

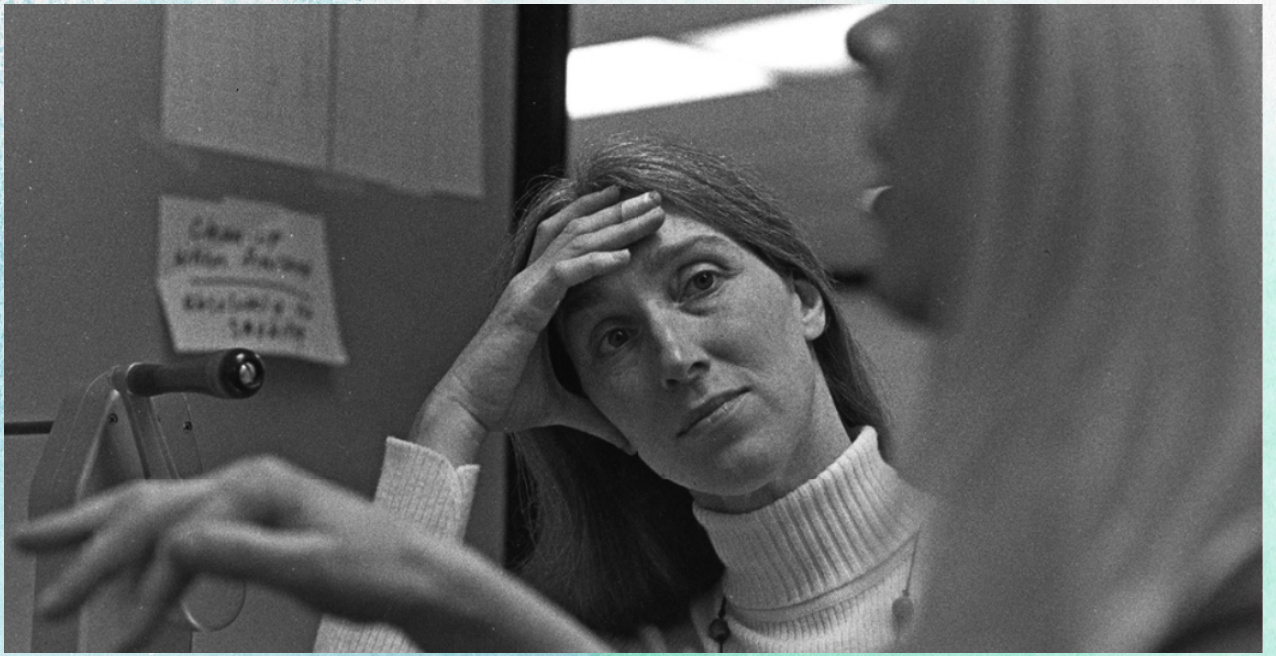
EXPERIMENTAL CURATOR:

The Sally Dixon Story

VIEWING GUIDE

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SYNOPSIS



THE WOMAN BEHIND THE GREATEST EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKERS OF THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

Experimental film is an established discipline, with a place in the art world and an influence on mainstream culture.

Not so fifty years ago. Sally Dixon played an enormous role in making it happen. In the 1960s, Dixon received a hand-held Super 8 movie camera as a gift. She grew fascinated by the power and possibilities of film, and began creating what she called “film poems.”

She discovered the work of Jonas Mekas and Stan Brakhage and found her true calling: helping experimental filmmakers create and exhibit their films.

In 1970 Dixon created the Film Section at Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Museum of Art (CMoA). She was an artistic sounding board. She put filmmakers up in her home. Pre-Internet, she published a circular that enabled them to book screenings for crucial income. Pre-digital video, she increased access for artists and audiences. Dixon championed women filmmakers while she herself was a woman in a man’s art world. *Experimental Curator: The Sally Dixon Story* weaves together Dixon’s “film poems,” archival footage, and interviews with her and others to celebrate a little-known pioneer of film as art.

A MESSAGE FROM BRIGID MAHER

I first came across Sally's work in B. Ruby Rich's book, "Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film." Years later I found myself in the living room of her son's house talking about experimental film. What I learned in that first meeting with him was how much influence she had and how little recognition she received for her work. I left that evening wanting to know more about Sally and knowing I wanted to make a documentary about her.

A couple months later, I returned to Saint Paul, Minnesota to begin filming. Sally was already in a nursing home but my partner and I stayed at her house. Much of her memories were already boxed up, however we came across 54 rolls of Super8 film which captured memories of her life in Pittsburgh, Colorado and Saint Paul and the structure of the film was born.



What struck me the most was how Sally code switched as many feminists of her era had to do.

She could have tea with Carnegie's Women's Committee and fundraise, help shoot Broughton's *Erogeny* on her dining room table and navigate the tempestuous moods of Stan Brakhage while producing one of his most pivotal documentaries.

Much of her work was uncredited, unappreciated and underpaid and yet she persisted.

As I continued to film her story, I became more and more inspired by how she overcame personal and professional adversity during a time when women received very little recognition for their work. Audiences can be inspired by her vision and and ignite a new love of avant-garde cinema.

Why Experimental Curator?

IN THE 1960S, AT THE TIME THAT EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING WAS NOT EVEN A BUZZWORD IN AMERICAN CINEMA'S LEXICON, A SURGE OF AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS BEGAN EXPLORING NON-NARRATIVE STORYTELLING IN FILM. MANY OF THESE ARTISTS HAD ONE THING IN COMMON: SALLY DIXON, A POWERFUL VOICE AND VISIONARY DURING THIS TIME.

A LIKELY LEADER BY ALL ACCOUNTS, SALLY DIXON WAS A TRAILBLAZER FORGING A PATH IN A MALE-DOMINATED FIELD. SHE CULTIVATED HER ROLE IN THIS WAVE OF EXPERIMENTALISM MUCH LIKE SHE CULTIVATED OPPORTUNITIES AND CONNECTIONS FOR HER COLLABORATORS, THE EXPERIMENTALISTS FROM THE 1960S. BY EXPLORING NON-NARRATIVE STORYTELLING, THESE EXPERIMENTALISTS, LED BY SALLY DIXON, UNLOCKED POETIC SELF-EXPRESSION AND UNPRECEDENTED CREATIVITY.

THEIR WORK TOGETHER FOCUSED ON THE INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE ARTISTS RATHER THAN A COMMERCIAL GOAL. EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING WAS CONSIDERED RADICAL AND IT IS EASY TO SEE WHY - A WOMAN WAS A MAJOR LEADER IN THE MOVEMENT, THE PRACTICE WENT AGAINST THE COMMERCIAL, FOR-PROFIT MODEL, AND THE ART CENTERS ON THE EXPRESSION OF INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVES OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

HER IMPACT AS A CURATOR AND HER ABILITY TO CREATE SPACE FOR ARTISTS TO DEVELOP THEIR WORK IS AN ENORMOUS CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING, BUT IN THE WIDER CONVERSATION OF THE GENRE, SHE IS NOT OFTEN LAUDED FOR IMPACT. SALLY DIXON USED HER RESOURCES AND HER LEADERSHIP TO SUPPORT ARTISTS THROUGH A MAJOR MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN CINEMA. THIS STORY TELLS US ABOUT THE WOMAN, THE ARTIST, THE SPACE-MAKER, AND THE BACKER WHOSE VISION ALLOWED OTHERS TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN.

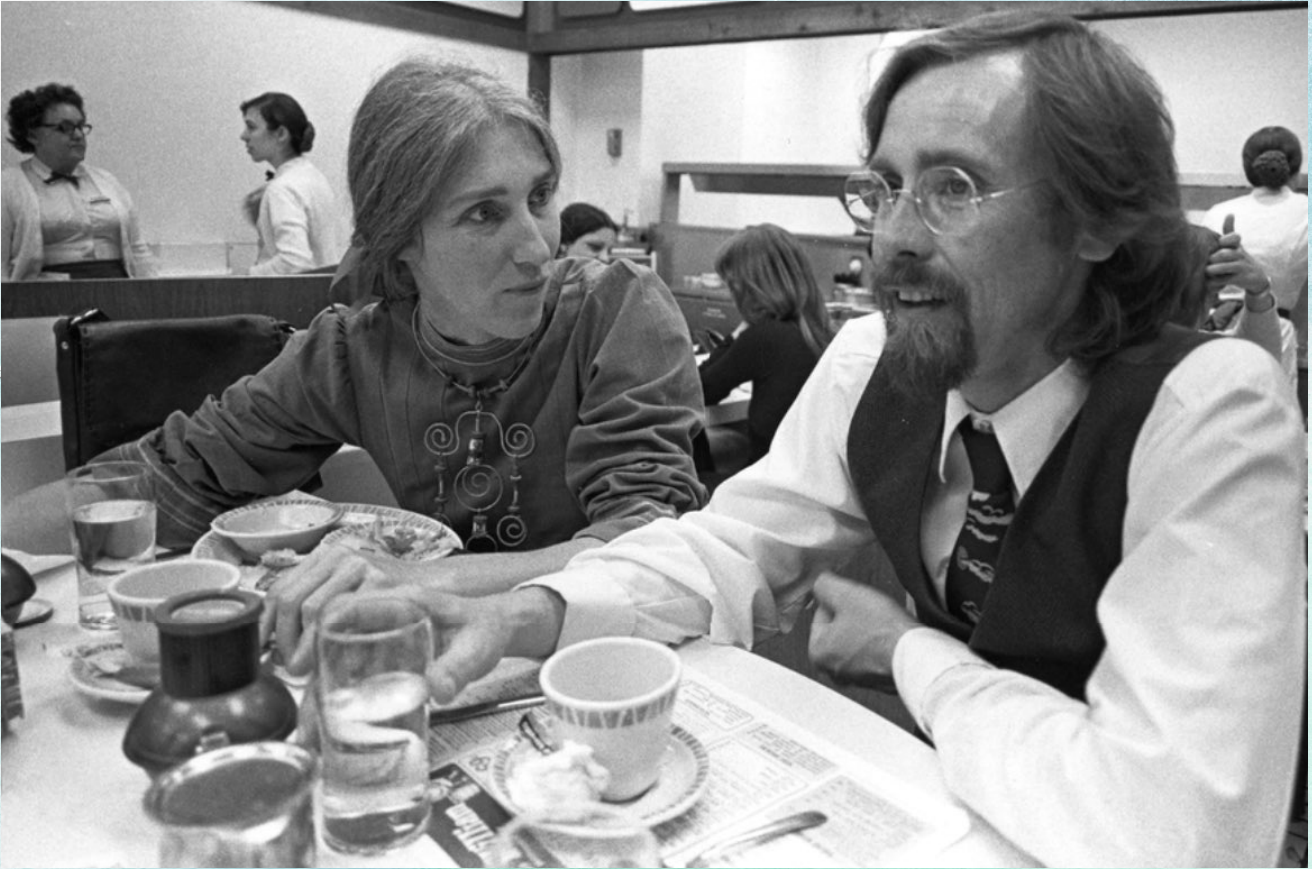
About This Viewing Guide

EXPERIMENTAL CURATOR: THE SALLY DIXON STORY WEAVES TOGETHER DIXON'S "FILM POEMS," ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE, AND INTERVIEWS WITH HER AND OTHERS TO CELEBRATE A LITTLE-KNOWN PIONEER OF FILM AS ART.

BRIGID MAHER AND THE TEAM BEHIND EXPERIMENTAL CURATOR: THE SALLY DIXON STORY PUT TOGETHER THIS VIEWING GUIDE TO AID VIEWERS AS THEY DIVE DEEP INTO SALLY'S STORY AND HER LEGACY. IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, YOU WILL FIND GUIDANCE ON HOW TO USE EXPERIMENTAL CURATOR, HOW TO DISCUSS THE FILM, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM THE EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING COMMUNITY,

THIS RESOURCE IS DESIGNED FOR EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, AND PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS WORKING TOGETHER TO POSITIVELY IMPACT THEIR COMMUNITIES.

Why Discuss Sally Dixon?



IN 1970 DIXON CREATED THE FILM SECTION AT PITTSBURGH'S CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART (CMOA). SHE WAS AN ARTISTIC SOUNDING BOARD. SHE PUT FILMMAKERS UP IN HER HOME. PRE-INTERNET, SHE PUBLISHED A CIRCULAR THAT ENABLED THEM TO BOOK SCREENINGS FOR CRUCIAL INCOME. PRE-DIGITAL VIDEO, AND SHE INCREASED ACCESS FOR ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES. DIXON CHAMPIONED WOMEN FILMMAKERS WHILE SHE HERSELF WAS A WOMAN IN A MAN'S ART WORLD.

THE FILM SECTION SPECIALIZED IN AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND FEATURED LECTURES AND SCREENINGS WITH ARTISTS SUCH AS STAN BRAKHAGE, WILLARD MAAS AND MARIE MENKEN, JAMES BROUGHTON, JOYCE WEILAND, AND MANY OTHERS. DIXON PREMIERED THE PROGRAM ON APRIL 1, 1970, WITH A LECTURE AND SCREENING BY COLLABORATOR AND FILMMAKER JONAS MEKAS.

KEY TERMS



NARRATIVE FILM - A FILM THAT TELLS A STORY. THE NARRATIVE FILM STRUCTURE IS COMPRISED OF EXPOSITION, RISING ACTION, CLIMAX, FALLING ACTION, AND DENOUEMENT.

AVANT-GARDE FILM - EXPERIMENTAL FILM, EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA, OR AVANT-GARDE CINEMA IS A MODE OF FILMMAKING THAT RIGOROUSLY RE-EVALUATES CINEMATIC CONVENTIONS AND EXPLORES NON-NARRATIVE FORMS OR ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES OR METHODS OF WORKING.

FILM ART - AN ART FILM IS TYPICALLY AN INDEPENDENT FILM, AIMED AT A NICHE MARKET RATHER THAN A MASS MARKET AUDIENCE.

Guided Discussion

- WHAT DID YOU KNOW ABOUT EXPERIMENTAL FILM BEFORE WATCHING THIS DOCUMENTARY? WHAT INFORMATION ABOUT THE EXPERIMENTAL FILM MOVEMENT DID YOU GAIN?
- DID THE FILM HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF SALLY DIXON? WHAT ARE SOME NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF HER LEGACY?
- WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAIN THEMES OF THE FILM?
- WHAT DO YOU THINK THE ROLE OF EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING IS IN THE INDUSTRY TODAY?
- IF YOU COULD ASK SALLY DIXON A QUESTION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?
- WHY IS EXPERIMENTAL FILM IMPORTANT?
- DO YOU THINK THERE SHOULD BE A DEDICATED SPACE WITHIN THE INDUSTRY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-COMMERCIAL, NON-NARRATIVE FILM? WHY OR WHY NOT?
- HOW DOES EXPERIMENTAL FILM CONTRIBUTE TO THE INDUSTRY?
- WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT SALLY DIXON IS A WOMAN?

BEYOND THE FILM

HOST A SCREENING

HOLDING A GROUP SCREENING OF THE FILM CAN PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT FORMAT TO BRING TOGETHER PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS, CREATING A SPACE FOR THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND OPINIONS. BY WATCHING THIS FILM TOGETHER, YOUR GROUP CAN GROW THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF EXPERIMENTAL FILM, SALLY DIXON, AND HER IMPACT IN THE INDUSTRY. FOR INFORMATION AND TIPS ON HOLDING A SCREENING, CONTACT BRIGID MAHER _____.

EXPERIMENTAL CURATOR: THE SALLY DIXON STORY HAS A MULTIMEDIA WEBSITE INCLUDING EXCERPTS AND OUTTAKES FROM THE FILM, EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND LINKS, AS WELL AS IDEAS FOR WAYS TO GET INVOLVED. CHECK OUT: SALLYDIXONFILM.COM

PURCHASE A COPY OF THE FILM

FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO BUY A COPY OF EXPERIMENTAL CURATOR: THE SALLY DIXON STORY OR BOOK A SCREENING, PLEASE CONTACT _____.

RESOURCES

MOUSLEY, SHERYL; VETTER, JILL; DIXON, SALLY (JANUARY 1, 2005). "RIDING THE (NEW) WAVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH AVANT-GARDE FILM CURATOR SALLY DIXON". WALKER ART CENTER. RETRIEVED OCT 28, 2021.

MOUSLEY, SHERYL (NOVEMBER 6, 2019). "REMEMBERING SALLY DIXON, A CHAMPION OF AVANT-GARDE FILM (1932–2019)". WALKER ART CENTER. RETRIEVED OCT 28, 2021.

JONAS MEKAS, CHAMPION OF THE "POETIC" CINEMA BY RICHARD BRODY IN THE NEWYORKER, APRIL 21, 2016 [1]

STAN BRAKHAGE, ESSENTIAL BRAKHAGE - SELECTED WRITINGS ON FILMMAKING (NEW YORK: MCPHERSON. 2001)