

POSTER



Past
Exhibition

HOUSE

Experimental Marriage: Women in Early Hollywood

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In the early days of the American film industry, it was common for women to hold a variety of jobs, including those of producer, director, editor, and writer. The unregulated, nonunionized status of this burgeoning field during the 1910s and '20s meant that there were fewer barriers to entry; this allowed women the opportunity to excel both on and off camera, particularly on the coasts in California, New York, and New Jersey where new cinema hubs were being developed. This halcyon period of relative freedom, was short lived, however. As Hollywood grew and investors saw cinema as a means of reaping large profits, studios began to focus on producing fewer movies with bigger budgets and more popular content. Industry positions that had once been more permeable, often covering multiple jobs, were now defined by unions and stricter corporate oversight, always with an eye on the bottom line. By the 1930s, many of the earliest female directors, producers, and

writers were being forced out, with no younger generation poised to replace them. This shift in the structure of film production from a collaborative, experimental endeavor toward one that operated as a vertically integrated business effectively eliminated women, creating an “old boys’ network” that persists today.

This exhibition focuses on lobby cards advertising Hollywood and East Coast movies made largely by women for women. Typically issued in series of eight, lobby cards functioned as static trailers, showcasing key scenes within a film in order to highlight the plot and lead characters. As their name suggests, they were often displayed in the lobbies of theaters, enticing viewers to come back and see the next film. The particular movies advertised here cover three main topics: women with agency, women who work, and marriage or divorce (or both). Each story was either written, directed, produced, art-directed, edited, or had costumes designed by a woman, and would have been promoted to a predominantly female audience. As roughly 75 percent of early American silent features have since been lost, the topic of women’s participation and how it was credited or preserved remains a ripe area for scholarship.

This exhibition comes to Poster House through a generous loan from Dwight M. Cleveland.

Curation

Melissa Walker

Exhibition Design

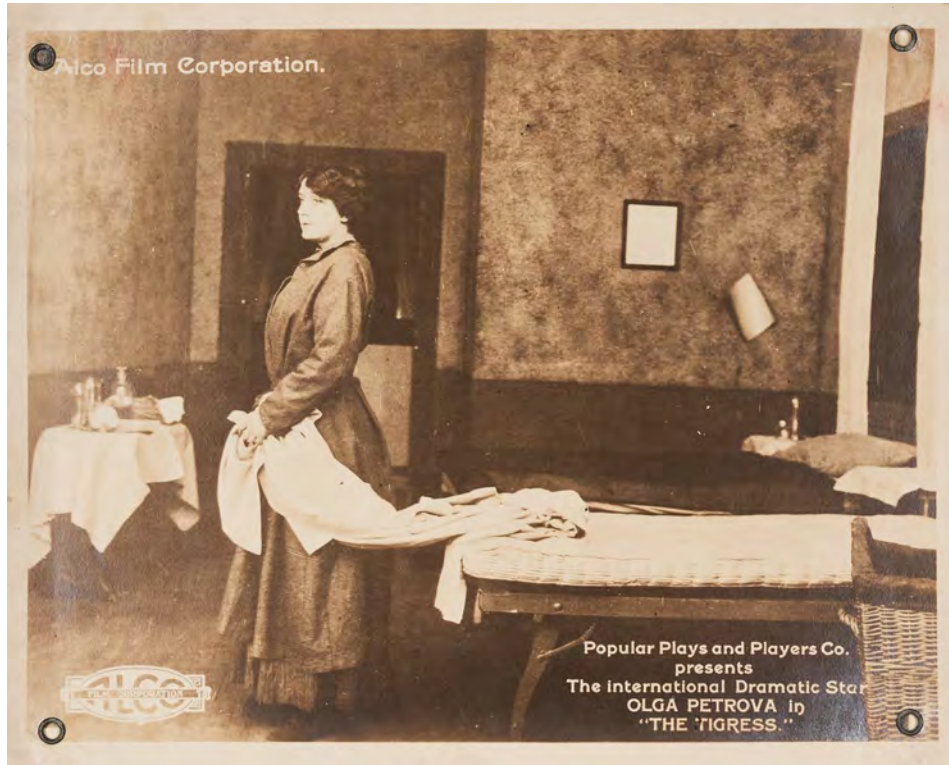
Ola Baldych

Special Thanks

Kate Saccone,
The Women Film Pioneers Project

Women with Agency

I am a feminist, by that I do not mean that women should try to do the work of men. They should merely learn to do their own work, live their own lives, be themselves.
—Olga Petrova, actress & producer



The Tigress, 1914

Lost Film

Director: Alice Guy Blaché (1873–1968)

Star: Olga Petrova (1884–1977)

- After seeing the Lumière brothers' *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* in 1895, Alice Guy Blaché—a secretary at the Gaumont film company in France—was inspired to make motion pictures, becoming the first female filmmaker. In 1910, she moved to the United States, founding Solax Studios, an independent film production company, in Queens, New York.
- Set during World War I, *The Tigress*—a word synonymous with “vamp” or “diva”—focuses on a loving wife and mother whose reputation is destroyed by a lecherous despot. In revenge, she becomes “the tigress,” the head of a gang of international spies. Stories like this, in which a woman “turns bad” and asserts her power, were only considered acceptable if her traditional homelife had been shattered by tragedy.
- Unlike the other images in this exhibition, this is not a lobby card but a publicity photograph of a scene from the film. Such stills served multiple functions; they were often reproduced in articles or reviews in newspapers and magazines, hung in the lobbies of movie theaters that could not afford to rent official movie posters or lobby cards, and used for general publicity purposes. The grommets in the corners indicate that this photograph was probably used like a traditional lobby card and hung indoors as advertising.



Left: Olga Petrova, c. 1917

Right: *The Tigress*, newspaper ad, c. 1914



The Weaker Sex, 1917

Survives Complete

Director: Raymond B. West (1886–1923)

Producer: Thomas H. Ince (1880–1924)

Story: Alice C. Brown (1856–1948)

Stars: Louise Glaum (1888–1970),
Dorothy Dalton (1893–1972)

- Written by Alice Brown, *The Weaker Sex* tells the story of a female lawyer married to a district attorney who wants her to quit her job. However, faced with prosecuting his own son for murder, the husband acknowledges the benefits of being married to a lawyer when she takes on (and wins) his son’s case.
- While women had been earning law degrees in the United States since 1870, in 1917 it was still seen as shocking for a woman to be a lawyer. Nonetheless, in Brown’s screenplay this fact is presented as unremarkable.
- Although the plot itself is progressive, the images in these lobby cards follow well-established sexist tropes: the virtuous wife stares confidently into the camera while the seductive “vamp” tilts her head back, inviting the viewer to gaze upon her décolletage.
- Unlike many of the other examples on display, these lobby cards are printed in a single sepia-toned color, making the entire production process cheaper. The distinctive triangle motif surrounding the photographs was the hallmark of the Triangle Motion Picture Company, a studio that employed such distinguished figures as director D.W. Griffith, but was only in business for four years.



The Amazons, 1917

Lost Film

Director: Joseph Kaufman (1882–1918)

Writer: Frances Marion (1888–1973)

Star: Marguerite Clark (1883–1940)

- *The Amazons* is one of more than 300 scripts by Frances Marion. In 1930, she became the first woman to win the Academy Award for screenwriting with *The Big House*. In 1937, she published *How to Write and Sell Film Stories*, a groundbreaking text that was quickly adopted by many universities.
- This film involves three sisters raised as boys who, unsurprisingly, find it difficult to fit into male-dominated society. While the plot may sound unusual, narratives featuring women masquerading as men were quite popular in the 1910s; they reflected the frustration of many women with prevailing conventions of gender as well as the associated rise of the concept of the New Woman.
- The lobby card on the left features hand-stenciled color. Full-color printing for lobby cards was often too expensive, so an almost translucent color was hand applied to the paper instead in a process similar to silk screening in which stencils are used.



Oh, You Women!, 1919

Lost Film

Director: John Emerson (1874–1956),

Anita Loos (1888–1981)

Story/Scenario: Anita Loos (1888–1981)

Star: Louise Huff (1895–1973)

- In 1912, Anita Loos was hired by D.W. Griffith at the Triangle Motion Picture Company as Hollywood’s first female screenwriter. Loos is best known for her novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), adapted for a silent film in 1928, a stage musical in 1949, and a movie musical starring Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in 1953. Even in 1919, however, her name was well known enough to be the largest (along with that of her husband, John Emerson) on the title card.
- While Loos is sometimes credited with co-directing this film with Emerson, she more likely acted as producer—a role that was rather amorphous at the time. During this early period, a producer might handle budgets, select stories, design the production, or even help direct the actors.
- Loos’s greatest contribution to cinema was her unique approach to crafting intertitle cards—text cards inserted between scenes in a film to describe the narrative or dialogue. She was a skilled wordsmith, known for clever turns of phrase and the ability to express a point succinctly.
- *Oh, You Women!* follows a soldier who returns home after World War I to find his town taken over by “women’s rights” advocates. Gender roles have been reversed—men mind the babies and do the dishes while women walk around in pants (associating them with the Suffrage movement).



A Midnight Romance, 1919

Survives Incomplete

Writer/Director: Lois Weber (1879–1939)

Star/Executive Producer: Anita Stewart (1895–1961)

Story: Marion Orth (1900–1984)

- In addition to being a writer and producer, Lois Weber is considered the first American female director, with a prolific and often progressive output. In 1914, she was the highest paid person in her field, making \$50,000 a year (equivalent to about \$1.4 million today).
- Weber frequently chose to write and direct stories that were ripped from the headlines, aimed at educating the public and encouraging social reform. Such sensational films include *Where Are My Children?* (1916), a drama about eugenics and abortion based on Margaret Sanger's struggle to provide information about contraception, and *Shoes* (1916), the story of a woman's choice between her virtue and a new pair of desperately needed shoes that was based on a study of the role of prostitution in the lives of the working poor.
- In *A Midnight Romance*, Weber worked with actor/producer Anita Stewart, whose production company employed her briefly, and writer Marion Orth, with whom she regularly collaborated.



Girls, 1919

Lost Film

Director: Walter Edwards (1870–1920)

Writers: Clara Beranger (1886–1956),
Alice Eyton (1874–1929)

- Written by Clara Beranger and Alice Eyton, *Girls* is about a group of friends who have sworn off the opposite sex and declare themselves “manhaters.” While this concept may seem progressive, all the characters eventually fall prey to love and marriage, unable to resist romance.
- Beranger was married to William C. de Mille, older brother of the famous director, Cecil B. DeMille, but she had an impressive career before the marriage, and would go on to assist William as his career began to decline in the 1930s. In 1929, she became one of the founding members of the University of Southern California’s Cinematic Arts Department.



Girls, 1910



Pollyanna, 1920

Survives Complete

Director: Paul Powell (1881–1944)

Star/Producer: Mary Pickford (1892–1979)

Adaptation: Frances Marion (1888–1973)

Book: Eleanor H. Porter (1868–1920)

- Originally published as a novel by Eleanor H. Porter (which later inspired a play by Catherine Chisholm Cushing), *Pollyanna* was adapted for the screen by Frances Marion, the most prolific female screenwriter in Hollywood who also had a career as a director.
- Actress Mary Pickford was 27 when she portrayed the twelve-year-old Pollyanna—the sort of role she was frequently hired for well into adulthood. Pickford was one of Hollywood’s most profitable stars at the time, and was the first person to be nicknamed “America’s Sweetheart.” She was also one of the shrewdest business women in the industry, teaming up with actors Douglas Fairbanks (whom she later married) and Charlie Chaplin, as well as D.W. Griffith, to create the United Artists production company.
- Frances Marion was also the ghostwriter for “Daily Talksby Mary Pickford,” the star’s syndicated newspaper column, covering beauty tips and general advice.
- These two surviving scene cards clearly do not derive from the same original set, since they feature different borders and typography, and are also printed on different paper stock. However, they are both tinted with the use of stencils.

Working Girls

In any service where a couple hold down jobs as a team, the male generally takes his ease while the wife labors at his job as well as her own.

—Anita Loos, screenwriter



Danger, Go Slow, 1918

Lost Film

Writer/Director: Robert Z. Leonard (1889–1968)

Writer/Star: Mae Murray (1885–1965)

- *Danger, Go Slow* was co-written by husband-and-wife team Mae Murray and Robert Z. Leonard. Leonard also directed Murray as the lead in the movie.
- In the film, Murray's character dresses as a young boy as part of her role in a criminal gang. Female-to-male cross-dressing was common in cinema of this period and allowed women to behave on camera in ways that would have been difficult or unlikely in the real world, while briefly inhabiting male-dominated spaces.



All Woman, 1918

Lost Film

Director: Hobart Henley (1887–1964)

Book: Edith Barnard Delano (1874–1946)

Star: Mae Marsh (1894–1968)

- Based on the novel by Edith Barnard Delano, *All Woman* follows Susan Sweeney as she heads to the Adirondacks to claim her inheritance: a hotel. When this turns out to be a ramshackle inn with an attached saloon occupied by drunks and people down on their luck, she forges ahead, turning the den of vice into a respectable business and shutting down the bar.
- While Prohibition was not yet in effect, the temperance movement was growing in popularity, particularly among women. The scourge of drunkenness was popularly labeled a “female concern,” with women’s organizations at the forefront of tackling alcoholism as a public health issue.



The Moving Picture World, 1918



Eve's Lover, 1925

Lost Film

Director: Roy Del Ruth (1893–1961)

Stars: Clara Bow (1905–65), Irene Rich (1891–1988)

Story: Lucy Lane Clifford (1846–1929)

- Lucy Lane Clifford was a well-known British novelist and playwright who frequently adapted her works, like *Eve's Lover*, for cinema. Female authors who found success outside of the Hollywood system were often brought in to translate their writing to the screen.
- Despite the fact that Clifford was the lead writer, and it featured Clara Bow, the original "It Girl," the popular fan journal *Picture Play* noted that the film was "a rather poor story of a business woman whom a baron marries for her money, then falls in love with after all [sic]."
- The single surviving lobby card does not feature the stars of the production, but does demonstrate the sophisticated design potential of the medium. The central image is vibrantly hand colored, while the border features elegant illustrations and typography.



Picture Play Magazine, 1910



A Virtuous Vamp, 1919

Survives Incomplete

Director: David Kirkland (1878–1964)

Producer/Scenario: Anita Loos (1888–1981)

Writer: John Emerson (1874–1956)

Star: Constance Talmadge (1898–1973)

- Although best known as Hollywood’s first female screenwriter, Anita Loos also acted as producer on this movie, demonstrating the permeable nature of jobs on set during these early days in the industry. Her husband, John Emerson, also helped write the script.
- *A Virtuous Vamp* stars Loos’s friend, the actress and producer Constance Talmadge, for whom she wrote numerous screenplays. Talmadge was so reliably popular that she appears in each of these six lobby cards. Some sources claim that she also acted as co-producer on this film with Loos.
- The plot of the film revolves around Talmadge’s character, who takes an office job and distracts all her male coworkers with her beauty. Each of the lobby cards demonstrates the “dangers” of allowing an attractive woman into the workplace.



The Beautiful Gambler, 1921

Lost Film

Director: William Worthington (1872–1941)

Writer: Hope Loring (1894–1959)

Star: Grace Darmond (1893–1963)

- Written by Hope Loring, *The Beautiful Gambler* is a Western about a young woman forced to marry the proprietor of a casino in order to pay off her father's gambling debts.
- While gambling was largely illegal in the United States at this time, and was therefore not generally allowed to be depicted in movies, the Western genre was seen as an exception to this rule. Censorship of motion pictures was also handled regionally, meaning each state could decide if a film was wholesome enough to be screened. Text cards were often displayed before or after a film indicating that "no offensive pictures are ever shown here."

Flirting with Love, 1924

Lost Film

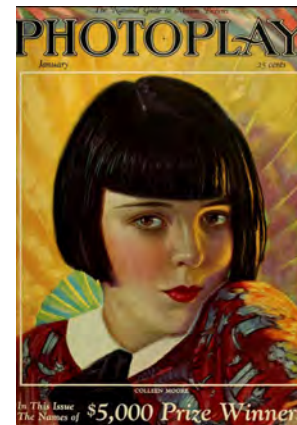
Director: John Francis Dillon (1884–1934)

Editorial Director: Marion Fairfax (1875–1970)

Costume Design: Clare West (1889–1980)

Star: Colleen Moore (1899–1988)

- By the early 1920s, Marion Fairfax, the editorial director on this film, was an established screenwriter and playwright with her own production company. In 1923, she joined the writing staff of First National, bringing reliable talent to the studio.
- Actress Colleen Moore, who is shown in all four of these lobby cards, is credited with popularizing the bob, a short hairstyle popular during the Roaring Twenties that marked a woman as young, fun, and modern.
- Clare West was the first official costume designer for Hollywood films, creating the contemporary looks on display in this and many other movies that would come to define modern American style. Her most successful collaborations were the ten films she worked on for Cecil B. DeMille, as well as her tenure as “studio designer” at the Triangle Motion Picture Company.



Photoplay, 1926



Silk Legs, 1927

Lost Film

Director: Arthur Rosson (1886–1960)

Story: Frederica Sagor Maas (1900–2012)

Writer: Frances Agnew (1891–1967)

Star: Madge Bellamy (1899–1990)

- *Silk Legs* is the story of a pair of rival stocking salespeople—a man whose slick pitch often seals the deal and a woman who exploits her sexuality by modeling the product for clients.
- At the time the film was released, the notion that a woman must choose between a career and a respectable family was being challenged. Movies like this one that highlighted female success in the workplace began to gain in popularity, even if the endings often show the main character finding love and marriage.
- Both the writers on this production, Frances Agnew and Frederica Sagor Maas, were rarely given credit on productions. Crediting, like much of the film industry in Hollywood, was in its infancy, and women were commonly overlooked. Both Agnew and Mass also wrote about Hollywood for newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Hollywood Reporter*, and Maas even published a salacious novel about the film industry.

Good Wives, Bad Wives, & Divorce

I spent my life searching
for a man to look up to without
lying down.
—Frances Marion, director & screenwriter



Experimental Marriage, 1919

Lost Film

Director: Robert G. Vignola (1882–1953)

Writer: Alice Eyton (1874–1929)

Star: Constance Talmadge (1898–1973)

- Written by novelist Alice Eyton (who was hired as a staff writer for Paramount Pictures the following year), *Experimental Marriage* covers an unconventional arrangement: the bride, a staunch feminist, proposes that the couple only lives together Saturday through Monday, leaving each free to pursue other pleasures the rest of the week.
- The film's star, Constance Talmadge, was close friends with the screenwriter Anita Loos, whose own marriage mimicked the one in the plot in many ways. However, Loos had not initiated the situation, and she maintained a business relationship with her screenwriter husband, John Emerson, until his death.
- While the plot offers Talmadge's character both agency and freedom, it also reinforces traditional values; at the end of the film, the woman calls off the arrangement in favor of monogamy. Most films that hinted at more feminist storylines were reigned in by these types of resolutions.



The Marriage Price, 1919

Lost Film

Director: Émile Chautard (1864–1934)

Scenario: Eve Unsell (1879–1937)

Star: Elsie Ferguson (1883–1961)

- Eve Unsell wrote more than 90 screenplays during her career, working in screenwriter positions in both the United States and London during the 1910s. In 1916, she became the head of scenarios at the newly formed Famous Players-Lasky Corporation where she worked with the young Alfred Hitchcock; he designed the titles for her film *The Call of Youth* (1921), among others. Five years later, she founded Eve Unsell Photoplay Staff, Inc.
- These monotone lobby cards feature stills from the film surrounded by ornamental motifs. They were most likely printed through the rotogravure process, involving an etched plate on a round drum press. Comprising eight cards, this is the most complete set in the exhibition, and summarizes the entire plot of the film.



The New York Idea, 1920

Survives Complete

Director: Herbert Blaché (1882–1953)

Writer: Mary Murillo (1888–1944)

Star: Alice Brady (1892–1939)

Costume Design: Lucy Duff-Gordon (1863–1935)

- Written by Mary Murillo, *The New York Idea* follows a young bride who decides to divorce her husband because he is too much admired by other women. While the concept of a wife proposing divorce would have been seen as progressive at the time, the movie ends (unsurprisingly) with reconciliation, reinforcing the status quo.
- In 1910, Alice Guy Blaché (the wife of the film's director) founded Solax, her own production studio, doing well enough to build a new facility in Fort Lee, New Jersey the following year. She retained ownership of the studio through its various iterations, even after 1918 when she moved to Hollywood as the film industry was becoming more centered on the West Coast. She separated from her husband in 1920, but they maintained an amicable professional relationship.
- Despite Alice Guy Blaché's trailblazing success as a director, screenwriter, and producer, her Hollywood career ended two years after this film was released, and she returned to France. Like many women in the industry, she was unable to find work, and fought unsuccessfully to get her films preserved and remembered up until her death.



Adam's Rib, 1923

Survives Complete

Director: Cecil B. DeMille (1881–1959)

Story/Screenplay: Jeanie Macpherson (1886–1946)

Film Editing: Anne Bauchens (1882–1967)

Costume Design: Clare West (1889–1980)

Star: Anna Q. Nilsson (1888–1974)

- Many women were involved behind the camera in the production of *Adam's Rib*, including the screenwriter Jeanie Macpherson, the film editor Anne Bauchens, and the costume designer Clare West.
- Macpherson had a long partnership with the powerful director Cecil B. DeMille, writing more than 30 of his films. It was revealed only after DeMille's death, however, that Macpherson had been one of his many mistresses, underscoring the complexities of her influence on Paramount Pictures in its various guises.
- In 1940, Anne Bauchens became the first woman to win the Academy Award for editing—an area of filmmaking in which women have historically flourished, even as films made the transition to sound. The director is often seen as playing the central role in the shaping of a film but the editor is just as crucial to the final version of the story.
- These lobby cards are the most colorful in the exhibition, and are printed through lithography rather than being hand tinted.



Modern Marriage, 1923

Survives Complete

Director: Lawrence C. Windom (1872–1957)

Adaptation: Dorothy Farnum (1900–70)

Art Director: Elsa Carmen Lopez (Dates Unknown)

Star: Beverly Bayne (1894–1982)

- Dorothy Farnum was a longstanding screenwriter in Hollywood, writing scenarios for MGM, Warner Brothers, and United Artists. At her peak in the late '20s, she was earning \$2,500 a week (equivalent to around \$40,000 today).
- Much less is known about the art director Elsa Lopez, whose credits include just three movies. Many women who worked behind the scenes were written out of film history, or had work that was undervalued, ignored, or marginalized as the industry moved into the era of talking pictures and the film canon as it is known today was formed.
- The melodramatic plot of *Modern Marriage* deals with infidelity, blackmail, and murder. Off-camera, the stars themselves were attempting to remedy a public relations nightmare: Francis X. Bushman had divorced his wife to marry lead actress Beverly Bayne, and the public scandal was threatening to destroy their respective careers. While salacious content in film typically resulted in excellent ticket sales, such behavior in real life tended to be met with outrage.

**In its heyday, Hollywood reflected,
if it did not actually produce, the sexual
climate of our land.**

—Anita Loos, screenwriter



Six Best Cellars, 1920

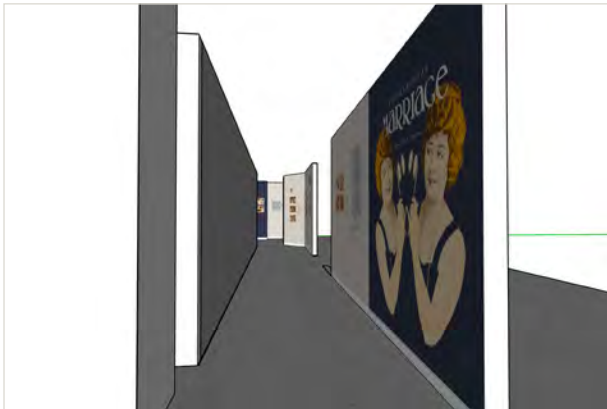
Lost Film

Director: Donald Crisp (1882–1974)

Editing: Dorothy Arzner (1897–1979)

Star: Wanda Hawley (1895–1963)

- While only an editor on this film, Dorothy Arzner would go on to have an illustrious career as a director in Hollywood, becoming the first woman to join the newly formed Director's Guild of America, in 1933. She was, however, an outlier in the profession after the 1920s, when unions and studio investors deemed women not reliably profitable.
- This is one of the simplest lobby cards on display, lacking any decorative details in the margins or descriptive text relating to the plot. The image is nevertheless intriguing, showing the couple attempting to fill liquor bottles with an unknown substance.





In the early 1920s the American film industry began to experiment with a variety of the leading film genres for women to look at. The experimental poster for *Experimental Marriage* was one of the first. The poster was designed by the artist *Franklin B. Rowland* and was one of the first to use the word "experimental" in its title. The poster was designed to attract women to the film and to the theater. The poster was designed to attract women to the film and to the theater. The poster was designed to attract women to the film and to the theater.





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