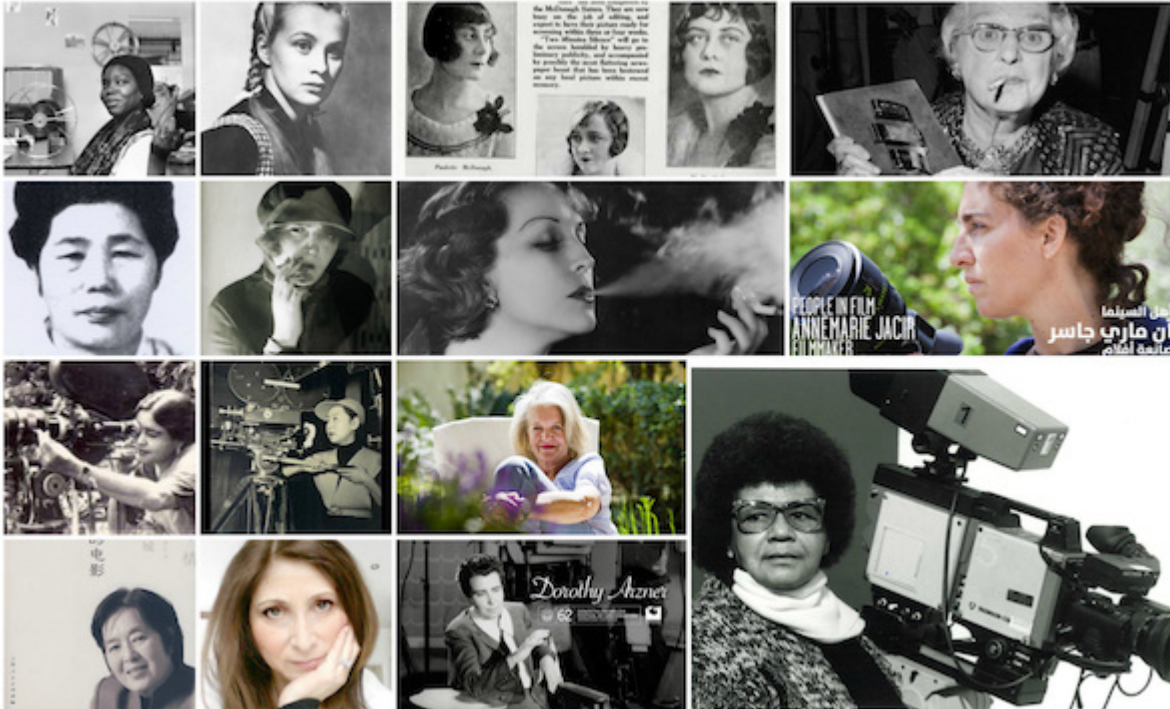


Community and Sisterhood via Cinema and Feminism



Collage Courtesy of Vaishnavi Sundar

Social psychology research long ago [succeeded](#) in establishing a relationship between cinema and human behavior. The dynamic bestows upon a filmmaker the power and privilege of molding subject matter for the purpose of transmitting a particular message. I keep this fact handy when I am on the set and endeavor to transform thoughts into the subtle world of visual medium.

As fiercely summed up by the civil rights activist and author Maya Angelou:

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

As a woman and a filmmaker, I continuously strive to overcome the hurdle of continued misogyny, not only in the world of

filmmaking, but also in daily life. As a socially awkward, part-humanist-part-misanthrope, though, I cannot alone take on the necessary challenge of confronting patriarchy. Fortunately, the best tool for voicing dissent and effecting change is collaboration.



Vaishnavi Sundar, Founder of Women Making Films

In 2015, I founded [Women Making Films](#) (WMF) with the principal [objective](#) of generating alliances among women through the connectivity of cinema and the artistic passion of filmmaking. Operating out of Chennai, India, and engaging a global audience via the world wide web, I have woven my own nexus of artists who share the intent of progressive filmmaking. I particularly seek out films with powerful female protagonists, those that do not conform to stereotypes of women, for example.

WMF: AN INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA SPACE

During September 2016, WMF celebrated its first anniversary and a noticeable amount of success. We published interviews with several filmmakers for the purpose of engaging our readers in thought about style, film, and genre. My aim in these interviews was to make female filmmakers' names commonplace in conversation about cinema. In the film world we are quick to quote a Scorsese or a Mani Ratnam, but not a woman, save a few names like [Bigelow](#) and [Sofia Coppola](#). Despite the fact that there are many groundbreaking female filmmaker pioneers, seldom do they come up in casual conversation; I seek to change this.

Women Making Films now boasts more than 100 members and we are growing daily. In just one year, five collaborative projects are underway. To me, collaborative efforts are the very reason I established this platform as they are the greatest measure of success. Collaboration and community leads to self-sustainability – this is WMF's contribution to challenging the dominant paradigm of the discourse on important people in the film industry.

Interested in reading these interviews yourself? I invite you to: [The Female Idol Blog Series](#), which catalogues these text-based interviews on the WMF website. The common thread that ties these pieces together is the discussion on the importance of feminism in the sphere of films and filmmaking.

Writing holds the power to fight sexism and oppression that is glorified in the world of celluloid. Many films are bigoted and so are the people who make them. The [Misguided Portrayal Series](#) is a blog that calls out that bigotry with a rational and evidence-based approach. Alongside a contributing writer, the blog challenges the biased information being spread about minority communities, like women and those from the [LGBTQIAA](#) community. While calling out the harmful content, I also make a point to highlight works that portray the issues without

appropriation or offense. Considering how controversial and risky it is to address sensitive issues, my writers and I act as an unstoppable force questioning the very industry in which we work. Our future topics include the misguided portrayal of fat characters, disability, body image issues, and age disparity.

If you are a more audiovisual consumer of information, check out the on-camera interviews featured on the "[In Conversation With](#)" Series. In this series, we discuss more sensitive topics, such as: the lack of Asian women's representation in international film festivals; the disparity in access to filmmaking resources between the West and countries like India and Pakistan; the portrayal of women as objects in Indian cinema; and the universal industry issue of unequal wages based on gender.

With the goal of creating an in-studio feel on the platform, I also conduct [AMA \(ask me anything\) sessions](#) with filmmakers. In this forum, though, rather than asking all the questions myself, I give members of the community and the world-at-large a chance to speak to their favorite filmmakers. Last year, the amazing [Nina Paley](#), director of [Sita Sings The Blues](#), answered questions asked by her fans all around the world. Identifying herself as a radical feminist, the award-winning director held nothing back from her interviewers.



AMA with Nina Paley

REACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

Of all the progress achieved by WMF in its inaugural year, I am quite proud of the [Children Outreach Programme](#). We underestimate the emotional maturity of children and presume their ignorance on the matter of cinema. By setting up theater workshops for children and making films with them, I have learned that kids understand so much more than we imagine they do. Cinema opens up opportunities for dialogue and discussion on topics with which they may be otherwise unfamiliar. I take films made for children (and by children) to schools, slums,

and other communities. In doing so, I create a space for the discussion of pressing issues like racism, sexism, casteism, and gender violence. These are challenging topics to discuss with children but it is necessary as well as possible through the vehicles of theater and cinema. In post-screening discussions we bust myths surrounding filmmaking and the arts, and engage with them about social justice.

ADDING TO "HERSTORY"

WMF's social media approach dedicates itself to the forgotten artists of yesteryears, who are brought back to life through daily featured posts. These figures include cinematographers, producers, sound designers, screenplay writers, casting directors, music composers, animators, editors, stunt women, makeup artists, and gaffers. There are no photographs of many of these individuals but I see it as my duty to bring them to light anyhow. As a new year round up, I wrote about "[Twenty Badass Women In Cinema You Have Probably Never Heard Of](#)," which included filmmakers from as far back as 1875 and hailing from Australia, Mexico, Senegal, Japan, Korea, Europe, throughout the Middle East, and more.

In my brief career as a filmmaker, I have learned that a film festival is the hub for career progress as well as the recognition for which a filmmaker strives. Gender disparity is omnipresent and the film festival is no exception. Films by women are hardly given any space. My response to this omission of the female voice is leveraging technology to carry out a film festival exclusively for women-made films. In 2016, [The First Festival took place in 10 cities across India](#) within the span of 15 days, and with subsequent events after the festival itself finished.

With a strong belief in community building, I contacted absolute strangers to pitch to them the idea of gathering

people to spend some time watching films made by women. I am highly indebted to all those who supported this initiative and hope they will continue to do so in the years to come. I have since conducted [13 film festivals all over India](#), and coordinated collaborations with three communities in New York, Philadelphia, and Islamabad. The most recent international venture is that which WMF now shares with Women's Voices Now. When WVN got in touch with me, I was thrilled to explore the opportunities that lay ahead, and it was very gratifying to know that my work is being noticed, recognized, and appreciated across international borders.

As the sole staff member of Women Making Films, it consumes me. I have carved out a difficult path for myself as an independent filmmaker and an activist working against the harmful forces of bigotry and sexism. At times, I want to just call it all off and return to my shell. But I keep going for just one simple reason: I have promised an unborn girl-child that I will work toward a fair playing field. To make good on this promise, I am willing to put up with the everyday bitterness and occasional breakdowns that are simply a part of this work.

Here's to hoping that 2017 will be a year of fruitful collaborations and smashing patriarchy!

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