

Films for the Feminist Classroom

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Still from *Optic Nerve*. (dir. Barbara Hammer, 1985). Used with permission from Barbara Hammer.

Q & A: How this Issue's Essayists Came to Know Barbara Hammer's Work, How They Describe Her, and Which Films They Like Best

Compiled by Deanna Utroske

Films for the Feminist Classroom asked this issue's contributors to answer a few questions about Barbara Hammer:

Would you please tell us about your first encounter with Hammer's work?

Klutinis: I took my first film class from Barbara in her studio in Oakland, California, where she showed us her work. I hadn't seen anything like it before. I was excited about this new vision and approach to filmmaking. She became my mentor and good friend.

Harper: *Resisting Paradise* (2003). Barbara is always playful—her shadow stretching out on the streets of Cassis or playing with light as a painter would. I loved how she showed up in her topical and historical film—"a resister and an artist."¹

Rezai: Flipping through a gay and lesbian film festival guide book in Madrid, Spain, I came across a mysterious black and white photograph of a woman smoking a cigarette with an air of dandyism, withdrawal, and intellectual poise, her mischievous personality concealed rebellion and knowledge. The photograph seduced me and lured me into the world of Barbara Hammer. The photo was the cover of *History Lessons* (2000).

Carducci: I learned recently that Hammer and I had the same experience at the end of film school: Where are all the women filmmakers? So we had to seek them out on our own. I showed up at Canyon Cinema to screen films by women, and they lead me to her. I promptly added *Tourist* (1984) to my program of influence in my senior show, and have been a Barbara Hammer fan ever since.

What three adjectives do you use to describe Hammer's work, and why?

Klutinis: fearless, visionary, energizing.

Fearless because she reaches beyond her comfort zone without a thought.

Visionary because her work reaches so many outer levels of creative artistry.

Energizing because she comes to every new work, every student, every new challenge with an inquisitiveness and energy that inspires everyone who comes into contact with her.

Rezai: raw, emotional, and pure.

Her desire penetrates through celluloid.

Carducci: Let's steal from her 70th birthday and say, "Sexy, Sizzling, Seventy!" Well, now she's made over 80 films (and counting!), so maybe we should alter that, but the Sexy and Sizzling applies no matter what. From the start, Hammer has hammered out films addressing sex and sexuality, and they are always sizzling on the cutting edge. Where would we be without her?

What is your favorite Hammer film, and why?

Klutinis: My favorite Hammer film is *Optic Nerve* (1985). When I first saw the film, I felt an emotional pitch that I hadn't experienced in some of her earlier work. The subject of filming her grandmother in the nursing home was, to me, raw emotion that needed to be vented. Once there, Hammer reached another level of filmmaking.

Harper: *Optic Nerve* (1985). The poetry of seeing raw film viewed through a mechanical process to reveal the intimate connection between a woman and her grandmother could not be more personal.

Rezai: *Dyketactics* (1974), sexy freedom.

Carducci: Oh, her first 16mm film, which I just saw for the first time at MoMA this summer! *I Was/Am* (1973) is full of Hammer humor and feminist charm, and it hasn't been screened enough!

¹Barbara Hammer, "Resisting Paradise Discussion" (lecture, European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, 2005).

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