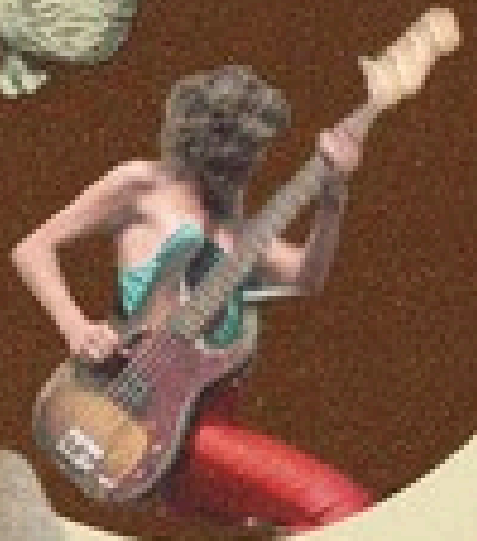
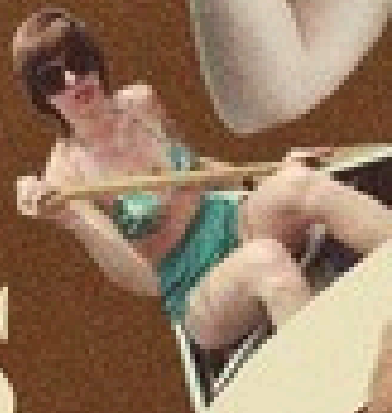
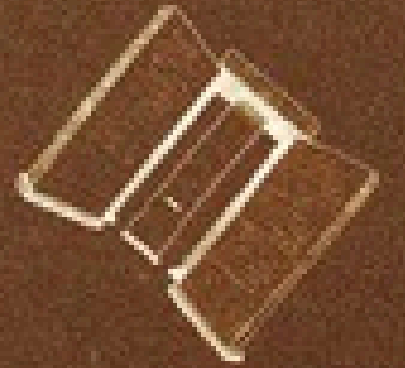
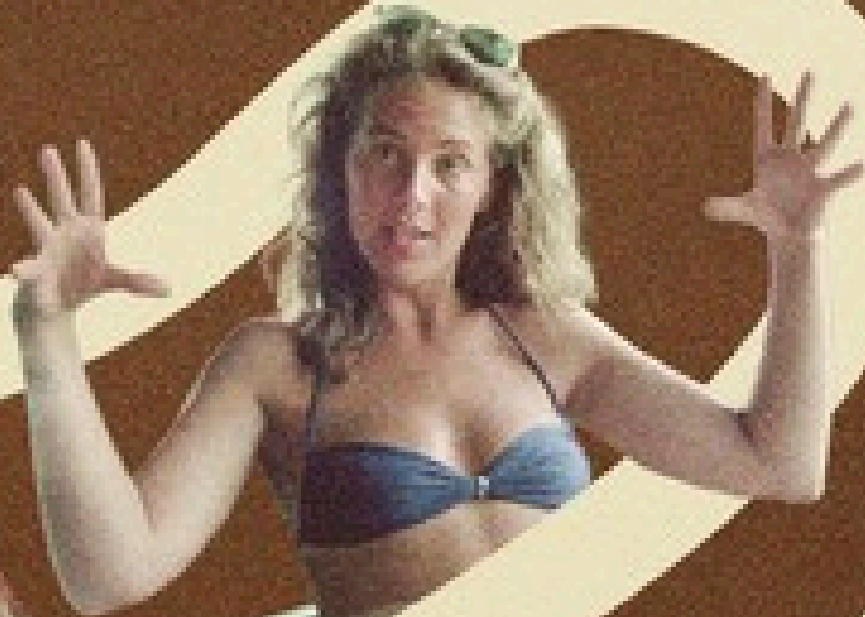


Sherman's March



Sherman's March

A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South
During an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation

Directed by Ross McElwee
Newly Restored in 4K

159 MINUTES | DOCUMENTARY | ENGLISH | USA | 1986

[OFFICIAL WEBSITE](#) | [OFFICIAL STILLS](#)

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LOGLINE

After his girlfriend breaks up with him, a young filmmaker retracing Sherman's March to the Sea shifts his focus to document his encounters with the Southern women he meets along the way in a landmark of first-person filmmaking.

SUMMARY

Armed with a 16mm camera and a grant to make a documentary about the lingering aftermath of William Tecumseh Sherman's 1864 march to the sea, Ross McElwee gets sidetracked. After his girlfriend breaks up with him, Ross shifts his attention from the historical to the personal, to the battlefield of modern love, and embarks on a sociological chronicle that documents the courting rites and rituals of the New South. A generous and humanistic portrait of several remarkable women that Ross meets along the way, SHERMAN'S MARCH sketches its characters with novelistic sensitivity: Pat, an aspiring actress with a yen for Burt Reynolds; Claudia, a roller-skating interior designer; Jackie, the activist whose anti-nuclear advocacy dovetails with Ross's deepest fears; and above all, Charleen Swansea, Ross's mentor and a one-woman Greek chorus of unsolicited romantic counsel. A landmark of first-person filmmaking that presaged everything from Michael Moore to reality TV, SHERMAN'S MARCH is now available in a new 4K restoration.



AWARDS & RECOGNITION

World Premiere – Berlin International Film Festival, 1986

Grand Jury Prize, US Premiere — Sundance Film Festival, 1987

Best Documentary — Kansas City Film Critics Circle, 1987

Special Jury Award — USA Film Festival, Dallas, 1987

National Society of Film Critics Award — 1987

U.S. National Film Registry, Library of Congress — 2000

“One of the Top 20 Documentaries of All Time” — International Documentary Association

Cinéma du Réel Retrospective — Centre Pompidou, Paris



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I had no firm idea as to how to begin shooting *Sherman's March*. That is, I only knew that I wanted to make some sort of film about my homeland, the South, and I was interested in the degree to which the South was still haunted by the Civil War - Sherman's campaign in particular - but I never intended for it to be an historical documentary. I thought perhaps my shooting would yield more than one film, and I assumed that racial relations in the so-called "New South" would be a major theme - perhaps the major theme of the film. But other themes became more dominant, though the notion of how blacks and whites coexist in the South is still imbedded in much of the footage. I thought I would probably narrate it with first-person voice-over, as I had done in *Backyard*, but I wasn't enthusiastic about stepping in front of the camera to perform monologues. I was more comfortable behind the camera. But as I finished my first month of shooting in North Carolina and realized that this film was going to be more directly autobiographical than I had anticipated, I began filming monologues. I thought it would be best at least to get them on film. I could decide whether to use them later.

I was on the road for about four months, and shot, or was ready to shoot, nearly every day. I was open to filming anything that came along. Serendipity was paramount. The only requirement I forced on myself was that I somehow stick to the path Sherman's army made as it swung through Georgia and the Carolinas. I shot perhaps twenty-five hours of film. I did not have a very big budget and had to marshal my film stock carefully. I sometimes wonder how much more footage I would have shot if I had been shooting video, but video was not really viable for field-shooting back in the early 1980s when I shot Sherman's.

The first test screening of any material from *Sherman's March* was comprised of scenes from my meeting and pursuit of Pat Rendleman, the aspiring actress who was in search of Burt Reynolds. I did not include my Atlanta monologue, filmed in a motel after Pat left Atlanta.

After the screening, there was a sense that something was missing, so I reluctantly cut that monologue into the version I had shown, and it seemed to work. I then processed all the other monologues I had shot on the road and ended up using most of them. I got over my camera-shyness and my reluctance to put the filmmaker in front of the camera. The first assemblage of all the footage I had shot, with all of the portraits, was eight hours long! I projected it for a small group of filmmaker friends. It took me another two and a half years to finish editing *Sherman's March*.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

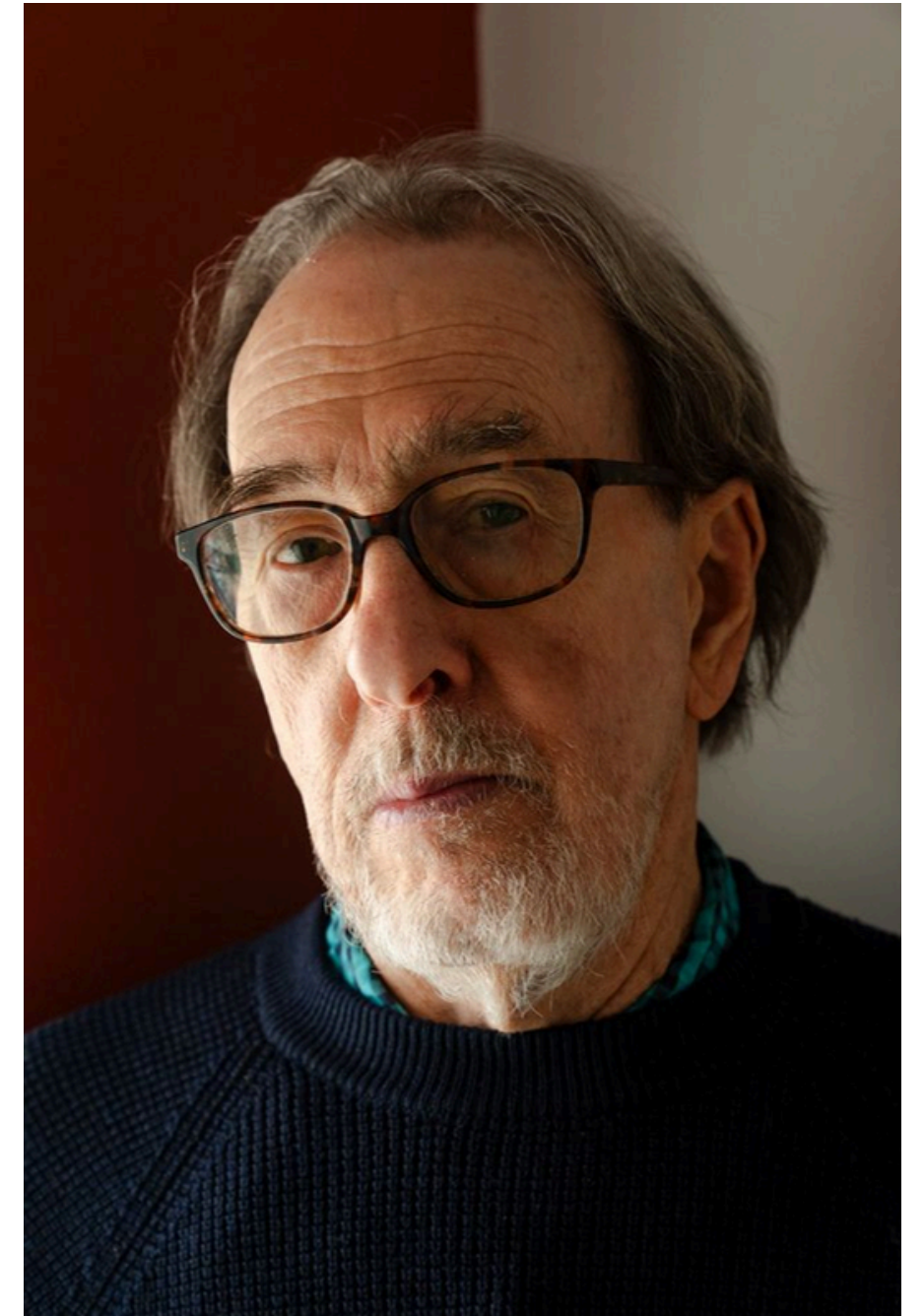
Ross McElwee has made eleven feature-length documentaries as well as a number of shorter films. *Sherman's March* has won numerous awards, including Best Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival. *Sherman's March* was also chosen for preservation by the Library of Congress National Film Registry in 2000 as a "historically significant American motion picture." *Bright Leaves* premiered at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival's Directors' Fortnight and was nominated for Best Documentary by both the Director's Guild of America and the Writer's Guild of America. McElwee's *In Paraguay* premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2008, and he returned to Venice in 2011 to premiere *Photographic Memory*.

In 2005, complete retrospectives of McElwee's films were presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and later in Paris, Brussels, Milan, Lisbon, New Zealand, Seoul, Quito, and Nyon, Switzerland. Four of his films were featured in a selection of western documentaries shown for the first time in Tehran, and in 2015, McElwee presented his films in Changchun, Guangzhou, and Beijing, China.

McElwee has received fellowships and grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute, the LEF Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. McElwee received the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival's Career Award in 2007.

His new film *Remake*, premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2025, receiving The Impact Golden Globes Prize for Documentary and the Bisato Award for Best Documentary. *Remake* will be making its North American premiere at True/False Film Fest in March 2026.

Director's Filmography: 1980, *Charleen*; 1982, *Backyard*; 1986, *Sherman's March*; 1989, *Something to Do with the Wall*; 1991, *Time Indefinite*; 1996, *Six O'Clock News*; 2003, *Bright Leaves*; 2009, *In Paraguay*; 2011, *Photographic Memory*



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION, RELEASE, AND RESTORATION OF SHERMAN'S MARCH

SHERMAN'S MARCH was shot in the early 1980s on 16mm film, with Ross McElwee acting as a one-man crew, serving as his own cinematographer and sound recordist with a miniature Nagra SN. The film was shot on a mix of Kodak color negative stocks, predominantly Eastman Color Negative II (7247) and Eastman Color Negative 250T (7293). McElwee recalled a production plagued by "terrible humidity and heat in Georgia and the Carolinas, not to mention the annoying presence of mosquitoes and blood-sucking cone noses. And beyond that, being sure to keep the negative protected from heat during weeks of shooting and then packing it up in special x-ray proof shipping containers and flying back with it to Boston. A different era of documentary filmmaking, for sure!"

The original release of SHERMAN'S MARCH, mounted by First Run Features in 1986, was distributed entirely through 16mm prints. Although several of McElwee's later films would be blown up to 35mm to facilitate theatrical distribution, SHERMAN'S MARCH was not. Nevertheless, the film opened at the Bleecker Street Cinema in New York and played widely in theaters, museums, and colleges, and was included on Top Ten lists from the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, the *New York Daily News*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, among others. It became First Run Feature's highest-grossing release, as well as one of the most successful documentaries up to that time.

SHERMAN'S MARCH was released by First Run Features on VHS following the theatrical release. A DVD version followed in 2004, using the existing standard-definition master. That video transfer has been the only version available until now, including on streaming. For its 40th anniversary, the original 16mm A & B rolls of SHERMAN'S MARCH were scanned in 4K by Gamma Ray Digital. The original 16mm mixed magnetic track was used for the soundtrack.

RESTORATION PRODUCED BY MARK MEATTO
RESTORATION SUPERVISED BY ROSS MCELWEE

FILM RESTORATION & COLOR
GAMMA RAY DIGITAL
Perry Paolantonio
Benn Robbins

SPECIAL THANKS
Cinema Conservancy
Harvard Film Archive
Library of Congress

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema by Scott MacDonald (Oxford University Press, 2014)

American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary – The Cambridge Turn by Scott MacDonald (University of California Press, 2013)

"Hiding Behind the Camera," by Jessica Weisberg, *The New Yorker*, February 2013

"Camera Angling to Reconcile Then and Now" by John Anderson, *New York Times*, October 2012

"Making Sense of Ross McElwee and 'Sherman's March'," by Mark Feeney, *Boston Globe*, February 2012



ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is the prestigious North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary feature films. Recent releases include Cannes Directors' Fortnight baseball comedy *Eephus* by Carson Lund; Sarah Friedland's Venice prize-winning coming-of-old-age drama, *Familiar Touch*, starring Kathleen Chalfant; Angus MacLachlan's poignant family portrait, *A Little Prayer*, starring David Strathairn; and Charlie Shackleton's Sundance award-winning true-crime autocritique, *Zodiac Killer Project*. Upcoming releases include the Dardennes' Belgian Oscar Entry, *Young Mothers*; Amanda Kramer's Sundance body swapping comedy starring Juliette Lewis, *By Design*; and François Ozon's Albert Camus adaptation, *The Stranger*.

Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premier venue for independent and foreign films. For more information, visit www.musicboxfilms.com.

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