

Film review

'The Bloody Child'

By David Hunter

A good film about the "negative energy" of violence, but with perhaps an unnecessarily thorny title, "The Bloody Child" (at West LA's Nuart) plays a fascinating game with time and point of view, resulting in a powerful experience unlike anything in the marketplace.

This third feature collaboration between sister independents Nina and Tinka Menkes ("Magdalena Viraga," "Queen of Diamonds") is too subtle and surreal for the masses, but for those with the patience, "The Bloody Child" is a masterful exercise in the deconstruction of events that cinematically leads to unforgettable conclusions.

The title refers to the witches' scene in "Macbeth," some lines of which are repeated in singsong snippets by girlish voices on the soundtrack, while on the screen a naked woman lies in a forest and writes mysteriously on her arm.

These unsettling images seem at first totally unconnected to the film's primary story — a young Marine kills his wife and is caught trying to bury the body in the desert by two Marines on patrol. But this inspired-by-a-real-incident plot is fragmented and presented in a documentary style that keeps winding back on itself.

Nina Menkes holds the camera at a distance as the arresting captain (Tinka Menkes), sergeant

THE BLOODY CHILD

A Menkesfilm production

Independent Television Service

Producer-director Nina Menkes

Writers-editors Tinka Menkes, Nina Menkes

Director of photography Nina Menkes

Color/stereo

Cast:

Captain Tinka Menkes

Sergeant Russ Little

Murderer Robert Mueller

Enlisted man Jack O'Hara

Murdered wife Sherry Sibley

Running time — 85 minutes

No MPAA rating

(Russ Little) and several others talk shop at the crime scene. There are also scenes set in a raunchy country-western bar where the soldiers are seen emoting with the help of alcohol.

Another point of view comes from the murderer (Robert Mueller), who has almost no dialogue but hauntingly evokes the kind of lost soul that can unexpectedly turn homicidal. Menkes many times comes back to an ugly moment when the outraged sergeant mistreats the killer, but she contrasts this kind of reflexive male aggression with the contemplative lover (Jack O'Hara) of the captain.

With the threads running parallel on nonlinear timelines, the North African odyssey of the captain becomes the end point, but the film itself manages to conclude where it began, in the desert of human emotions that remains when destructive energy is unleashed. □