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SCREENING ROOM

'Child' Takes a Fresh Look at Violence

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Leave it to Nina Menkes, a major experimental filmmaker, to find a genuinely fresh way of confronting us with violence in her bold new film "The Bloody Child." It is presented as part of the American Cinematheque's Alternative Screen series Friday at 8 p.m. at Raleigh Studios. (A discussion with Menkes follows.)

The maker of "The Great Sadness of Zohara," "Magdalena Viraga" and "Queen of Diamonds" took a newspaper article as her inspiration for this film. Much of her beautiful, utterly demanding and enlightening picture takes place on a Mojave Desert highway, where a group of Marines awaits backup in bringing in another Marine. Recently returned from the Gulf War, the character has murdered his wife, and her bloodied body lies in the back seat of a car.

The film's key figure is a Marine captain, played by Tinka Menkes (the director's sister and collaborator), who is the arresting officer and absorbs the impact of the dead woman's spirit. This is expressed in surreal imagery intercut with an otherwise near-documentary film to suggest the ways in which we internalize violence and its myriad effects upon us.

As with Menkes' other films, "The Bloody Child" warrants further exposure and greater consideration of its complex implications. (213) 466-FILM.

Mamoru Oshii's timely animated feature "Ghost in the Shell" (opening Wednesday at the Nuart for one week) projects a future in which a computer virus becomes the ultimate tool in political espionage yet longs to become human. Although the film's heavy-duty technical jargon will zoom over many heads, the film is a clear warning against the abuses of artificial intelligence.

Repeating at the Nuart at noon Saturday and Sunday is Helena Solberg's "Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business," an illuminating, poignant consideration of a much loved, ill-fated entertainer. (310) 478-6379.

On Saturday in Venice, filmmakers Erik Deutschman and Relah Eckstein will present "My Favorite Films," composed of eight vintage animation and experimental shorts. Although many would consider them technically primitive by today's standards, they're all works of exquisite charm and sophistication.

Norman McLaren's "A Phantasy" follows the adventures of six bouncing balls across a Dali-esque landscape; it will be echoed by Hans Richter's experimental "Ghosts Before Breakfast" (1928), which follows four bowler hats all over town before they land on the heads of four gents who have just sat down for an outdoor morning repast. Especially delicious is Ladislav Starevich's 1912 "The Revenge of Kinematograph Cameraman."

An excerpt from Jean Renoir's "Le Fille d'Eau" (1924), Man Ray's "L'Etoile de Mer," featuring his legendary model Kiki, and Rene Clair's "Entr'acte" represent the early French experimental cinema at its richest: dreamlike, free-associating, witty, wildly Freudian and goddess-worshipping.

Other charmers include Willis O'Brien's 1914 animated "Dinosaur and the Missing Link," in which the Link (who anticipates special effects wizard O'Brien's King Kong nearly 20 years later) sees a likely meal in a surprisingly diminutive dinosaur. The presentation will be at 8:30 p.m. at Beyond Baroque, 681 Venice Blvd., Venice. (310) 822-3006.

The Sunset 5 launches its "Russian Women Filmmakers Series" Saturday and Sunday at 11 a.m. with Larissa Shepitko's landmark 1976 "The Ascent," a widely heralded film as harsh as it is poetic. Two partisans, Sotnikov (Boris Plotnikov), a teacher with a hacking cough, and the sturdy soldier Rybak (Vladimir Gostuhin), foraging for food in wintry German-occupied Byelorussia, are eventually captured by the enemy, but it's Sotnikov who calmly resists thoughts of torture. Early on, Shepitko makes it clear that she's identifying the two men with Jesus Christ and Judas to create a profoundly transcendent allegory that takes a familiar Russian war story and turns it into a lament for the lack of spirituality in Soviet life. (213) 848-3500.