Trieste Film Festival 2009

Paris Was A Woman

Directed and Edited by Greta Schiller

Written and Researched by Andrea Weiss

1996, Betacam, in English

Featured film in the James Joyce and the Volta Cinema

Trieste Film Festival 20 Year Anniversary

During the 1920s, Paris lived through a period of unrepeatable cultural ferment. These were the years in which most of the protagonists of Modernism found themselves living on the banks of the Seine for one reason or another. Many of them were expatriates, such as James Joyce, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eisenstein, and Ernest Hemingway. Paris also became a destination for a new generation of independent women, who chose it as their second home.

Writers like Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein, painters like Romaine Brookes and Marie Laurencin, photographers like Bernice Abbott and Gisele Freund, publishers and booksellers like Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier, or journalists like Janet Flanner created a female artistic community which is still seen today as legendary. These were women who left a profound mark in the history of art, opening art salons, bookshops, promoting periodicals and contributing to the elevation of Paris to cultural capital of the time. And it was thanks to the courage and initiative of one of these women, the American Sylvia Beach, that Joyce’s ***Ulysses*** was published by her bookshop, “Shakespeare & Company.”

After years of research, Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss produced this documentary using unpublished and rare material, in particular home movies showing Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Tokias, or Sylvia Beach with James Joyce and Adrienne Monnier, all accompanied by rich iconographic material from the period and brilliant interviews with Janet Flanner, Gisele Freund and Natalie Clifford Barney’s housekeeper, Berthe Cleyrerque. What emerges is not only the portrait of the lesbian microcosm of the Rive Gauche, but also of an entire world that the Second World War would soon sweep away.