

The Outfest Legacy Project applauds REDCAT's commitment to showcase an exquisite range of diverse programming and is thrilled to co-present the first feature film directed by an African American lesbian, *The Watermelon Woman*. The Outfest Legacy Project, in collaboration with the UCLA Film & Television Archive, is the only program in the world exclusively devoted to saving and protecting LGBT film. We have established the largest publicly accessible collection of LGBT moving images in the world (over 10,000 items and growing). Beyond actively collecting LGBT film and video media for permanent conservation and preservation, the Legacy Project strives to fund the restoration of damaged films and videos to their original release quality. In addition, the Project conducts LGBT public education and extensive outreach to filmmakers, archivists and educator. It seems hard to believe that *The Watermelon Woman*, made as recently as 1996, could be in imminent danger, but it is. In fact, many of the landmark LGBT films of the last 30 years are already at risk of fading away forever. While mainstream films are both collected by nonprofit archives and cared for by the commercial film industry itself, independent films are largely overlooked. Gay and lesbian independent films – including significant titles from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s – are in particular peril.

The images shown in *The Watermelon Woman* are crucial to helping people find the courage to accept themselves, love themselves and find the strength to be who they are. The Outfest Legacy Project is now the world's primary steward of our community's heritage in moving images, an awesome responsibility that we proudly share with REDCAT in this screening of *The Watermelon Woman*. We hope to raise awareness about film preservation and inspire discussion in our common fight against xenophobia and homophobia.

– Kristin Pepe, Legacy Project Manager

For more information about the Outfest Legacy Project for LGBT Film Preservation, please visit:
<http://www.outfest.org/legacy>

CHERYL DUNYE: *THE WATERMELON WOMAN*

May 11, 2009
8:30 pm

presented by
REDCAT
Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater
California Institute of the Arts

CALARTS 

CHERYL DUNYE:

THE WATERMELON WOMAN

Monday, May 11 | 8:30 pm

Jack H. Skirball Series

Los Angeles theatrical revival
1996, 85 min., screened in Beta SP

Cheryl Dunye's "saucy, daring, insidiously smart debut" (*The Boston Phoenix*) stands as the first-ever theatrical feature directed by an African American lesbian. *The Watermelon Woman* tells the story of Cheryl, played engagingly by Dunye herself, who develops a fascination with 1930s actress Fae Richards—a fictional character confined to playing "Mammy" roles in movies by a Dorothy Arzner-type director. As part of the production, New York photographer Zoe Leonard shot cleverly constructed still images of Fae Richards and in the process (re)invented a history running counter to the invisibility of black women in early Hollywood and black lesbians in general. The winner of the Teddy (The Berlinale) and Outstanding Narrative Feature (Outfest) awards, *The Watermelon Woman* also managed to raise the hackles of unreconstructed reactionary Jesse Helms, who called the work "flotsam floating down a sewer."

In person: director Cheryl Dunye and producer Alex Juhasz

"Cheryl Dunye has such a light, easy touch both in front and in back of the camera that you're in danger of not noticing how skillful a craftsman she really is or how deftly she raises serious issues of race and sexual orientation in her wry and exhilarating comedy, at once romantic and sharply observant." – Kevin Thomas, *Los Angeles Times*

Written, directed and edited by: Cheryl Dunye

Producers: Alexandra Juhasz, Barry Swimar

Cinematography: Michelle Crenshaw

Original Music: Paul Shapiro

Fae Richards pictures: Zoe Leonard

Cast: Cheryl Dunye, Guinevere Turner, Valarie Walker, Lisa Marie Bronson, Camille Paglia, Sarah Schulman

Cheryl Dunye, a native of Liberia, holds an MFA from Rutgers University. Her first short was *Wild Thing: A Poem by Sapphire* (1989). Her debut feature, *The Watermelon Woman* was awarded the Teddy Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. Her second feature, HBO Films *Stranger Inside* (2001) garnered her an Independent Spirit award nomination for best director. Her third feature film, Miramax's *My Baby's Daddy* (2004) was a box office success. Her other works have premiered

at film festivals and museums worldwide. Dunye served on the boards of Outfest, the DGA, and the IFP. She has been honored with a Community Vision Award from National Center for Lesbian Rights, a Creative Excellence Award from Women in Film and Television, and a Fusion Award from Outfest and was selected as one of the 2008 PowerUp Top Ten Women in Showbiz. <http://www.cheryldunye.com/>

Alexandra Juhasz, Professor of Media Studies, Pitzer College, teaches video production and film and video theory. She has a Ph.D. in Cinema Studies from NYU and has taught courses at NYU, Swarthmore College, Bryn Mawr College, Claremont Graduate University, and Pitzer College. Juhasz has written multiple articles on feminist and AIDS documentary. Her current work is on and about YouTube and other more radical uses of digital media. She produced *The Watermelon Woman*, as well as nearly fifteen educational documentaries on feminist issues like teenage sexuality, AIDS, and sex education. She is the author of *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Video* (1996), *Women of Vision* (2001) and *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing*, (2006, edited with Jess Lerner). www.aljean.wordpress.com.

The quintessential lesbian icon, **Guinevere Turner** started her career in Rose Troche's *Go Fish* (which she also co-wrote) (1994), and has appeared in a number of productions since, such as Kevin Smith's *Chasing Amy* (1997) and *Dogma* (1999), Tony Vitale's *Kiss Me, Guido* (1997), Q. Allan Brocka's *Rick and Steve the Happiest Gay Couple in the World* (1999), Jamie Babbit's *Itty Bitty Titty Committee* (2007), Angie Powers and Elizabeth Stark's *Little Mutinies* (2008) and (as Gabby Deveaux) in four episodes of the *L Word* (2004-2009). A true Renaissance woman, she has also collaborated to a number of screenplays, including Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (2000) and *The Notorious Bettie Page* (2005), and written two episodes of *The L Word*. She has directed a series of short films: *Spare Me* (2001), *Hummer* (2003), *Hung* (2005), *Quiet Please* (2008) and *Late* (2008).

A multimedia artist who has worked in sculpture, installation, and film, **Zoe Leonard** first exhibited her photographs in 1979 and has since established photography as her principal artistic medium. She has exhibited at Documenta IX and XII (1992 and 2007) in two Whitney Biennials (1993 and 1997), the Centre National de la Photographie in Paris, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Kunsthalle Basel and the Tate Modern in London, among others. In *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1993-96), created in collaboration with Cheryl Dunye, she stages an archival ruse through scripting, casting, staging, and performing the life of an imaginary black Hollywood actress and blues singer Fae Richards, whose accomplishments have supposedly disappeared into the pit of American cultural amnesia. In the seventy-eight images that comprise this work, we follow Richards's carefully annotated story from the earliest images of her as a teenager in Philadelphia in the early 1920s, to her heyday as a screen ingenue in the 1930s and '40s, to the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, to the final image of her as an older woman in 1973.

Curated by Bérénice Reynaud and co-presented with Kristin Pepe/Outfest.

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