

Queen of Diamonds

Director: [Nina Menkes](#)

Screenwriter: [Nina Mankes](#)

Institute History

[1991 Sundance Film Festival](#)

Winner of the 1986 Best Independent Film Award from the Los Angeles Film Critics for Magdalena Virago!, Nina Menkes has been internationally recognized as one of America's most intriguing and challenging underground filmmakers. Menkes calls her latest film, which is difficult to describe but cinematically evocative, a minimalistic, postpop X ray of the U.S. What can definitely be said about Queen of Diamonds is that it defies the logic that a plot description will always tell you what a film is about. Nonetheless, made in close collaboration with her sister Tina, who is the film's star and co-editor, Queen of Diamonds captures the harsh atmosphere surrounding a Las Vegas dealer.

Working intuitively, Menkes speaks authoritatively with a European sensibility. What is most striking about Queen of Diamonds is the manner in which irrational fear is thematically aroused. It does not emanate from the film's plot, nor from the dealer's overt behavior, but is a result of an aggressive, unflinching camera pointed at the character. Extended deliberate shots on the dealer heighten the tension, because it is her impassivity, her lack of action and reaction, that is intimidating. She can dish out what she receives — compassion, anger, boredom, contempt. And with her steely demeanor, she can coexist with the mute and arid alienation around her, and in fact is part of it.

Masterfully shot, this "lower-than-low" budget film is in stunning 35-mm color and Dolby Stereo, a declaration of Menkes's perseverance as a totally independent filmmaker. Her strict adherence to her personal, challenging filmic language endows Queen of Diamonds with a tremendous amount of integrity and originality. This is a film that takes chances and maneuvers skillfully.

—Alberto Garcia

— Alberto Garcia

- Dramatic Feature
- 1991, Sundance Film Festival
- U.S.A., 77 min.

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