women’s experimental films, addressing logistical concerns (how to acquire the films and secure proper viewing spaces) and extending the range of the book by suggesting alternative films for classroom use.

“Women’s Experimental Cinema is an invaluable resource for students and devotees of experimental cinema and feminist film, fields defined by remarkable films and a dearth of critical attention. It brings to light the social and political roots and cultural impact of women’s experimental film, and the specific female, feminine, and feminist practices of an exceptional group of women artists.”—ALEXANDRA JUHASZ, editor of Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video

“This definitive volume on U.S. women’s experimental cinema fills a significant and long-lamented gap within film studies, and in feminist film studies in particular. Together, these essays offer us a richly nuanced picture not only of women’s experimental film but of avant-garde filmmaking in general from the 1940s to the present.”—SHARON WILLIS, author of High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film

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