

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE PRESENTS 20 FILMS BY PIONEERING WOMEN IN AUSTRALIAN CINEMA

Featuring films directed by women in the 1980s and '90s, kicked off by Gillian Armstrong's 1979 film *My Brilliant Career*, the first Australian feature directed by a woman since the 1930s

July 21–August 14, 2022



Astoria, New York, May 13, 2022 — From July 21 to August 14, Museum of the Moving Image will present the 20-film series **Pioneering Women in Australian Cinema**, featuring visionary independent female artists who, in the 1980s and '90s, helped define a new era in the region's cinema. It includes both feature films and shorts by a diverse set of filmmakers including Gillian Armstrong, Clara Law, Jane Campion, Tracey Moffatt, Ann Turner, Ana Kokkinos, Nadia Tass, Corinne Cantrill, Margot Nash, Jocelyn Moorhouse, and others—bringing together the work of widely celebrated directors and others who remain unknown to American audiences. Most of the films will be imported from Australia, offering a rare opportunity for these works to be seen in the United States. This series is co-presented with the Australian International Screen Forum.

In 1979, Gillian Armstrong premiered her debut fiction feature, *My Brilliant Career*, at the Cannes Film Festival. Incredibly, it was the first Australian feature directed by a woman since those made by the McDonagh sisters in the early 1930s. The foundations for this breakthrough had been laid throughout the 1970s thanks to the giddy rush of the Australian New Wave cinema, the progressive Whitlam government (1972–75), the country's thunderous Women's Liberation movement, and the creation of the nation's first major film school, Australian Film Television & Radio School (AFTRS). In the 1980s and '90s, women slowly but surely set themselves up behind the camera, leading to the emergence of new voices, many of which are featured in this series.

Pioneering Women in Australian Cinema encompasses comedy, musical, romance, and horror, as well as more underrepresented essayistic, autobiographical, documentary, and experimental styles into a revised cinematic historiography. The program includes such titles as *Celia* (1989), the debut feature by Ann Turner; *My Brilliant Career* and *Starstruck* (1982), Gillian Armstrong's debut and sophomore features; Jane Campion's 1988 film *Sweetie*; Tracey Moffatt's *BeDevil* (1993), the first feature directed by an Indigenous Australian woman; *Only the Brave* (1994), Ana Kokkinos's uncompromising debut; *Floating Life*, a Silver Leopard recipient at the 1996 Locarno Film Festival from Hong Kong-raised Clara Law; Laurie McInnes's 1993 debut feature *Broken Highway*; *The Big Steal* (1990), directed by Nadia Tass; and *Proof*, Jocelyn Moorhouse's 1991 feature film.

The series also includes the 1929 silent film *The Cheaters*, the only surviving feature film of the filmmaking trio the McDonagh sisters.

"This series pays tribute to the women directors who emerged in the '80s and '90s, highlighting the contributions of queer, feminist, migrant, and Indigenous women filmmakers and their stories, which are focused on class, work, education, friendship, and—as always for such a geographically isolated country—dreams," said series curator Michelle Carey, a festival programmer (Directors' Fortnight, International Film Festival Rotterdam, advisor to New York Film Festival) and curator and previously Artistic Director of the Melbourne International Film Festival.

Pioneering Women in Australian Cinema is presented with support from Australian Consul-General in New York, The Hon. Nick Greiner AC with additional support from the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia and Australian International Screen Forum.

This series originated in the smaller program Pioneering Women, curated for the Melbourne International Film Festival by Michelle Carey and Alexandra Heller-Nicholas. More information on the films and several others of the era can be found at Heller-Nicholas's [Generation Starstruck](#) website.

The following restored films are presented in association with the National Film and Sound Archive's digital restoration program NFSA Restores: Reviving our Cinema Icons: *The Cheaters*; *My Survival as an Aboriginal*; *Witches and Faggots*, *Dykes and Poofers*; *Starstruck*; *For Love or Money: A History of Women and Work in Australia*; *Celia*; *Proof*; and *Floating Life*.

DESCRIPTIONS FOR 'PIONEERING WOMEN IN AUSTRALIAN CINEMA' (JUL. 21–AUG. 14)

All films screen in the Sumner M. Redstone Theater or the Celeste and Armand Bartos Screening Room at Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35 Ave, Astoria, NY 11106. Advance tickets and schedule will be available soon at www.movingimage.us.

The Cheaters

Dir. Paulette McDonagh. 1929, 92 mins. DCP. Silent. With Marie Lorraine, Arthur Greenaway, Paula Marsh works as part of a criminal organization headed by her father. Tasked to rob an expensive country club, she falls in love with the son of one of its wealthy guests. *The Cheaters* is the only surviving feature film of the filmmaking trio the McDonagh sisters—with Paulette billed as director, Phyllis as producer, and Isabel the lead actress, here under the name “Marie Lorraine.” The film was made on the cusp of the introduction of the “talkies,” such bad timing forcing the sister to add sound and dialogue to subsequent versions, with negative critical and financial consequences. The original silent version remains the only intact version, and has been fully restored by the NFSA.

On Guard + Nice Coloured Girls + Shadow Panic

On Guard. Dir. Susan Lambert. 1983, 50 mins. 16mm. With Liddy Clark, Jan Cornall, Kerry Dwyer, Mystery Carnage. Four women conspire to sabotage the research program of Utero, a multinational firm engaged in reproductive engineering. But when one of the women loses her diary containing the group’s plans, they begin to fear exposure, fueling tensions. A radical feminist twist on the heist genre, the film packs the toil of family obligations, media manipulations, and even shiny lycra-era aerobics into its compact runtime.

Preceded by ***Nice Coloured Girls***. Dir. Tracey Moffatt. 1987, 16 mins. 16mm. With Gayle Mabo, Cheryl Pitt, Janelle Court, Fiona George. Three young Indigenous women have a night out on the town in Kings Cross, encountering an exasperatingly retrograde display of sexual politics unchanged from colonization to the present day. Moffatt’s debut film is told with a sly humor and feminist knowingness, with cheeky use of on-screen texts subverting the colonialists’ original words from the 1790s. ***Shadow Panic***. Dir. Margot Nash. 1989, 26 mins. DCP. With Robin Laurie, Rose Wanganeen, Kaarin Fairfax. Three women—a dreamer, an investigator, and a fool—ruminate on internal and external states of emergency, personal and collective shadows, resistance and spirit. Beloved independent feminist filmmaker and scholar Nash’s playful and essayistic film is a response to a world beset by greed, natural catastrophe, war, and changing weather patterns.

My Survival as an Aboriginal

Dir. Essie Coffey. 1978, 51 mins. DCP. The first Australian film directed by an Indigenous woman, this documentary depicts the dispossession of the Aboriginal people of Australia with passion and stark honesty. It reveals an incredibly resilient and proud activist in the figure of Coffey, a Murawari woman, fierce campaigner, and filmmaker who actively fought for (and won) advances for the basic living conditions of Aboriginal people.

Followed by ***Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers***. A film by the One in Seven Collective, produced by Digby Duncan. 1980, 45 mins. DCP. This trailblazing documentary captures the queer spirit of 1970s Australia, portraying the events leading up to and around the first ever Sydney Mardi Gras in 1978, an occasion rife with pride and love but also violence, both on the night of the event and in the media surrounding it. The provocative title comes from the community’s call to reclaim such terms of abuse for themselves.

Only the Brave

Dir. Ana Kokkinos. 1994, 54 mins. 16mm. With Elena Mandalis, Dora Kaskanis, Maude Davey. Two Greek-Australian schoolgirls dream of escaping their suburban lives, while contending with boredom, sexism, and troubled home lives. Kokkinos is one of the great chroniclers of working-class migrant stories in Australia, and her mid-length film powerfully conveys the raw sexuality and dreams of artistic expression in these rebellious best friends.

Followed by ***Greetings from Wollongong***. Dir. Mary Callaghan. 1982, 43 mins. 16mm. With Tina Waller, Kevin Bugden, Lorraine Palamara, David Horridge. Four teenagers in the small industrial city of Wollongong are affected by the economic recession and the slashing of jobs, which especially took a toll on women. The precarity of blue-collar work is brought to life in these individual stories, with radio and television clips transmitting local news and providing the political and economic context for their predicament.

My Brilliant Career

Dir. Gillian Armstrong. 1979, 100 mins. With Judy Davis, Sam Neill, Wendy Hughes. An impudent and free-thinking young woman aspires to an artistic life in late-19th-century, drought-ridden rural Australia. Sent away by her family to earn her own living, she navigates her own path and cultivates her voice and desires. Based on Miles Franklin's celebrated feminist book of the same name, this Australian New Wave classic launched the careers of actors Judy Davis and Sam Neill, as well as director Gillian Armstrong. It was also the first Australian dramatic feature film directed by a woman in 46 years, paving the way for a new generation of female voices.

Starstruck

Dir. Gillian Armstrong. 1982, 94 mins. With Jo Kennedy, Ross O'Donovan, Margo Lee, Max Cullen, Pat Evison, John O'May. A young working-class woman dreams of being a pop singer, while living and working in her family's struggling pub in The Rocks, under the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Aided by her media-savvy teenage cousin, and deploying various shrewd antics, she ultimately crashes a popular talent competition. With its vibrant '80s new wave video aesthetic, this light-hearted musical comedy displayed Armstrong's commitment to stories of women's self-determination and creative versatility across different milieu.

For Love or Money: A History of Women and Work in Australia

Dirs. Megan McMurchy, Margot Oliver, Margot Nash, Jeni Thornley. 1983, 107 mins. DCP. The 1970s saw a radical revision of Australian history through a feminist lens. This film was created as part of the 1978 Women and Labour Conference and went on to become a feminist essay film classic. Five years in the making, with contributions from hundreds of women and over 200 Australian films, it is an investigation and celebration of women's work from colonial settlement to the present, a story told by women: Aboriginals, migrants, convicts, and a variety of others. Narrated by actress Noni Hazelhurst.

In This Life's Body

Dir. Corinne Cantrill. 1984, 147 mins. Corinne Cantrill, who works with her husband Arthur Cantrill, is one of Australia's most committed and prolific experimental filmmakers. This brilliantly constructed and questioning autobiography covers the years 1928–1984, using a tapestry of photographs and a handful of moving image clips, centering the emotions and memories they elicit. The film recounts a passionate life of travel, friendships, romance, and artistic exploration, while also interrogating Cantrill's own family background and heritage. Says filmmaker Margot Nash, "Corinne has lived the

passionate and unconventional life of an artist, and tells her story with intelligence, complexity and (at times) a refreshing uncertainty.”

Sweetie

Dir. Jane Campion. 1989, 97 mins. 35mm. With Geneviève Lemon, Karen Colston, Tom Lycos, Jon Darling. New Zealand-born Jane Campion's debut feature film portrays—with lurid and unabashed vitality—the perilous relationship between two sisters, one repressed and anxious, the other unhindered and reckless, after the latter, nicknamed Sweetie, returns to their Sydney suburban home, throwing family relations and aspirations into disarray. Campion's distinctive, bold eye is already evident in this tragicomic portrait of two vastly different women, suburban strangeness, and how society considers mental illness. The film won several awards in Australia, and launched the international career of this Oscar-winning filmmaker.

Celia

Dir. Ann Turner. 1989, 102 mins. DCP. With Rebecca Smart, Victoria Longley, Mary-Anne Fahey, Nicholas Eadie. It's 1957. At school eight-year-old Celia encounters the horrific fantastical story of the Hobyahs. After her beloved grandmother passes away, she becomes intrigued by a family that's just moved in next door. Exposed to a new, post-innocent world, she attempts to navigate fantasy and reality. Novelist/director Turner's film was categorized as horror upon its release, but it's more of a nuanced coming-of-age tale, with mythological elements, set against the backdrop of 1950s conservatism, anti-communism, and the rabbit plague.

The Big Steal

Dir. Nadia Tass. 1990, 99 mins. 35mm. With Ben Mendelsohn, Claudia Karvan, Steve Bisley, Damon Herriman. Teenager Danny (a baby-faced Mendelsohn, in an early role) wants to woo his crush Joanna, promising a ride in his 1973 Jaguar. Except that he doesn't have one. Unwanted and unintended consequences ensue when he decides to trade in his dowdy 1962 Nissan via a sketchy car dealer. This warm-hearted teen comedy caper was the third feature for filmmaking couple Nadia Tass (director) and David Parker (writer and cinematographer). A car-lover's delight, it invigorates the 1980s teen date-comedy formula with an Aussie sensibility, showcasing the streets of inner-city Melbourne and a sunny Oz-rock soundtrack.

Proof

Dir. Jocelyn Moorhouse. 1991, 86 mins. DCP. With Hugo Weaving, Geneviève Picot, Russell Crowe. Weaving plays Martin, a blind photographer whose distrust of everyone is rooted in a childhood incident. He takes photos as proof that the world he imagines is the same world that sighted people see. When he meets Andy (Crowe), he comes the closest he ever has to trusting the words of a fellow friend. But when Andy gets involved with Celia (Picot), Martin's housekeeper, who is also in love with the photographer, things get decidedly calculating. Moorhouse's debut feature deftly controls a tangle of emotions and manipulations between the three players in this not-quite love/hate triangle. With its black humor and simple set-up, it's a cinematic master class on human vulnerability and the need for connection.

Broken Highway

Dir. Laurie McInnes. 1993, 98 mins. 35mm. With Claudia Karvan, Aden Young, David Field, Bill Hunter. Upon arriving on the Queensland coast in a merchant ship, sailor Angel has business to conduct on behalf of his recently deceased mentor. Instructed to deliver a package to an apparently

tropical paradise town called Honeyfield, he instead finds a malevolent melting pot of desire and deceit. Though she had previously worked as a cinematographer (shooting, among others, *On Guard*), Laurie McInnes here makes her feature directorial debut, a haunting, dusty Australian gothic noir, shot in rich black-and-white. Featuring Claudia Karvan in two roles, and beloved character actor Bill Hunter, *Broken Highway* stands apart today from most Australian cinema, as it did at the time of its release.

BeDevil

Dir. Tracey Moffatt. 1993, 90 mins. 35mm. With Jack Charles, Diana Davidson, Tracey Moffatt, Banula Maruka, Debai Baira, Pinau Ghee, Patricia Handy, Lex Marinos, Dina Panozzo. Celebrated visual artist Tracey Moffatt's only feature film is a triptych of strange ghost stories rendered with a vivid staginess and dark humor. An Indigenous man recounts how the pervasive malevolence of a dead American GI's presence is still felt by his fellow inhabitants of Bribie Island. The ghost of a young girl haunts a woman and her family along the desolate train tracks in outback Queensland. The spirits of a doomed Torres Strait islander couple refuse to leave a condemned warehouse, tormenting its owner. Each story is informed by recollections of childhood bedtime stories, drawn from the filmmaker's Aboriginal and Irish heritages, and simmers with the underlying threat of violence that has surrounded so much of Indigenous experience historically. Influenced by the work of Masaki Kobayashi and other Japanese ghost films, it delights in an explicitly anti-naturalistic style.

Love and Other Catastrophes

Dir. Emma-Kate Croghan. 1996, 76 mins. 35mm. With Alice Garner, Frances O'Connor, Radha Mitchell, Matt Day. Film studies student Mia wants to switch classes and must jump through a plethora of logistical hoops and hurdles to get that highly coveted stamp on her university form. Meanwhile, jealousy simmers as her girlfriend spends time with a fellow student. Her roommate Alice romantically daydreams of her perfect type while she should be writing her PhD. And nice guy Mike is trying to find a new place to live. Set over 24 hours, this low-budget, independent comedy about love, friendship, share-houses, and university bureaucracy sizzles with sharp dialogue and radiant performances from its young leads. Every scene is imbued with vibrant '90s idealism and pop-culture references.

Floating Life

Dir. Clara Law. 1996, 96 mins. DCP. With Cecilia Fung-Sing Lee, Edwin Pang, Annie Yip, Annette Shun Wah, Anthony Wong. Against the backdrop of the impending Hong Kong handover, a middle-aged HK couple and their two sons move to Australia to make a new life and to be with their grown daughter, who's already fully assimilated there as a businesswoman. Another adult daughter, now living in Germany, decides to join them. Part fish-out-of-water comedy, part family melodrama, this warm-hearted, hilarious, and sharply observed depiction of the Chinese diaspora was Law's first film (written with her recurring collaborator Eddie Fong) made in her newly adopted home country after a highly successful career in Hong Kong.

Acknowledgments

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Jocelyn Moorhouse; Lynda House; Margot Nash; Ronin Films (Andrew Pike and Craig McConnell); Nadia Tass and David Parker; Umbrella Entertainment (Ari Harrison).

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Top image: *BeDevil* (Dir. Tracey Moffatt. 1993) / courtesy of Women Make Movies

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PRESS SCREENERS ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST. Please contact Tomoko above.

MUSEUM INFORMATION

Museum of the Moving Image (MoMI) is the only institution in the United States that deals comprehensively with the art, technology, enjoyment, and social impact of film, television, and digital media. In its acclaimed facility in Astoria, New York, the Museum presents exhibitions; screenings; discussion programs featuring actors, directors, and creative leaders; and education programs. It houses the nation's largest collection of moving image artifacts and screens over 500 films annually. Its exhibitions—including the core exhibition *Behind the Screen* and *The Jim Henson Exhibition*—are noted for their integration of material objects, interactive experiences, and audiovisual presentations. For more information about the MoMI, visit movingimage.us.

Face masks (ages 2+) are required during screenings in the Museum's theaters and strongly encouraged in other areas of the building. Please review all visitor safety guidelines [here](#).

Hours: Thursday, 2:00–6:00 p.m. Friday, 2:00–8:00 p.m. Saturday–Sunday, 12:00–6:00 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$15 adults; \$11 senior citizens (ages 65+) and students (ages 18+) with ID; \$9 youth (ages 3–17). Children under 3 and Museum members are admitted free. Free gallery admission every Thursday, 2:00–6:00 p.m.

Address: 36-01 35 Avenue (at 37 Street), Astoria (Queens), NY, 11106

Subway: M (weekdays only) or R to Steinway Street. W (weekdays only) or N to 36 Ave.

Program Information: Telephone: 718 777 6888; Website: movingimage.us

Membership: <https://movingimage.us/join-and-support/become-a-member/> or 718 777 6877

Film Screenings: Friday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays, and as scheduled. Unless noted, tickets are \$15 adults / \$11 students and seniors / \$9 youth (ages 3–17) / free or discounted for Museum members.

Advance online purchase is recommended.

Museum of the Moving Image is housed in a building owned by the City of New York and has received significant support from the following public agencies: New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; New York City Council; New York City Economic Development Corporation; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Governor and the New York State Legislature; Institute of Museum and Library Services; National Endowment for the Humanities; National Endowment for the Arts; and Natural Heritage Trust (administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation).

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