

INTRODUCING JANE CAMPION

The Anthropological Meets the Artistic

Biography

- Born 1954 in Wellington, New Zealand
- Parents Richard Champion and Edith Hannah, prominent figures in NZ theater, attempted to build national theater and produce plays that articulated distinctly national aesthetic



Image source: [Bombsite](#)

Education

- Studied anthropology at Victoria University, graduating with B.A. in 1975
- Champion on anthropology:
 - What interested me about anthropology was to be able to ‘officially’ study what I was curious about anyway: how our thoughts function, their mythic content which has nothing to do with logic, human behaviors. . . . I think that humans believe themselves to be rational beings when they are not, they are governed by something completely different” ([Wexman](#), qtd. in [McHugh](#) 5).
- Enrolled at Sydney School of the Arts, receiving BA in painting in 1979
 - Champion viewed SSA program—which emphasized global art—as foundational for filmmaking vision
- Created “story paintings,” images annotated with dialogue and text

Artistic Influences

Joseph Beuys, Sculptor (1921-86)

Socially and politically charged art which negotiated physical and psychological trauma through irrational, mythical imagery



Animal Woman (1949, cast 1984)

Image source: [Tate Museum](#)

Artistic Influences

Frida Kahlo, Painter (1907-1954)



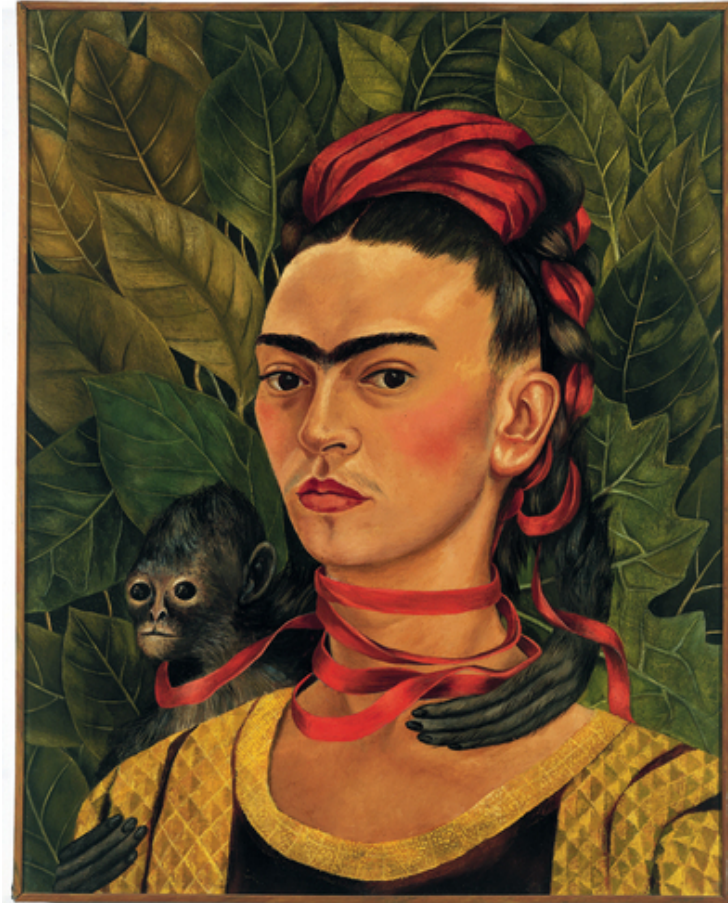
The Broken Column (1944). Image source: [Tate Museum](#)

- Surrealistic self portraits
- Both Beuys and Kahlo came to art after physical trauma (shot down Luftwaffe pilot, train accident) and used the body to interpret trauma
- Both making recognizable elements strange
- Kahlo's powerful gaze and tragic romantic history as inspiration for Ada

Kahlo and Ada



Screen shot from *The Piano* (1993)



Self-Portrait with Monkey (1940).

Image source: [Tate ETC.](#)

Short Films

- *Tissues* (1981)
- Enrolled in graduate school at Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS)
- Made four short films while student (1981-1984):
 - ▣ *Mishaps: Seduction and Conquest* (1981)
 - ▣ *Peel: An Exercise in Discipline* (1982; won Cannes Palme d'Or in 1986)
 - ▣ *Passionless Moments* (1983, cowritten and directed with novelist Gerald Lee)
 - ▣ *A Girl's Own Story* (1984)



Image source: *The Observer* at [guardian.co.uk](https://www.guardian.co.uk)

AFTRS and Australian Film Industry

- Reduction in Hollywood output in 1960s making national and art cinemas viable alternatives
- School inaugurated in 1972 as “part of the Commonwealth Government’s strategy to promote the development of Australia’s Cultural Activity” (McHugh 14) in 1970s and 1980s.
 - ▣ School’s desire to produce filmmakers with distinct, national aesthetic vision, whose work focused on Australian issues
 - ▣ But films had to be commercial enough to be popular at home and abroad
 - ▣ “New Australian Cinema”
- Feminism informing endeavors → national cinema
 - ▣ Women’s Film Fund, Sydney Women’s Film Group, The Women’s Programme funded, provided workshops/training, distributed and exhibited women’s films
- Champion finding AFTRS nationalist emphasis limiting; her vision dismissed by instructors
- However, Champion met filmmaking collaborators at AFTRS
 - ▣ Cinematographer Sally Bongers (*Peel*, *Girl’s Own Story* and *Sweetie*, Champion’s first feature
 - ▣ Editor Veronika Haeussler, who has worked on almost all Champion features

Feature Films

- *Sweetie* (1989)
- *An Angel at My Table* (1990)
- *The Piano* (1993)
- *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996)
- *Holy Smoke* (1999)
- *In the Cut* (2003)
- *Bright Star* (2009)
- Television films/
miniseries and
anthology film
segments



Campion on the set of *The Piano*.
Image source: [National Portrait Gallery](#)

Narrative, Thematic, Stylistic Commonalities

- “[P]ower, violence and emotional pain in dysfunctional sexual, familial and social relationships” ([McHugh](#) 17-18)
- Ways in which power and violence affect gender roles
- “[C]inematic techniques that represent and blur the differences between objective and subjective narrative states” ([McHugh](#) 18)
- Heterosexual romance “represented in the context of, and often dwarfed in importance by, relationships between siblings, parents and children, and friends” (McHugh 18)
- Strong, reckless passions that can foment disaster or death
- “[T]he importance of women’s work, their creative expression, and of sexual desire as a powerful, necessary, and compelling *threat* to that expression” (McHugh 18)

Campion on Ada

“I always saw her as someone who had very powerfully removed herself from life. . . . There is no sense of her as a handicapped person, however. It’s almost as though she treats the world as if it were handicapped. At the same time, there is a great deal of suffering from this position. It is a retreat from a lot of what the world offers, which I imagine for women at that time would have been very mundane and boring—inufferable, in fact. There is advantage in retreat, but there’s a great disadvantage in it as well” ([Wexman](#) 116)



Image source:

[The Guardian at guardian.co.uk](https://www.guardian.co.uk)