



VISIONARIES: FEMALE FILMMAKERS 1910 - TODAY



GIRLS' VOICES MATTER

We offer a safe, supportive community for girls to tell their stories and show us what they think and feel. We listen to girls and help them understand how important they are in the world. Through teamwork and individual attention, we encourage free expression through literary art and technology. We help girls feel proud of themselves and their accomplishments.

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Alice Guy Blaché

First Narrative Filmmaker

Born in 1873, Alice Guy began her career as a typist and stenographer.

She worked at “Comptoir général de la photographie,” a camera manufacturer. It was owned by Felix-Max Richard, and later, by Léon Gaumont, a pioneer of the early film industry.

Alice became Gaumont’s secretary, and over several years, grew exceptionally familiar with the film industry and those in it.

In 1895, after attending a screening of *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, Alice became convinced that she could create a film different than the strictly observational films currently being made.

With Gaumont’s permission, Alice made her first film, *La Fée aux Choux*, (*The Fairy of the Cabbages*). This was arguably the world’s first narrative film; the first to incorporate fictional story-telling elements.

Her most significant film, *The Life of Christ*, was filmed in 1906. It was a big production for the time and included 300 extras.

She was one of the first filmmakers to use audio recordings in conjunction with the images on screen in Gaumont’s “Chronophone” system. She also used some of the world’s first special effects, including using double exposure, masking techniques, and running a film backward.

In 1910, Alice started her own film company, Solax. Her business flourished for over two years, allowing her to build a \$100,000 studio plant of her own.

The same year she made *A Fool and His Money*, with a cast of only African-American actors. The film is now at the National Center for Film and Video Preservation at the American Film Institute.



Alice made over 1000 films, some 350 of which still exist today. Many of them carry very progressive themes for the time, including that marriage was a partnership between two equals. Many starred women in action roles, doing their own stunts.

Following marital and financial trouble, Alice directed her last film in 1919 and dissolved the studio in 1921.

She was awarded the Legion of Honor in 1953, the highest non-military award France offers. Despite this, she was often passed over or ignored by film historians. She grew concerned with her apparent absence from the historical record of the industry and worked hard to correct it.

Her autobiography, which was published posthumously in 1976 (eight years after her death), is entitled, *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*.

MAYA DEREN

PIONEER OF EXPERIMENTAL FILM

Maya Deren, born in 1917 as Eleonora Derenkowska, was a Ukrainian-American filmmaker and one of the most important American experimental filmmakers and promoters of the avant-garde movement in the 1940s and 50s.

After graduation from Smith College, Maya joined the European émigré art scene in Greenwich Village, where she supported herself writing for radio shows and foreign language newspapers.

In 1940, Maya moved to Los Angeles to focus on her poetry and freelance photography.

In 1941, she wrote a children's book on dance, which she suggested to acclaimed African American dancer, choreographer, and activist Katherine Dunham. Maya later became Dunham's assistant and publicist. It was this relationship that sparked Maya's interest in Haitian culture.

In 1943, Maya purchased a used 16mm Bolex camera. This camera captured her first and best-known film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Made in her Los Angeles home in collaboration with her husband, and on a budget of \$250, *Meshes of the Afternoon* is recognized as a formative American avant-garde film.

The film features a woman, played by Maya, walking to her friend's home in Los Angeles, where she falls asleep and has a dream. Sequences in the film repeat themselves, as do certain symbols.

Georges Sadoul, author of *l'Histoire générale du cinéma*, a comprehensive work on world cinema, said Maya Deren may have been "the most important figure in the post-war development of the personal, independent film in the U.S.A."

Over her career, Maya made many influential experimental films, such as *Ritual in Transfigured Time* and *Meditation on Violence*.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, Maya prominently spoke out against Hollywood's influence on film-making. She declared, "I make my pictures for what Hollywood spends on lipstick," and observed that Hollywood had "been a major obstacle to the definition and development of motion pictures as a creative fine-art form."

She opposed the restrictions and standards of the commercial industry.

In 1947, she traveled to Haiti for the first of four multi-month visits. She studied and filmed Haitian culture; specifically, Voduo.

The footage was used in a 1977 documentary film fifteen years after her sudden death in 1961 to a brain hemorrhage. She was 44.

In 1986, the American Film Institute created the Maya Deren Award to honor independent filmmakers.

Past recipients have included fellow visionary women Julie Dash and Barbara Kopple.



JULIE DASH

TRAILBLAZING DIRECTOR



Julie Dash, born in 1952, is an American film director, writer, and producer.

Talented and driven from a young age, Dash received her MFA in 1985 at the UCLA Film School.

While there, she directed *Working Models of Success* and *Diary of an African Nun*. Screened at the Los Angeles Film Exposition, the latter earned a Director's Guild Award for a Student Film.

Julie is one of the filmmakers born out of the L.A. Rebellion, alternatively known as the "Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers."

This refers to the generation of young African and African-American filmmakers who studied at the UCLA Film School in the during the 1960s to 80s and created a quality Black Cinema that provides an alternative to Hollywood cinema.

Julie's most successful film, 1991's *Daughters of the Dust*, was the first full-length movie directed by an African-American woman to obtain a general theatrical release in the United States.

The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. It was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize and won a cinematography award.

Set in 1902, the film follows three generations of Gullah women on St. Helena Island off the coast of South Carolina.

It received critical acclaim, with the New York Times calling Julie a "strikingly original filmmaker."

In 2016, 25 years after the film's release, Beyoncé's acclaimed visual album, *Lemonade*, made several overt references to the film, leading to a revival of interest and an introduction to a new generation.

BARBARA KOPPLE

AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARIAN



Barbara Kopple, born in 1946, is an award-winning director known primarily for her documentary work.

Barbara attended the School of Visual Arts, where she met documentary filmmakers Albert and David Maysles through a classmate. She assisted them on their documentary *Salesman*, and did camera work for their film on the Rolling Stones, *Gimme Shelter*.

When reflecting on her work with the Maysles, Kopple reminisced, “the wonderful thing about working for Alan and David Maysles was that they were the first company that treated women as equals... everybody attended all the meetings; everybody’s opinion was important.”

She ultimately worked as an editor, camera operator, and sound operator on numerous documentaries before starting her own production company, Cabin Creek Films, in 1972.

Her first film, *Harlan County, USA*, explored a mining labor dispute in Kentucky.

Kopple moved to Harlan with a small crew and a loan of \$12,000. She and her crew lived with the miners, often filming in very tense situations. She recalls filming even when they ran out of film because the presence of a camera “kept down violence.”

The film took four years to make and cost over \$200,000. Barbara, determined to see the film to completion, ended up using her personal credit cards to finance much of the film. She was also subjected to death threats and harassment from the mine owners.

The film debuted at the New York Film Festival in October 1976, where it received a standing ovation. The film would go on to win the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

Kopple’s next full-length documentary, *American Dream*, captured a two-year-long workers strike against Hormel Foods in Minnesota. It premiered at the New York Film Festival on October 6, 1990. It earned Barbara her second Academy Award.

Barbara’s most recent film, *New Homeland*, which explores the Canadian practice of sponsoring refugees. Canadian citizens put up their own money (sometimes upwards of \$20,000) to help settle families of refugees in the country. The sponsor families then provide guidance and support as the sponsored families adapt to their new home.

According to *POV* magazine, Canada’s premier magazine about documentary culture, the film is, “a poignant story of new beginnings and of the challenges of creating a home after being displaced by violence...Kopple’s doc offers an impassioned tale for Americans old and new to remember that the USA is a nation founded upon immigration.”

MIRA NAIR

GOLDEN LION WINNER

Mira Nair is an internationally successful filmmaker and producer specializing in films highlighting Indian culture.

Born in 1957 in Odisha, in eastern India, Mira moved with her family to Delhi as a child.

As a young adult, Mira applied to Western schools. She was offered a full scholarship to Cambridge University but ultimately turned it down to accept a full scholarship to Harvard University.

Although she was originally interested in acting, Mira began her film career creating documentaries focusing on Indian cultural tradition.

Her second documentary film, *So Far From India*, won Best Documentary at the American Film Festival and New York's Global Village Film Festival.

In 1983, with her long-time collaborator Sooni Taraporevala, Nair co-wrote *Salaam Bombay!*, a film following the lives of Bombay street children.

Nair sought out real children living in Bombay's slums to more accurately portray the lives of children who survive in the streets.

Though not a box office success, the film is critically acclaimed and won 23 international awards, including the Camera D'or and Prix du Public at the Cannes Film

Festival in 1988.

Perhaps her most popular film, *Monsoon Wedding* followed a Delhi family preparing for a traditional Punjabi wedding.

The film earned over \$30 million at the box office, won the Golden Lion award and received a Golden Globe Award nomination. In 2017, IndieWire named it the best romance of the 21st century.

Nair then directed the Golden Globe-winning HBO film *Hysterical Blindness*.

Her 2007 film, *The Namesake*, follows the conflicted son of Indian immigrants. The film was presented with the Dartmouth Film Award and was honored with the Pride of India award at the Bollywood Movie Awards.

A longtime activist, Nair created an annual film-makers' laboratory, Maisha Film Lab in Kampala, Uganda.

Beginning in 2005, young directors in East Africa have been trained at this non-profit facility with the belief that, as Mira has stated, "If we don't tell our stories, no one else will."

Mira is an adjunct professor at Columbia University, where in collaboration with Maisha Film Lab, the school offers opportunities for international students to work together making films.



KATHRYN BIGELOW

HOLLYWOOD POWERHOUSE

Kathryn Bigelow, born in 1951 in San Carlos, CA, is a celebrated Hollywood director, producer, and writer.

Bigelow attended the graduate film program at Columbia University in New York City.

Bigelow's 2008 film, *The Hurt Locker*, is critically acclaimed and won the Academy Award for Best Picture (the first to be directed by a woman).

With that film, Kathryn became the first woman to win the Academy Award for Best Director, the Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing, the BAFTA Award for Best Direction, and the Critics' Choice Movie Award for Best Director. She was also included in Time's 100 most influential people of the year.

Zero Dark Thirty, her next film, was another box-office and critical success, with dozens of critics including it in their Top 10 lists. It was also nominated for five Academy Awards and four Golden Globes.

In her career, Kathryn has been known for her determination in getting the shot she needs for her films and for being extremely involved on set.

This meant that in her 1991 film, *Point Break*, while filming a skydiving scene, Kathryn was on the airplane with a parachute on as she filmed, and during surfing scenes in the film, she would paddle out with the actors. For *The Hurt Locker*, Bigelow filmed in 130-degree heat in Jordan.

When discussing women in the film industry, Kathryn is quick to assert that she's a filmmaker, "full stop." Not a "female director." She seems reluctant to carry that mantle, and during her acceptance speech for *The Hurt Locker*, she did not acknowledge the historical aspect of the win.

Kathryn was approached by a reporter



backstage who claimed that Bigelow had been hesitant in the past to call herself a female director. The reporter asked, "Are you ready to say that now, at this historic moment?"

Bigelow replied, "First of all, I hope I'm the first of many. And of course I'd love to just think of myself as a filmmaker, and I wait for the day when the modifier can be a moot point."

In another interview, she explained her take on women in the industry:

"If there's specific resistance to women making movies, I just choose to ignore that as an obstacle for two reasons: I can't change my gender, and I refuse to stop making movies. It's irrelevant who or what directed a movie, the important thing is that you either respond to it, or you don't. There should be more women directing; I think there's just not the awareness that it's really possible. It is."

JENNIFER YUH

FIRST WOMAN TO SOLO DIRECT
A MAJOR HOLLYWOOD ANIMATED FILM



Jennifer Yuh is a South Korean-American director and storyboard artist. Born in 1972, she immigrated to the United States with her family when she was 4 years old.

Yuh attended California State University, Long Beach, where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Illustration.

It was at Cal State that she was introduced to animation. She describes the moment she knew what she wanted to do:

“When I was in college...a veteran storyboard artist came to talk to my class. He showed us how he drew movies for a living. My mind exploded. And that led to a career in animation.”

In 1997, she got hired as a storyboard artist on HBO’s Todd McFarlane’s *Spawn* series.

In 1998, Yuh began working at Dream-

Works as a storyboard artist, working on such films as *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas*, *Madagascar*, and finally, *Kung Fu Panda*, where she served as head of story and as the director of the opening hand-drawn dream sequence.

After its release, Yuh was called to direct *Kung Fu Panda 2*. The film was a major critical and international box office success with a worldwide gross of \$665.6 million, making it, at the time, the highest-grossing film ever directed by a woman.

For *Kung Fu Panda 2*, Yuh also won the Annie Award for Best Directing in a Feature Production.

In an interview with *Time*, Yuh credits producer Melissa Cobb with providing the drive she needed to direct, saying:

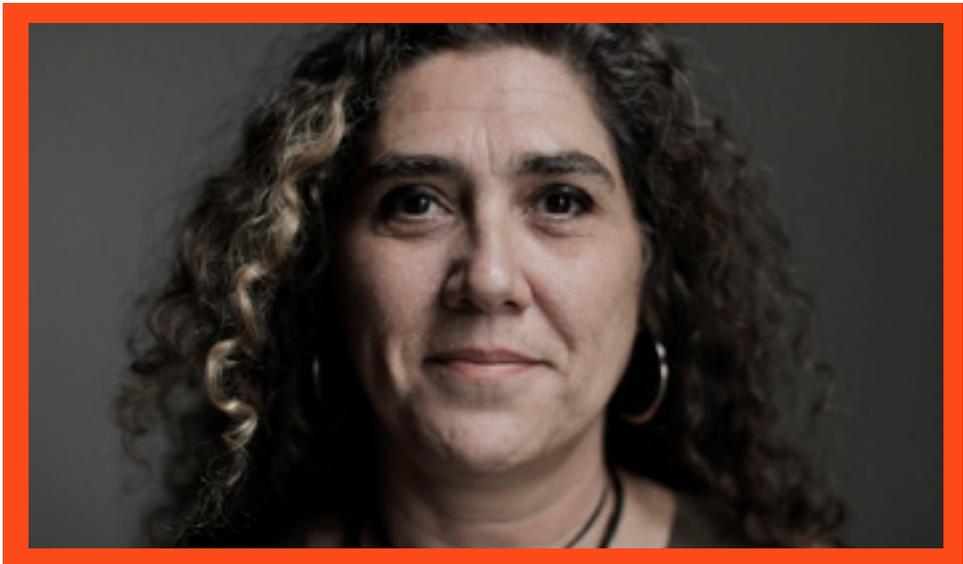
“Melissa Cobb came to me and said, ‘Jen, you should direct a movie.’ I said, ‘I can’t do it, I haven’t done it, I’m too quiet, I’m too introverted’...and she said, ‘No, you can do it.’ I wouldn’t have gone to that glass ceiling yelling and screaming and saying ‘I’m going to make you break!’ She literally put me in a catapult and threw me at it.”

She follows in the footsteps of fellow DreamWorks colleague, Vicky Jenson, who co-directed of *Shrek*, the first film to win an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.

Yuh recognizes that like the women before her, she’s in a very visible and important position, telling *gal-dem* magazine, “If being visible, being one of the ones that people can look at and say ‘hey, that person looks like me and is doing a job I want to do,’ if it provides encouragement to people, then I think that’s a really, really good thing.”

ANNA MUYLAERT

EMINENT ARTHOUSE DIRECTOR



Anna Muylaert, born in 1964, is an award-winning Brazilian arthouse director and writer. She's written and directed such films as *Que Horas Ela Volta?* (*The Second Mother*), and *Mãe Só Há Uma*, (*Don't Call Me Son*).

She studied film-making at the School of Communications and Arts at the University of São Paulo from 1980 to 1984.

The Second Mother entered the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and Panorama at Berlinale film festival, where it received the Audience Award.

Her most recent film, *Don't Call Me Son*, about a gender-fluid teenager struggling with the revelation that the woman who raised them is not their mother, was shown in the Panorama section at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival. It won a Jury Prize at the Teddy Awards for LGBT-re-

lated films at the festival.

Frustrated by the sexism she encounters in the industry, she's used her fame within the arthouse community to speak out against it, explaining:

"When you get a certain level of success, it's like entering a party where there's only men...they say, 'If this is happening, it's because of us. Not you.'"

She describes a situation where distributors of *The Second Mother* ignored her and praised a male producer who had nothing to do with the creative aspects of the film:

"[The atmosphere] was like, guy-to-guy. If the film is good, it's because of the guy...the distributor was just looking at him and saying, 'Oh, those characters are so good. The script is so good.' But he didn't even look at me. That's humiliating. We

We hope the stories of these important pioneers of film have inspired you. At GIRLS' VOICES MATTER, we truly believe that the creative potential of teen girls is a major force for good in the world.

We offer classes and workshops in photography, video storytelling, writing, and visual art. Please visit us at www.girlsvoicesmatter.com.

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