

ON THE ISSUES

THE PROGRESSIVE WOMAN'S MAGAZINE

A MAGAZINE OF CRITICAL, INDEPENDENT THINKING

Search On The Issues:

Search the Archive

Home
About Us
Letters to Editor
Kudos & Awards
Archive
Links



[ShareThis](#)

[Print page](#)

[Bookmark site](#)

Follow us on:



Join On The Issues

[Sign Me Up!](#)

[Send us Email](#)

The Cafe

**New
commentary**

[Enter the Cafe](#)

The Cafe at On The Issues Online Magazine is deepening the conversations by continually adding the insights of progressive writers, thinkers and artists on the topics we address. Check back frequently for new commentary. If you wish to contribute to the Cafe, email cafe@ontheissuesmagazine.com.

[Back to Cafe Home](#)

"The Heretics": Film Invigorates Feminism, Art, Politics

by Ariel Dougherty

Exuberance and bravado! Gumption and sweat! Vision and breadth! These are among the many elements that composed the literal [collective experience of 28 women](#) who came together in 1977 to produce one of the truly dynamic women's publications to emerge from the Women's Liberation Movement.

That publication was *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*. The energy and commitment lasted 15 years and produced 27 issues, which are [viewable online](#). Today the rosy cheeks, bright eyes and continued high energy and creativity of these women is deeply invigorating.

In the new film, [The Heretics](#), Joan Braderman, filmmaker, professor and one of the collective members, takes her camera crew on the road -- from New Mexico to Venice -- to revisit her collective sisters. Now ages 54 to 84, in ones and threes, the women gather in homes, studios and worksites. With the same excitement and freshness that they brought to the publication, the women recant the tale of how and why they came together, made content decisions and physically cut and pasted the publication into being, issue after issue.

While a history, Braderman breaks way out of any formal mold. Starting with personal narrative, yet instilling a dynamic group process, a new kind of collective "memoir" unfolds.

Building from the rich and imaginative graphics of the publication itself and old photos, Braderman animates (via talents of Sarah Clark and Molly McLeod) the women when younger, enlivening some of their critical political points. An amusing yet informative history bursts through in this experimental spark. Tight-framed head shots -- filmed by camerawoman Lily Henderson -- adoringly contain the women like loving arms. Angled here and there, these smart women maintain a constant conversation as though all were still in one room.

This dynamic is skillfully crafted by editors, Kathy Schermerhorn and Scott Hancock, as the women discuss how "we have to do it ourselves" (Marybeth Edelson) and "the engagement and passion...that is what I still

CURRENT ISSUE
Fall 2009

[Race, Feminism,
Our Future](#)

[Taking on
Postracialism](#)

[To Stop Gender
Violence, Start
Changing the Tune](#)

[Birthers and
Birchers: Hiding
Behind Stars and
Stripes](#)

[Mujeres Take Back
the Culture With
Old Photos](#)

[Beginning with the
Children: To Teach
Peace](#)

[Fall2009 Index](#)

hunger for" (Harmony Hammond). Viewers are drawn back into their powerful collective and consciousness raising processes--processes that made *Heresies* provocative, highly productive and stimulating for collective and readers alike.

Pat Steir, noted painter, stands on a tall ladder dwarfed before a gigantic red field painting, as Braderman asks: "Who was the first person who told you (that) you painted like a man?" Steir, brush in hand, laughs, pauses ever so briefly and turns to the camera: "A man!" she states emphatically.

Braderman's series of questions to the women are sharp and pointed, shaping a series of "ah-has" that so many women experienced via consciousness raising groups. The sequences inform the viewer that feminism is a process on a continuum. The "personal is political" learning moments form bridges to new plateaus as women de-robe the myths they were brought up with or that persist within patriarchal culture, and collectively delve into new truths.

Consistent with a Braderman trademark in earlier films, she analyzes mainstream media. For *The Heretics*, she composes TV news anchor vignettes in the corner of the frame in which the anchor expounds something horrific about women or feminists. A lightening bolt strikes them off the screen.

The enthusiasm is infectious, such as when performance artist Marty Pottenger exclaims about the naming of the publication, "There were 300 written names...I have the list....and "Heresies" was one of them!" And it bubbles over in heartfelt joy when Miriam Schapiro reads an Adrienne Rich writing, and at the end comes back to the phrase: "the power to name." Viewers are reminded about Schapiro's own vital contribution here: Femmage = Female + Collage.

"The Heretics" captures a fertile and effervescent past that is a model for young activist-artists of today. Couldn't we all, old and young alike, benefit from some dazzling, politically savvy, visually dynamic new collectively made television show? One that combines news and culture, opinion and analysis? And looks into ourselves?

Without documenting our own cultural and political process, we do not have a movement. Thanks to Braderman and her savvy crew, in *The Heretics*, we have a compelling powerhouse example of feminism's creative force - both in the history on the screen and the makers of the history.

"**The Heretics,**" directed by Joan Braderman, produced by Crescent Diamond; 95 minutes.

[Watch the trailer.](#)

October 23, 2009

[Back to Cafe Home](#)

ShareThis

Ariel Dougherty, a media maker and advocate, is the initiator of the Media Equity Collaborative. She lives in New Mexico.

*Also see "[Women in the Arts: How They Can Change Your Life](#)" by [Barbara Kahn](#) in this edition of *On The Issues Magazine*.*

*See "[Third Wave Video Art: Sarcastic and Serious](#)" by [Heather MacGibbon](#) in this edition of *On The Issues Magazine*.*



RSS Feed

©1983-2009 On The Issues Magazine; No Reuse without permission.