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Women's Work

10.05.09



Joan Braderman, *The Heretics*, 2009, stills from a color film, 95 minutes. Left: Detail of Joyce Kozloff's *Voyages*. Right: Lucy Lippard.

"IT BECAME VERY CLEAR TO ME that everything in my life, in terms of my art, I was going to have to fight for." So says artist Nina Yankowitz in *The Heretics*, Joan Braderman's info-packed documentary on the groundbreaking feminist art magazine *Heresies*. The film contextualizes the hurdles faced at the dawn of second-wave feminism: Prior to the 1970s, as interviewees attest, one of the highest compliments a female artist might get from teachers and critics was that she "painted like a man." Published from 1977 to 1992, *Heresies* was produced out of (still) scrappy Lower Manhattan by a sprawling collective of artists and writers drawn together to support and explore women's art in defiance of a curatorial and historical vacuum. Herself a *Heresies* veteran, Braderman reconnects with former participants, now living around the globe, including critic Lucy Lippard; filmmaker Su Friedrich; architect Susana Torre; artists Amy Sillman, Miriam Schapiro, Mary Miss, and Cecilia Vicuna; and twenty or so others, editing together their stories into a fast-paced, thematically chaptered montage.

Upbeat and affirmative, the documentary employs copious low-tech text and graphics sequences in keeping with the style of Braderman's canonical video-lecture projects like *Joan Does Dynasty* (1986) and *Joan Sees Stars* (1992). Though *The Heretics* ends with a nod to the present with a short sequence on third-wave feminist collective publishers LTTR, it's Braderman's portrait of another era that drives the film. The stories these women tell envision a radically different moment in art-world history, one in which questions of career and market are barely mentioned, and philosophical arguments are firmly grounded in street-level politics. Braderman's take is unabashedly utopian and celebratory but looks to the past for lessons rather than nostalgia. For as artist Emma Amos notes, "There are more women artists than there are male artists. More of them will get into the best programs. And then what happens? The boys still have the edge on us."

— Ed Halter

The *Heretics* screens at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, October 9–15. For more details, [click here](#). A website devoted to the film and *Heresies* archives can be found [here](#).

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