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Amateur Versus Professional

MAYA DEREN



The function of film, Maya Deren believed, like most art forms, was to create an experience.

Maya Deren is inspiring to all artists and filmmakers. Her short films experiment with the language of cinema and mesmerize the viewer with their uniqueness and mystery. Further, seeing her works and understanding her philosophy on filmmaking encourages all artists to explore more about their craft and what it means to make art. This gives rise to the importance of *Amateur Versus Professional*, a significant essay by Maya Deren on the art and craft of filmmaking and what it takes to be an artist/filmmaker. Enjoy!

The major obstacle for amateur filmmakers is their own sense of inferiority vis-a-vis professional productions. The very classification "amateur" has an apologetic ring. But that very word—from the Latin "amateur"—"lover" means one who does something for the love of the thing rather than for economic reasons or necessity. And this is the meaning from which the amateur filmmaker should take his clue. Instead of envying the script and dialogue writers, the trained actors, the elaborate staffs and sets, the enormous production budgets of the professional film, the amateur should make use of the one great

advantage which all professionals envy him, namely, freedom—both artistic and physical.

Artistic freedom means that the amateur filmmaker is never forced to sacrifice visual drama and beauty to a stream of words, words, words, words, to the relentless activity and explanations of a plot, or to the display of a star or a sponsor's product; nor is the amateur production expected to return profit on a huge investment by holding the attention of a massive and motley audience for 90 minutes.

Like the amateur still photographer, the amateur filmmaker can devote himself to capturing the poetry and beauty of places and events and, since he is using a motion picture camera, he can explore the vast world of the beauty of movement. (One of the films winning Honorable Mention in the 1958 Creative Film Awards was Round and Square, a poetic, rhythmic treatment of the dancing lights of cars as they streamed down highways, under bridges, etc.) Instead of trying to invent a plot that moves, use the movement of wind, or water, children, people, elevators, balls, etc. as a poem might celebrate these. And use your freedom to experiment with visual ideas; your mistakes will not get you fired.

Physical freedom includes time freedom—a freedom from budget imposed deadlines. But above all, the amateur filmmaker, with his small, light-weight equipment, has an inconspicuousness (for candid shooting) and a physical mobility which is well the envy of most professionals, burdened as they are by their many-ton monsters, cables and crews. Don't forget that no tripod has yet been built which is as miraculously versatile in movement as the complex system of supports, joints, muscles, and nerves which is the human body, which, with a bit of practice, makes possible the enormous variety of camera angles and visual action. You have all this, and a brain too, in one neat, compact, mobile package. Cameras do not make films; filmmakers make films.

Improve your films not by adding more equipment and personnel but by using what you have to its fullest capacity. The most important part of your equipment is yourself: your mobile body, your imaginative mind, and your freedom to use both. Make sure you do use them.

Watch [Maya Deren's Short Films](#).