

LERINS

Portrait of a woman



Alice Guy-Blaché

A Prolific Pioneer Yet Forgotten in the Seventh Art

We know of Léon Gaumont and the Lumière brothers, but few have heard of Alice Guy-Blaché.

Yet, an extraordinary destiny is that of Alice Guy-Blaché (1873-1968), **the world's first screenwriter and director starting in 1896 in France, and later a producer and studio head in the United States.**

At 21, Alice joined Léon Gaumont's company as a secretary. They were captivated by the first screening of the Lumière Cinematograph in 1895. Gaumont decided to create one of the first cinema studios. Passionate about photography, Alice suggested to her boss that she could make short films, convinced that this technique could serve stories.

Thus, in **1896, she became the world's first female film director**, and a pioneer of fictional cinema, with *The Cabbage Fairy*.

Gaumont entrusted her with numerous films. She directed the first historical epic in the history of cinema, recounting several episodes from the life of Christ, one chapter requiring more than 300 extras, inspiring more than one filmmaker!

Gaumont, holder of the patent for the first "talking" cinema, the chronophone, sent to the United States one of his assistants, Herbert Blaché, who had just married Alice and she accompanied him. It was a fiasco, but she decided to make films there.

The life of Alice Guy is a novel that, unfortunately, would turn sour. The nascent film industry, controlled by men, would sideline her, including her husband from whom she would divorce. Her company could not withstand the Hollywood juggernaut. Returning to France, she was equally ignored by the industry, as well as by film historians.

It took director Pamela B. Green for an American documentary to honor this French cinema pioneer, with *Be Natural: The Untold Story of Alice Guy-Blaché*.

So, this documentary on Alice's life, released in 2018: “Be Natural: The Untold Story of Alice Guy-Blaché”, produced and narrated by Francophile and Francophone Jodie Foster, is a must-watch.