

## CREATING A DIFFERENT IMAGE: BLACK WOMEN'S FILMMAKING OF THE 1970S-90S

### THE SOJOURNER TRUTH FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

In 1976, an extraordinary group of Black feminist artists and activists—Faith Ringgold, Margo Jefferson, Patricia Jones, Michele Wallace, and Monica Freeman—co-organized the first ever Black women's film festival: the Sojourner Truth Festival of the Arts. The festival, held at the Women's Interart Center in New York City, situated films by Black women within a broader Black feminist arts ecosystem. The festival was simultaneously a celebration of the emergence of a Black women's film culture as well as a radical call for the kinds of socio-political and institutional changes necessary for it to thrive.

Four decades later, **The Sojourner Truth Festival of the Arts, 2023** commemorates the 1976 festival with a nine-week screening series—*Creating a Different Image: Black Women's Filmmaking of the 1970s-90s*—and a closing symposium March 3-4 celebrating the original festival and the tradition of Black feminist filmmaking with over 40 Black women filmmakers, artists, writers, and scholars participating.

### PROGRAM 1: BLACK WOMEN BEHIND THE LENS, IN PRODUCTION, AND FILM PROGRAMMING

The series opens with a showcase of the multifaceted work of Black women filmmakers.

#### ***Sisters in Cinema* (Dir. Yvonne Welbon, 2003, excerpt, 10 min, digital video)**

Yvonne Welbon's award-winning documentary *Sisters in Cinema* (2003) examines the careers of Black women filmmakers from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup>, including many of the filmmakers in our 2023 series. The film is based on research Welbon conducted for her doctoral dissertation and includes a set of fascinating and informative personal interviews. Welbon (b. 1967) is the founder of the non-profit Sisters in Cinema, an organization with an inclusive mission to center and celebrate Black girls, women, and gender nonconforming media makers.

Welbon is a co-organizer of the 2023 festival and Sisters in Cinema is a co-presenter of the film series.



#### ***Editing Exercises* (Dir. Hortense "Tee" Beveridge, c1950s, 3 min, 16mm)**

Courtesy of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, gift of Pearl Bowser.

Hortense "Tee" Beveridge (1923-1993), a talented film editor who worked in public television as well as feature films, experiments with the expressive possibilities of editing in *Editing Exercises* (1950s), short classroom montage sequences made at New York University.

#### ***Morris* (Dir. John E. Quill, Ed. Hortense "Tee" Beveridge, 1971, 10 min, digital video)**

Courtesy of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, gift of Pearl Bowser.

Written and directed by John E. Quill, *Morris* (1971) was made in collaboration with members of the Brownsville Youth Center as a Youth Services Agency film project. Beveridge served as associate producer and editor on this experimental narrative suffused with humor and poignancy.



***Integration Report I* (Dir. Madeline Anderson, 1960, 21 min, DCP)**

Courtesy of Icarus.

Groundbreaking documentary filmmaker, producer, and screenwriter Madeline Anderson's *Integration Report 1* (1960) examines the struggle for racial equality across the United States—in Alabama, Brooklyn, and Washington, D.C. Anderson incorporates footage by other documentarians such as Albert Maysles and Ricky Leacock, includes protest songs by Maya Angelou, and a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. The film is recognized as the first 16mm documentary film directed by an African American woman. Anderson (b. 1923) participated in the 1976 festival, receiving its Woman of the Year award.



***Being Me* (Dir. Madeline Anderson, 1975, 20 min, digital video)**

Courtesy of Medgar Evers College (CUNY) Library Archives.

Anderson's *Being Me* (1975) explores the power of arts education on how children conceptualize their personal, family, and cultural identities.



***The Guest* (Dir. Pearl Bowser, 1977, 5 min, 16mm)**

Courtesy of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, gift of Pearl Bowser.

Bowser (b. 1931) is best known as a major film collector, curator, archivist, and historian who, among her many contributions, led the first wave of scholars researching the filmmaking career of Oscar Micheaux and early Black filmmaking. It is largely thanks to her preservation efforts and advocacy that we have access to so many films made by African Americans across the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bowser was also an accomplished filmmaker, experimenting with the horror genre in her short film *The Guest* (1977), featuring Starletta DuPois as a woman whose inner thoughts are revealed as she performs various domestic tasks.

***Just Briefly* (Dir. Louise Fleming, 1975, 19 min, digital video)**

Courtesy of Medgar Evers College (CUNY) Library Archives.

Shown at the 1976 festival, Fleming's *Just Briefly* (1975) centers on a young Black woman, Adie (Kellie Williams), as she reflects on a fleeting romance with a man, Alfred (Will Rose). The film oscillates between the past of the affair and the present as Adie reflects on it, hoping to gain insight for an emotionally fulfilling future. Fleming wrote, directed, and edited the film.



***Valerie: A Woman, An Artist, A Philosophy of Life* (Monica J. Freeman, 1975, 15 min, DCP)**

Courtesy of the Black Film Center & Archive, Indiana University, Bloomington. *Valerie: A Woman, an Artist, a Philosophy of Life* (1975) is a portrait of Valerie Maynard (1937-2022), a New York-based printmaker and sculptor who served Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Maynard's art practice was deeply concerned with issues of civil rights and social justice. In her portrait of Maynard, Monica Freeman also explores, more broadly, what it means to be a Black woman and an artist. Freeman (b. 1947) curated the film program at the 1976 festival and is a co-organizer of the 2023 festival.



Program notes by Allyson Nadia Field

*Creating a Different Image: Black Women's Filmmaking of the 1970s-90s* was programmed by Monica Freeman, Yvonne Welbon, Michael Phillips, Hayley O'Malley, and Allyson Nadia Field.