

Selected as one of 1991's ten best films by the *Los Angeles Times* and the opening feature at the Munich International Film Festival, *Queen of Diamonds* has generated interest in Nina Menkes's earlier films, *The Great Sadness of Zohara* (1983), and *Magdalena Viraga* (1986). All three films feature the filmmaker's sister, Tinka Menkes, and explore themes of loneliness, alienation, and spiritual and physical oppression through poetry and stark, beautiful imagery. —Julie Diana

# NOTES FROM A QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

by Nina Menkes

Before making images of thriving, surviving women, maybe we should make and watch some images of what it's like RIGHT NOW—not a confused, babbling, stupid, sexy, waiting female—but yes, a hurting, desolate, alienated one. Without giving voice to those damaged layers, it is meaningless to jump ahead and show surviving thriving women...but to clarify Hey! many of us ARE thriving and surviving, DESPITE sexism, in the face of it, in courageous defiance of it...and yet, I don't think there's a woman alive in this country and even, I would say, in this **world**, who doesn't carry the burden of her femaleness, her #2 status, and all that goes with it.

I think we have to talk about THAT: about the deep meaning and the shape/form, color/texture of what it means to be always, always, always #2. I wish I could see more honest work from women filmmakers—go ahead and put yourself on the line—what are you really going to lose? Well, you're right: If you even ALLOW YOURSELF to *FEEL* what is really going on—and of course that's the hardest part—you'll either be fired or quit.

In her review of *Privilege* by Yvonne Rainer in the *Atlanta Art Papers*, Linda Brooks called Rainer's film "a witty and dazzling complex docudrama on racism and menopause...the disorienting juxtaposition of her own experiences with those of fictional and

actual women acts to recuperate...from the stigmatized event of menopause: Through the film's protean nature the conventionally negative transforming of a woman's body becomes a positive event to be celebrated: a woman's privilege." I would add: The privilege of the title refers to the privilege we DON'T have and men DO have...and the film's power, for me, comes as much from a sort of celebration of menopause (a celebration, simply by FOCUSING on a taboo subject)—as it does from an exposé of the deep pain that all these issues carry with them. The filmmaker lets her scars show, and I love her for it. Thank you, Yvonne Rainer. You give me courage in your courageousness.

But it's good to remember that good honest work can't flow out of people who are leading cut-off, dishonest lives—our work is always simply an extension of our lived experience, and that's the problem, the real problem, as I see it: Too many of us



Tinka Menkes plays male characters in her politically re-worked fairy tales, *The Great Theater of Love*

women try, and succeed, in ignoring THE ACTUAL EVIDENCE of our own daily lives.

Media, of course, (mainstream media) is a culprit in this mess. Let's hear Angela Carter: "This confusion as to the experience of reality—that what I know from my experience is true is, in fact, not so—is most apparent, in the fantasy love play of the archetypes (male and female), which generations of artists have contrived to make seem so attractive that, lulled by their dreams, many women willingly ignore the palpable evidence of their own responses." Anyone who hasn't yet read her mind-blowing book *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* should do so!

Another example is Tinka Menkes's *The Great Theater of Love*, her two original one-act plays. My beloved sister Tinka speaks right from the heart about female loneliness and longing, with the clear understanding that a sweet, attractive lover WILL NOT make that feeling go away and questions the egomaniacal male-centered, constricted view of the universe that we live in daily.