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Liberating Hollywood – Female Filmmakers of 1970s American Cinema With a nationwide release for *Wanda*

In its Liberating Hollywood programme, Eye Filmmuseum is screening works by female directors working in the US in the 1970s. Pioneers of the second-wave feminist era, their work has seldom or never been screened in the Netherlands. One highlight of the programme is Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (1970), which Eye is releasing in cinemas across the country from 5 March.

Liberating Hollywood – Female Filmmakers of 1970s American Cinema: 5 March – 8 April 2026 in Eye Filmmuseum, IJpromenade 1, Amsterdam, eyefilm.nl/liberatinghollywood

It was estimated that there were just sixteen women making films within the American independent and studio film industry during the 1970s: directors such as Barbara Loden, Elaine May, Anne Bancroft, Lee Grant, Joan Micklin Silver, Penny Allen and Claudia Weill. Maya Montañez Smukler describes their remarkable careers in her book *Liberating Hollywood* (2018). These women – many of whom started out as actresses – swam against the tide, managing to forge a path for themselves within the male-dominated culture of Hollywood.

Eye Filmmuseum is showcasing this seldom-seen work in its film programme *Liberating Hollywood – Female Filmmakers of 1970s American Cinema*.

National release for *Wanda*

A more well-known film is *Wanda* (1970), in which Barbara Loden (who also directs and wrote the screenplay) is phenomenal as adrift divorcee Wanda, who leaves her children and roams Pennsylvania's decaying 'rust belt'. Once a seldom-screened cult film, now a classic of feminist cinema, recently voted one of the 50 greatest films of all time in a Sight and Sound poll. Eye is releasing *Wanda* in cinemas across the country from 5 March. It will also be available on the Eye Film Player.

Lesser known is perhaps the film *Girlfriends* (Claudia Weill, 1978), in which young New York photographer Susan feels lost when her best friend abruptly moves out of their shared apartment to get married. This refreshing and authentic indie film full of wry humour was the inspiration for Greta Gerwig (Frances Ha) and Lena Dunham's series *Girls*, an episode of which was directed by Weill. And in *Between the Lines* (1977), Joan Micklin Silver gives an empathetic, humorous portrayal of

relations between male and female members of the editorial staff of a struggling, hip weekly magazine.

Other titles in the programme include black comedy *A New Leaf* (Elaine May, 1971), the beautifully designed drama *Hester Street* (Joan Micklin Silver, 1975) and the poignant *Tell Me a Riddle* (Lee Grant, 1980).

On 8 March (International Women's Day) there will be a Q&A after the screening of *Wanda*. Koolhoven & Simons will also be taking a deeper dive into the horror cult film *The Mafu Cage* (Karen Arthur, 1978) during the Woman Who Shot Back Night on 8 April.

Unequal springboard to Hollywood

For a long time, there was a belief in Hollywood that women were physically unsuited to the role of director. Hollywood's resistance to change was great. The figures prove how desperately change was needed: during the silent era, some 57 women were working as film directors in the United States. From the early 1930s up to the late 1960s, only Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino were making commercial films in Hollywood. Between 1961 and 1966, they were joined by two women from New York: Shirley Clarke and Juleen Compton, who made independent films outside of Hollywood.

It wasn't until the late '60s that the number of female filmmakers started to grow again. Between 1966 and 1980, some sixteen women were making feature films aimed at large audiences. Sometimes from within the studio system, and sometimes as independent filmmakers with very small budgets.

Inequality started within film education: UCLA and the University of Southern California (USC) were the springboards to Hollywood, but took predominately male students. Women began to get organised, and in 1972 set up the Writers Guild Women's Committee to expose gender discrimination, but their many meetings with studio bosses were to no avail. A group of feminists then attempted – in vain – to get the Directors Guild to admit more women through the Women's Steering Committee, established in 1979.

Almost all of the women who managed to direct a film during this second-wave feminist era had very short careers in feature film-making. At most, some were able to go on and work in television. Female directors making their debuts in the '80s were often able to continue in the profession for longer – thanks in no small part to the pioneering work of their older colleagues, which we can now finally once again see on the big screen in Eye.

Films in the programme

Wanda (Barbara Loden, 1970), nationwide release

A New Leaf (Elaine May, 1971)

Hester Street (Joan Micklin Silver, 1975) – 4K restored version

Mickey and Nicky (Elaine May, 1976)

The Stronger (Lee Grant, 1976, 30') – 4K restored version
Between the Lines (Joan Micklin Silver, 1977)
Girlfriends (Claudia Weill, 1978)
The Mafu Cage (Karen Arthur, 1978), on 35mm from the Eye collection, in
Koolhoven & Simons, accompanied by clips and trailers from other films by female
filmmakers of the '70s
Tell Me a Riddle (Lee Grant, 1980) – 4K restored version

Films subject to confirmation

The Heartbreak Kid (Elaine May, 1972)
Chilly Scenes of Winter (Joan Micklin Silver, 1979)
Property (Penny Allen, 1979)
It's My Turn (Claudia Weill, 1980)
Fatso (Anne Bancroft, 1980)

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Note for press, not for publication

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