

## **Codeshift - Chai with Srivi - Interview with Lynne Sachs**

**Would you be able to tell us a little bit about your path to where you are today?**

**What was your early subject matter?**

**How has it evolved or changed?**

Well, I'll say that I was always interested in art and, though I didn't necessarily think I want to be an artist because I was also interested in doing work that would be engaged with society. At one point, I thought, oh, I want to be a human rights lawyer. And another point I thought, oh, I can be a pediatrician.

But I also thought, oh, I want to make art. I want to paint and write poetry. And then I came across filmmaking, kind of, almost accidentally. It wasn't that I was watching all the most popular movies. You know, that came out as a child or I wasn't the kind of person who was just voracious for television.

And I learned all the movie stars, that was that were so, so distant from the kind of world I wanted to live. But when I started to see personal art films and what we call cinema poems, and I saw more nontraditional documentaries that were more like essays, and that articulated people's point of views and concerns. I thought, oh, that's a medium that can contain all of my, my, curiosities so that I could have an interest that would you might call a political sensibility.

But I could also articulate that, in a form that was unconventional or or very much my own or sort of speaking to the moment. And it seemed like that, that, that, that making. A life in cinema that was also a way of learning about how the world works and doesn't work would, would, would be a good life for me.

That's what I would like to do. Okay.

**That's super interesting that you didn't start off as like a typical, like, I guess, like "film broad", is what people say these days**

Oh, no, no, not at all. I was kind of the opposite. I actually had, almost like an antipathy to going to movies because a certain movie star was in it.

But in my junior year of college, I was living in France, and I started to see work by guess what, women. And I hadn't even seen films directed by women until about that point.

I think I came to this process, in an inside out way. Not the way that most people make, either a documentary film or a narrative film. In the sense that narrative film, people generally write a script and then they come to the, the, the medium of film as a way of, of either adapting that script or interpreting that script.

And they measure their success by their ability to, to transform the text on a page to, a visual and aural experience. But, that to me seemed quite limited because it seemed that it was always rooted in something that was already figured out. And I wanted to jump into filmmaking with another kind of read like register for success.

The Register had to do with discovery, and that you would face an obstacle and that you would, I actually had to learn from obstacles the way, in a way, mirroring life. Like we have this obstacle, the obstacle actually tells you more about the situation than, what you knew about it before. And some people make a documentary film, they want to prove a thesis.

And that's, again, not the way that I work. I might have a hunch, and then I want to see if it might be true, but I could be disappointed. And then the disappointment or the doubt becomes embedded in the film. A lot of my work integrates my doubt about myself. Like my ability to do what I'm doing or my doubt about the belief system that I had before my shift.

And so those kinds of, Open positions of openness are really important to me. It's sort of like that saying, I, I love going to a good academic lecture, but I don't really like the ones that use PowerPoint at all, because the PowerPoint lecture was figured out two months ago and was probably already given three times.

And then I'm just seeing that lecturer deliver something that they could have done last week. But if they do it in a more extemporaneous way and don't feel tied down by the script, then I'm in the process with them. And I kind of like that to happen in my work as well.

**What does filmmaking from a feminist perspective mean to you?**

**What does that look like on a day to day basis?**

I love that you're asking, is there a feminist film making sensibility? And I would say any man could have it. It's a sensibility that offers a kind of that stands in opposition to what we call the Hollywood ethos of, the director at the top who has this great vision and I mean, everything else is, is, is kind of in, it's in all of that person's point of view where as I work in a more collaborative way.

So if I work with someone on a, on a film project, even someone in front of the camera, I want them to. And I learned this early on. I want them to bring something about their point of view to my project, and maybe even challenge me. Hopefully they will. That's why I like if I'm working with an actor, which sometimes I do. I like, I'd never choose an actor just because of the way they look. And actually the idea that people look at headshots, hundreds of them to fill a role is just horrific to me. And not just because I think it says this person is prettier than that person. But I think that people can play roles outside of the body they're given because they have a kind of creative soul, and that's the kind of person I want to work with.

I would never work with someone just because they look like the older man, you know, the grandfather or something like it. They have a grandfatherly look. I would rather have like the

audience be challenged and have a like an 18 year old young woman play the grandfather and the head and push us to think what is the essence of a grandfather and then push that woman's skills.

And, you know, I think that would be fantastic. And and I think that's a liberating way of getting out of, of the script or out of the confines of story and to be more playful. So that could be a feminist perspective because it's working outside of the convention. And, so it's, what I'm addressing here is the making.

So I'm talking about not necessarily positioning the, the, the director at the top of the pyramid, but I'm also talking about a kind of osmosis between who's in front of the camera and who's behind. And if, let's say a woman is being filmed and she doesn't like the way she's filmed, she can then challenge the director, probably a man, and that, you know, but not necessarily because I actually think some women cinematographers, for example, aren't shooting from a specific feminist perspective because they've been so ingrained with the ways that we treat the female form that they just are emulating what has already been done.

### **Could you tell us about your new project This Side of Salina and the Abortion Film Collective?**

So I've been working with a group called the Abortion Film film, the Abortion Clinic Film Collective. And we're kind of an omnibus of filmmakers who have or who have created this body of work. But, that is addressing the DoD decision post Roe versus Wade and the the to interpret those legal jargon or those cases is to say that we went from a woman's right, a right to make her own decisions about her own body, what we call bodily autonomy.

In the United States from 1973 to 2022, post June 24th, 2022, there was another decision by the Supreme Court that said that each state is able to make its own shifting and legislation that would actually prevent that. And so we, I became part of this collective of filmmakers working in North Dakota, Arizona, two parts of Tennessee, because I'm from Tennessee.

So I made my film in Tennessee called contractions, which I'm just starting to show. And actually the film I'm happy is had some screenings and festivals, but it's also giving me opportunities like today at the new House code shift, seminar, where we talked about the resonances of those decisions and how it affects people from doctors to other kinds of providers to patients.

And how the echo of that, like, is also felt from one socioeconomic or racial group, how it's different from one socioeconomic group to another or one racial group to another, because you might live in a state that doesn't allow for that choice. And then if you're a middle class person, you just get in your car or you fly or you take a few days off from your job, or maybe you don't have a job, and then you take care of what you need to take.

And actually, it's been shown that, the majority of women who decide to have abortions already have children and they can't afford the next one, another one. It's not it's not like all teenagers

with who've had sex and which is all, you know, whatever, whatever reason, these are people who are making really, really difficult decisions and finding it difficult to make, but they need to make it for the protection of their other children and lots of different reasons.

So, that but what happens if you don't have the means to make those changes? Or you, you don't have a job where you can take time off or you don't have someone to take care of your children, and that is often the case. And, there's a lot of racial discrimination in that situation. So that is called reproductive justice.

And I'm trying to explore that now in Syracuse. A piece for the Everson Museum. And working with people from the town, from this town of Syracuse, and trying to figure out how Syracuse is not different from a lot of other places, but maternal mental health, mental health and medical accessibility keeps free people from all kind of leading off of the fulfilled life that they would aspire to.

**Would you say that doing this project in the Central New York region sort of influenced the trajectory of your project?**

Oh, definitely. Because I had I did write a proposal and I was aware of the situation in Seneca Falls. And I've learned more about Auburn. And there's a whole history of women's suffrage, of women speaking out for their rights. But it's a complicated history, and people are starting to challenge that. Like what? What did those what who who were the women?

Those people were women of our of previous generations who were great leaders. But who were they really fighting for? Were they fighting for the whole population of women are fighting just for white women and trying to analyze that. We had to look back at history, not in it. We call it revisionist, but we're just looking at a deep from a deeper perspective.

So I didn't, I actually wrote about that in our New York State Council for the Arts. But we'll we'll see how it fits into the film.

**At Newhouse we have many aspiring filmmakers. Do you have any advice for them, or anyone that is looking to storytell in unique and creative ways?**

Yeah. Oh, I would say no matter what tools do you have, at your fingertips that you can make work and that if you if you have a cell phone, you can actually make a fantastic film. These days, I teach lots of workshops that use the cell phone and that the great thing about the digital sphere is it's it's, democratization of the filmmaking process, and you just can't say enough about that because it's been such a shift.

So, anybody can be a one person band and, and come up with the story and shoot it and edit it, and that's pretty fantastic. You know, there's actually not really an excuse except, that you accept lack of perseverance. So you just got to try it. And that's a wonderful. But it used to be that painting and poetry were the cheap arts.

But now filmmaking can be.