

## Germaine Dulac: First Feminist Filmmaker\*

*William Van Wert*

Puis l'essentiel n'est-il pas que nous soyons nos maîtres, et les maîtres des femmes, de l'amour, aussi?

What is most important, is it not that we be our own masters and the masters of women and also of love?

—André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, 1924.

In the ten years between 1920 and 1930 French film established itself as the equal of the American, Russian, and German cinemas; more importantly, it showed a skeptical world that film was indeed a serious and formidable art form. Freed from its false reputation as a subgenre of theatre or photography, French film in this decade began to command respect and appreciation from artists and audiences alike for its potential both as product (document) and as performance (fiction). It attracted painters (Duchamp, Picabia, Léger, Dali) and poets (Breton, Desnos). They foresaw very clearly that film would become an immensely popular art, a means of reaching audiences beyond the bookstores and museums, beyond national boundaries of territory and language. They believed that the cinema had almost messianic powers, that through film the post-war audience could be restored to a lost innocence, away from

\* Reprinted from *Women and Film*, nos. 5 and 6 (1974).