

by Robert KOEHLER



ACTRESS TINKA MENKES (L) AND DIRECTOR/CINEMATOGRAPHER NINA MENKES ON THE SET OF *QUEEN OF DIAMONDS*

Queen of Diamonds

Las Vegas is what you make of it. Hollywood

makes it into a place of speedy, jacked-up risk (as calm as it ever gets in Hollywood's Vegas is Jonathan Demme's Melvin and Howard). Nina Menkes is an American filmmaker with no interest in that Vegas. Hers is a place of great expanses of dry earth, smudged blue sky, flat lakes, lonely people and incongruously garish or claustrophobic interiors. Her second feature, *Queen of Diamonds*, is about moods, the Old Testament, death, marriage, hazard and how we watch images on a screen; it is only tangentially about a black jack dealer (Tinka Menkes) whose husband is missing.

Menkes, who once photographed Bedouin people in the Sinai, has an eye for compositional drama and a sense of pace that couldn't be more opposed to Hollywood time, which assumes viewer impatience. Although Menkes' shots do not always lend themselves to the scrutiny allowed by her multi-minute takes, most become hypnotic in a way almost that no other American filmmaker is managing these days. Maintaining the integrity of a radical experimentalist with the resources of fine-grain 35mm film technology, LA-based Menkes may be on a course to making an unprecedented kind of cinema. *Queen of Diamonds* is a step in that course.

"AN UNPRECEDENTED KIND OF CINEMA"