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The Heretics

by Kilian Melloy

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Lucy Lippard, one of the creators of Heresies, in Joan Braderman's documentary about the feminist publication, The Heretics (Source: No Moire Nice Girls Productions)

According to Joan Braderman's documentary **The Heretics**, Freud once posed the question, "What do women want?" Braderman's film supplies an answer to that: equal pay for equal work; the same control over their bodies that men enjoy; and to be taken seriously as artists, writers, professionals, and human beings.

Braderman's film recalls a group of women to which Braderman once belonged. The group created a publication called Heresies, which drew its name from a quote, to wit: "New truths begin as

heresies." (The provenance of the quote is not explained, but it may be a version of Thomas Huxley's famous quote, "It is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies and to end as superstitions.") Whether or not it heralds new truth, "heresy" contains the word "her," and the publication's creators liked that.

Braderman and two younger women travel to a lengthy itinerary of destinations to interview the women behind Heresies about the publication's origins and meaning. The documentary illustrates the interviewees' words in brisk, entertaining ways, starting with Braderman's own recollection of first arriving in New York ("In Washington Square, my welcoming committee were the usual perverts...") Along the way, the film offers a concise course in the history of feminism, from the suffrage movement (women finally got the right to vote in 1920) to contemporary attitudes. Lament the Heresies women, "'Feminist' has become a dirty word."

Back in the early 1970s, women wanted--and worked for--legal equality of recompense and opportunity, but that's not how things turned out: "We have Title IX, everyone gets to play soccer now," one woman says. "But the reality is women are still seen differently than men."

The film attributes a long list of woes to anti-woman attitudes, and some of the items are certainly justifiable: battering, for example, or the marketing of unhealthy images of female "beauty" that ravage the psyches of women young and old. But other things on the list would seem to target men just as cruelly, such as genocide and "corporate tyranny."

Still, this is a compelling documentary about an early, and ongoing--but still often underestimated, if not entirely overlooked--aspect of the culture wars. If nothing else, it's a chance to spend some time with smart, self-possessed women who are long past taking any guff from men or anybody else: as one woman puts it, with a mix of dry intelligence and considered crudeness, "I may have breasts and a cunt, but that

doesn't mean I can't do anything in the world."

Kilian Melloy reviews media, conducts interviews, and writes commentary for EDGEBoston, where he also serves as Assistant Arts Editor.



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