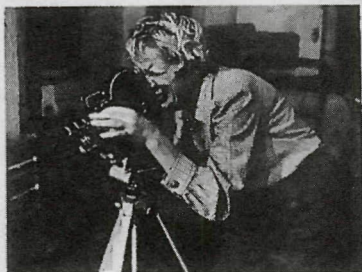


# WOMEN MAKE MOVIES INC

WOMEN MAKE MOVIES, INC., a non-profit, educational corporation, pending tax-exempt status, is designed to promote 16mm film-making within a local community; to provide professional film and video instruction for individuals who would not ordinarily receive such training; and to distribute finished movies and videotapes to a wide audience of interested viewers.

The Directors, Ariel Dougherty and Sheila Paige, recognize that women need special encouragement to develop their technical skills. Women Make Movies' creation of Chelsea Picture Station provides women with a first opportunity to document the central role which they play in community life.

Women Make Movies will produce films commissioned by a variety of clients. Chelsea Picture Station film-makers will bring a personal interest and fresh point of view to movies about menopause, new forms of family rearing, consumer protection, etc.



107 West 26th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10001  
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Brochure for Chelsea Picture Station workshop,  
20 November 1972. Photo (right) by Susan Meiselas.  
Women Make Movies Papers. Courtesy Women  
Make Movies, New York

## More Than “Just Talk”: The Chelsea Picture Station in the 1970s

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Kristen Fallica

*Women Make Movies (WMM) was formed in 1972 to address the under- and misrepresentation of women in film and media; today, the New York-based nonprofit supports the creation and circulation of independent film and media by and about women through its production assistance program, extensive distribution service, and advocacy role. WMM's place in feminist film culture is unparalleled; its fortieth anniversary is an occasion to reflect on its history, longevity, and ongoing influence.*

—Patricia White

From a distance it would have looked like this: two women—one, strapped with recording equipment, stands framed in the light from the open workshop door; the other runs farther up the street and stops, waiting for the signal.

“OK.”

She starts running toward the women with the equipment. She begins screaming as she runs and then comes to an abrupt halt . . . She is out of breath and begins to cry.

“Distortion. Let's do it again.”

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Backing up for a second run. The sky and buildings form an enormous vault, opening her up, making her feel small and desperate. She had needed to scream all day. It was a good time to record.

“OK.”

This time she runs for real, the screams breaking out of her in sharp stabs. She stops again near the equipment, crying and gasping for air. Good. They play it back right there, before going in. It’s good. . . . It will be used as part of a sound track for a movie. For HER movie.

Before Chelsea Picture Station was operating, she would have gone home silent, mildly depressed. Now she is no longer tied by her feelings, by her circumstances. She is unbinding her fears, her hopes, her angers, working through and with them, putting them outside herself into sound and image for herself and others to see, identify with, evaluate. She is making a movie. But it is not therapy, however therapeutic. It is a medium of expression, with its own discipline and laws, which means plain, hard work.

There is no overriding sense of authority at Chelsea Picture Station. . . . It feels more like a partnership. Because there is real work and purposeful activity happening, all that is shared and learned has a vital, living, breathing quality. Being together as women is not just talk. . . . We are together in the context of activities.

—“A Winter Night, Chelsea, Manhattan, 1973”

This production snapshot was written in 1973 by an unidentified film student at New York City’s Chelsea Picture Station, a media workshop for women established by Women Make Movies soon after WMM’s incorporation.<sup>1</sup> Readers of *Camera Obscura* are likely to recognize WMM’s exceptional longevity and reach within feminist media culture. For forty years, it has supported diverse women filmmakers, championed films by and about women, and inspired the audiences who see and use those films.

WMM’s anniversary—forty years of plain, hard work—is an opportunity to reflect on the past and present, the successes and challenges of feminist film culture, the relationship feminist filmmaking has with film studies, and the resonance today of the



commitments and values WMM articulated in its earliest years. This contribution grows from my research on the early history of WMM and its roots as a community media workshop and filmmaking collective.

After graduating from college in the late 1960s, WMM cofounders Ariel Dougherty and Sheila Paige worked in the field of youth media education in lower Manhattan alongside instructors Rodger Larson, Lynne Hofer, Jamie Barrios, and Deedee Halleck. Involved in local women's movement activities, Dougherty and Paige sought to extend their teaching to women, who, they noticed, needed "special encouragement" to develop technical skills and whose experiences they felt were not reflected in commercial films, television, and visual culture.<sup>2</sup> Providing women with access to film equipment and instruction was thus WMM's earliest mission. Growing out of a swelling feminist movement in the US and paralleled by the development of women's film groups around the world (including the UK, Canada, and Mexico), WMM recognized that while filmmaking was not the only vehicle through which women's consciousness raising could be enacted, it was an important one. These were powerful forces of the time: confidence in new technology's democratizing potential and the assertion that self-made-media culture fostered social and political change.

Securing a \$9,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts in the summer of 1972 allowed WMM to become officially incorporated as a nonprofit educational organization whose central goals were developing "the creative potential of women" and creating films "by, for, and about women."<sup>3</sup> The set of values articulated when WMM was founded established the basis for its institutional identity. Community, activism, access, support, and collaboration became concretized through four major projects taken up by WMM in its first decade of activity: filmmaking instruction, collective production, local and festival exhibition, and networking and coalition building. Although organizational priorities have shifted over time, these core commitments are worth historicizing.

For the first two years, WMM operated out of a church basement on West Twenty-Sixth Street in Manhattan, and its classes emphasized collaborative teaching and production to empower

women to respond to local concerns. To align the workshop more explicitly with the specific neighborhood in which it was located, WMM adopted the second name, Chelsea Picture Station. Pamphlets, flyers, and other records dating from 1972 to 1975 emphasized the local with phrases like “neighborhood media center” and “community film and video workshop.” One of the first promotional brochures states that the classes “provide women with a first opportunity to document the central role which they play in community life.”<sup>4</sup> A key early institutional priority was teaching basic skills—screenwriting and 16mm filming, editing, and sound as well as video and radio production—as tools for strengthening communication among neighborhood residents.

As WMM cultivated a civically engaged media center, it received national press coverage from newspapers and attention from other film organizations all around the US, and it took on the role of “prototype for other community film and video centers,” as it stated in its materials.<sup>5</sup> The students screened their films at women’s film festivals in Washington, DC, Toronto, Halifax, and Berlin, and reviews and mentions of WMM appeared in feminist publications such as *off our backs*.<sup>6</sup> Thus WMM’s community has always extended beyond its physical location in New York City—even at a time when it focused on serving women in its immediate neighborhood. WMM’s initial imperatives—that women use film as a mode of political engagement, speak from their own experiences and local concerns, and share their narratives and perspectives with larger audiences—still apply in especially meaningful ways in today’s globalized visual landscape.

Perhaps the most self-evident value enacted in the earliest years at WMM was a commitment to progressive politics and specifically to feminism, although the organization did not always call direct attention to its feminist engagement. An inclusive approach to feminist politics infused multiple dimensions of WMM’s early activities. The original workshop location was chosen because Chelsea was a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse neighborhood that had plentiful day care facilities, which would make it easier for mothers to take classes or participate in Chelsea Picture Station activities.<sup>7</sup> This kind of attentiveness shows an awareness of “intersectional” feminism before that term was even used.

By teaching first-time women filmmakers the technical skills of a male-dominated craft through a collaborative production workshop, WMM achieved a fusion of theory and practice and aimed to enact film's "radical aspiration," to use Annette Michelson's influential term, in concrete ways.<sup>8</sup> The 1970s saw the organizing of feminist collectives in numerous areas—health care (Healthright), publishing (the Feminist Press), radio (Radio Free Women), and even restaurants (Mother Courage). Filmmaking was just one arena in which feminist action took place, but it became a significant one in several ways. An upsurge in feminist filmmaking helped reshape the character of avant-garde art practices, seen primarily as a male domain through the 1950s and 1960s; feminist filmmaking nurtured the nascent development of film studies through the feminist work of Claire Johnston, Laura Mulvey, and other pioneers; and it became a salient example of visual media's influence in communities, politics, and education. For example, WMM's own "self-health" documentary production from 1976, *Healthcaring: From Our End of the Speculum* (dir. Denise Bostrom and Jane Warrenbrand, US), was a significant cinematic application of consciousness raising in the context of the women's health movement. Histories of the women's health movement tend to single out the text *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, published by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective in 1971, but *Healthcaring* and other feminist documentaries were used by scores of community centers and health organizations and helped fuel the growth of women's health groups and alternative clinics.

Committed to making visible the usually invisible experiences of women, such as street harassment, the Chelsea Picture Station aimed to show "real women's lives" and called attention to the importance of such documentation. Students wrote and filmed short narrative films about rape, balancing marriage and career, women artists, leadership, and the loneliness felt by older women, bringing "hitherto-invisible heroines to the screen."<sup>9</sup> But, importantly, the content of the films was not the only place to see feminist ideals enacted.

As feminist film theorists have argued, feminist cinema derives meaning not only from the content and form of its films but also, crucially, from its institutional structures and the relationship



between production and reception.<sup>10</sup> The Chelsea Picture Station workshop encouraged the ideals of collective organization, and, in line with their attempts to speak to local concerns, participants arranged screenings in locations such as schools, senior citizen centers, settlement houses, branches of the public library, street corners, and laundromats, and they conversed with audience members after screenings.

WMM's earliest programs sought to reshape how filmmaking and film viewing were imagined and experienced: according to a description from 1976, the organization was "dedicated to encouraging women and men, young and old, to view films—and all visual media—with a greater degree of understanding the nature of media, and how powerfully media can affect our lives. [As we] screen films and discuss the issues raised in the films, a strong sense of community is developed."<sup>11</sup> Consistent with other alternative art practices that proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Newsreel Collective and Third Cinema movement, WMM emphasized the political dimension of self-made and collaborative productions, nontheatrical screenings, and audience engagement. Exhibition was guided by an idealized vision of alternative cinema, associating the screening of locally produced films with social activism. As it was described in a 1973 news article, "They [the Chelsea Picture Station] see film as a community resource. It is not only a means of self-expression, but in the hands of the local people, film becomes political as they tell their stories and teach one another about themselves."<sup>12</sup>

One of the challenges I have faced while constructing an institutional history of WMM is how to articulate the big-picture question of WMM's unique position in independent film. Is it simply a matter of longevity—that while numerous feminist organizations formed in the 1970s, WMM is one that has lasted? Is it a matter of aesthetics—a result of WMM's consistent selection of high-quality films that people want to see, write about, and teach? Like most interesting questions, this one has a complex tangle of answers—WMM's status in the realm of independent and feminist media is defined by an intersection of histories, politics, influential individuals, powerful films, and long-standing commitments.

WMM's foundational goal to bring "long-needed women's

perspectives to visual media," as stated in an early flyer, was not necessarily unique.<sup>13</sup> Like many organizations established roughly forty years ago, WMM affirmed the premise that giving the means of production to people who would not ordinarily have access to them was a valuable tool for social change. A compendium of feminist media sources published in 1975 listed more than seventy organizations under the rubric of "non-print media," including WMM.<sup>14</sup> A similar volume, also from 1975, listed more than forty feminist film organizations around the US.<sup>15</sup> Iris Films and New Day Films, for example, were both founded in the 1970s by feminist filmmakers. They still survive, with New Day now a broader social justice media distributor and Iris a production company. But unlike many analogous cultural groups, and although it almost shut down several times in the face of various financial and organizational challenges, WMM lasted beyond the 1970s and became a film institution whose name and mission are legible to numerous organizations, filmmakers, educators, activists, and film festivals in many countries.

What was unique at WMM, perhaps, was its early cognizance of how important it was to power multiple aspects of film culture with feminist ideals—film content, production, distribution, and exhibition—and to struggle critically with the concepts and manifestations of difference and diversity that would become so central to feminism, even when those struggles led to near collapse on a few occasions. Filmmaker and critic Barbara Halpern Martineau (Sara Halprin) visited her WMM colleagues at their workshop in 1975 to assemble a set of interviews. While she acknowledged that "there are many American women working collectively in film," she wrote, "I chose [to write about] Women Make Movies . . . because they seem to be such a strong and continuing focus for other women working in media, and their problems are paradigms of the basic problems facing women who are working independently of the established film industry."<sup>16</sup> In 1975, after WMM organized a large-scale national Conference for Feminist Film and Video Organizations that more than seventy groups attended, activist and photographer Joan E. Biren (JEB) commented, "WMM is a model for more people than you recognize."<sup>17</sup>

As Debra Zimmerman stated at a workshop on WMM and the legacies of cinefeminism at the 2012 Society for Cinema and



Media Studies conference, some might see it as depressing that WMM has not “moved on” from its explicit feminist mission. The fact that WMM is still needed testifies to the persistent and long-standing struggle women filmmakers face in a sphere of cultural production that remains drenched in sexism and institutionalized inequality, and it testifies to the general lack of supportive infrastructure for independent film compared to the mainstream corporate media establishment. For this fortieth anniversary it seems to me that a simpler and more hopeful way to understand WMM’s distinctive position is to realize that WMM has always been something more—more than a community media workshop in 1972, and more than a distributor in 2012: a vibrant network of dedicated and talented people and a persistent agent of plain, hard work in the realm of feminist media.

### Notes

1. “A Winter Night, Chelsea, Manhattan, 1973,” ca. December 1973, Women Make Movies Papers, Women Make Movies, New York (hereafter WMM Papers).
2. Brochure, 20 November 1972, WMM Papers.
3. Archival document, ca. 1972, WMM Papers.
4. Brochure, 20 November 1972, WMM Papers.
5. Chelsea Picture Station flyer, ca. 1973, WMM Papers.
6. *off our backs* 3, nos. 10–11 (1973), clipping, WMM Papers.
7. “A Winter Night, Chelsea, Manhattan, 1973,” ca. December 1973, WMM Papers.
8. Annette Michelson, “Film and the Radical Aspiration,” *Film Culture*, no. 42 (1966): 34–42.
9. Chelsea Picture Station flyer, ca. 1973, WMM Papers.
10. For example, see Annette Kuhn, “Textual Politics,” in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 250–67.
11. Overview of activities, ca. 1976, WMM Papers.

12. *Valley Advocate*, 14 November 1973, clipping, WMM Papers.
13. Overview of activities, ca. 1976, WMM Papers.
14. Cynthia Ellen Harrison, *Women's Movement Media: A Source Guide* (New York: Bowker, 1975).
15. Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie, *The New Woman's Survival Sourcebook* (New York: Knopf, 1975).
16. Interviews by Barbara Halpern Martineau, 1974-75, 12 October 1974, Ariel Dougherty Papers, 1946-93, MC 589, folder 12.8, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
17. Conference for Feminist Film and Video Organizations follow-up discussion, 1 April 1975, New York, WMM Papers. Biren was a founding member of the Furies Collective in Washington, DC.

**Kristen Fallica** is completing her dissertation on the history of Women Make Movies in the Film Studies Program at the University of Pittsburgh. In support of her research, she has received honors and awards from the Andrew Mellon Foundation and the American Association of University Women, among other organizations. Her primary interests are film historiography, documentary cinema, feminist media studies, and film and composition pedagogy.

Photo from Chelsea Picture Station workshop, ca. 1972. Carla Johnson (left), Ariel Dougherty (right). Presumed photographer Sheila Paige. Women Make Movies Papers. Courtesy Women Make Movies, New York



- The interview below is 'suggested' reading, but not mandatory -

## Looking Back and Forward: A Conversation about Women Make Movies

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Debra Zimmerman and Patricia White

In the summer of 1984 I interned at Women Make Movies, working closely with Debra Zimmerman, the organization's relatively new director and then sole employee. When I returned in 1988 to work in distribution, the organization had moved to Soho and taken on significantly more films and staff. I eventually joined the board in 2001 and currently serve as chair.

As a teacher and scholar, I owe much of my perspective on feminist film to what I have learned from the staff, board members, filmmakers, consultants, funders, programmers, and nonprofit film professionals with whom I have come into contact through WMM—no one more than Zimmerman. An intense presence with a seductive voice and an infectious laugh, she taught me how to hail a New York City cab, read a budget, see more festival films in one day than would seem humanly possible, and turn a passionate commitment to women and film into a vocation.

This is a distillation of our conversations in late summer 2012, as Zimmerman juggled real-estate issues, negotiations with a

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folding nonprofit to take on dozens of their fiscal sponsorship projects, and preparations for the Toronto International Film Festival.

### Interview

Patricia White: *This is WMM's fortieth anniversary—next year will be your thirtieth anniversary as director. Can you speak to how far the organization has come since you started?*

Debra Zimmerman: I am thinking about when you first walked through the door, after I became director—the entire WMM could fit into my office now. The poster of Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (US, 1983) was in the office—we distributed her earlier film *Regrouping* (US, 1976). Somehow *Born in Flames* is reverberating; it was kind of like the past and the future and the present all twisted into one.

*Yeah, it was set in the future—about now—and their African American president really was a socialist!*

Back then, imagining WMM as it is now is like imagining that we'd have an African American president—quite unbelievable. There was a moment back then—a decade, really—of cinematic exploration combined with feminist theory that was so exciting. And it goes to the heart of the beginnings of WMM under my leadership. That intersection of politics and theory defined us. I wonder where films like that are now. In a positive way, though, today we see a kind of activism that connects back—to the seventies, maybe, not the eighties—and a real desire for social impact. But I miss it.

*When I came back to work at WMM we were releasing Surname Viet Given Name Nam (dir. Trinh T. Minh-ha, US, 1989). For me that film was a bridge between that kind of theoretically engaged filmmaking and the global embeddedness and transnational emphasis that characterizes so much of the collection now. That was a pivotal moment. But that was a feature film and we struggled to put it in theaters. It has had an incredible life in scholarly and nontheatrical settings. But I think the landscape has*

*changed—some of that experiment with form has had to go into art films that are at least semiviable theatrically.*

Yes, how can you keep those two things going at the same time? I think about *The Gold Diggers* (dir. Sally Potter, UK, 1983) as the end of something—it was about pushing theory into practice as far as it could go until it was devoid of pleasure for many people—though not for me!

*Or me!*

If there is another film that encapsulates a time of change, I think it would have to be personal filmmaking—films like *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (dir. Deborah Hoffman, US, 1994) or *A Healthy Baby Girl* (dir. Judith Helfland, US, 1997).

*The catalog is full of such films that engage documentary ethics in so many ways, but there's still an imbalance in terms of which filmmakers get public recognition.*

We are in a time right now of the million-dollar documentary—the multimillion-dollar documentary—and for some reason, women have not been able to bring that personal element into their big documentaries.

*The distributors of those films are not nonprofits.*

The issue is more that the films are softened around the edges.

*I wanted to ask you about a comment that you made at the workshop on WMM at the 2012 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in Boston, a sort of good news, bad news statement.*

What I said was that I'm really happy to be celebrating our fortieth anniversary, and I'm also sad because it makes me think about what it means that we're still as needed as we were forty years ago. . . . We were supposed to go out of business! We're a project that by its very nature was meant to stop when equity is reached, but equity hasn't been reached by a long shot. Certainly there's so much to celebrate. When I came to WMM, I could count on one hand the

number of women directors working in Hollywood. I remember being on a panel with Michelle Parkerson in Chicago at the Women in the Director's Chair Festival, probably around 1985, 1986, and being able to count on two hands the number of African American women directors that we could think of, much less those working in Hollywood. Now there are more women than I can count making movies, yet the statistics are still very, very bad. We're talking about a decrease or at least stasis since 1998 in the number of women directors who are in the Directors Guild of America. We're talking about celebrating when we see a film festival that has more than 25 percent women, like Sundance does. So these things make me question whether it's a time to celebrate or not.

*But the number of films that WMM distributes or supports is much greater today. And it's not necessarily the case that the women in WMM's collection or fiscal sponsorship program are Hollywood-bound.*

That's right, that's right. What I find interesting is the growth of women's film festivals around the world, particularly in developing countries, in former Soviet republics—even in the US. This is under the radar in the film world because these are community-based festivals. In New York we have not one big but four smaller women's film festivals—including two African American women's festivals. I am finding out about festivals all the time—in Ljubljana, in Chile. I'm proud that WMM has actually played a role with some of them: Women Make Waves in Taiwan and Film Mor in Istanbul started with WMM films. We decided that any group that wanted to have a festival would be given films for free the first year and we'd come and help present them. We've done that in six to eight places. This year we worked with the Sierra Leone International Film Festival to create a women's film section, and this month I am on my way to Monaco to present five documentaries focusing on human rights issues at the MINI Film Festival. It's sponsored by BMW and we are collaborating with a conference called "Grace, a Symbol of Change," about Princess Grace's legacy! This really represents the breadth of audiences' interest in seeing



feminist film. And this year with our fortieth anniversary we are doing events in Bolivia, Sheffield in the UK, Dallas, St. John's in Canada, South Africa, Sarajevo, and Iceland, just to mention a few.

*Can you give a sense of the change in scale of the organization?*

I think the early 1980s catalog probably had about forty films. The collection now is around 550 films . . . we've kept it fairly stable. Every year we pick up between eighteen and twenty-five films, and that means deaccessing films every couple of years. I'm thinking that we need to make these archival films available for streaming on the Internet; we're hoping to get a grant for it. There are films that are still significant historically but really no longer appropriate for active distribution. For example, there were so many films that were made about Latin America, about Nicaragua and El Salvador, back in the day.

*What about the size of the organization's budget?*

When you were an intern at WMM and I was the director, I remember there being a budget figure for \$54 for the year in Xeroxing costs. That's probably because we were getting free Xeroxing from somewhere! The change in scale is just insane. We have a spreadsheet of every year's income in distribution from the mid-eighties until now, and I think this past year was about \$1.5 million, and back then it was about \$26,000. We are a stable organization . . . [though] we change all the time and we get better, I think, at what we do. We have thirteen on staff. That's part-time and full-time, and we have a couple of consultants that work with us on a regular basis.

*That stability is also extraordinary given that WMM receives very little government support.*

At this point, with the recent cuts, our funding from the government is probably less than \$100,000 a year. So it's way less than 10 percent. When you include forms of earned income besides distribution, like the Production Assistance Program, I think it's some-

thing like 2 to 3 percent of our total budget, which I'm so proud of. I was just asked last week, in an interview for a fortieth anniversary event at the Dallas Video Festival, what I am most proud of. Nobody's asked me that before. And the answer—I realized after watching the Republican Convention that it was a little scary [laughter]—but what I was most proud of was that I created jobs. It's actually possible to make a living working in women's film, and that to me is an extraordinary thing.

*And this stability is maintained despite the vicissitudes of media culture. It's a wonder that there's still a viable educational film market.*

We have always been ahead of the curve in the films we acquire because of our filmmakers, but I don't think we can be ahead of the curve in terms of format. We've seen formats come and go, like CD-ROM. Of course institutions take a much longer time to respond to technological changes than the consumer market does. What WMM is more than anything is a content aggregator—aggregator being one of those buzzwords of the 2010s—but we are one, and we are a brand; as long as there continues to be a paucity of films directed by women that represent women in a feminist way, there will be a need for some sort of WMM distribution program.

*Going back to that dual mission of production assistance and distribution, it is not about finding films on certain topics for a market. Obviously you have to market and package things; but this truly is independent work, it represents filmmakers' formal inventiveness, their cultural perspectives on the material, their ambitions about how to use the medium, and that's a tricky balance—to have political commitment and aesthetic commitment and a business model that weathers all these technological storms.*

It is the thing I love the most about WMM. When we see a film that tackles a difficult political issue—like *Rachel* by Simone Bitton (France/Belgium, 2009)—in a formally inventive and important way, I get excited. That being said, there are amazing, strong, solid, though perhaps more traditional documentaries being made about important issues that are not being covered by the

mainstream media—or not being covered from a feminist perspective. I am thinking of *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo* (dir. Lisa F. Jackson, US, 2007), which came out the same month that the issue hit the front page of the *New York Times*. But no matter what the style of the film, it is still so difficult to get them made. Films in our Production Assistance Program take years and a huge diversity of funding sources to get made. *Nerakhoon (The Betrayal)*, (US, 2008) by Ellen Kuras took twenty years, *Love and Diane* (US/France, 2002) by Jennifer Dworkin, twelve years. These films are produced independently; they do not receive major grants. They are not produced by studios, they are not produced by television, and they do in fact really represent very individual perspectives.

At the same time I am proud that we still distribute *La nouba des femmes du Mont-Chenoua* (Algeria, 1979), by Assia Djebar, which is going to show at the Museum of Modern Art in November [2012]. And I love that we have a collection that is really irreplaceable in terms of [capturing] the formal experimentation of the eighties—we called it “New Directions.” . . . At the Visible Evidence conference at New York University last summer, an academic teaching film stood up and said that WMM has enabled her to expand outside the US and to have access to an international feminist perspective. I was blown away. I think that what we have been able to do in very selected areas is to build collections that are really nuanced in their breadth. We had collections like “New Directions” and “Punto de Vista: Latina.” Now I think we have one of the most important collections by and about Muslim and Arab women. Post-9/11 we made the films available for free to anyone who wanted to use them. Before launching the offer—we called it “Response to Hate”—we all needed to look at the films to make sure that we weren’t reinforcing anti-Arab sentiment. And I was proud that not one of the films needed to be taken out. Feminism and Islam have an uneasy relationship, but even the films that were most critical of Islam were from a very personal perspective. It’s a complex collection.

*When I come to a board meeting I’m so impressed at how present WMM is in the larger film world.*



It is very intentional. I believe that WMM should be an advocacy organization and we should do it within the film world. We are much more the women's organization within the film world than we are the film organization of the women's community. So many times people have told us to change our name; I'm sure you were part of those conversations where we talked about changing the name to Women's Educational Media or something like that and we stuck with the name because it is a statement: Women Make Movies. I love to be on a panel like the one on distribution that I'll be on next week at the Toronto International Film Festival. Coming from an organization called Women Make Movies—as one of only four invited speakers—I don't have to say a word about feminism and I am still advocating for stronger representation of women in the film world. And making people aware that there is still a need for organizations like WMM.

And it's not just about who is directing the film. When we started looking at statistics regarding the funding and financing of independent documentaries, we looked at the subject of the film. Of course men making films about men got the most money and women making films about women got the least money. But what might even be more distressing is that those men making films about women get less money than women making films about men. Women's interests are seen as special interests. This reinforces something else people have tried to get us to change over the years—the fact that we distribute films that not only are by women directors but that also look at the world from a feminist perspective—with the broadest definition of feminism possible.

**Debra Zimmerman** has been the executive director of Women Make Movies since 1983. During her tenure it has grown into the largest distributor of films by and about women in the world and helped hundreds of women get their films made through its Production Assistance Program. Films from WMM programs have won prizes at the last five Sundance Film Festivals and have been nominated for or won Academy Awards in five of the last six years. Zimmerman speaks around the world on independent film distribution, marketing, and financing as well as on women's film.

**Patricia White** is a member of the editorial collective of *Camera Obscura* and the current chair of the Women Make Movies board. Professor of film and media studies at Swarthmore College, she is the author of *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*, the coauthor of *The Film Experience*, and the coeditor of *Critical Visions in Film Theory*. Her book on contemporary global women's filmmaking is forthcoming from Duke University Press.

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