

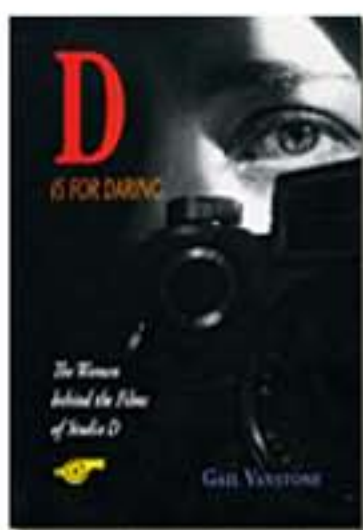


Headline News

Prof writes book on NFB's feminist Studio D

Sexuality, identity, pornography, women and work, nuclear war and environmental destruction: these were the topics of groundbreaking films created by the National Film Board's (NFB) Studio D, the first government-funded film studio dedicated to giving a voice to women's realities.

In an original tribute to the studio, Professor [Gail Vanstone](#) from York's Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies has compiled a comprehensive history titled *D is for Daring: The Women behind the Films of Studio D*. The book is an in-depth exploration of the key players behind the scenes and the filmmakers, writers and directors who produced over 150 documentaries during its 22-year history.



Published by Sumach Press, *D is for Daring* uncovers a dramatic and powerful story of how the women of Studio D battled institutional frameworks, social norms and media responses in an attempt to share their stories. A portfolio of original black and white photographs captures in-action scenes of film shoots and script-writing meetings.

Studio D was born in the 1970s at the same time the women's movement was gaining momentum in Canada. Increasingly, there was pressure throughout federal institutions to address the position of women within their organizations. Established in 1974 in conjunction with the International Women's Year, Studio D was born out of that pressure in what many call a token gesture. Housed in the basement of the NFB in what had previously been a janitor's storeroom, its chances of success appeared futile.

Drawing on archival records and personal interviews, Vanstone explores how Studio D overcame its limited operating space and small budget to become one of the most celebrated filmmaking studios. It garnered over 100 international awards including three Academy Awards.

Right: Gail Vanstone

Executive producers Kathleen Shannon, Rina Fraticelli and Ginny Stikeman played an integral role in the success of the studio, insisting ordinary women become filmmakers. In this respect, Studio D was a pioneer. The studio produced provocative, daring and original films that crossed boundaries of race, class and geography and unleashed international debates at the time of their release that, in some cases, continue to attract attention today.



"The films of Studio D grew out of the women's movement and simultaneously became a catalyst for that movement," said Vanstone. "For the first time ever, women were not only exploring issues that were important to them in a very public way, but they were also telling those stories on their own terms."

It was in her McLaughlin College course, Images of Women in Contemporary Canadian Literature, that Vanstone first discovered Studio D. She was teaching Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* and thought a film might complement fiction with a real-life view. She booked a screening room and popped in *Great Grand Mother* (1974) and was impressed with what she saw on the screen.

"I saw old women talking about their experiences as pioneers to the Canadian West – cooking, giving birth, doing hard physical labour, dealing with winter and loneliness," said Vanstone. "Here were intelligent, perceptive, spirited, courageous and admirable women, gutsy pioneers whose stories remained untold in any history books I'd ever read." Two well known Canadian filmmakers – Lorna Rasmussen and Anne Wheeler – directed the film.

In 1996 Studio D closed due to cutbacks. It is Vanstone's hope that her book will preserve some of the issues the filmmakers struggled with during the 1970s and offer the younger feminist generation an account they can consult that captures both the struggles and successes of women at the time.