

Les Cahiers du Cinema

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This review is excerpted from a longer piece about the best films at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival.

Like Christopher Munch, Nina Menkes is one of the forces of "no-budget" cinema on the West Coast, with a genius for obtaining a maximum of free goods and services for her productions.

Menkes films in 35mm, but, alongside directing, also serves as director of photography and camera operator; a difficult process, but one she finds essential in maintaining the integrity of her vision: "I do not use storyboards. I prepare a scene, but refine it during the actual moment of the shoot. It would be impossible to convey my needs to someone else." Nina Menkes financed her latest feature, *THE BLOODY CHILD*, garnered through a combination of grants, the largest of which came from a new American public television organisation, ITVS.*

THE BLOODY CHILD was inspired by a newspaper article which describes the arrest of a US marine, just back from the Gulf War, who is apprehended in the middle of the Californian Mojave Desert, with the bloody body of his wife lying in the back seat of his car. Benefiting from the hypnotic presence of her sister Tinka, who, for the past twelve years, has been her lead actress, co-writer, and co-editor, the director transforms this tragic, yet somehow banal incident into an obsessive meditation on the rampant infiltration of violence within the American landscape.

The almost abstract structure of the film, based on repetition, allows for a fascinating and mysterious connection not only with the inner world of the murdered spouse, but also with the turmoil felt by the young woman marine Captain in charge of the arrest (Tinka Menkes). Serge Daney** has noted that when lacking financial resources, the most precious thing a filmmaker can offer the audience is his/her own body. Through her sister/actress, Nina Menkes achieves a similar alchemy: "Our collaboration lies at a very deep and complex level, which allows me to explore the more obscure areas of my own psyche. In the part of the Marine Captain, Tinka, apparently cool, but torn on the inside, takes both physical and mental risks."

*The Independent Television Service produces work with funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Serge Daney was the founder and head critic of Les Cahiers du Cinema.