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# Les Femmes Folles

WOMEN IN ART

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MARCH 24, 2014 *with* 2 NOTES

*tags:* LETTERS FROM BAGHDAD. GERTRUDE BELL. ZEVA OELBAUM. SABINE KRAYENBÜHL.

## SABINE KRAYENBÜHL & ZEVA OELBAUM, FILM-MAKERS



Sabine Krayenbühl and Zeva Oelbaum are taking on an immense and immensely inspiring project: “Letters From Baghdad: A Film About Gertrude Bell,” a documentary on “the most powerful woman in the British Empire, who drew Iraq’s borders before disappearing from history.” As it is Women’s History Month (March!), they’ve started a

**Kickstarter campaign to help them pay for the digitization of the “rare, never-seen-before archival footage that we will use in the film. We are asking the archives to retrieve the material from their vaults and scan the original 35mm negatives. The results are stunning, but it is a costly process.” On the Kickstarter page is a Trailer to get a glimpse of Bell, who was “gifted in politics, and her personal life was scarred with tragedy.” You can see the depth of research the filmmakers have put in and the quality of what they can and will do and why. Here they generously take the time to share with LFF about how they both got into filmmaking, how they came together on this project, their own personal courageous triumphs and more...**

**Where are you from? How did you get into film-making?**

**Zeva:** I’m originally from Kansas City, but I’ve lived in the New York area for many, many years. I came to filmmaking from a 20 year career in still photography. I’ve always been interested in story telling which is why I originally got into photography. A few years ago, I met a woman, a survivor from Auschwitz, that was so extraordinary that I decided to do a documentary film about her—although I had never done one before.

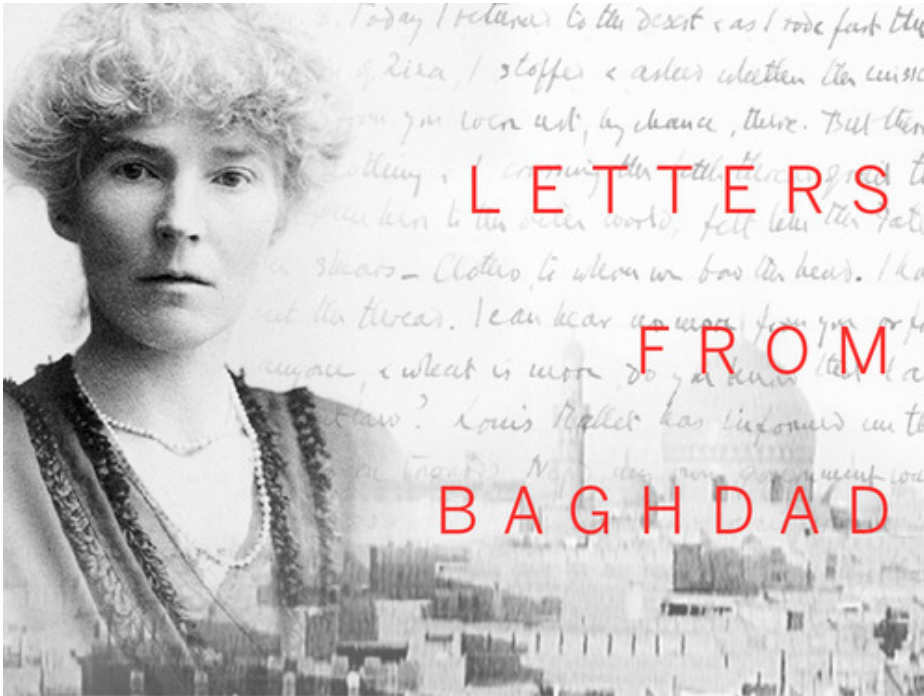
**Sabine:** I’m from Switzerland and came to New York in 1986 to study film at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. After I graduated, I was lucky to be hired by the Maysles Brothers, two pioneering documentarians. They have done groundbreaking films such as Grey Gardens, Gimme Shelter and have documented the artist Christo over many years.

I was always drawn to documentaries because with each film I learn and experience new interesting stories. And especially as an editor, I have the opportunity of to tell those stories in a compelling way.

**Tell me about your inspirations, process.**

**Zeva:** I’ve always been very interested in women who haven’t received acknowledgement. As a photographer, I published a book on cyanotypes which was an homage to Anna Atkins. She published the first book that was illustrated with photographs in 1843.

**Sabine:** I am inspired by music and art and by people. I love to travel, I love languages and I always encountered the most inspiring stories by being curious about and open to other cultures and the world. Sometimes you can find those stories in books, but nothing beats a conversation with another human being.



**Tell me about your project and why its important to you. How did you come across Gertrude Bell?**

**Zeva and Sabine:** We met while working on “Ahead of Time”, a film about another remarkable woman named Ruth Gruber. We discovered that we both had read the biography of Gertrude Bell, by Janet Wallach, and felt that Bell was an inspiring choice for a film. Although her dramatic story might lend itself to a biopic, our research revealed such fascinating primary source material we felt we had to make a documentary. As female filmmakers, we are always intrigued by the choices that trailblazing women must make. What was it like to be a woman ahead of her time?

Like so many other accomplished women, Gertrude Bell has been written out of history. We want to bring her story back to a large audience.

**Artist Wanda Ewing, who curated and titled the original LFF exhibit, said of her work: “I’ve been making provocative art with a political edge in my Midwestern hometown since 1999. And to do that, you have to be tenacious as hell.” Are you tenacious in your work or life? How so?**

**Z&S:** As part of our personal journeys, we’ve always chosen the road less traveled. Both of us

have traveled extensively throughout the Middle East and other places off the beaten track like Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. Coincidentally, we are both breast cancer survivors and feel even more passionate about creating significant and challenging works of art. As independent documentary filmmakers we wear every hat including fundraising and tireless promoting of our project. It takes energy and dedication. But we love what we do.

**Ewing, who examined perspective of femininity and race in her work, spoke positively of feminism, saying “yes, it is still relevant” to have exhibits and forums for women in art; does feminism play a role in your work?**

**Z&S:** Yes, it plays a role since we want to highlight stories of women, inspire a younger generation of women, and perhaps even pave the way for other female directors.

**Ewing’s advice to aspiring artists was “you’ve got to develop the skill of when to listen and when not to;” and “Leave. Gain perspective.” What advice do you have for aspiring artists?**

**Z&S:** Don’t allow your vision to be diluted by the marketplace. It’s very hard to stand your ground, but it’s worth it.

**Learn more about *Letters From Baghdad: A Film about Gertrude Bell*, and how you can support their efforts at their [Kickstarter Page](#) by clicking here.**

[lettersfrombaghdadthemovie.com](http://lettersfrombaghdadthemovie.com)

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**Les Femmes Folles is a completely volunteer run organization founded in 2011 with the mission to support and promote women in all forms, styles and levels of art with the online journal, anthologies, books, exhibitions and events; originally inspired by artist Wanda Ewing and her curated exhibit by the name Les Femmes Folles (Wild Women). LFF was created and is curated by Sally Deskins. *LFF Books* is a micro-feminist press that publishes 1-2 books per year by the creators of Les Femmes Folles including *Intimates & Fools* (Laura Madeline Wiseman, 2014). Other titles include **Les Femmes Folles: The Women 2011, 2012 and 2013**, available on [blurb.com](#), including art, poetry and interview excerpts from women artists. A portion of the proceeds from LFF books and products benefit the University of Nebraska-Omaha’s Wanda Ewing Scholarship Fund.**

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