

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 50 Black women filmmakers, artists, writers, and scholars participating.

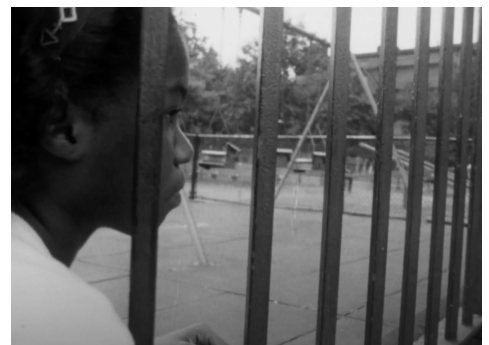
PROGRAM 8: SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

To confront and critique historical and present-day injustices, Black women have used filmmaking as a tool for engaging social issues from the local to the global.

***Lost Control* (Dir. Edie Lynch, 1975, 37 min, digital video)**

Courtesy of Medgar Evers College (CUNY) Library Archives.

Produced and directed by Edie Lynch, *Lost Control* details the stories of men and women in Philadelphia struggling with drug addiction. This film captures various types and stages of addiction, focusing mainly on opioids as well as cocaine and heroine. All the men and women featured in this documentary were patients of Lynch's husband at the North Central Mental Health Center who were going through the "detoxing" process. Some of these patients originally came from maximum security prisons and then were transferred to the center due to their struggles with addiction. Juxtaposing these different contexts within which people struggle with addiction (normal life, medical settings, prisons), Lynch is able to emphasize the motivations and external factors that lead someone down this path as well as the ones that can help prevent it. The film also features an original song composed and written by Lynch herself entitled "Can It Really Be." The film was shown at the original 1976 Sojourner Truth Festival and nominated for an Academy Award.



***Brick by Brick* (Dir. Shirikiana Aina, 1982, 36 min, 16mm)**

Collection print courtesy of the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

Shirikiana Aina's 1982 documentary *Brick by Brick* offers a compelling portrait of a Black population displaced by gentrification under the guise of "urban renewal." Taking to the streets of Washington, D.C., Aina interviews residents who relate their own experiences of eviction, exploitation, and displacement in the city as their rents skyrocket and whole neighborhoods and communities are uprooted. A recent graduate from UCLA, having studied both filmmaking and African area studies, Aina skillfully situates the local struggle of Black tenants in Washington, D.C. within a global history of expulsion and dispossession. Aina went on to direct and co-produce several documentaries and feature films about pan-Africanist politics, African ancestry and heritage, and the American slave trade, including with her husband, fellow L.A. Rebellion filmmaker Haile Gerima.



***Your Children Come Back to You* (Dir. Alile Sharon Larkin, 1979, 27 min, 16mm)**

Restored print courtesy of the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

Alile Sharon Larkin's 1979 short film *Your Children Come Back to You* dramatizes financial inequality through the eyes of a young girl, Tovi, who gets caught in the middle of a fight between her mother, a single mother trying to provide for her daughter on welfare, and her aunt, a well-off woman who wants to give her a better life away from the "beggars, winos, and welfare offices." Tovi must reconcile the waste-ridden lawns and boarded-up windows of her own neighborhood with the opulence of her aunt's fully stocked china cabinet, as she negotiates the existence of these conflicting worlds and navigates her own family drama. Larkin has directed, written, and produced several short and feature-length films, including her 1982 thesis film, *A Different Image*.



Program notes by Anya Gorai, Hugo Ljungbaeck, and Makila Sims.

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.

<https://voices.uchicago.edu/sojourner/>