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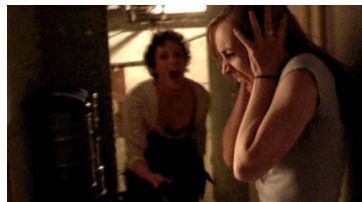
HOME: MAY 15, 2009: SCREENS

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The Medium Mash
 MALI Women's Film & Performance Arts Festival
 BY **CINDY WIDNER**

An incorrect film title in this piece was corrected here; the error appeared in the printed issue.

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Ulrike Molsen's *Die Besucher* (The Visitors)

If you look in the dictionary under "defies categorization," you might find the logo of the Media Arts & Literacy Institute's Women's Film & Performance Arts Festival. Now in its ninth year, the four-day music, film, poetry, and performance party has long heralded the inevitable rise of the shape-shifting artist. Crossing disciplines and mashing media are logical responses to the always-accelerating call-and-response of contemporary culture, and that approach reads like second nature for more and more of the festival's players. Take, for instance, 87 Dance Production, a troupe consisting of twins Cara and Mackenzie Hagan. They will present two stage pieces – a short dance to Wynton Marsalis' music and one about what happens "when all the men leave and the women are left to their own devices," according to Cara – along with "Folding Over Twice," a film about girls' un-self-conscious movements becoming dance steps. Slippery.

Or, for that matter, look at DJ POW, aka Poet on Watch, the festival's artistic director. A filmmaker, writer, music producer, and performer, she's been on the interdisciplinary beat for years. Fed up with her early-Eighties experience at NBC as the only black woman shooting news in Texas, she left to focus on "the stories the news wouldn't and didn't cover," she says, and started exploring ways to connect with other women. Her first foray resulted in the Blowin' Up a Spot! Film Festival, originally held in Houston in 1999, with the help of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Southwest Alternate Media Project; and connections made possible by the burgeoning Internet.

"Blowin' up a spot" was a hip-hop term I used," she says, "but after 9/11 it wasn't really a term anyone wanted to be hearing." She moved the festival to Austin under the auspices of MALI (the festival helps fund the group's summer media literacy camp). The mission of the festival, she says, is to "join communities and cultivate expression through different forms of media."

The year's theme is sustainability; like most everyone, artists are trying to see their way through hard times, and POW hopes to suss out "how we can sustain ourselves as creative-industry people." Another theme of the times – war – seems to have emerged in this year's work as well, something that makes sense to POW. "[Women] are the aftermath of war," she explains, "be it domestic war or a physical war or a war we don't know we're in."

The most literal example of that theme is probably "Armed Defense,"

FURTHER READING

- Keywords for this story**
- MALI Women's Film & Performance Arts Festival
 - Poet on Watch
 - DJ POW
 - Blowin' Up a Spot
 - Cara Hagan
 - Mackenzie Hagan
 - Irina Patanian
 - Second Nature
 - Armed Defense
 - Fry Bread Babes
 - Steffany Suttle
 - Maru Buendia Senties
 - Entre Lineas

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Irina Patkanian's short about a man who barricades himself against a nonexistent enemy, playing out the idea that constant vigilance, contrary to popular belief, can make us only "more and more afraid," says the director. War takes many forms, of course, and can mean anything from the war on women's bodies - see "Fry Bread Babes," which director Steffany Suttle says is the first film about body image issues and Native American women - to the war on the "other," explored in Maru Buendia Senties' "Entre Líneas," about friends on opposite sides of the Mexican-American border.

It's the kind of festival you have to give yourself over to: Films, music, and performances are scheduled in blocks rather than very specific times, and the events are scattered about town, though anchored at Hostelling International - Austin. Immersion seems appropriate for maximum satisfaction.

MALI Women's Film & Performance Arts Festival takes place May 28-31 at the Austin hostel, the Long Center, Hot Mama's Espresso Bar, and Cafe Mundi. The festival is produced in partnership with ALLGO and the city of Austin and is co-sponsored by the Texas Commission on the Arts, KOOP 91.7FM, and The Austin Chronicle. For MALI Fest-related news, reviews, and interviews, check austinchronicle.com/chronic. For more information and ticket prices, visit www.blowinupaspot.com.

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HOME: APRIL 28, 2006: SCREENS

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Open Festival Season

Taking aim at some of spring's festival offerings

BY **MARC SAVLOV**

"We're trying to bring exposure to the largest audience possible," says Austin-based performance artist and fest director DJ P.O.W. "That's where the term 'Blowin' Up a Spot' came from: I'm taking a smaller situation and enlarging it to make people consider something that they might not have considered before."

P.O.W.'s (Poet on Watch) home-brewed women's film festival has been active since the former NBC videographer decided to jump ship and strike out on her own in the name of women's filmmaking. This being Austin, she knew the best way to do that was by creating her own fest from scratch, although the Blowin' Up a Spot! Film Fest has resided in several other Texas cities, notably Houston, before coming to rest at the Carver Museum in Austin.

This year's program includes not just films but also DJs, actors, poets, and performance artists from across the country, all united under P.O.W.'s femme-centric banner. "Men are welcome to come and help out, get on a crew, but as far as showcasing work, it's a women's film festival," says P.O.W.

"It's a venue for women to show their work. What happens with [female filmmakers] is that we tend to get into a situation where we submit work to a South by Southwest Film Festival or a Sundance Film Festival or any of the bigger organizations, and we end up competing against the type of films people see on a daily basis – bang-bang gangster films and more commercial productions. But women's stories are not those stories. The technical qualities of the films we're screening can compete with any film on the market, but these are stories about family, about community, about the earth, about making babies – they're not mainstream stories."

Featuring roughly 30 films and six workshops (Sexy Bits for the Screen sounds promising) over four days, plus a Thursday night networking blowout that promises to be more funky-cool than anything else you're likely to stumble across, it's not only P.O.W.'s baby, it's another jewel in the Austin film community's bang-bang, indie-film scepter.

And then there's the 30th Annual Banff Mountain Film Festival, sponsored by Whole Earth Provision Co., Patagonia, and Dunham Bootmakers, a traveling fest that arrives in Austin for one day only this Sunday and should give the vertically challenged some idea of what's happening atop various global mountain peaks and within all manner of gnarly crevasses.

Spotlighting "mountain culture" (i.e., climbing, snowboarding, kayaking, and "desert crack climbing") Banff's three-hour program brings together both documentary and experimental shorts in a cohesive, heady whole



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Four Fabulous Days of Film, Poetry & Industry Workshops
Blowin' Up a Spot! Film Festival
April 27-30, 2006 - Austin, TX

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Keywords for this story

- Banff Mountain Film Festival
- Blowin' Up a Spot! Film Festival
- DJ P.O.W.
- Whole Earth Provision Co.

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that'll likely bring, not only the noise and the pain, but also the vertigo.

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www.blowinupaspot.com

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www.banffmountainfestivals.ca

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May '00 : Blowing Up A Spot! Film Festival: No Ordinary Festival

(May: [Main Page](#) * [Features](#) * [Reviews](#) * [Gallery](#)) Current Issue * [Archive](#)

by : *LaTrice A. Dixon*

On October 1, 1999, at the Glassell School of Arts, Brown Freed Auditorium there was an explosion in the City of Houston, Texas. Blowing Up A Spot! Productions, a Multimedia Arts Project founded by Houston media artist, Angela Williamston, literally broke new ground in the Houston area. Nearly 400 people attended Cinema Shorts:A Woman's Perspective 2000, a three day film and video festival which highlighted the work of emerging women directors with a special emphasis on Latin American and African American women films.

As a filmmaker, who has just begun to send my short film out on the festival circuit, and whose work was presented in Blowing Up a Spot! festival, I know all too well the pain of rejection and the difficulty filmmakers, and especially filmmakers of color, have in finding an appropriate venue to show their work. Blowing Up a Spot! represented the perfect festival home for my short film *The Book of Ezekiel*. Not only did my film receive a great deal of attention through the promotional efforts of the organizers, but the festival also provided a direct connection to my intended audience, the Women's community and the African American community.

Media can build community, but I also believe media literacy is lacking in our society. Once we begin to understand the visual, oral, and literary imagery in the media, then we can begin to control our own images, says Williamston, who strategically brought together a cross section of poets, musicians, filmmakers, activists, health educators and others. Film in Houston is very commercial. They don't promote real issues, describes Williamston about Texas regional media. With the help of Rahdi Taylor, the film coordinator for Blowing Up a Spot!, Williamston acquired 13 pieces and looked for common themes that would attract community based organizations who are doing similar work and would be interested in lending support to the festival. Women's issues are not coming out of a vacuum. A woman's issue is a world issue, says Williamston.

The Houston Chapter of National Black Women's Health Project took special interest in sponsoring documentaries like NO! a video on Black women and rape, by Philadelphia based maker Aishah Simmons.

A forum was provided for local organizations to speak in between screenings and set up tables to provide information on health care, literacy, and the arts. Other local sponsors included the Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA), the Children's Prison Arts Project, and the Women's Group, the longest running women's organization in the Houston area. It became clear that this event was more than just a festival. You could feel the spirit of artistic and community collaboration as audience members were provided with comment cards that they returned to the filmmakers with feedback on their work, which any filmmaker would love. The festival culminated in an enthusiastic discussion where participants were able to dialogue about the role of media and art in their lives. Once you lock down the artist, you lock down the whole country, because the artists are the bridges to change, says Angela Williamston.

For this filmmaker the level of examination and enthusiasm given to my work and the others was a refreshing change from festivals that just want to screen films for purely aesthetic values. The outreach done to involve the community and organizations working toward change gave me a valuable perspective as to how women can use film in their everyday lives.

Blowing Up A Spot! will host the next festival of women's film in October of 2000 which will

feature Women of the Sun: Work by Women of the African Diaspora, 15 feature films from all around the world. Judging by the success of this years event, Houston should keep their eyes and ears open for the Spot's! next big bang. For more information on Blowiní Up A Spot!

You can reach them at totalartist@poetonwatch.com or hit them on the web at <http://www.freeversepublishing.net>

The writer of this article is LaTrice A. Dixon, a Brooklyn-based media maker who is currently writing her next film *Who Saves Brown Girls Who Don't Holler?* She is the Membership/Advocacy Director for the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers in New York City.

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Blowin' Up a Spot Film Fest: A Woman's Perspective 2000

By **Kamilah Duggins** Thursday, Nov 9 2000

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A poet "on watch," according to author and filmmaker [Angela Williamston](#), is a lyricist on the lookout for anything that can't be trusted -- the government, local politicians or even our own emotions. In **Blowin' Up a Spot Film Fest: A Woman's Perspective 2000**, [Williamston](#) is keeping her eye on the male-dominated business of movies.

Sixteen national and international filmmakers will get the opportunity to showcase their communities in video and on celluloid. In its second year, the combination of spoken word and dialogue films has its roots in the Austin-based Women in Cinema. "There were so many women in there with good ideas and with legitimate good work, and I was like, "Why aren't we showcasing our talents?" " says Williamston, who has worked on the sets of such [Hollywood](#) productions as *Jason's Lyric* and *Terms of Endearment*. "The fact that we're under-represented in media in general creates a challenging struggle, because we say, "So we have stories too, but are they worth telling?" "



Poet on watch: Angela Williamston.

One controversial film, *Beyond Prison Bars*, documents women whose male lovers are incarcerated. "During the screening, they were wondering, "Why is she depicting women like that?" like we shouldn't love men who are in prison," Williamston says. "We women hide from the truth, and the truth is that there is a large population of women out there whose husbands are locked up, and we become victims when we don't accept it." Another 30-minute documentary portrays the courage of Argentinean women who step out of their

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traditional roles.

Williamston describes herself as a "conscious capitalist" who's not going to wait for Hollywood to create opportunities for her. "Women's issues are world issues, and we need a venue to showcase our work and talents," she says. "We shouldn't depend on someone else to do that for us."

February 19, 2004

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