

MOVIE REVIEW

# A surreal yearning in 'Phantom'

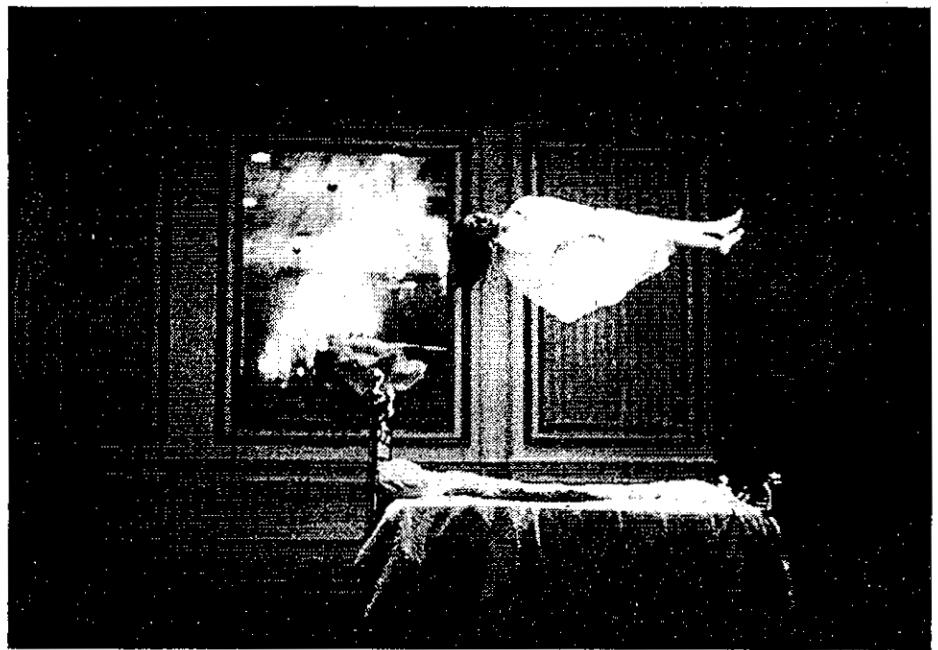
By KEVIN THOMAS  
Special to The Times

**W**ITH "Phantom Love," Nina Menkes, long one of the most audacious and potent experimental filmmakers, continues her explorations of solitary women undergoing a painful process of self-discovery in an often surreal, fragmented world that mirrors the tumult and longing in their inner lives.

Like its predecessors, "Phantom Love," screening Saturday at REDCAT as part of the "Where Did Our Love Go" film series, is shot superbly by cinematographer Chris Soos in rich black and white and follows one striking, evocative image with another. It's easy — and best — to yield to Menkes' powerfully seductive vision, which invites viewers to make intuitive connections. For all its surreal touches, "Phantom Love" is actually one of Los Angeles-based Menkes' most accessible works.

"Phantom Love" opens with a sex scene in which a beautiful woman, Lulu (Marina Shoif) is clearly not getting any pleasure out of the single-minded, self-absorbed exertions of the young man (Bobby Naderi).

Menkes returns periodically to scenes of this one-sided business; it is possible that Lulu's story is unfolding as a flashback, taking place in her memory while her lover pursues his strenuous efforts.



NINA MENKES

**A WOMAN ADRIFT:** Marina Shoif stars as Lulu, here in a dream sequence, in the feature film by L.A.-based Nina Menkes.

Lulu's apartment, furnished with tasteful, traditional-style furniture, is in a splendid, old Spanish-style structure, and has a formality echoed in her elegant appearance: She favors dark gowns and glamorous makeup.

Lulu, who speaks with a charming Russian accent, and her home seem from another era, but the brutality and chaos of the contemporary world are forever intruding. In her living room she often watches news of the war in Iraq, and the sounds of sirens and traffic disrupt her tranquil surroundings. In the street outside, police arrest a youth; a baby placed in a cardboard box is abandoned in an alley.

Lulu's life is highly marginalized, divided by her time at home and at a casino where she works as a croupier. Lulu's imagination may yield such Freudian images as an immense python oozing down the hallway outside her apartment door, but gradually she is confronted with the real-life psychotic breakdown of her younger sister Nitzan (Juliette Marquis).

Trying to deal with Nitzan and warding off their intrusive

## Nina Menkes' 'Phantom Love'

**Where:** REDCAT, at Walt Disney Concert Hall, 631 W. 2nd St., L.A.

**When:** Saturday, 9:30 p.m., part of the "Where Did Our Love Go" film series running Friday through Sunday at REDCAT, associated with MOCA's "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution"

**Price:** \$8, \$6 for students, \$4 for CalArts students

**Info:** (213) 237-2800  
[www.redcat.org/season/0607/fv/love.php](http://www.redcat.org/season/0607/fv/love.php)

mother propels Lulu onto a path of self-liberation that Menkes expresses in an increasingly daring, surreal manner. It's not surprising that Menkes takes her motto from a Zen priest: "Make no provision for retreat." There's no turning back for Lulu in her interior odyssey or for Menkes in creating such a challenging yet luminous work.

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