



WOMEN'S CIRCUIT: Vivian Ostrovsky as *Curator* and *Distributor*

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LEFT: Crowds gathered to full screenings at the Gaumont Rive Gauche for "Femmes/Films", 1975.

RIGHT: Posters for "Women by Women" and "Femmes/Films", the latter designed by Rose Ostrovsky, Vivian's sister.

Vivian Ostrovsky's relationship with cinema began not with her own films, but through a lesser-known facet of her work: her decisive role in promoting and circulating the films of other women, helping to consolidate festivals, distribution initiatives, and strengthen the foundations of women's cinema.

In the 1970s, when women's film festivals emerged, Ostrovsky played a central role in creating spaces for women's cinema in France. Her involvement began in 1974, as assistant to curator Esta Marshall at *Women by Women*, in Paris — the country's second women's film festival, held just months after the pioneering *Musidora*. The event screened about 60 works by U.S.-based filmmakers and hosted debates on women's underrepresentation in directing and on-screen gender stereotypes.

In April 1975, Ostrovsky and Marshall co-organized *Femmes/Films*, an international festival presenting 81 films (shorts and features) and 22 videos by Chantal Akerman, Agnès Varda, Sarah Maldoror, Mai Zetterling, among others. Supported by Alpha-FNAC, the festival was a success, filling six daily sessions from noon to midnight at Gaumont Rive Gauche and Fnac-Montparnasse, with accessible ticket prices in



line with the feminist agendas of the time. Many of the films were shown to a French audience for the first time, often giving women their first chance to see female characters reflecting their own lives.

Daily debates brought together figures such as Jacqueline Veuve, Nelly Kaplan, Liliane de Kermadec, Maldoror, Varda, and Zetterling to discuss themes ranging from women's representation in cinema to abortion rights and, for the first time in a film festival in Paris, female homosexuality. More than a film showcase, the festival became a space for exchange, where filmmakers and audiences forged solidarity networks.

That same year, Ostrovsky and Marshall were commissioned by UNESCO to organize the International Meeting Women in Cinema in Saint-Vincent, Italy, as part of International Women's Year. Over five days, 28 professionals from 15 countries debated female representation, feminist cinematic language, and the challenges of production and distribution. Participants included Anna Karina, Claudia von Alemann, Helke Sander, Susan Sontag, Chantal Akerman and María Luisa Bemberg. These exchanges strengthened ties that would fuel cross-border collaborations for years to come.

According to Agnès Varda's (1976) report on the event, "There was an atmosphere of kindness and friendship that one wouldn't have experienced at a congress of male filmmakers, since for them it was normal to meet regularly at conferences."

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These experiences led to the creation of the association *Femmes/Media* in 1974 — later renamed *Ciné-Femmes International* (1977) after Marshall's departure — founded by Ostrovsky and Rosine Grange to promote and distribute films by women. Traveling through Europe in a Renault 4L packed with 35mm and 16mm reels lent by filmmakers, they brought women's films to cultural centers, film clubs, Maisons de Culture, and festivals in cities such as San Sebastián, Copenhagen, Berlin, Brussels and various French cities, connecting different audiences and contexts.

Its catalog included both landmark and lesser-known works, spanning narrative and experimental cinema, with essential works by filmmakers ranging from Varda, Marguerite Duras and Vera



TOP: Charlotte Szlovak, Vivian Ostrovsky, Liliane de Kermadec, Jacqueline Veuve, Isa Hesse debate at "Femmes/Films" in 1975. (Copyright: Bill Thompson).

MIDDLE: Chantal Akerman and Judit Elek lay on the grass at "Unesco's Women in Cinema". Vivian Ostrovsky takes a picture at the center. Also in the picture are Larissa Shepitko and Márta Mészáros. (Copyright: Dominique Roger).

BOTTOM: Ešta Marshall, Sarah Maldoror, Agnès Varda, debate at "Femmes/Films" in 1975. (Copyright: Bill Thompson).

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Vivian Ostrovsky Archives.

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Chytilová to Chick Strand and Gunvor Nelson. It also featured filmmakers beyond the US-Europe axis, including Lebanese Heiny Srour, Senegalese Safi Faye, and Brazilians Ana Carolina and Vera de Figueiredo. Most women's film festivals of the 1970s lasted only one or two editions and lacked continuity, distribution networks, or exhibition circuits. Ostrovsky's association was among the first in France to consolidate such initiatives. *Ciné-Femmes International* functioned not only as a distributor, but as a visibility and support network, creating an alternative circuit free from traditional industry filters. Screenings were moments of encounter, fostering collective reflections on the horizons of women's cinema.

The association came to an end in 1980 when Ostrovsky turned to making her own films, still highlighting women artists such as choreographer Mathilde Monnier, writer Clarice Lispector, visual artist Ione Saldanha, poet Elizabeth Bishop and filmmaker Chantal Akerman, a friend she first met at the festivals she helped organize.

Ostrovsky's efforts in promoting women's audiovisual work resurfaced in 2015 with the restoration of Brazilian women's video art in the *Brazilian Film and Video Preservation Project* (BFVPP), in partnership with Associação Videobrasil and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI).

Her trajectory shows that circulating women's cinema was not only an artistic and political gesture, but also an act of care for memory and the continuity of her story. Many of the films she once programmed continued to echo, directly or indirectly, in her own work — influences the audience is invited to discover in this program.