

# What goes on at...the London Feminist Film Festival

by Emily Steer

Think there aren't enough films that tackle serious female issues? The London Feminist Film Festival hopes to fix that. We caught up with festival director, Anna Read to find out more.



**What happens at the London Feminist Film Festival (<https://twitter.com/LdnFemFilmFest>)?**

We show films by women directors from around the world. We usually have a great mix of films - animations, documentaries, fiction - and about a great range of subjects. Examples of some of the subjects we've had so far are: creative writing therapy for UK women in prison, a women's football team in Senegal, kung fu for elderly women in Kenya, female genital mutilation, and black women in the civil rights movement.

The films can be of any genre, length or year. We also screen classic feminist films from yesteryear in our 'Feminist Classic' sessions - these are often films which received a lot of critical praise when they came out but which are difficult to get to see nowadays.

We have a panel discussion or director Q&A after each screening so we can discuss the film as well as the feminist themes that have come out of it, and we encourage questions from the audience. Our aims are to support women directors in the male-dominated film industry, encourage people to talk about and get active in feminism, and get feminist films seen by a wider audience.

This year the festival will be held 20-23 August at the Rio cinema in Dalston as well as other London venues. It would be great to see some of your readers there!

### **How do you go about choosing the films for each year?**

We solicit submissions from women directors from around the world, trying to reach out to every corner of the globe. From the submissions we select films which have feminist themes or which show a feminist representation of women. We receive so many excellent films that it is always a very tricky job to decide which ones to screen!

### **Which directors do you admire for creating rounded female characters?**

I love Gurinder Chadha's films because they often have well-rounded female characters and tell women's unheard stories, whilst also being a lot of fun to watch.

### **Why do you think the film industry has been so male orientated over the years?**

In the film industry it is mainly men who have the power and are making the decisions, just like in pretty much every other industry. There is a lot of sexism in the film industry because there is a lot of sexism in the world in general. But the film industry is so powerful in influencing people's attitudes through films, so the fact that's it's male-dominated and churns out a lot of sexist films has a big impact on society as a whole. The industry is more and more being called out on its sexism, but I think it'll take a long time to change. Hence the need for women's film festivals!

### **How can the arts be used to tackle discrimination against women?**

The arts are so powerful in influencing how people think, what they focus on, what they care about. They can have a huge part to play in challenging people's prejudices, for example, and making people think about political issues. We react on an emotional level with films - they can make us cry, laugh, get angry - so they are very powerful and can encourage people to think about important issues and to get involved in activism. I think it's so important to get feminist messages into the mainstream, to open people's eyes to what goes on and to hopefully draw them into doing something about it.

### **Do you think young people are more aware of feminism in recent years?**

Yes, it does definitely seem that way. I think it's become more socially acceptable in recent years to say you're a feminist and to align yourself with feminist ideals. It's great that more and more people are calling out sexism where they see it and making it less and less acceptable to be sexist. I hope it continues. There are lots of feminist groups springing up all round the UK for people to get involved with - e.g. [see UK Feminista's map of UK groups \(http://ukfeminista.org.uk/take-action/local-groups/\)](http://ukfeminista.org.uk/take-action/local-groups/). We need all generations of feminists to work together to end sexism.

### **What advice would you give to any young people looking to find out more about feminism in the arts?**

There are lots great festivals out there, e.g. Bristol Women's Literature Festival and Underwire film festival (as well as London Feminist Film Festival of course!), that people can go to. And lots of good books and blogs on the subject. I would say get stuck in and get involved in whatever's around you - volunteer to help out at festivals, even put on your own events at your school/college/workplace or in your hometown. Push yourself to get involved and do things you might not have thought you could do - as women we are so used to being in the background, so put yourself in the spotlight and get out of your comfort zone a bit and you'll learn so much! Don't be afraid to do what's true to you and your passions.

*Image: A 2013 panel discussion at LFFF*

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