CCAD’s Itty-Bitty Retrospective Film Festival

Female Directors in Focus

Spring 2020

Thursday, April 23rd and Friday, April 24th
6:00 PM - 10:00 PM
Canzani Screening Room
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The students in the History of Cinema set out to program a small film festival – CCAD’s Itty-Bitty Retrospective Film Festival. The class split into small groups and pitched an array of festival themes and concepts, which ranged from Magical Realism, to Bad Movies, to films based on the various concepts of Family. After whittling down the most popular ideas through three rounds of Mentimeter voting, the class decided that this year’s focus was to be **Female Directors in Focus**.

Each student then took a few weeks to research and decide which two female directed films they would include in the festival. After compiling the nearly forty films together, the students then had to determine what four subcategories would be established to structure and organize the festival. At that point various departments and teams were formed to develop and implement the festival.

This specially programmed pop-up, microfest was intended to be open to all members of the CCAD family and was going to take place on **Thursday, April 23rd** and **Friday, April 24th** from **6:00 PM to 10:00 PM** in the Canzani Screening Room. After the coronavirus pandemic stymied those plans, the festival project was converted into an artifact project – a program that comprised the style, branding, advertising designs, festival day materials and designs, and even the movie trivia that was going to be launched for the promotion and implementation of the festival.

Aaron Petten, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
History of Art & Visual Culture
Spring 2020
CCAD'S ITTY-BITTY RETROSPECTIVE FILM FESTIVAL FEMALE DIRECTORS IN FOCUS SPRING 2020

Columbus College of Art & Design
THURSDAY, APRIL 23RD  
FRIDAY, APRIL 24  
6:00PM  10:00PM
In the 92 years that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has awarded Best Director, only 5 women have been nominated for this most prestigious prize. Yet, women have been making movies since the medium began, starting with Alice Guy-Blaché. Every so often, there seems to be a trend to rediscover the “so-called lost women directors”1 to give them their due. Perhaps, now women will be recognized for achievement in directing. After all, there has been a long history of successful ones. They have just been forgotten. Yet, just this February at the Academy Awards, Natalie Portman felt compelled to wear a cape with the names of this year’s female directors who went without any formal nomination. There were five.2 So, this festival will pay homage to many women directors from film’s early beginning to today and move the effort of recognizing women’s work forward.

It would be easy to conclude that the disparity between successful male and female film directors is simply because women are not capable of producing anything artistically worthwhile or that it is men who define greatness. One does, however, have to be mindful of falling into a pitfall of excuses that will not advance this women’s cause. To be sure, these prejudices exist,

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but they not and cannot wholly provide the answer to a rather complex solution.³ Women film
directors need to be celebrated and honored in film festivals like this one. But, girls need to be
encouraged to create stories at a young age, and they need to be encouraged to pick up a
camera in scholarly institutions. Young film directors do need more male film director mentors.
In order to be more widely successful, they need access to experiences and exposure that their
male counterparts can give.

A women film director theme, at first, seems relatively easy to develop. However, there
are some aspects that complicate the category, one of which is the very definition of what it
means to be a woman director. Incorporating questions of gender identity was a large part of
this discussion. The Matrix (USA, 1999) for example, was directed by the Wachowskis, both of
whom identified as men at the time the movie was made.⁴ However, their work is still
considered in this category because of how the Wachowskis speak about the transition
themselves, saying that “transgender self-actualization has been co-constitutive” with the
imagery and themes seen in their work. Film scholars have also since performed queer readings
of The Matrix, as its metaphors could also apply to gender identity and discovery; it offers a
perspective that “we might today recognize as the start of a distinctly trans popular cinema.”⁵

³ Linda Nochlin, "From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” ARTNews, May 30, 2015,
https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists-4201/.
⁴ Christopher Bucktin, “Matrix director Andy Wachowski comes out as transgender four years after brother
transitioned,” Mirror, March 9, 2016.
⁵ Cáel M Keegan, "Sensing Transgender." In Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1-130. Urbana, Chicago; Springfield:
In addition, point of view and focus of the films was also considered. There was some discussion as to which direction to take: should the focus be on women directors who highlight heroic women, or who explore traditional topics many women seem to appreciate such as romance and motherhood? Or what about women who don’t focus on women at all, but instead tell stories from men’s point of views?

Students in Dr. Aaron Petton’s History of Film class formed teams and presented topics they thought would be worthy of a general film topic. All voted on the topics and Women Film Directors was chosen as the overall theme. Then, each student chose two films directed by women to be considered as candidates for the festival. One selection had to be before 1950. There was a slightly disproportionate distribution: many chose films in the first decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There were several films from the 1940’s and 1950’s as well as the 1990’s. It is interesting to note that there were no movies chosen from the 1960’s or 1980’s. As Janet Staiger points out “some films will be chosen for extensive discussion and analysis; others will be ignored.” So, sadly, films like Daisies (Věra Chytilová, Yugoslavia, 1966) or Yentl (Barbara Streisand, USA, 1983.)

Also not suggested are any films from noted actress and director Penny Marshall or recent standout Greta Gerwig.

When choosing the subcategories for the festival, the goal was to cover a wide range of film eras and genres, despite those that were overlooked during the selection process. As mentioned previously, the question of, “Why can’t women do this too?” -- along with the answer that they have been -- were important to the overall theme. Because of this, the selection committee wanted to choose keywords that focused on action, as well as what women filmmakers have accomplished with their work. The categories were finalized.

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as Pioneering, Subverting, Empowering, and Inciting. Pioneering stems from the idea that women have made great strides in film since the very beginning of the medium itself, referring back to prominent figures such as Alice Guy-Blaché and Lois Weber. These “firsts” can be anything from film techniques to the topics discussed in the films themselves. Subverting deals specifically with the themes found in the work presented, and how they challenged societal norms. Empowering focuses on women supporting women, usually (but not always) with a focus on female strength and agency. Finally, Inciting was chosen because it fits a niche somewhere between Subverting and Empowering; it includes films that spark discussion and bring controversial topics to the forefront. All four of these categories overlap with one another in some way, but films were chosen for each depending on what the committee thought their main focus was. This points to a more interwoven selection of films that cannot completely be divorced from one another, which in turn makes their thematic connection stronger.
CCAD’S
ITTY-BITTY
RETROSPECTIVE
FILM FESTIVAL
FEMALE DIRECTORS IN FOCUS
SPRING 2020

COLUMBUS COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN
THURSDAY, APRIL 23RD
FRIDAY, APRIL 24
6:00PM 10:00PM
CCAD’S
Itty-Bitty
FEMALES
IN FOCUS
Retrospective Film Festival
TRIVIA
1895 - 1920s
Which female filmmaker is accredited with making the first narrative fiction film?
Alice Guy
Lois Weber a silent film director, actress, and screenwriter helped establish what film technique in her 1913 film *Suspense*?
Split-Screen
Which early female filmmaker was the first woman to join the Directors Guild of America?

Did you know?
This early female filmmaker also had a female significant other.
Dorothy Arzner
Mabel Normand acted in, directed, and wrote for films starring which two famous slapstick comedians?
Charlie Chaplin & Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle
CCAD's Itty-Bitty Retrospective Film Festival:

FEMALE DIRECTORS IN FOCUS

Spring 2020

PIONEERING

Thursday April 23rd & Friday April 24th
6:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Canzani Screening Room
Pioneering: Where Are My Children
(Universal, USA, 1914)

Pioneers take risks. They lead the way and inspire future generations to exceed the greatness that they attained. These women directors and their films have influenced the backbone of cinema from its inception to today. Whether it be through subject matter or technical innovations, these women are the first to have accomplished a significant feat in the film industry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie Title</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Production Company</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Fool and His Money</td>
<td>Alice Guy-Blaché</td>
<td>Solax Film Company</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrimony's Speed Limit</td>
<td>Alice Guy-Blaché</td>
<td>Solax Film Company</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspense</td>
<td>Lois Weber</td>
<td>Rex Motion Picture Company</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Merchant of Venice</td>
<td>Lois Weber</td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Are My Children?</td>
<td>Lois Weber</td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blot</td>
<td>Lois Weber</td>
<td>Lois Weber Productions</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wild Party</td>
<td>Dorothy Arzner</td>
<td>Paramount</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah and Son</td>
<td>Dorothy Arzner</td>
<td>Paramount</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Beauties</td>
<td>Lina Wertmüller</td>
<td>Medusa Distribuzione</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hitch-Hiker</td>
<td>Ida Lupino</td>
<td>The Filmmakers Inc. / RKO</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1953</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

From the very start women were making movies. Alice Guy-Blaché was almost certainly the first woman to direct a film. She started in 1896 and in that same year, she made La Fée aux Choux (Gaumont, France, 1896) which is often thought as the first fiction film made.\(^1\) Dorothy Arzner uncovers woman’s issues, including woman as spectacle or even women behaving badly. She advances technical aspects of film when she invented what is now known as the boom microphone. She used this to assist silent movie star, Clara Bow, with her first speaking part.\(^2\)

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Ida Lupino, a fairly well-established actress, wanted to work behind the camera and ultimately formed a production company, known as The Filmakers. While Lupino typically makes films about social issues aimed at women audiences, in The Hitch-Hiker, she makes a thrilling, first woman-directed film noir, a traditional masculine genre, focusing on masculine issues. Lupino explores what motivates some men to kill in her portrait of Emme: Myers. Devoid of any femininity, The Hitch-Hiker is lightly shot in stark black and white and for the most part on location in the California desert.

Figure 1: The Hitch-Hiker, (USA, 1953), IMDb.com

Lupino strips down dialogue and character development and focuses, instead, on the tense, claustrophobic action that takes place in a car with Myers holding a gun at the men's heads.

Lina Wertmüller reaches a significant milestone: she is the first woman director to be nominated for The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Best Director for Seven Beauties. This is a picaresque story of a dandy and wannabe gangster, Pasquilino, and how he survives in Fascist Naples and WWII Germany. For all of her accomplishments, however, “Lupino, Ida,” Sense of Cinema, accessed March 29, 2020, h:ps://sensesofcinema.com/2009/great-directors/idala-lupino.


While the film industry still struggles to give women directors their due, it has also forgotten that one of their greatest directors is a woman. Lois Weber, Guy-Blaché’s contemporary is often credited as the first woman director to make a full feature with The Merchant of Venice in 1914. She was as well-known as her contemporary, legendary male directors DW Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille.

Wertmüller remains problematic. Despite her success and advancements in film, some feminist critics would prefer that she would have never made a film. Many feel she degrades women and shows them at their worst. Nevertheless, she is both a witty and beautiful filmmaker. She never aspired to be a popular artist and made her films with her unique vision, sense of humor and artistry.

While the film industry still struggles to give women directors their due, it has also forgotten that one of their greatest directors is a woman. Lois Weber, Guy-Blaché’s contemporary is often credited as the first woman director to make a full feature with The Merchant of Venice in 1914. She was as well-known as her contemporary, legendary male directors DW Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille.

Figure 2: Suspense, (USA, 1913), silentlocations.com

the procedure and the girl dies. On her deathbed, however, she reveals what happened to her mother and Mr. Walton. Weber shoots this deathbed scene beautifully. She tints the film a dark and haunting blue and shoots through a veil that drapes over the bed.

![Figure 4: Screenshot. Where Are My Children, (USA, 1916)](image)

She also uses a fairly tight close up of the girl’s face to create an angelic effect.

During Dr. Malfit’s court hearing, Mr. Walton discovers his wife and many of her friends have paid for Dr. Malfit’s services. He realizes why he has no children and confronts Mrs. Walton. As the film ends, an elderly Mr. and Mrs. Walton sit by the fireplace. Weber uses a double-exposure technique to have ghosted children fade in and out. They are the children they never had.

By even making a film about controversies that women face, Weber appears to advocate for women. However, one can argue that Weber really reveals her flawed and anti-feminine views. Through Mr. Walton, Weber promotes a eugenicist argument for birth control for lower class society, yet condemns his wife and her friends for having abortions. He, furthermore, favors a practice of selective reproduction so that the “best” of society can advance while weeding out those characteristics that are deemed detrimental to society. It should be noted that some 20 years later, Nazi Germany took this to a horrific level by exterminating millions of

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CCAD’S
Itty-Bitty
FEMALES IN FOCUS
Retrospective Film Festival
TRIVIA
1930s - 1950s
This mid-20th century director was coined as “The Mother of Us All”. Who is she?
Ida Lupino

Did you know?
Ida Lupino was the only female directors working in the early '50s. Her company, The Filmmakers had an exclusive contract with RKO in which she would direct 3 feature films for. Ida Lupino was also the second female director admitted to the Directors Guild Of America.
This Polish feature film was one of the first to be made about the Holocaust. It would go on to win the Crystal Globe at the Karlovy Vary International Film festival in 1948. What was it?
Did you know?
The film went on to be nominated for the Grand International Award at the Venice film festival and the BAFTA Award for Best Film from Any Source. It was directed and co-written by Wanda Jakubowska, a survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp.
This 1943 experimental film was selected by the Library of Congress to be preserved in the National Film Registry. What film is it?
Meshes of the Afternoon

Did you know?
Directed by famed Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* established the New American Cinema (Avant-Garde) movement in the United States. It would go on to inspire many other filmmakers including Kenneth Anger and Stan Brakhage.
Which of these female directed German feature films was heavily censored for its anti-fascist and strong LGBT themes?

a. Girls in Uniform  
b. Triumph of The Will  
c. Ritual in Transfigured  
d. The Hitch-Hikers
Girls in Uniform

Did you know?
Directed by Leontine Sagan in 1931, *Girls in Uniform* (*Mädchen in Uniform*) was almost banned in the United States. It was only saved after Eleanor Roosevelt spoke highly of the film, and went on for limited release. The film marginally survived World War 2 and was heavily censored until the ‘70s.
CCAD’s Itty-Bitty Retrospective Film Festival:
FEMALE DIRECTORS IN FOCUS
Spring 2020
Thursday, April 23rd & Friday, April 24th
6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

INCITING

CCAD’s Itty-Bitty Retrospective Film Festival:
Female Directors in Focus
Women film directors use the medium to incite heartfelt and intense reactions. Some intend to drive change. Others, want to disrupt common conceptions and call out known issues that have long since become buried. Many of their characters are deeply flawed and/or exist in arduous times. Often, it becomes hard to decipher which comes first: their damaged personalities or the circumstances they are in.¹

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<th>Director</th>
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<td>Lost in Translation</td>
<td>Sofia Coppola</td>
<td>Focus Features / Tohokushinsha Film Corporation (TFC)</td>
<td>USA/Japan</td>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>The Hurt Locker</td>
<td>Kathryn Bigelow</td>
<td>Voltage Pictures</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>We Need to Talk about Kevin</td>
<td>Lynne Ramsay</td>
<td>BBC Films</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Babadook</td>
<td>Jennifer Kent</td>
<td>Screen Australia/ Causeway Films</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma</td>
<td>Ava DuVernay</td>
<td>Plan B Entertainment / Paramount</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Intern</td>
<td>Nancy Myers</td>
<td>Warner Bros</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Marvel</td>
<td>Anna Boden</td>
<td>Marvel Studios</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2019</td>
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Unlike the other categories, where several films could have qualified as the category pick, this category has a clear front-runner. In fact, one could place this film in any one of the four categories and it could easily be named the category pick.

Kathryn Bigelow is certainly no stranger to filmmaking, especially films about masculine violence. As far back as her early years as an MFA candidate in her film The Set-Up (1978), Bigelow explores violence as a narrative form, and this film becomes a precursor to many of her future films.² Since her first feature The Loveless (Pioneer Films, USA, 1982), she challenges...

viewers to rethink conventional and traditional male action heroes. She picks up on this theme and takes it to an entirely new level in The Hurt Locker.

This intense, action-packed war film opens with a quote “War is a drug.” (0:27) It is 2004 during the initial days of the US occupation of Iraq. Immediately, Bigelow engulfs the viewers with tension and frenetic action from soldiers’ points of view. Quick cuts to and from soldiers running to Iraqi street scenes to heaps of rubble to the menacing faces of Iraqi citizens looking through windows capture the visceral realities of modern conflict. Most of the film is shot hand-held and using a 16mm format to give a documentary feel. Camera movements are often jittery and shaky to reinforce the soldiers’ turbulent pace and environment. The audience, too, is now a soldier unsure of where the next firefight will be.

Soon thereafter, Staff Sgt. Thompson, meets his death trying to dismantle a bomb. Bigelow employs an intermittent, slow motion/fast motion technique. In a gut-wrenching, roughly 20 second sequence Bigelow first shows a tight shot of someone pressing a button on a cell phone to the initial explosion to an extremely fast cut to a wider angle of the dust rising as Thompson runs toward the camera to a slow motion shot of the rust from a car to an even slower sequence of Thompson as he continues to try to outrun the explosion. The bomb’s force is so massive that he is blown through the air into his hurt locker.

Staff Sgt. Will James replaces Thompson and has defused nearly 800 bombs so he is clearly capable of leading this bomb unit. He is brash, highly-talented and cocky. His is also

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3 Ibid.
reckless and addicted to the thrill of high intense, life-or-death situations found in war. So much so that he constantly puts himself and his teammates in peril. At one point, Sanborn and Eldridge even contemplate his “accidental” death, not unlike Roy and Gilbert did in Lupino’s The Hitch-Hiker.

The three-man team gets caught up in a grueling, hours long firefight in the Iraqi desert. Even in the blazing heat, James becomes exhilarated encouraging Sanborn to kill the enemy and teaching Eldridge to clean blood of bullets with his spit so the gun will not jam. Bigelow’s cinematographer, Barry Ackroyd, used 8-9 camera filming simultaneously. Her editing team cuts from wide shots of the entire battlefield to an extreme closeup of Sanborn shooting a rifle to another extreme closeup of a fly on James’ eyelash and ultimately to another extreme close up slow motion shot of a bullet falling to the ground and bouncing back up.5

Figure 2: The Hurt Locker (USA, 2009), IMBd.com

For all of his bravado and swagger, James displays moments of vulnerability, regret, and genuine care for others. After Eldridge gets shot, James runs into the shower with all of his gear on. He crumbles to the floor in a fit of rage. In arguably, the most intense, heart-wrenching and

violent scene, James appears genuinely sorry that he could not extract an Iraqi man from all of the bombs attached to him. Again, Bigelow cuts back and forth between extreme closeups of the man’s face to the timer to James’ concerned face. She builds tension with sound: heavy breathing, cutting metal, the man praying and begging, Sanborn and James yelling. In a moment of desperate compassion James looks in the man’s eyes and apologizes profusely. He does not have enough time and must save himself.

Soon after her film’s release, Bigelow told Newsweek that “War’s dirty little secret is that some men love it. I am trying to unpack why, to look at what it means to be a hero in the context of the Twenty First Century.”6 This is the truth that has been left out of history books and has been buried under all of the patriotic drive to protect, serve, and honor country. There are men who need war, who need to kill in order to survive themselves. This is the only occupation that allows them to channel their darkest and self-destructive forces. If they are good at it, and as James tells soldiers often, if they can forget about it, they are heroes.

After James finishes his tour in Iraq, he is home with his family. While shopping for groceries, James is lost in a sea of cereal boxes. Bigelow creates another long take, slowly cutting back and forth between wide angle shots James in the aisle searching to a closeup of his confused face. Her pacing is slow and exquisitely reflects James sinking into boredom and nothingness.

Figure 3: The Hurt Locker (USA, 2009), IMBd.com

His wife cannot possibly relate. In a domestic scene James mentions that they need more bomb techs. Not even addressing what he has just implied, she blandly asks him to chop up the vegetables for her. Finally, in one of the most telling scenes, while James is playing with his son, he says that “the older you get, the fewer things you love...In the end, I think it’s only one.” (2:04) James goes back for another tour.

The Hurt Locker is a gritty and unflinching account of what many soldiers and citizens experience in war. The film is shot and edited to make the viewers feel the tension and uneasiness of fighting an enemy who is not entirely visible. More importantly, Bigelow disrupts conventional ways of viewing heroes and conflict. Until 2010, no female director had been awarded Best Director by AMPAS. Not until fellow female director Barbara Streisand announced the still famous one-line introduction: “Well, the time has come – Kathryn Bigelow!” She is still the only woman to have received this honor.

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CCAD’S
ITY-BITY
RETROSPECTIVE
FILM FESTIVAL
FEMALE DIRECTORS IN FOCUS
SPRING 2020
CCAD’S Females in Focus
Itty-Bitty
Retrospective Film Festival
Trivia
Which Stephen King film adaptation was directed by a woman?

a. The Shining (1980)
d. Carrie (1976)
*Pet Sematary (1989)*

Did you know?

*Pet Sematary* was directed by Mary Lambert in 1989, and it was the only Stephen King film adaptation directed by a female until 2013 with the remake of *Carrie* directed by Kimberly Pierce.
Who was the first female director to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director?

a. Kathryn Bigelow
b. Lina Wertmüller
c. Jane Campion
d. Marleen Goris
Did you know?

Italian filmmaker Lina Wertmüller made history as the first Oscar-nominated female director for her work on the 1970s film *Seven Beauties*. She went on to receive an honorary Oscar in 2019, making her the third woman to ever receive an Oscar for her work as a director.
Who was the first woman to have won Best Director at the Golden Globes?

a. Barbra Streisand  
b. Kathryn Bigelow  
c. Jane Campion  
d. Allison Anders
Did you know?

Barbra Streisand directed, co-written, co-produced, and starred in the 1983 film *Yentl*, that won her Best Director at the Golden Globes.
In Kathryn Bigelow’s *Point Blank* (1991), which actor was Kathryn persistent to have casted as Johnny Utah?

- a. Johnny Depp
- b. Charlie Sheen
- c. Keanu Reeves
- d. Matthew Broderick
Keanu Reeves

Did you know?
Kathryn Bigelow fought to have Keanu Reeves cast as Johnny Utah, insisting she wouldn’t film the movie without him. The studio and producers were interested in looking at higher profile actors at the time like Johnny Depp.
SUBVERTING

CCAD ITTY-BITTY

Retrospective Film Festival:
Female Directors in Focus
Spring 2020

Thursday April 24th
& Friday April 25th
6pm - 10pm
Subversion is a term frequently heard in modern film critique, most often as a buzzword for press tours and pop culture reviews. Because of this generalization, the real meaning and impact of subversion is often lost in such discussions. As a result, “to subvert” is usually equated with “to shock”-- which, while certainly a possibility, is not the sole mission of a subversive film. To subvert is to challenge the audience’s expectations of film narrative and structure, and many times, to make a statement about those very constructs. The inherently critical nature of subversive films makes them especially relevant to a festival such as this one. Women directors

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<th>Director</th>
<th>Production Company</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Hypocrites</td>
<td>Lois Weber</td>
<td>Paramount Pictures</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1915</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Last Stage</td>
<td>Wanda Jakubowska</td>
<td>Film Polski</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1947</td>
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<tr>
<td>Point Break</td>
<td>Kathryn Bigelow</td>
<td>Largo Entertainment</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mi Vida Loca</td>
<td>Allison Anders</td>
<td>Sony Pictures</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1993</td>
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<td>The Piano</td>
<td>Jane Campion</td>
<td>Jan Chapman Productions</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>The Matrix</td>
<td>The Wachowskis</td>
<td>Warner Bros. Pictures</td>
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<td>American Psycho</td>
<td>Mary Harron</td>
<td>Lions Gate Films</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night</td>
<td>Ana Lily Amirpour</td>
<td>Logan Pictures</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>You Were Never Really Here</td>
<td>Lynne Ramsay</td>
<td>Film4 Productions</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<td>Rafiki</td>
<td>Wanuri Kahiu</td>
<td>Big World Cinema</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2018</td>
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are in a unique position when it comes to this type of filmmaking; as women, they are inherently providing a fresh take on a male-dominated art form. To go a step further, those who choose to address controversial topics—because, of course, not every film needs to challenge the status quo—are capable of making even greater strides in the world of subversive film.

Strong contenders for this category include Wanuri Kahiu’s Rafiki, Lois Weber’s The Hypocrites, and Ana Lily Amirpour’s A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night. All three address gender roles in various ways and through various genres: Rafiki focuses on modern-day Kenya and its struggles with LGBT rights, as experienced by its queer female protagonists. The Hypocrites addresses societal norms which a more general approach, in which “Truth”—embodied by a nude woman—reveals the vices of a religious congregation, despite their open criticism of such behaviors in others. A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night takes a unique approach as “the first Iranian vampire Western”; it plays on common tropes of sexuality and class often addressed by vampire narratives and applies them to a non-Western setting and cast. But while these films and more all certainly have subversive qualities, there was another choice on the list that even more perfectly encapsulated what it means to challenge expectations with a critical lens.

American Psycho, a 2000 psychological thriller directed by Mary Harron, caused much controversy upon its release. Even during production, the film was met with protests and boycotts, especially from feminist activist groups.

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The fact that such subject matter was adapted for the screen by a woman only added to this contention: its source material, a novel by Bret Easton Ellis, has garnered a reputation for its graphic violence towards women. However, in adapting this sensitive content, Harron deliberately steers away from the most shocking imagery of American Psycho, “so that the parody is more clearly signalled for the viewer.” Instead she focuses on the absurdity of the violence, as well as the sex, to help paint a picture of toxic masculinity and the often misogynistic worldview of men in power. “There's a scene,” Harron says in one interview, “that to me that was a real dividing line between male and female [...] where Bateman [Christian Bale] has sex with two prostitutes. Because when I read that scene in the book, clearly it was written as a parody of a Penthouse fantasy [...] You know that they're prostitutes and they're not getting into it. It's a job. So my direction to the actors, to the girls, was that this is routine.”

This juxtaposition of male fantasy with female reality is what, to many, makes American Psycho’s critique effective.

course, there are always those who do not understand the film’s subversion. Much like the 1999 adaptation of Chuck Palahnuik’s Fight Club, American Psycho still receives praise from the very people it seeks to critique. Christian Bale has described meeting such individuals while making the film. "I chatted with a few of these guys when I was preparing for the role," [Bale] remembers. "For a lot of them, it's their favourite book. They just don't seem to get that it's

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laughing at them. And some really disturbing things came out of their mouths [...] they seemed to assume I was the character.”

However, because of the choices made in its direction, Harron’s film is a more successful satire than its source material (while the inverse would be true of Fight Club). Its subversion lies in the discussion it raises around violence in film, its satire of the male power fantasy, and its unique position as a film directed by a woman but (initially) written by a man. American Psycho walks a fine line, and to many, resoundingly succeeds in doing so. Its story has become, in many ways, “a sly skewering of a woman-hating, alpha-male mindset that sadly didn’t die along with the 1980s.”

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CCAD’s
Itty-Bitty
FEMALES IN FOCUS
Retrospective Film Festival
TRIVIA
Which one of these actors were NOT asked to play Patrick Bateman?

a. Ewan McGregor  
b. Leonardo Di Caprio  
c. Tom Cruise  
d. Jared Leto
c. Tom Cruise

Did you know?

The Director of *American Psycho*, Mary Harron was essentially forced off the film when she took over casting. The production studio did not agree with her about casting bigger names. The studio reached out to Leonardo DiCaprio for the lead of Patrick Bateman. Mary Harron quit the film because of this and Oliver Stone was brought in to replace her. After DiCaprio dropped out to make *The Beach* instead and the project found it’s way back to Harron and the rest is history.
Who is the first female director to launch a billion-dollar movie franchise?
Catherine Hardwicke

Did you know?

Catherine Hardwicke directed *Twilight*. The single film made $69.6 million in its opening weekend in theaters. The franchise is worth $3.3 Billion.
This female director was Oscar nominated for her debut as a solo director. Who is she?
Greta Gerwig

Did you know?

Gerwig joined the rank of other distinguished artists similarly recognized with her nomination for *Lady Bird*. Other directors that also were nominated for their debut films:

- Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane* (1941))
- Robert Redford (*Ordinary People* (1980))
- James L. Brooks (*Terms of Endearment* (1983))
- Kevin Costner (*Dances with Wolves* (1990))
- John Singleton (*Boyz n the Hood* (1991))
- Spike Jonze (*Being John Malkovich* (1999))
- Sam Mendes (*American Beauty* (1999))
- Rob Marshall (*Chicago* (2002))
- Bennett Miller (*Capote* (2005))
- Tony Gilroy (*Michael Clayton* (2007))
- Benh Zeitlin (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012)).
Who is the first female to win an Academy Award for Directing?
Kathryn Bigelow

Did you know?

Yes it took that long! Kathryn Bigelow was the first female director to win an Academy Award for directing for *The Hurt Locker*. She was only the fifth to be nominated. The other four were: Lina Wertmüller, Jane Campion, Sofia Coppola and Greta Gerwig.
CCAD’s Itty-Bitty Retrospective Film Festival

Empowering

Female Directors in Focus

Spring 2020

Thursday, April 23rd & Friday, April 24th,
6:00-10:00PM
in the Canzani Screening Room

Columbus College of Art & Design
Especially in the modern-day film industry, feminist films or simply films about women are often called to be in some way empowering. While whether or not this is a necessary quality of such films is highly debatable, like “subverting”, “empowering” is also a term used to generate excitement and discussion surrounding a film at its release. Perhaps what makes the term so pervasive is how versatile it can be throughout various film genres: it has been used to refer to animated films such as Frozen (2013)\(^1\), romcoms like Legally Blonde (2001)\(^2\), and numerous action movies-- including those made by the superhero juggernauts Marvel and DC Films. These examples all lean in a more lighthearted direction, but the tone and execution of an empowering film can vary wildly. Many of the films considered initially for this category were found in others as well, including the number one choice for Pioneering, Where Are My Children? (1914), which deals with female empowerment in a far more serious way. Regardless of these factors, however, empowerment was a necessary inclusion in this film festival because of its inherent connection to women directors and the mark they often seek to leave on the industry and their audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sarah and Son</th>
<th>Dorothy Arzner</th>
<th>Paramount Pictures</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>1930</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dance, Girl, Dance</td>
<td>Dorothy Arzner</td>
<td>RKO Radio Pictures</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1940</td>
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<td>Outrage</td>
<td>Ida Lupino</td>
<td>The Filmakers</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1950</td>
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<td>The Intern</td>
<td>Nancy Meyers</td>
<td>Warner Bros. Pictures</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wonder Woman</td>
<td>Patty Jenkins</td>
<td>DC Films</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2017</td>
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Ida Lupino’s Outrage is a good example of an empowering film with a focus on real world social issues; it was only the second film out of post-Hays Code Hollywood that dealt with rape. It follows the story of Ann Walton, who is raped by an unwanted admirer and has to deal with the fallout as it relates to her own mental health, her family and friends, and how society now views her. In a different vein, Dance, Girl, Dance (1940) also puts female agency at the front and center, albeit with a different thematic focus. Its two main characters, played by Maureen O’Hara and Lucille Ball, are burlesque dancers who compete with one another for fame and the affections of the leading man. The film makes a strong statement about the objectification of women and the often fraught relationship between art and the business world. In the end, however, the film chosen for this category was one known for the stir it caused by depicting a well-known pop culture icon from a women’s point of view: the superhero.

Wonder Woman, released in 2017 and going on to gross nearly $822 million worldwide, is the first superhero film to be directed by a woman. It is also the first superhero film with a female lead since Elektra (Rob Bowman, Marvel Enterprises, USA) in 2005. Though it has since been followed up by Captain Marvel (Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, Marvel Studios, 2019), Wonder Woman is notable because it set the stage for future films with its resounding success. It was, in fact, the most profitable superhero film of 2017-- and since so much of the worry surrounding female superheroes is based in financial success\(^3\), this is an important aspect of Wonder Woman’s effect on the film industry as a whole. Beyond that, the film has garnered positive reviews worldwide and, in

many ways, has been cited as a milestone in the shattering of the glass ceiling regarding women and the superhero blockbuster film.

Since her very inception, Wonder Woman’s history as a superhero has been a complicated one. Created by American psychiatrist Dr. William Moulten Marston, Diana Prince was meant to embody female strength, of which Marston himself was a huge advocate. He often vouched for the importance of strong role models for women: “not even girls want to be girls as long as their feminine stereotype lacks force [...] strength.”4 While Marston’s language is no doubt a period of its time, the groundwork of a feminist mindset is there. However, Wonder Woman has been reimagined many times since her debut in 1941, and not all of those versions have been equally focused on female empowerment. It’s the logical conclusion, therefore, to have the superhero’s return to film be told through the lens of a woman director. Most importantly, Jenkins’ reimagining of the Wonder Woman character directly challenges the concept of “the male gaze” and its relationship with female agency.

Used to refer to the “maleness” of a film’s direction and focus (both thematically and technically), this term reveals the frequent framing of women as objects for the benefit of a male audience. Jenkins went to great lengths to be aware of this framing, in everything from Diana’s outfits, to her dialogue, to the men she is constantly surrounded by. One article points to an instance of harassment (specifically cat-calling) in the film and how it is approached from a different angle: “In capturing this encounter without the invasive use of intimate close-ups to accentuate Diana’s assets, and

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without the involvement of humour [...] Jenkins distinguishes this version of Wonder Woman from her predecessors by refusing to actively sexualise her.” Similar scenes in male-directed films are often used for comedic effect, depicting the woman as a punchline instead of a victim of objectification. Instead, here “the audience [has] to acknowledge the uncomfortable nature of serving as secondary participants to the male gaze.” This theme carries throughout, putting the focus on Diana’s strong moral code, practicality, strength, and skill in combat.

The overall lack of focus on female superheroes-- and the lack of female voices in the writing room-- has been a persistent issue throughout both Marvel and DC’s history. Even now, while many critics and fans alike are thankful for the legacy of Wonder Woman, some are also frustrated that such a milestone took this long to achieve in the first place. However, there is something to be said for the impact Wonder Woman has made, despite how long it’s taken to reach this milestone. In his 2016 essay on, of all things, American Psycho, Reagan Ross posited the following statement: that “the progressive (and subversive) potential of popular cinema in general is substantial” because it offers a stepping stone for which new, bold ideas can reach a wider audience. While Wonder Woman isn’t necessarily radical, it’s certainly a step in the right direction for action films, the superhero genre, and the importance of representation.

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itty-bitty
retrospective film festival
female directors in focus
spring 2020

Columbus College of Art & Design

Thursday, April 23rd
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6:00pm
10:00pm
CREDITS

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Film Categories .............................................. Lisa Di Giacomo, Caroline Manley, Allison Schnaidt, and Madison Van Buren

Selection Team .............................................. Lisa Di Giacomo and Caroline Manley

Historical Research & Explication .............................................. Lisa Di Giacomo and Caroline Manley

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