

A Women's Film Fest

Brattleboro Series Features the Provocative & Political

By ELAYNE CLIFT

This year being one of enormous political consequence, perhaps the question to ask about the 13th annual Brattleboro Women's Film Festival is this: Is filmmaking a political act when women do it?

"Sophia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* is not a political act," says my daughter, filmmaker Rachel Clift, whose first documentary premiered at the Brattleboro Women's Film Festival in 2002. "But she is the first woman to be nominated for an Oscar as best director in the history of the Academy. That's insane! Does that make her film 'political'?"

Clift says, "films by women can become political acts simply because they were made. A film made by a woman in Afghanistan or Iran can be considered a political act because women in those countries are not generally afforded freedom of expression." While the goal of any filmmaker is to tell a good story, she says, when the content of a film challenges the dominant culture or serves as a call to action, it might well be called political, even subversive.

Vermont-based director Nora Jacobson, whose film *Nothing Like Dreaming* will be featured in this year's festival, agrees that filmmaking is "an activist way of being in the world." Her 98-minute feature tells the story of a teenage girl traumatized by the loss of her best friend, who finds solace in the company of a reclusive artist making music with fire. She describes it as a coming-of-age story about healing, compassion and creativity.

"What interested me," Jacobson explains, "was exploring what I call 'edge' states: boundaries and transitions between different states of mind and times in life ...

and the boundaries between sanity and madness. I tried to tell a story about two people in 'edge' states, who experience coercion in different ways, and who, despite great differences in age and status, form a friendship based on compassion and acceptance."

Jacobson thinks that the rise in number and prominence of women in film recently has a lot to do with truth-telling, and with women's ability to let people tell their own stories. Both filmmakers see women's work in the visual media as a challenge to the linear, male model of storytelling. "My work is much more of a woven piece," she says. "It makes it harder to have your work accepted when it suggests a new, more inclusive form."

Provocative views like these are the essence of the Brattleboro Women's Film Festival, which opens on March 5th and runs through the 21st at The Latchis and the Hooker-Dunham Theaters in Brattleboro.

Recognized regionally and beyond as "a celebration of the creative process in women's lives through film and the visual arts," this year's Festival focuses on teenage girls, and also pays tribute to the late Katherine Hepburn. With showings each week from Thursday through Sunday, the Festival will screen nearly two-dozen films from around the world that focus on women's lives and women in filmmaking. (Several documentaries and feature films represent area premieres of international releases.)

Films include: *Love and Diane*, a bold documentary that follows a teenage welfare mother and her family over the course of several years; *Lady Warrior*, an inspiring film about physical endurance featuring a race run by Native American teenagers; and *What I Want My Words To Do To You*, pro-

duced and directed by Judy Katz and Madeleine Gavin, and featuring Eve Ensler. (Katz will be speaking at the Festival on March 19th). The film focuses on the healing power of writing for incarcerated women. Hepburn films include *Adam's Rib* and *Alice Adams*.

Arlene Distler, Festival co-chair, sees the Film Festival as "a way to expand consciousness. We see how people live, what women's struggles are, where the connections lie. It's the real stuff. You won't see it coming out of Hollywood."

The Festival is mounted entirely by volunteers and serves as a major benefit for the Women's Crisis Center of Windham County, which works to end physical, sexual, and emotional violence against women. Founded in 1977, the Center provides a wide range of services for callers, drop-ins, and residents. It is committed to providing advocacy and support to women and their children who are abuse survivors, and it offers prevention and education services to help create a community in which violence is not tolerated.

In addition to films, the Festival includes a number of special events: talks by directors (including Nora Jacobson), panel discussions, and other guest speakers. Tickets for each show are \$7 for adults and \$6 for youth and seniors. Discounted Festival passes may be pre-purchased at local bookstores and at The Latchis and Hooker-Dunham theaters on opening night and throughout the Festival.

The 2004 Women's Film Festival schedule is available at www.womensfilmfestival.org or by calling 802-258-9100. ▼

Elayne Clift is a writer in Saxtons River, a member of the Board of Directors of the Women's Crisis Center, and the mother of filmmaker Rachel Clift.

and lighting for theatre productions in Vermont and is providing theatre design, acoustics and consulting services for several performing arts facility projects.

ously married for 25 years, Greg 20 years. They have four daughters ages 16 through 25. ▼

Bob Wolff makes things of clay, fibers, and paints in watercolor and acrylics. He also designs scenery

Artist

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Bob Hooker and Greg Sharrow had their Civil Union on September 9, 2001. Bob was previ-

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