

Michele Prettyman Beverly SSAP Presentation

Presentation/Essay title: “Finding Kathleen and *Losing Ground*: The Cinema and Philosophy of Kathleen Collins Prettyman”

Abstract

In an essay entitled “Finding Kathleen and *Losing Ground*: The Cinema and Philosophy of Kathleen Collins Prettyman” I examine the life and cinematic vision of Collins Prettyman who was the first black woman feature filmmaker as well as a prolific writer and philosopher. Collins Prettyman’s film *Losing Ground* was released in 1982 just six years before her death at age 46. I explore her pioneering approach to filmmaking that unites her background in philosophy with compelling character-driven narratives. Her cinematic style emphasized the interior dimensions of human experience and crisis in an era dominated by social realism and authenticating narratives of blackness. I discuss the influences that shaped her unique aesthetic and philosophical point of view alongside her interpretations of the work of other black artists of her time like Lorraine Hansberry and LA School filmmaker Charles Burnett. While focusing on Collins Prettyman’s contributions as an independent filmmaker, I also challenge the limitations which have often governed black cultural politics and film criticism; limitations which have often obscured our capacity to fully see and experience neglected, innovative work like *Losing Ground*. This film provides a powerful model of independent cinema that is not anchored to the regimes of representation of dominant cinema and which also challenges the cultural politics and expectations of black critics, scholars, and viewers.