

Juliette Klinke about DANS LA SILENCE D'UNE MER ABYSALLE

“Film history presents cinema as an all-male industry”

“Who decides what is worth remembering?” Although women have been shaping cinema since its very beginning, they’re often completely overlooked in official film historiography. In her documentary essay *DANS LA SILENCE D'UNE MER ABYSALLE* Juliette Klinke compiles film clips that were made by women between 1896 and 1940 and brings back a buried legacy to the present cultural memory. In their statement at the *doxs!* festival – where the film was awarded the Grosse Klappe – the Youth Jury praised *DANS LA SILENCE...* for “finally giving justice to courageous and innovative women that had deserved recognition a long time ago.”

Juliette Klinke grew up in Switzerland and later joined the Belgian female filmmakers collective [Elles Font des Films](#). Together with six members, they created a series of short films about “women & cinema”. Juliette Klinke: I made a film about “the pioneers”, the many female filmmakers during the early days of cinema. My biggest effort was in the research – I

found more information than I ever could include in one film.

What exactly did you find?

Klinke: I discovered so many films and was really impressed by their cinematographic qualities. I used these images to make a new film, honouring their work and legacy. Maybe this will trigger people’s curiosity to explore more of it. Those films are out there, you can find them on YouTube, but yet they are not being seen. Why do we keep on watching the same movies, all sharing the same point of view, while so many other titles seem to be forgotten. Including every film made by women back in the day.

I might have thought there were no female directors in the early days of cinema, which would have been shocking. Now we find out there were plenty; we simply don’t know about them. That might be even more shocking!

Klinke: I knew about some personalities like the French director Alice Guy-Blaché, being the first person ever



to make a fiction film, and I’ve seen *ET LA FEMME CREA HOLLYWOOD* by Julia & Clara Kuperberg, about the days of Hollywood before it became an industry. Still I was afraid to end up rather empty handed, until I found out there were so many of them, everywhere in the world.

But your focus remains on the Western world.

Klinke: Throughout my studies the focus has always been on the Western

world. Now I discovered female filmmakers in India, Turkey, Tunisia... but I decided to stick to my own field of expertise. I have included some names in a personal list rolling with the credits; maybe these references can open a few doors. The [Women Film Pioneers Project](#) dedicates a webpage to the work and relevance of every woman making films; that was my goldmine and at the same time an additional challenge... Making movies is making choices.



Some of the filmmakers mentioned were making clear social statements.

Klinke: Like Maria P. Williams, who participated in a better representation of the African-American community in cinema, or Drusilla Dunjee Houston, who wrote a screenplay protesting against BIRTH OF A NATION and its displayed racism, but couldn't get it produced.

History in general is written by men, but your film shows a different narrative than generally accepted. Are you a historian who wants to rewrite history, or do you consider yourself more as actively making a change?

Klinke: Why is history simply defined by white Western males? Even when learning in school about the second World War, we got the European version of the story. Film history presents cinema as an all-male industry; seldom is it brought up that financing is more problematic for female directors. When it's about women being involved, money is always an indicator.

This film gives us your personal point of view, with your own voice doing the narration.

Klinke: I came across so much information, but didn't know how to process it into one story. I ended up researching,

writing, directing and editing simultaneously. When evaluating the first draft, my editor told me: we need to hear your point of view; we need your story to guide us. Moreover, this project made me rethink my own history. Who could have been my role model as a teenager? Even if I adore Jane Campion, with her long white hair she was not exactly the kind of woman that made me wish to "become like her" at the age of 16.

At some point all female directors seem to disappear out of the picture. Was it when cinema became "a respected form of art" or when it became "a profitable business"?

Juliette: In my opinion it is all about the industry. When, in 1929, the first union was founded in Hollywood, women couldn't sign up for it. Moreover, taking a man's job in those days of economic crisis was considered as unpatriotic. Women were then relegated to other positions and no longer had access to decision-making positions. Moreover the cinema evolves and changes with the arrival of the sound. Lois Weber, who's films about important social issues were extremely successful, was one of the best paid filmmakers in Hollywood. But being in her forties, both the change towards sound film and big entertainment



was too drastic for her. When cinema turned into a profitable business, all of them disappeared.

Did you recently see a change?

Juliette: 2021 has been an important year. After 90 years, Julia Ducournau was only the second woman winning the Palme d'Or in Cannes, and Chloé Zhao was only the second female director to receive a Golden Globe and an Oscar. I hope things are changing, and I want to be part of it, because there is still work to do.

Certain scenes in your film are in some way far ahead of their time. Which one did you find most striking?

Juliette: There are two. One is the extract of Alice Guy-Blaché's film playing with reversed gender roles. Realising she made this film more than 100 years ago, already questioning the topics that puzzle us today, was a revelation. The other one comes from a film by Dorothy Arzner, who invented the boompole microphone, although the licence was claimed by a man. In the only spoken scene in DANS LA SILENCE D'UNE MER ABYSSALLE, a girl who dreams of becoming a dancer ends up in a cabaret and addresses the indignant audience with an impressive speech.

Who are you quoting with that bizarre title?

Juliette: Michelle Perrot, the French author who wrote MON HISTOIRE DES FEMMES about the place of women in history. In one excerpt she mentions how she had to dive deep into the ocean to find what she was looking for.

—
Gert Hermans