

# STRONG WOMEN, POWERFUL IMAGES, JERSEY CONNECTIONS:

*A Tribute to Women Directors*

## WOMEN IN FOCUS

*If you're doing something outside of dominant culture, there's not an easy place for you. You will have to do it yourself.*

*- Ava DuVernay  
(Selma)*

## HAPPY WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

*March 2021*

March is Women's History Month, a time dedicated to celebrating the accomplishments of women and their contributions to the world in which we live, both historically and presently. In this spirit, the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission wishes to pay tribute to women directors who have worked in New Jersey, and helped to establish the state's reputation as the birthplace of the film industry and a current day production center. Since the invention of the motion picture camera in West Orange, women have created movies and television programs that have entertained and amused us, enriched our minds and broadened our outlook. And so, we honor a century of cultural and artistic innovators who have pushed the boundaries of art and commerce.

"We are continuing to see a rising tide of women directors recognized for their contributions to filmmaking," said Secretary of State Tahesha Way. She notes that there were a record number of women working on major motion pictures in 2020. Women represented 16% of the directors working on the 100 highest-grossing films in 2020, up from 12% in 2019 and 4% in 2018, according to the Center for the Study of Women in Television. "This year's Golden Globe Awards was history-making," according to Secretary Way. "For the first time, three women were nominated for best director in the same year. We all celebrate this momentous occasion and recognize the pioneers who paved the way. Still, there are plenty of strides to be made for women directors. Here's to all the female filmmakers on the horizon. We welcome you to New Jersey for your next project!"

Additionally, we invite you to visit The Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP), a digital publication and resource rich with information on hundreds of women throughout the world who have worked as directors, producers, screenwriters, editors, and more during the silent film era. These women were creative, visionary and prolific in an era when opportunities for women were scarce. **Read more at <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/>.**

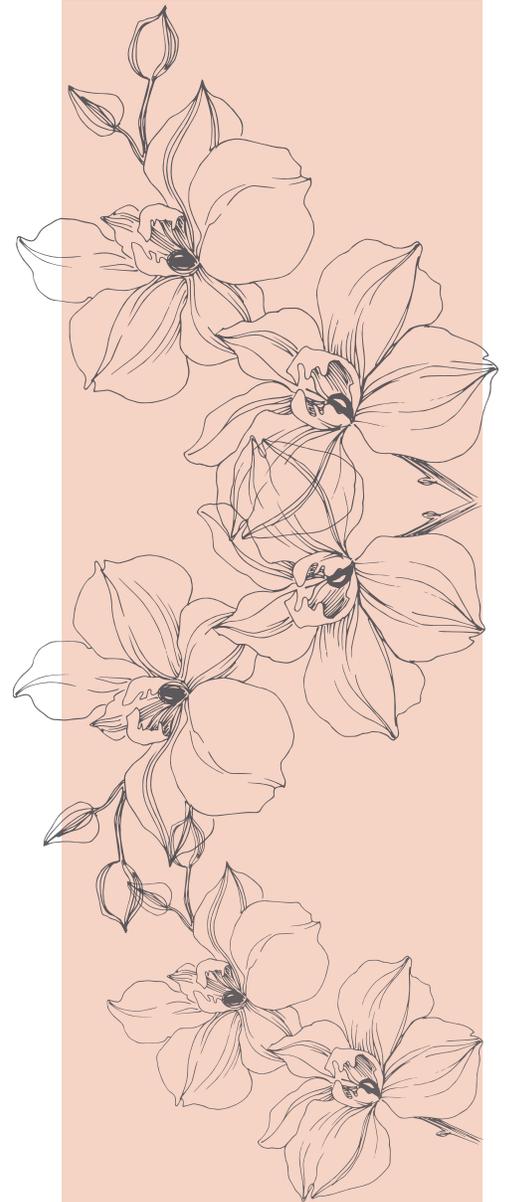


## ALICE GUY-BLACHÉ

In the early 1890s, Fort Lee, New Jersey was the silent film capital of the world. By the early 1900s, there were as many as 17 major studios located here, including the highly successful production company Solax Studios, co-owned by Alice Guy-Blaché, the world's first woman to direct movies and own a studio. Her credo for actors, printed boldly across a banner hung in her studio: "Be Natural."

Guy-Blaché entered the film business in 1896 as a secretary at the Gaumont Film Company based in France. The next year, Gaumont became the world's first motion picture production company when they switched to creating movies, and Guy-Blaché became its first film director. After moving to the United States with her husband, cameraman Herbert Blaché, she branched out on her own, founding the Solax Company in 1910. By 1912, her rate of film production equaled that of D.W. Griffith's and her films were just as popular. In the span of two years, she directed 40 to 50 films and produced hundreds of others at Solax in Fort Lee. During her career, she made more than 1,000 silent shorts, including comedies, westerns and dramas, many of which spotlighted women. In fact, Guy-Blaché is credited by many as the first director to film a narrative story.

She died in New Jersey in 1968 and is buried in the Catholic cemetery in Mahwah. In 2011, Guy-Blaché was accepted as a member of the Directors Guild of America, after the Fort Lee Film Commission successfully lobbied for her inclusion. She was subsequently awarded a posthumous "Special Directorial Award for Lifetime Achievement" at the 2011 DGA Honors. In 2013, Guy-Blaché was inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame.



*"Not only is a woman as well-fitted to stage a photo-drama as a man, but in many ways she has a distinct advantage over him because of her very nature and because much of the knowledge called for in the telling of the story and the creation of the stage setting is absolutely within her province as a member of the gentler sex. She is an authority on the emotions. [...] There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man."*

*– Alice Guy-Blaché*



## GLORIA MONTY

Emmy-award winning and former New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission chair Gloria Monty was an American television producer and director. She is best known for taking over the low-rated ABC daytime drama *General Hospital* in 1978 and turning it into an international phenomenon. Almost instantly, she changed the face of daytime television, directing and writing adventurous story lines, and achieved the highest ratings in daytime television history for seven years running.

Monty won two Emmys when *General Hospital* was named Outstanding Drama Series in 1981 and 1984. Multiple episodes of the show were filmed in New Jersey in 1986.

Monty was named by People magazine as one of the 50 Most Interesting People in the World. She was born and raised in Demarest, and attended Academy of Holy Angels.

## JOAN MICKLIN SILVER

Joan Micklin Silver was a successful film director who broke barriers for women. She realized that she would have to direct movies to tell the stories that intrigued her, when scripts she sold went unproduced or were changed beyond recognition. She directed seven feature films, including the highly-acclaimed and Oscar-nominated *Hester Street* starring Carol Kane, and the romantic comedy *Crossing Delancey* with Amy Irving, filmed partly in Hoboken.

Micklin Silver was recognized as one of the only female directors working in Hollywood through the 1970s and '80s and established a reputation as one of the most important woman directors in the United States.



## LINDA YELLEN

Linda Yellen is a director, writer and producer best known for her work in television and independent film. Over the course of her career, Yellen has made twenty-six films and has won numerous awards, including two Peabodys and seven Emmys.

The telefilm *Jacobo Timerman: Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, based on Jacobo Timerman's 1981 autobiographical book of the same name, was filmed in Hackensack. She also wrote and directed *The Simian Line*, starring Harry Connick Jr., Cindy Crawford, Tyne Daly, William Hurt and Lynn Redgrave. The film, involves three couples gathered together at a dinner party in Weehawken, New Jersey. They are told by a psychic that the house is haunted and that one of their relationships will end before the night is over. Filming took place predominately in Weehawken and Jersey City.



## SUSAN SEIDELMAN

Recognized as a leading figure in both independent and women's filmmaking since the early 1980s, Susan Seidelman has been making movies for over 40 years, including a variety of female-focused comedies produced throughout the 1980s.

Seidelman's second feature, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, co-starring Rosanna Arquette and Madonna, involves the interaction between two women – a bored New Jersey housewife and a bohemian drifter – linked by various messages in the personal column of a newspaper. The movie was filmed partly on location in Edgewater, Lakehurst, and Tenafly. The New York Times named it one of the ten best films of 1985.

In 1989, Seidelman directed the black comedy *She-Devil*, produced by Orion Pictures and starring Meryl Streep and Roseanne Barr. The film was shot predominantly in East Rutherford, Englewood Cliffs, Hackensack, Hoboken, Newark, North Bergen, and Union. Another Seidelman comedy, *Cookie*, featuring Emily Lloyd, Peter Falk and Dianne Wiest, was filmed in Secaucus and Atlantic City.





## PENNY MARSHALL

No stranger to New Jersey, Penny Marshall directed three features in the Garden State. First rising to fame as Laverne DeFazio in the hit television show *Laverne & Shirley*, Marshall later achieved even greater success behind the camera, becoming one of the top-grossing female directors while paving the way for a wave of others. Her memorable 1988 comedy *Big*, starring Tom Hanks, spins a fantasy about a 12-year-old boy who wakes up in the body of his 30-year-old self. *Big* made Marshall the first female to direct a film that grossed over \$100 million. Extensive filming took place in Cliffside Park and Fort Lee.

In 2008, Empire Magazine selected *Big* as one of "The 500 Greatest Movies of All Time."

In 1996, Marshall directed the comedy-drama *The Preacher's Wife*, starring Whitney Houston and Denzel Washington, at the Trinity United Methodist Church in Newark and in downtown Paterson. She returned again in 2000 to direct her final theatrical feature, *Riding in Cars with Boys* starring Drew Barrymore, on location in East Orange, Bloomfield, Newark, and the Paterson Great Falls.

## NICOLE HOLOFCENER

Nicole Holofcener is a film and television director and screenwriter. Her debut feature, *Walking and Talking*, starring Catherine Keener, Anne Heche, Todd Field, Liev Schreiber, and Kevin Corrigan, concerns two lifelong female friends living in New York City and approaching 30. The movie filmed in West Milford and other New Jersey towns. Holofcener continues to direct episodic television for various networks.



## BETTY THOMAS

Betty Thomas is one of the few artists to win Emmys for both acting and directing. She is also the first woman to direct a film that grossed more than \$200 million, making her one of the most commercially successful female directors in the industry.

In 1997, Thomas directed *Private Parts*, an adaptation of the bestselling 1993 autobiography by radio personality Howard Stern. Elizabeth, Hackensack, Newark, Paramus, and Union locations were used in this Paramount Pictures comedy.



## NORA EPHRON

Nora Ephron, who passed in 2012, is best known for writing the romantic comedies *When Harry Met Sally* (filmed partly at Giants Stadium in the Meadowlands Sports Complex), and *Sleepless in Seattle*, which she also directed. She also wrote and directed another popular rom-com, *You've Got Mail*, starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. It is the story of two people involved in an online romance who are unaware that they are also business rivals. Much of the movie was filmed on sets built at the Teaneck Armory. *You've Got Mail* debuted number one at the box office in 1998.

Ephron's last film, *Julie & Julia*, tells the story of iconic chef Julia Child, played by Summit's Meryl Streep, and a food blogger who plows her way through hundreds of Child's recipes, cooking them one at a time. The film received numerous award nominations, including an Oscar nod for Streep. Several scenes were shot at the Hoboken Train Station.



## BARBRA STREISAND

With a career spanning seven decades, Barbra Streisand has achieved success in multiple fields of entertainment. She is the first woman to win the Golden Globe for best director for *Yentl*, in which she also stars.

The romantic drama *Prince of Tides*, based on the 1986 novel of the same name by Pat Conroy and starring Streisand and Nick Nolte, was partially filmed in Blairstown.

The movie was nominated for seven Academy Awards including Best Picture, enjoyed critical success and proved to be a box office smash, ranking as one of the top 20 highest-grossing movies of the year.

Streisand returned to New Jersey in 1996 to film scenes for *The Mirror Has Two Faces*, in which she co-starred with Jeff Bridges and Lauren Bacall.

## DARNELL MARTIN

Darnell Martin is a writer and director of television and film. She became the first black American woman to write and direct a feature for a major Hollywood studio, Columbia Pictures, with her debut film *I Like It Like That*. In 2008, she wrote and directed the musical drama *Cadillac Records*, starring Beyonce Knowles, Adrien Brody and Jeffrey Wright. The film chronicles the work of Leonard Chess and the singers who recorded for Chess Records through the early days of R&B and rock 'n' roll. *Cadillac Records* was filmed in Clifton, Harrison, Newark and West Orange. Martin continues to direct episodic television for several major networks.



## AMY ADRION

Amy Adrion is a director and writer who grew up in Hillsdale. Her debut feature, *Half The Picture*, celebrates the groundbreaking work of women film directors and shines a light on gender discrimination in the film industry. The documentary includes interviews with prominent female filmmakers including Ava DuVernay (*Selma*), Jill Soloway (*Transparent*), and Lena Dunham (*Girls*). *Half The Picture* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2018 where it won the #WhatNext Award, and at the Lighthouse Film Festival where it won the Audience Award for Best Documentary.



## HALLE BERRY

In 2020, Oscar-winning actress Halle Berry made her directorial debut with the highly anticipated sports drama *Bruised*, in which she also stars. The movie follows a former mixed-martial arts fighter struggling to regain custody of her son and rekindle her athletic career. *Bruised* had its world premiere at the 2020 Toronto International Film Festival, where it garnered rave reviews, and will premiere on Netflix in 2021. It was filmed largely at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City and at a boxing gym in Newark.



### OTHER WOMAN DIRECTORS WHO HAVE WORKED IN NEW JERSEY:

Joyce Chopra (*The Lemon Sisters*)

Stacy Cochran (*My New Gun*)

Melanie Mayron (*The Enemy Within; Ed*)

Julie Taymor (*Across The Universe*)

