

Throughout the 1970s, filmmaker Barbara Hammer toured the United States, Africa, and Europe, making film after film about women and the lesbian experience, neither of which had seldom been seen *by* a woman, *for* women on screen before. She made a slew of now-legendary experimental films, including *Sisters!* (1973), *Dyketactics* (1974), *Multiple Orgasm* (1976), *Sappho* (1978), and *Double Strength* (1978), more or less inventing lesbian cinema at a time when such material had largely been relegated to the pornographic imagination of male artists and filmmakers. During this prolific period, Hammer photographed her travels, her lovers, moments of community and kinship between her collaborators on set, private and public performances, friends, strangers. In these photographs, most of which have never been exhibited before, Hammer's work explodes traditional notions of female sexuality by showing it for what it is: complex, messy, abstract, human.

As a filmmaker, Hammer fused the non-linearity of Gertrude Stein and the poetic realism of Djuna Barnes to the early to mid-century American filmmaking experiments of Deren, Stan Brakhage, and Jonas Mekas. Her kaleidoscopic vision continuously upended representational expectations about the female body and the expression of sexual and romantic desire as well as the formation of the self on screen. Many of the photographs included in *Truant* relate directly to Hammer's better-known work as a filmmaker; others are considerably more spontaneous and personal, even diaristic. There are private moments of sex and nudity—two crucial subjects that she has investigated in film, photography, sculpture, and performance throughout her career. Bodies cavort beside a river, in fields, and in museums. Women look at art. There are landscapes and animals. Known women: the feminist artist and writer Tee Corinne, for one, makes numerous appearances across the decade. Lesser known women, too.

There are women in nature, and women in the world. Often, that woman is the artist herself. She bears witness to her body and its changes, and in doing so, she brings herself closer and closer to the viewer. In one self-portrait, taken in Baja, California in 1974, she turns the camera directly on her own face, revealing a mute expression of indifference, her lips turned in a slight frown, as if the camera did not impress her. She is, at times, ambivalent. Most of the time, she is fascinated, captivated by her body and the bodies of others. When a lover sits on the toilet or Hammer makes love with a girlfriend or finds herself alone and bored, she has her camera ready, so that each event (or nonevent, for that matter) becomes material that she meticulously documents. When a lover injures her leg, Hammer photographs her crotch with a crutch lying beside it, a visual pun that predicts Hammer's later interest in disability and illness, especially in the 2000s, when she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, a disease she has lived with ever since. Notions of perfection and imperfection (and, in a related subject, youth and age) are taken up and challenged throughout the photographs as Hammer considers the many types of bodies and individuals who compose lesbian

life.

Barbara Hammer (b. 1939) is an American feminist artist known as a pioneer in experimental film. She has had film retrospectives at the Jeu de Palme (Paris), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Tate Modern, National Gallery of Art (DC), Kunsthall (Oslo, Norway), Toronto Film Festival, and Pink Life Queer Festival (Ankara and Istanbul, Turkey). Her work was included in the 1985, 1989, and 1993 Whitney Biennials and is included in the permanent collections of the Australian Center for the Moving Image, the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Centre Georges Pompidou, and elsewhere. She is the author of *Hammer! Making Movies Out of Sex and Life* (Feminist Press 2009). She holds a Masters in Literature (1963) and a Masters in Film (1975) from San Francisco State University in California. She lives and works in New York City and Kerhonkson, New York.

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