

# CHERYL DUNYE

b. May 13, 1966

## FILMMAKER

*“... There are other people with stories to tell.”*

Cheryl Dunye is a Liberian-born American lesbian filmmaker, actress and educator. Her films highlight social and cultural issues surrounding African-Americans and the LGBT community, most notably, black lesbians.

Dunye grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She earned her bachelor's degree from Temple University and her Master of Fine Arts from Rutgers Mason Gross School of the Arts. In 1992 Art Matters Inc. awarded her a fellowship. The following year, her work appeared in the Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Dunye has made more than 15 films whose themes explore the intersection of race, sexuality and personal identity. Emerging as part of the Queer New Cinema movement of the 1990s, she began her career producing short film narratives. A compilation of her work from 1990 to 1994, “Early Works of Cheryl Dunye,” is available on DVD.

In 1996 Dunye wrote, directed, edited and starred in the romantic comedy-drama “The Watermelon Woman,” her first feature film and the first full-length narrative made by and about a black lesbian. It won the Teddy Award for Best

Feature Film at the Berlin International Film Festival and the Audience Award for Outstanding Narrative Feature at L.A. Outfest. Her next project, “Stranger Inside” (2001), an HBO drama about black lesbian prison inmates, earned her an Independent Spirit Award nomination for best director.

Dunye's other films include “My Baby's Daddy (2004),” a comedy that grossed \$18.5 million against a \$12 million budget; “The Owls”

(2010); “Mommy is Coming” (2012); and “Black is Blue” (2014), a sci-fi film set in a futuristic Oakland, California, that explores black queer transgender love.

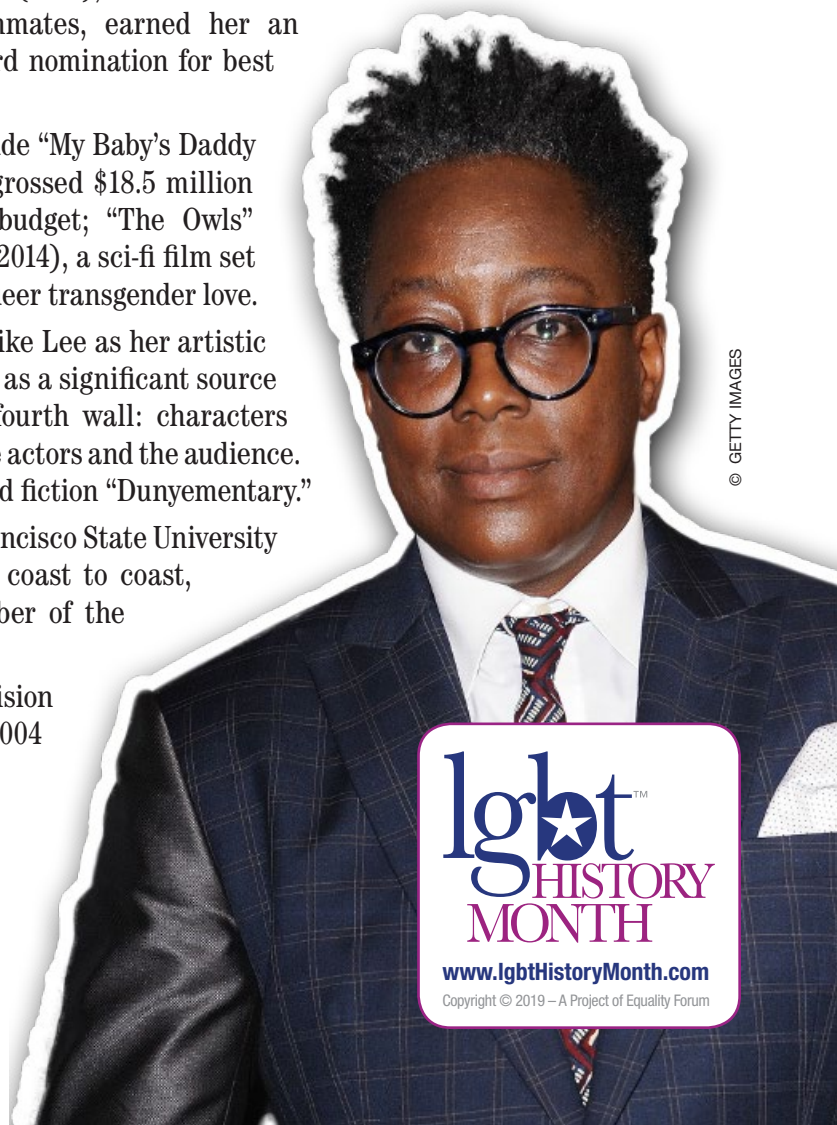
Dunye cites American film directors Woody Allen and Spike Lee as her artistic influences and Charles Burnett's “Killer of Sheep” (1978) as a significant source of inspiration. Her distinctive style often breaks the fourth wall: characters directly address the camera, blurring the line between the actors and the audience. Industry insiders have labeled her creative mix of fact and fiction “Dunyementary.”

In addition to filmmaking, Dunye is a professor at San Francisco State University School of Cinema. She has taught at universities from coast to coast, including UCLA and Temple University. She is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Among other honors, Dunye received the Community Vision Award from the National Center for Lesbian Rights in 2004 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2016.

She lives in Oakland, California, with her two children.

**She is a noted  
lesbian filmmaker  
and educator.**



© GETTY IMAGES

**lgbt**  
HISTORY  
MONTH

[www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com](http://www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com)

Copyright © 2019 – A Project of Equality Forum