

Realizing a Vision Through Women's Eyes

A History of the International Film Festival: 2000 - 2009

It all began with one woman's vision of a film festival in Sarasota to advance community outreach and fundraising for UNIFEM, the women's fund at the United Nations.



Through Women's Eyes

Much has changed since the first annual Through Women's Eyes film festival was presented by the Gulf Coast Chapter of the US National Committee for UNIFEM in 2000. But two guiding forces have remained constant:

- the focus remains on increasing local awareness about the situation of women in developing countries and raising funds for UNIFEM programs; and
- the unwavering commitment of Jan Holmes in leading the annual event.

Toasting Women Filmmakers

2005



Suzanne Niedland (*Miss Lil's Camp*), Janet Goldwater (*Rosita*) and Liz Mermin (*The Beauty Academy of Kabul*)

2007



Diane Mason (*Mother's Day*), Susan Hogue (*Promises Made*) and Beth Murphy (*Beyond the 11th*)

Her name was Nancy Griftner, co-founder and first president of the Gulf Coast Chapter of the US National Committee for UNIFEM. In the late 1990s, she organized an annual Saturday film screening. Then, in 2000, she joined forces with another UNIFEM member, Jan Holmes, to launch a "real" film festival.

The rest is history – a rich history created through countless hours given by hundreds of local UNIFEM members to realize Griftner's vision.

Building a Film Festival

For two years, Griftner and Holmes co-chaired the event and screened international films on a Saturday at the Ringling School of Art and Design. In 2001, a Friday evening fundraising event was added.

In 2002, the make-up of the all-volunteer film festival committee changed. Judy Helgager organized a day of free screenings of films by local women at Selby Public Library on a Friday. Holmes and Ginny Hitchcock put together a Friday evening reception and additional Saturday screenings at Ringling's 100-seat auditorium.

Turning the Spotlight on Women Filmmakers

The fourth year of the festival was a turning point, with the decision to screen only films made by women. Sarasota filmmaker Diane Mason teamed with Helgager to organize the selection and screening of 15 short films by local women at Selby Public Library. The following day, the festival moved to the Mildred Sainer Music and Arts Pavilion at New College of Florida. Again, Holmes and Hitchcock organized the event with the able assistance of 40 UNIFEM volunteers.

The 2004 festival was hosted again at the Sainer Pavilion, featuring films by local and international women filmmakers and an afternoon workshop. The audience turnout and the increase to 59 volunteers proved it was time to move Through Women's Eyes to a larger venue.

Breaking Records & Premiering Films

The decision to present Through Women's Eyes at the 500-seat Players Theatre in April 2005 resulted in a record-breaking event. Not only did the fundraiser reception sell-out, the festival set a new fundraising record fueled by a 100 percent increase in sponsorships and donors, a 32 percent increase in festival ticket sales and the auction of an original cartoon by award-winning political cartoonist Etta Hulme.

The audience was treated to 16 films selected by Artistic Co-directors Helgager and Mason, including five films by local women filmmakers and a pre-release preview screening of *Rosita* by award-winning filmmakers Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater, a New College graduate. The nine filmmakers who led Starbucks Directors' Dialogs after the screening of their films joined audience members for the Friday night reception.

Faces on Film

2005



The Kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt, a film by Victoria Bruce & Karin Hayes

2006



My Land Zion, a film by Yulie Cohen



2007

Saudi Solutions, a film by Bregtje van der Haak



Far From Home, a film by Rachel Tsutsumi

That year, the festival also grabbed the attention of the area media and support of corporate sponsor Starbucks Coffee Co. With Phyllis Johnston joining the 33-member volunteer festival committee as Communications Chair, the first Through Women's Eyes public service announcements were produced and aired. The ABC-TV affiliate in Sarasota broadcast the promotional piece produced by Mason, and Sun Coast radio stations aired the announcement scripted by Johnston and produced by Mason.

For the first time, Through Women's Eyes hosted a preview reception showcasing women's perspectives on film, on canvas and on stage at The Backlot on February 26, 2006. The fundraising event included a silent auction of six paintings by Sarasota artist and UNIFEM member Cynthia McMullin. Five days later, Through Women's Eyes took to the big screen at Regal Cinema's Hollywood 20 to show 23 films by women directors. Among the many other highlights were post-film discussions by six of the featured filmmakers, a 32 percent increase in ticket sales, an audience comprised of 45 percent of first-time attendees, the addition of Regal Entertainment Group and ABC 7 – WWSB-TV as corporate sponsors, a wrap party at Metro Café, and the dedication and hard work of the 30-member film festival committee.

The 2007 festival was ushered in by a Fundraiser Reception at The Backlot on February 11 and a Filmmakers' Reception at the Sarasota Herald-Tribune Community Room on February 22. The following day, Through Women's Eyes opened at Hollywood 20, screening 21 films by women directors over two days. They included the pre-screening of Beth Murphy's film *Beyond the 11th* prior to its world premier at the Tribeca Film Festival and the world premier of Diane Mason's *Mother's Day*, which went on to capture the Columbine Award at the Moondance Festival in Hollywood.

The 2007 festival events, films and post-film discussions with filmmakers and Florida residents appearing in several of the documentaries drew praise and support. Among audience members surveyed, 98 percent applauded the mix of films and film subjects selected by Artistic Director Mason and 81 percent said they would definitely attend the 2008 festival. Ticket sales rose 70 percent and individual sponsorships grew 90 percent. Corporate sponsors Comcast and ABC 7 – WWSB-TV aired the Through Women's Eyes public service announcements. And again, the 35-member strong film festival committee volunteers gave their all to present another successful festival.

Announcing the First Sold-Out Festival

After nine years, Festival Chair Jan Holmes made the big announcement: "The 2008 festival and the Filmmakers' Reception are sold out!" When the festival opened on February 1, the excitement was palpable. People came to Hollywood 20 from all along the Sun Coast, across from Tampa and up from Miami to see 18 films by women directors selected from more than 150 entries. The program included a sneak preview of Amy Serrano's *The Sugar Babies* prior to its screening at the Miami International Film Festival and first-time filmmaker Pilar Prassas' *In Sickness and In Health*, which went on to be distributed by Women Make Movies, the leading distributor of women's films in North America. Both Serrano and Prassas joined with several other filmmakers to lead post-film discussions and attend the Filmmakers' Reception at Esca Restaurant.

With a revamped website and increased media coverage, the 2008 festival set new records for attendance and sponsorships, and earned rave reviews for the films and filmmakers from loyal festival filmgoers. The support provided through ticket sales, program book ads and sponsorships had increased 85 percent between 2006 and 2008.

Faces on Film

2008

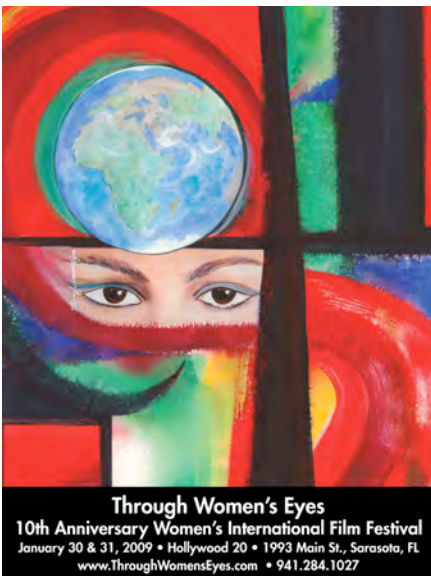


Been Rich All My Life, a film by Heather Lyn MacDonald



The Women's Kingdom, a film by Xiaoli Zhou

Commemorating 10 Years



Sarasota artist and UNIFEM member Cynthia McMullin created the 10th Anniversary film festival poster.

Most importantly, this first sold-out festival was a tribute to the late Nancy Griftner, the woman whose vision started a project that grew to become the single largest fundraising and community awareness event presented by the 300-member Gulf Coast Chapter of UNIFEM. It also communicated a well-earned thank you to the leadership of Jan Holmes and all the film festival committee volunteers who worked tirelessly over the years to bring the women's perspective of the world to Sarasota, and to raise over \$86,000 for UNIFEM programs helping women and girls in over 100 countries.

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary

The tradition of screening great films by talented women directors from around the globe continues in 2009. The 10th anniversary festival on January 30 and 31 features the Southeastern U.S. premier of *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*, which is scheduled for airing on "American Masters" this fall. The creators of the film, Nancy Porter and Harriet Reisen, are among the eight filmmakers slated to lead post-film discussions and attend the Filmmakers' Reception at Esca.

When the curtain falls on the last of the 16 films selected for the 2009 festival from more than 200 entries, a total of 151 films will have been presented by the Gulf Coast Chapter of the US National Committee for UNIFEM.

Special Credits

The names of all those who have supported Through Women's Eyes over these 10 years are far too many to list. Here is a brief summary of the thousands of individuals and organizations whose contributions to the annual film festival deserve our recognition and gratitude.

Audience members who bought tickets, filled the seats, offered their feedback, and applauded each and every film.

Film festival committee volunteers who organized the Filmmakers' Receptions and fundraising events, coordinated volunteers, maintained the finances, sold tickets, served as ushers, organized and staffed the fair trade boutique, raised funds, secured program book ads, and promoted the festival to friends and the area media.

Festival benefactors, patrons, donors and sponsors who helped to underwrite festival costs and increase the annual contributions to UNIFEM.

Corporate and film sponsors who provided funding and services, including ABC 7 – WWSB-TV, Comcast, Esca, Lobsenz Foundation, MetLife, Regal Entertainment, Sarasota-Manatee Chapter of the United Nations Association/USA, Sarasota-Manatee National Organization for Women, Starbucks and Women With Moxie.

Area businesses that advertised in the annual festival program book.

Reporters and editors from the print and broadcast media whose coverage helped heighten public awareness of the film festival.

Women Make Movies, the largest North American distributor of women's films, for its assistance in previewing, recommending and promoting films screened at the festival over the years.

Women filmmakers who have submitted their films and those who traveled to Sarasota to share their insights with festival audiences.

THROUGH WOMEN'S EYES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

10 years of screening 151 films from around the globe

2000 FILMS

FIRE

A film by Deepa Mehta

GUELWAAR

A film by Ousmane Sembene

2001 FILMS

BLUE EYES OF YONTA

A film by Flora Gomes

CORAJE

A film by Alberto Durant

FARAW! MOTHER OF THE DUNES

A film by Abbdoulaye Ascofare

A PLACE CALLED CHIAPAS

A film by Nettie Wild

WOMEN WITH OPEN EYES

A film by Anne-Laure Folly

2002 FILMS

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

A film by Alice D'Souza & Irene Mirkovic

CUBA: PARADOX FOUND

A film by Holly Morris

FAAT-KINE

A film by Ousmane Sembene

FRUITS OF THE REVOLUTION

A film by Ava Avam

I WAS BORN A BLACK WOMAN

A film by Maria Luisa Mendonca

LA BODA

A film by Hannah Weyer

LIVE IN PEACE

A film by Hu Bingliu

SEVEN HOURS TO BURN

A film by Shanti Thakur

A WOMAN WHO RUNS WITH WOLVES

A film by Diane Mason

WOOD, WIND AND WATER

A film by Camie Ford

2003 FILMS

ART OFF THE WALL: LOIS RECTOR

A film by Laura Tierney

DIAMONDS IN THE DARK

A film by Olivia Carrescia

ESCUELA

A film by Hannah Weyer

FACES OF PEACE & FLORIDA BREEZE

Films by Diane Mason

FISHING FLORIDA

A film by Leslie Harris Senac

FROM SHANGHAI TO BEIJING BY TRAIN

A film by Carolyn Bloomer

HAIKU CARNIVAL & ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Films by Mary Providence McGill

IDEA HUNTING AND REFLECTIONS

A film by JoAnn Patel

MAI'S AMERICA

A film by Marlo Poras

MIRROR, MIRROR

A film by Anne Muir

MS. GRAVITY & QUAKE AND GRACE

Films by Tanya Weinberger

OBAACHAN'S GARDEN

A film by Linda Ohama

RETURN TO BELAYE: A RITE OF PASSAGE

A film by Amy Flannery

SHOUTING SILENT

A film by Renee Rosen

SKIN DEEP

A film by Anne Muir

WOMEN OF THE WORLD

A film by Dorothy Conlon

YESTERDAY AND YOU

A film by Debra Hussong

THE ZEBRA LONGWING

A film by Anne Jackson

2004 FILMS

BEDWIN HACKER

A film by Nadia El Fani

BEYOND THERAPY, KOSHER

Films by Aimee Barth

CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE

A film by Marsha Emerman

THE DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET

A film by Kim Longinotto

DOG, ENOUGH ALREADY, IKKK!,

MONSTER & TEDDYMAN

Films by Tama Weinberger

EMERALD FOREST

A film by Lisa Wilson

GET BEHIND

A film by Deerwoman & Kat White Star

GOOD DAYS, BAD DAYS

A film by Mary Providence Magill

HUMAN SHIELD & SQUARE PEG,

ROUND HOLES

Film by Debra Hussong

RUMBA FLAMENCA

A film by Anne Jackson

SATIN ROUGE

A film by Raja Amari

STANDING ON MY SISTER'S SHOULDERS

A film by Laura Lipson

THREE KHMER FLOWERS

A film by Diane Mason

THUNDER IN GUYANA

A film by Suzanne Wasserman

2005 FILMS

AFGHANISTAN, THE LOST TRUTH

A film by Yassamin Maleknasr

THE BEAUTY ACADEMY OF KABUL

A film by Liz Mermin

CHINA'S LOST GIRLS

Hosted by Lisa Ling

CONDEMNED

A film by Diane Mason

CUT

A film by Erin Solari

IN WHOSE NAME?

A film by Nandini Sikand

JAZZ POSTALES

A film by Mary Providence Magill

THE KIDNAPPING OF INGRID

BETANCOURT

A film by Victoria Bruce & Karin Hayes

THE MAN WHO STOLE MY MOTHER'S FACE

A film by Cathy Henkel

MISS LIL'S CAMP

A film by Suzanne Niedland & Anberin Pasha

NDOX MI

A film by Esther Marian Baker

PLAYFULNESS IS GENIUS BUSINESS

Maia Shaffer

REGRET TO INFORM

A film by Barbara Sonneborn

ROSITA

A film by Barbara Attie & Janet Goldwater

TAYLOR'S STORY

A film by Monica Kennedy

TRAILBLAZER: THE EDITORIAL

CARTOONS OF ETTA HULME

A film by Katherine Denison

2006 FILMS

AGAINST MY WILL

A film by Ayfer Ergun

ART OF QUILTS

A film by Lilly Ann Boruszkowski

BACK TO LIFE

A film by Samantha Reynolds

COMING OUT – COMING IN: FAITH,
IDENTITY AND BELONGING
A film by Susan Campbell

DRAWING LESSONS
A film by Maureen Selwood

EVERYONE THEIR GRAIN OF SAND
A film by Beth Bird

THE GRACE LEE PROJECT
A film by Grace Lee

INDEPENDENT INTERVENTION:
BREAKING SILENCE
A film by Tonje Hessen Schei

JURY OF HER PEERS
A film by Sally Heckel

LADIES IN WAITING
A film by Hope Dickson

THE LAST REFUGE: ONE WOMAN'S
GLIMPSE OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE
A film by Diane Mason

LOVE DEFINED
A film by Francesca Talenti

MY LAND ZION
A film by Yulie Cohen Gerstel

MY SISTER, MY BRIDE
A film by Bonnie Burt

NALINI BY DAY, NANCY BY NIGHT
A film by Sonali Gulati

ONE IN EIGHT: JANICE'S JOURNEY
A film by Cynthia A. McKeown Leach

PLUM FLOWER
A film by Serena Moy

QUICK BROWN FOX
A film by Ann Hedreen & Rustin Thomas

SCENE NOT HEARD: WOMEN IN
PHILADELPHIA HIP HOP
A film by Maori Karmael Holmes

SWIMMING
A film by Diane Lisa Johnson

THE WHISPERER
A film by Andrea Odezynska

WOMEN MAKE ART
A film by Lisa Seidenberg

2007 Films

AWOL
A film by Brigid Maher

BEYOND THE 11TH
A film by Beth Murphy

BUILDING BRIDGES
A film by Jeanine Isabel Butler

CITY OF MERMAIDS
A film by Leah Wolchok

CRUNCH!
A film by Sheila Schroeder

FAMILY VILAKATI
A film by Xanthe Hamilton

FAR FROM HOME
A film by Rachel Tsutsumi

THE FOREST FOR THE TREES
A film by Bernadine Mellis

GOD SLEEPS IN RWANDA
Kimberlee Acquaro

GRANITO DE ARENA
A film by Jill Freidberg

THE GROUND TRUTH
A film by Patricia Foulkrod

HEART OF THE SEA
A film by Charlotte Lagarde & Lisa Denker

IF THERE WERE NO LUTHERANS...
WOULD THERE STILL BE GREEN
JELL-O?
A film by Gayle Knutson

INFINITE MOMENTS
A film by Karen Nielsen

LIKE A SHIP IN THE NIGHT
A film by Melissa Thompson

MOTHER'S DAY
A film by Diane Mason

PROMISES MADE
A film by Susan Hogue

THE PROJECTIONIST
A film by Elaine Liu

SAUDI SOLUTIONS
A film by Bregtje van der Haak

SEX SLAVES
A film by Ric Esther Bienstock

SHIRIN EBADI: A SIMPLE LAWYER
A film by Bani Khoshnoudi

2008 Films

BEEN RICH ALL MY LIFE
A film by Heather Lyn MacDonald

CRICKETS
A film by Kari Nevil

DERNIER SOUPER & WEDDING DRESS
Films by Annie Macdonald

ENEMIES OF HAPPINESS
A film by Eva Mulvad & Anja Al Erhayem

FROM FIRE: AN ODYSSEY OF GLASS
A film by Karen Lavender

HER VIETNAM
A film by Melyssa Payne

HIDDEN WARRIORS: WOMEN ON THE
HO CHI MINH TRAIL
A film by Karen Turner

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH
A film by Pilar Prassas

LA HIJA DEL GENERAL
A film by María Elena Wood

A LETTER TO A PRIME MINISTER
A film by Julia Guest

MOTHERLAND AFGHANISTAN
A film by Sedika Mojadidi

THE OLDEST BASKETBALL TEAM IN
THE WORLD
A film by Sharon McGowan

SEXY THING
A film by Denie Pentecost

SOMEONE TO LOVE
A film by Jill Jaress

THE SUGAR BABIES
A film by Amy Serrano

WOMEN BEHIND THE CAMERA
A film by Alexis Krasilovsky

THE WOMEN'S KINGDOM
A film by Xiaoli Zhou

YA DEVI... THE GODDESS
A film by Amtojh Sandhu

2009 Films

COURTING JUSTICE
A film by Jane Thandi Lipman

DAUGHTERS OF WISDOM
A film by Bari Pearlman

DEFINITION
A film by Cole Dillingham, Mauricette
Lekea & Kennedy Zuniga

FOUR OF A KIND
A film by Fiona Cochrane

FOUR WIVES – ONE MAN
A film by Nahid Persson

GENERATION OF CONSOLIDATION
A film by Brooke Noel & Sami Muilenburg

HOLDING THE LINE
A film by Susan Hagedorn

KILLER'S PARADISE
A film by Giselle Portenier

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT: THE WOMAN
BEHIND LITTLE WOMEN
A film by Nancy Porter & Harriet Reisen

LOVE LIVED ON DEATH ROW
A film by Linda Booker

MY HOME – YOUR WAR
A film by Kylie Grey

MUSKRAT LOVELY
A film by Amy Nicholson

NAMING PLUTO
A film by Ginita Jimenez

ONE SUMMER IN NEW PALTZ
A film by Nancy Nicol

PENGUINS FOR CHANGE
A film by Diane Mason

TOUGH CROWD
A film by Iman K. Zawahry