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| Anthology Film Archives |
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| Anthology Film Archives is an experimental film institution that was founded in 1970 by experimental filmmakers Jonas Mekas, Jerome Hill, Peter Kubelka, Stan Brakhage, James Broughton, Ken Kelman, and film critic P. Adams Sitney. Based in the Joseph Papp Theatre in New York City, Anthology was funded primarily by Jerome Hill. According to its founders, Anthology was the first film museum dedicated to film art and, as stated in their manifesto, the institution aimed to define film study and exhibition with a film art canon (Essential Cinema) and a theatre (Invisible Cinema). In addition, Anthology created the Film Study Centre, a space for archiving, preserving, and examining films and film-related journals, ephemera, and paper documents.  The Essential Cinema canon was chosen by a Film Selection Committee composed of Anthology’s founders. The committee utilized controversial methods of selection based on their collective taste in — it was later criticized — predominantly male filmmakers.[[1]](#footnote-1) Their methods garnered the attention of critics and scholars and the canon became Anthology’s most famous endeavour.[[2]](#footnote-2) Screened in the Invisible Cinema theatre, Essential Cinema was presented in cycles and enabled the patrons to view a whole history of art cinema in one institution. |
| Anthology Film Archives (‘Anthology’ hereafter) is an experimental film institution that was founded in 1970 by experimental filmmakers Jonas Mekas, Jerome Hill, Peter Kubelka, Stan Brakhage, James Broughton, Ken Kelman, and film critic P. Adams Sitney. Based in the Joseph Papp Theatre in New York City, Anthology was funded primarily by Jerome Hill. According to its founders, Anthology was the first film museum dedicated to film art and, as stated in their manifesto, the institution aimed to define film study and exhibition with a film art canon (Essential Cinema) and a theatre (Invisible Cinema). In addition, Anthology created the Film Study Centre, a space for archiving, preserving, and examining films and film-related journals, ephemera, and paper documents.  Link: http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/about/manifesto  1 ‘Manifesto’ Link to Anthology Film Archives Manifesto, 1970  Link: http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/about/essential-cinema  2 ‘Essential Cinema’ Link to Essential Cinema description and film canon  Link: http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/collections/collections-landing  3 3 ‘Film Study Center’ Link to Anthology Film Archives Collections overview  The Essential Cinema canon was chosen by a Film Selection Committee composed of Anthology’s founders. The committee utilized controversial methods of selection based on their collective taste in — it was later criticized — predominantly male filmmakers.[[3]](#footnote-3) Their methods garnered the attention of critics and scholars and the canon became Anthology’s most famous endeavour.[[4]](#footnote-4) Screened in the Invisible Cinema theatre, Essential Cinema was presented in cycles and enabled the patrons to view a whole history of art cinema in one institution.  Conceived by Peter Kubelka, the Invisible Cinema was a minimalist theatre designed for concentrated viewing. It was furnished with hooded seats that encapsulated the viewer and blocked external noise and visual distractions. Such specifications were expensive to maintain and in 1973, Anthology closed the theatre. After Jerome Hill’s death in 1972, Anthology struggled to remain open with private and public funding. After a year, the institution moved into 80 Wooster Street in SoHo, where it remained until 1978.[[5]](#footnote-5)  Included in Anthology’s original institutional goals, the Film Study Center remained a lasting endeavour that helped Anthology obtain public funding. It provided research and viewing space for students and enthusiasts, and allowed Anthology to work with local and international university film programs in order to expand and cultivate film research.  Anthology Film Archives brought experimental, art, and independent cinema into the framework of a museological institution. Prior to 1970, experimental films were screened primarily within itinerant spaces.[[6]](#footnote-6) Experimental filmmakers such as Mekas and Brakhage created films antithetical to the aesthetic and narrative norms of popular cinema, which were difficult to exhibit in commercial theatres. As independent filmmakers continued to favour formal investigation over conventional narrative, experimental film exhibition remained peripheral to commercial theatres and modern art museums, and was largely limited to those who had access to urban screenings or film societies.[[7]](#footnote-7) Anthology placed experimental film in a broader public sphere by creating a centralized space for its exhibition and distribution. |
| Further reading:  (Alfaro)  (Bernstein and Shapiro)  (James)  (P. A. Sitney)  (Sitney) |

1. Out of ninety filmmakers, eighty-five were male and five were female (Maya Deren, Marie Menken, Helen Levitt, Janice Loeb, and Leni Riefenstahl). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom wrote one of the earliest feminist criticisms of Essential Cinema, wherein they criticized the dominance of New York experimental film critics. See Constance Penley, Janet Bergstrom, and P. Adams Sitney, ‘Letters from the Film Work Group, P. Adams Sitney, Constance Penley, Janet Bergstrom.’ *Screen* 20 3-4 (1979): 149-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Out of ninety filmmakers, eighty-five were male and five were female (Maya Deren, Marie Menken, Helen Levitt, Janice Loeb, and Leni Riefenstahl). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom wrote one of the earliest feminist criticisms of Essential Cinema, wherein they criticized the dominance of New York experimental film critics. See Constance Penley, Janet Bergstrom, and P. Adams Sitney, ‘Letters from the Film Work Group, P. Adams Sitney, Constance Penley, Janet Bergstrom.’ *Screen* 20 3-4 (1979): 149-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. During its hiatus from 80 Wooster Street, Anthology purchased the courthouse on 2nd Avenue, and launched a fundraising campaign for renovations. From 1983-1988, Anthology screened films in the basement auditorium of former Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art on 59th Street. Today, Anthology remains at the courthouse and continues to screen, preserve, and archive films. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For more on itinerant screens see, Tess Takahashi’s ‘Experimental Screens in the 1960s and 70s: The Site of Community.’ *Cinema Journal* Vol. 51, No. 2 (Winter 2012): 162-167. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For more on the relationship between universities and experimental cinema see Michael Zryd’s ‘The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance,’ *Cinema Journal* 45 no. 2 (Winter 2006): 17-42 and ‘Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America.’ *Inventing Film Studies*. Eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 182-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)