

Reel Herstory: The Real Story of Reel Women ★★★

(2014) 147 min. DVD: \$300. DRA. Reel Women Media. PPR.

Actress and director Jodie Foster serves as host for filmmaker Ally Acker's comprehensive documentary survey of women in film, which draws on Acker's book *Reel Women: The First Hundred Years*, while also incorporating interviews, archival material, and film clips. This "herstory" begins in the silent era, during which women found fame through acting, although French filmmaker Alice Guy Blaché actually made the first narrative film in 1896—months before Georges Méliès. Historians also credit Blaché for bringing

naturalism to screen acting. As author Molly Haskell notes, women were involved with all aspects of production in the 1920s, especially editing (Margaret Booth, who got her start at that time, would edit or supervise editing work through the 1980s). Mary Pickford also made her mark in the silent era, first as an actress, and later as a studio owner, when she co-founded United Artists. Lillian Gish remembers making *The Wind*, for which she selected the material, the writer (a woman), and the director. As filmmaking became a profitable business, however, women were moved to the margins. In the 1930s and 1940s, only Dorothy Arzner found regular work in the studio system, while in the independent arena Ida Lupino enjoyed success as a filmmaker (which she parlayed into a TV directing career), but these women were exceptions. The documentary also recognizes notable screenwriters, including Anita Loos, Leigh Brackett, and Lillian Hellman, some of whom lost ground due to the Production Code and McCarthyism. Acker ends by looking at contemporary writers, filmmakers, and producers, such as Greta Gerwig, Sarah Polley, and Sherry Lansing, former head of 20th Century Fox. A solid overview of women's notable contributions to film, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)