

# Foreword

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*Joe Rubin*

*Founder, Vinegar Syndrome*

The first time I met Roberta Findlay in person was to go down to lower Manhattan and inventory a storage unit she'd rented to house the various negatives which, for years, had languished behind a wall at a recording equipment museum in Brooklyn. She'd brought along one of her male studio technicians to do the heavy lifting part of the job, noting (with her always slightly cynical humor) that such a task was only suitable for a man. Our "helper" for the day was completely floored by the revelation that his boss had once enjoyed a prolific career directing and shooting "porno movies" (among other things) and, on the taxi ride back to Sear Sound, kept inquiring about details on the subject, eventually asking how exactly she went about directing sex scenes. Without missing a beat, Roberta loudly shot back: "I told them to screw, and they screwed!" The resulting gasp on the taxi driver's face was truly priceless.

Summarizing the life and career of someone like Roberta Findlay is a bundle of contradictions: artistically, politically, and at times even morally. For a filmmaker who has worked on projects in nearly every imaginable genre, and having held nearly every key creative position in the medium of cinema itself (sometimes close to half a dozen on a single project), Findlay has often tried—quite deliberately—to remove herself from her work.

Be it through the use of pseudonyms; focusing on genres and subject matter that, by her own admission, she found boring at best, distasteful at worst, it can seem difficult to find the artist reflected in the art. That, coupled with her deliberate avoidance of prospective interviewers and well-known distaste for the very concept of academic interest in the areas of film in which she toiled has, unfortunately, left her incredible career of directing

over thirty theatrical features and nearly double that number in cinematography credits, out of much of the recent collective “rediscovery” of key genre-based filmmakers (a wrong that my company Vinegar Syndrome has been actively trying to right through our ongoing preservation and release efforts for both her hardcore and horror films).

However, Findlay is and was never anything less than an astute and primarily self-taught master craftsman who delighted in using the cinematic form for equal parts creative release and commercial gain, frequently devising ingenious and economical methods of making movies under the most inhospitable conditions.

The ten chapters in this collection offer an initial opportunity for scholars and cinephiles alike to begin finally exploring one of New York exploitation cinema’s most challenging and key figureheads. From examinations of some of her most iconic directorial efforts, to studies of the subtly and consistently present themes across her vast body of work, to deconstructions of the more notorious and controversial titles in her filmography, *ReFocus: The Films of Roberta Findlay* fills a crucial gap in the history and culture of independent movie making while shedding light on a woman who has proudly not cared about any of it.

