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Smithsonian Galaxy - Photographer Berenice Abbott, June 11, 1982

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WEBVTT

01:02:02.000 --> 01:02:05.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: It's uh --

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Hear, hear!

01:02:05.000 --> 01:02:10.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Do you still use Brownies, Miss Abbott?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: What? It's apparently...? What?

01:02:10.000 --> 01:02:13.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Do you still use it?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: No.

01:02:13.000 --> 01:02:16.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: What do you use now? What do you like?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Nothing.

01:02:16.000 --> 01:02:21.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: You're not photographing?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: No.

01:02:21.000 --> 01:02:25.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: What were you using?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Everything. [[laughter]]

01:02:25.000 --> 01:02:30.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: I give up! [[laughter]]

01:02:30.000 --> 01:02:40.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: You need all kinds. You need different, for different types of subject, you need different cameras. You can't do anything with the wrong camera.

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Most people try, they don't seem to know it. They do everything today with a little bitty camera.

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<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Yeah, I see what you mean.

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<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: It's too easy, to carry around. It's easy. I wish it were easy, I wish it were easy.

01:02:59.000 --> 01:03:07.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: You taught yourself photography, of course.

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Yes. Well, I learned the darkroom work with Man Ray.

01:03:07.000 --> 01:03:13.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Did you work with Man Ray?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Three years.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Really?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: And I started out with him.

01:03:13.000 --> 01:03:27.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: I didn't know that.

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Yes, I started out with him and I ended up - you know, doing - I was the Girl Friday. I did everything after he took the picture. So I developed it and printed it and spotted --

01:03:27.000 --> 01:03:31.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: What wonderful training that must have been!

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Yes, I did everything.

01:03:31.000 --> 01:03:41.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Is he as great a photographer as most people think, to you?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: That's an embarrassing question! [[laughter]]

01:03:41.000 --> 01:03:51.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Well you don't have to answer that, I take it back. [[laughter]]

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I think he took some marvelous portraits of men.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Yeah.

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Some very fine portraits of men.

01:03:51.000 --> 01:03:53.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Who can you think of?

01:03:53.000 --> 01:04:16.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Oh I can't remember names-- of course, Marcel Duchamp, Stella, they were very fine. And others - well, Sinclair Lewis, especially a European Musician was a superb portrait. And, well he took some very wonderful portraits, no doubt. But I think --

01:04:16.000 --> 01:04:22.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: You weren't with him all that long, were you, about a couple of years, was it?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Three years.

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Oh, three years. Yeah.

01:04:22.000 --> 01:04:29.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: The women were more - just beautiful objects, as a whole --

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Yeah. They weren't people, huh?

01:04:29.000 --> 01:04:34.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I think they were - sort of beautiful still lifes.

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<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: Yes, I remember his still lifes.

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<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: You obviously parted company with him on that way of looking at things.

01:04:44.000 --> 01:04:54.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: No, it just happened. I was very fond of Man Ray. He was a wonderful person. He was a very good friend. We were good friends before I worked for him.

01:04:54.000 --> 01:04:58.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Yeah, you met in Greenwich Village, did you?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Yes.

01:04:58.000 --> 01:05:06.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Do I remember a picture or am I dreaming that you took of E.E. Cummings?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: No.

01:05:06.000 --> 01:05:11.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: You did not?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: No. E.E.Cummings? No.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Funny, I--

01:05:11.000 --> 01:05:23.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Mine were mostly in Paris, my portraits. And I found making portraits in America so different, that I lost interest in it-

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<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Of course, he was in Paris for a long time--

01:05:23.000 --> 01:05:25.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Well what was different about it?

01:05:25.000 --> 01:05:43.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I lost interest. Well it was partly technical. Unless you have plenty of light or skylight. It's pretty difficult. You need light to take portraits but you don't want difficult, shiny lamps and - all that sort of thing.

01:05:43.000 --> 01:05:46.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: You're talking about, natural light, of course.

01:05:46.000 --> 01:05:50.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: So I didn't have that. In New York, I had to do everything with artificial light, it made it very unpleasant.

01:05:50.000 --> 01:05:51.000

<i>Meryle Secrest</i>: Oh I see.

01:05:51.000 --> 01:05:57.000

<i>Berenice Abbott</i>: And people never had the time and they never wanted to pay for pictures.

01:05:57.000 --> 01:06:07.000

They seemed to think that you could go to the department store and get one for a dollar. And it was very hard to convince them that isn't true.

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<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: How much time did you like to take?

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<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I never went by the time. It sometimes takes longer but you don't want to be hurried. And I never took more than one a day, I didn't want to.

01:06:20.000 --> 01:06:26.000

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: Not quite passport photo place, no!

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: No, no.

01:06:26.000 --> 01:06:30.000

{OVERLAP}

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: Did you know a woman named -- Doris Ulmann?

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: If I asked you, if I asked you -- who do you think is the --

01:06:30.000 --> 01:06:41.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: -- that's a silly question, 'best' doesn't mean anything, but who you think is the most interesting of modern photographers?

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<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I couldn't possibly say.

01:06:44.000 --> 01:06:47.000

I really couldn't.

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A great deal of photography right now - I don't even know what's going on. There are no ways of - there are no publications. There are a few

books, but, there are no good magazines. It's all for the amateur.

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And the same old stuff, over every three years.

01:07:08.000 --> 01:07:15.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: And it's all fashion stuff.

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: -- and it's all technical and glamour stuff. It's idiotic stuff.

01:07:15.000 --> 01:07:19.000

I don't know - I don't know what they're doing.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Yes.

01:07:19.000 --> 01:07:29.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Hmm - you were saying --

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: It isn't, certainly isn't - it isn't the kind of material usually that's meant for this fabulous medium.

01:07:29.000 --> 01:07:35.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Medium of this century. It has tremendous potential, and it isn't being made use of.

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<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: How would you like to see it used?

01:07:37.000 --> 01:07:39.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Don't ask me that.

01:07:39.000 --> 01:07:47.000

The present day - the now - that's all you can photograph. What's happening today. What's vital and important today.

01:07:47.000 --> 01:07:53.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Yes, it's a sort of sinful, because, almost nothing of importance is being photographed.

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<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I know and there are tremendous things going on. Of course, New York is quite mad.

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<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Well somebody could be doing with New York what you were doing in the 30s, couldn't they?

01:08:04.000 --> 01:08:05.000

<i>Berenice Abbott</i>: Of course

01:08:05.000 --> 01:08:15.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Think what you could do with Reagan's face, for one. [[laughter and clapping]]

01:08:15.000 --> 01:08:17.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I could do a beaut.

01:08:17.000 --> 01:08:19.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: She could do a beaut, she said.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: I bet you could.

01:08:19.000 --> 01:08:24.000

[[cross talk]] Supersized --

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: I think today's talent goes into movies, don't you?

01:08:24.000 --> 01:08:31.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: What?

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: A lot of today's photographic talent goes into moving pictures and television.

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: TV, which incidentally --

01:08:31.000 --> 01:08:44.000

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: That's where it all is.

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Yes. I think something about the 20s that, one reason why -- there was a pretty nice period there for a while, was that we didn't know television.

01:08:44.000 --> 01:08:53.000

It didn't exist. And if you can imagine what this meant. Not to have a television in every place. People gathered around looking at it.

01:08:53.000 --> 01:09:01.000

It was non-existent. There also -- there were, we never listen to radios.

01:09:01.000 --> 01:09:11.000

People worked, and did their thing, and they went out to the cafe.

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: You can't - yes - [[garbled]]

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: They had a cafe life which is very healthy and wonderful.

01:09:11.000 --> 01:09:19.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: You know, for the first time I disagree with you. I think some motion picture photography is very great.

01:09:19.000 --> 01:09:32.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Today?

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Today, yes, I think some of it is, I don't think television is ever very good with -- I think some motion picture photography is wonderful.

01:09:32.000 --> 01:09:49.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: I wish I knew where it was. Of course where I live out in Maine there are no movies what ever - so I never see any. And this, I'm sure I lose something because -- but the last time, I never see them, almost never. I haven't seen them for 10 years.

01:09:49.000 --> 01:09:54.000

If they were around, if I thought a good movie came around, I'd probably go see it.

01:09:54.000 --> 01:10:02.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: I think you'd want to go see - uh, Bergman uses - I never can remember his name. Probably the greatest of all --

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<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Ingmar. Ingmar Bergman.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: What's his name?

01:10:05.000 --> 01:10:09.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Ingmar.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Ingmar?

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Ingmar.

01:10:09.000 --> 01:10:16.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Oh I remember Bergman's name - I meant the photographer's name.

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Oh the photographer's name - sorry.

01:10:16.000 --> 01:10:24.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: I never can remember his name - he's a very great photographer. Buñuel uses a great photographer, but I suspect that Buñuel himself is a great photographer.

01:10:24.000 --> 01:10:28.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: What was that, sorry?

<i>FROM AUDIENCE</i>: The cinematographer's name is Sven Nykvist.

01:10:28.000 --> 01:10:37.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: That's right - Sven Nykvist - exactly - thank you. He's a very great photographer, I think.

01:10:37.000 --> 01:10:42.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Well I'd probably go if it - when we're around but --

01:10:42.000 --> 01:10:57.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Yeah, Miss Hellman, you've sort of mentioned that you were in Paris in 'An Unfinished Woman', but you don't say very much about it.

01:10:57.000 --> 01:11:03.000

When did you go there? I'm not clear about that, for the first time, to Paris?

01:11:03.000 --> 01:11:08.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: When, what?

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: When did you go to Paris for the first time? I'm not clear on that.

01:11:08.000 --> 01:11:12.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: I went on my honeymoon which was about 6 or 8 months after we were married,-

01:11:12.000 --> 01:11:29.000

- and my husband worked on a -- I couldn't get a job, but he got a job on a magazine that maybe Miss Abbot remembers - I see no reason why she should - it was quite bad, called the 'Paris Comet'.

01:11:29.000 --> 01:11:33.000

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Oh yes.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Do you remember this?

<i>BERENICE ABBOTT</i>: Yes.

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Paris Comet.

01:11:33.000 --> 01:11:40.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Then I - then, out of the kindness of his heart, he began to publish some short stories I wrote.

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I got 22 dollars for one, and pretty proud I was, too.

01:11:46.000 --> 01:11:51.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: And was it then that you met F. Scott Fitzgerald?

01:11:51.000 --> 01:12:07.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Uh, no. I had met F. Scott Fitzgerald a few years before when I had gone to Paris with my two college roommates. And Scott Fitzgerald had taken a great fancy to one. Not to the rest of us, God knows why.

01:12:07.000 --> 01:12:20.000

And I remember my days in the Tess Hotel were spent persuading her to sleep with him so that we could all find out what he was like. [[laughter]]

01:12:20.000 --> 01:12:28.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Did she?

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: But the stubborn bastard wouldn't go along. [[laughter]]

01:12:28.000 --> 01:12:40.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: So we'll never know.

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: I will never know, no. No, I will certainly never know. I was never to see him again until the ride I wrote about.

01:12:40.000 --> 01:12:49.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Right, the ride you wrote about. You say he had changed a great deal, but you don't really tell us what change you found in him.

01:12:49.000 --> 01:13:08.000

<i>LILLIAN HELLMAN</i>: Well he had become from, I suppose in those days when I first met him he probably was 30 - 32. And by the time I saw him in Hollywood again, which was, he probably was in his deep 40s, middle 40s anyway.

01:13:08.000 --> 01:13:16.000

And a very changed man. I know he changed in aged, but changed in general. Emily probably remembers him then, don't you Emily?

01:13:16.000 --> 01:13:20.000

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: Did you know him then?

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: Yes. I didn't know him well, but I met him.

01:13:20.000 --> 01:13:26.880

<i>MERYLE SECREST</i>: You met him in Hollywood?

<i>EMILY HAHN</i>: Yes, I was disappointed because it was in that later phase. He wasn't as pretty as he had been --



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