

Jo Spence: Cultural Sniper

Directed by Bea Moyes

Produced by:
The Derek Jarman Lab

Currently in Development

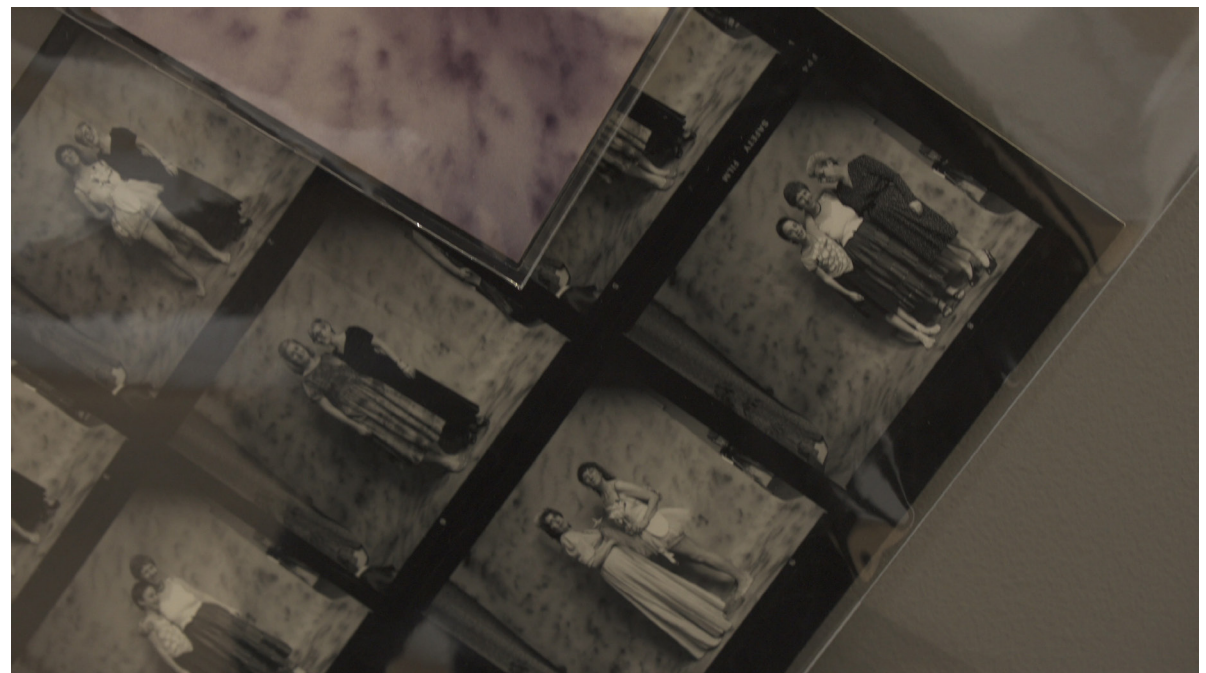
The feminist, socialist photographer, Jo Spence, was celebrated during her life for her bold photographs that critiqued the normative modes of representation around gender, class, sexuality, and our role in society. Beginning her career as a high-street photographer, Spence became increasingly politically aware in the 1970s, and concerned with the relationship to power and powerlessness as a photographer. She became a vocal opponent of the 'elitist' forms of social realist photography, which she felt lent towards the voyeuristic in the observation of social struggles. Instead she looked back to the radical photographers of the 1930s for models of politically engaged photography. It was during the 1970s and 1980s that Spence's collaborative practice flourished within the burgeoning community arts movement in London. Through the workshop movement she found a political vehicle for photography, and her interest in democratising the technologies of photographic production and the means of self-representation - subjects which have particular relevance today.



Jo Spence: Cultural Sniper is a feature-length essay film examining the cultural and political legacy of Jo Spence's work. The film will consider the context of her collaborative practice in the 1970s and 1980s, as a photographer, writer, and educator, as well as her involvement in many significant community arts cooperatives in East London: such as The Half Moon Photography Workshop, Camerawork magazine, the Hackney Flashers, Spare Rib, the Polysnappers, as well as her co-founding of the Photography Workshop with Terry Dennett.

Over a quarter of a century since her early death in 1992, the film will reflect on some of the questions Spence posed through her photographs, and their relevance to photographers and activists working today. The film will also look at the legacy of Spence's photography, and her wishes to continue to be 'polemical and socially useful' through her photographic archive. With the increasing interest and popularity of her work over the past decade, the film will consider how archives and collections of Spence's work can negotiate the complexities of balancing the veneration of her work as an individual artist with Spence's own radical collaborative practice during her lifetime, and with her politics.

Cultural Sniper will examine a fascinating and long overlooked period in London's cultural history, during which community arts re-wrote the definitions of art, and who it was for. In doing so the film will record voices from Spence's life who have long been neglected in this history, and seek to consider the photographic legacy of Jo Spence within the context of London at that time.



I don't want to end up as an
'Art Gallery Hack' – my work
will be sterilized if it is shown
out of context. So "little
treasure," keep it
polemical and socially useful.

(Jo Spence, 1992)

"Photographic technology is so
highly evolved and relatively
cheap that we now have a
potentially revolutionary means
of production in our hands"

(Rosy Martin and Jo Spence, 1985)

