

Barbara Forever

Post screening conversation w Lynne Sachs, Matt Hixon Editor, Claire Edelman Producer, Joey Carducci participant-subject

Film Forum

NYC

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I am so honored to speak after Brydie's remarkable portrait of Barbara. Brydie and I have been in conversation about our work with and love for Barbara and her films for long time. It was an honor to see a bit of my footage in the film here tonight.

You might be wondering where my relationship with Barbara began.

Barbara Hammer and I met in San Francisco in the late 1980s during a time when that city was affordable enough to become a mecca for alternative, underground, experimental filmmaking. Barbara taught me the fine, solitary craft of optical printing – which you witnessed today -- during a weekend workshop, thus beginning a thirty-year artist friendship that followed us across the country to New York City. On Barbara's 70th birthday, I decided to give her a photo session during which I would shoot one roll of film with her. As often as we would see each other at screenings or over meals in the city, it took me five years to schedule a date for our photo shoot. She was always busy making her movies or traveling with them!

By the time we were both in town and not too busy doing our work, Barbara had lived through several years of cancer. My husband Mark and I were actively involved providing meals to Florrie and Barbara over these years.

Barbara and I made a date to meet at her home in the West Village. She believed that I would see her at her best on a Tuesday, the day of the week in which she would be most energetic after her chemotherapy treatments. That afternoon, I "directed" Barbara to run along a fence as fast as she could toward the camera. My camera revealed the shadow from the fence across her body, creating a fabulous series of exhilarating stripes in the resulting image. You can see this image in my film "Carolee, Barbara, and Gunvor," and, to my great pleasure today in "Barbara Forever."

As we both stood together holding our cameras, I thought about her film "Sanctus" (1989) – excerpt from which you also witnessed today -- which she was making when we first met in San Francisco. In Barbara's prescient words, this film "makes the invisible, visible, revealing the skeletal structure of the human body as it protects the hidden fragility of interior organ systems."

In the last few months of Barbara's life, she asked me to come to her home to discuss something she needed to say in person. I immediately faced a complicated set of emotions. I knew that this tête-à-tête would involve some kind of good-bye, but I had no idea that she had decided to share a part of her personal archive, and thus a part of her being on this earth, with me. As I sat at her side, Barbara vividly described to me a 1998 artist residency. While there, she shot 16mm film with her Beaulieu camera, made field recordings, and kept an extraordinary journal.

Barbara's only instructions to me were very simple: "Do absolutely whatever you want with this material." This was Barbara's deeply personal, truly exhilarating way of embracing her death.

In 2020, "**A Month of Single Frames**," won the Grand Prize at the Oberhausen International Film Festival in Germany. I decided to use funds from the prize to start the Barbara Hammer Feminist Film Award at the Ann Arbor Film Festival, a place and a community that Barbara and I both adored and have visited often.

Tonight, I am wearing the same leather jacket you see in the film. Barbara's life partner Florrie Burke kindly gave it to me a few months after Barbara's death. It certainly is one of the great gifts of my life. I treasure it dearly.

Okay, now let's talk to the people who made this film happen with director Brydie O'Conner!

Matt: Barbara says early in the film, "My life has been lived in film." We see her in her own films throughout the film. Talk about working with this material and how rare it is. Tell us what it was like to search for Barbara with her camera in hand. Why was this important?

Claire: Why was it important that Barbara called herself a Lesbian Experimental Filmmaker. How did this resonate as you were searching for support for the film? Around 15 minutes into the film, Barbara says "At age 30, I learned the word 'lesbian' for the first time. It was 1970. I had this electric rush come through my body?" We see very experimental images at this point. Matt, edited this section this way. What does all this mean in terms of the film's language?

Joey and Matt: Barbara found some resistance from the avant-garde film world in terms of her themes. She wanted to be welcome and celebrated, so she moved to NYC to make that happen. She spoke about wanting to put emotion into the structural film. How did she accomplish this?

Joey: The optical printer is a highly technical component of Barbara's process. In her hands, it was an extension of her tactile relationship to cinema. She was a real crafts person and this provided her with the skill she needed. This apparatus also gave her the chance to create a meta-discourse that was full of cultural commentary, history. As a maker with great skills yourself, how did you two work together to bring emotion to the modernist ethos? Why was TOUCH so important?

Joey: How was working across generations important for Barbara at the time that you both started to collaborate. Barbara said: "There might be some way that we could enter inside another person. I could become you and you could become Barbara Hammer. If you could do that, you would know who I am." How did you feel about this invitation?

All three: For Barbara, there seemed to be no space between her public world and her private world. How did Brydie use her diaries to convey this?

All three: Barbara documented almost everything in her life – both her activities and her thinking. What did you learn from her in making this film together?

Matt: Barbara had ovarian cancer. When we learn this in the film, you chose to show images of the sea and of dandelions as a way to talk about mortality. Later we see Barbara's images of skeletons and we hear her say "I am not fighting cancer. I am living with cancer." Then we see images from her film "A Horse is not a Metaphor" and flowing hands across a window leading to her film "Evidentiary Bodies". Talk about how you and Brydie created this section. Barbara says: "Fear came in last night, but I had to let go of this. Death is an adventure, something I have never done." We see her hands, horses, shadows, and her body with the camera."

All three: Brydie found so many images of Barbara getting up to turn off the camera which was filming her. Tell me about these kinds of archival discoveries and how Barbara's enormous archive both beckoned and overwhelmed you.

