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details about her position as a referent for feminist cinema. In this interview, we have a preview of some of the issues she will discuss.



How do your projects come about and how do you work on the scripts?

My projects generally appear to me, as if from the atmosphere, the netherworld...I don't choose my projects, actually they choose me. Usually it's a figure, a character or a situation, and then images start appearing and I collect these images, over a certain period of time, it could be a few months or a year. Once the images have reached a critical mass, I examine them and try to discover the hidden or preexisting narrative, then the script happens, I feel my films come to me and that I channel them; it's an autonomous process. I feel lucky to receive these images.

A large part of your filmography has your sister, Tinka, as the main character. How would you describe this collaborative creative work?

We started working together by chance, when I made my first Super 8 film, **A Soft Warrior** (1981). The film shoot was set in my mother's apartment, and my sister, being a young teenager, was still living at home. I had cast two actresses to play me and my sister...but one fail



to show up! So I asked Tinka to play herself. (The film is about two sisters, and one is very ill). Since Tinka had, in fact, been very ill and had only recently recovered she did not want to play herself. So I said, OK, you play me!! Tinka covers herself in black paint and tries to connect with her sister, who is very ill. The film ties trauma to the process of art making, and Tinka's character is seen first creating her own art and then, in a way, transforming herself into her art. For me the black paint was part of a healing ritual or an attempted healing ritual, and connected to my feeling that filmmaking and art making is a way both to deal with trauma and to enter alternate levels of reality. When we got the dailies back we were stunned at the power of Tinka as an actress (who knew?). This was how our collaboration began. The work we have done together is very deep, interior and transformative. It is definitely not something that usually happens on film sets. We generally teleport to an alternate universe when filming and much of our communication is telepathic.

Being a truly independent filmmaker, what is the process of financing and production like for your projects?

This is the most painful and difficult part of filmmaking. In the USA, there is no support for independent film, as there is in Europe and other countries. It is brute capitalism in the USA, so this is why all my budgets have been very low. Perhaps now, after #METOO, with the awareness of how women directors have been blocked and severely discriminated against maybe there will be a change. Each film was a different struggle but the money aspect is the strangest and usually the most difficult and painful aspect for me.

If being an independent is not easy, it must be even less easy being a woman director. Do you feel that you have confronted particular difficulties throughout your career because you are a woman in an area (and an industry) that is in its majority run by men?

Of course yes! My first feature, *Magdalena Viraga* (1986), made while I was a student at the UCLA Film School, received a Los Angeles Film Critics Award. We got such a rave review in the Los Angeles Times that I almost fainted when I read it. And yet no one from Hollywood contacted me to offer me a chance to make another film. This would

have never happened to a man. This is only one example, but it is a good example of the kind of obstacles we faced at the time, and not much has changed in the meantime, sadly.

#34MDQFILMFEST

Your filmography is diverse in formalistic terms, but there is always a very particular and rigorous camera work. Plus, you are also your own cinematographer and camera person. How do you think about your camera work and what importance does it have for you?

It is very important and I can never imagine having someone else doing the camera for my films, this is because I feel my films through the lens. I don't like to create story boards, because I fear that if I did, it would mean losing the zen spontaneity of the moment...which to me is what I am reaching for. If I stood to the side, while someone else was shooting I would feel outside the movie and outside the alternate electrifying universe which is being created moment by moment inside the camera. My last few films I worked with professional excellent DP's who handled lighting and technical aspects so I could focus on directing and camera work. I always design my own shots, it's very dear to me and I love it very much.

Your films deal with questions of gender in various ways. Your main characters tend to be female characters alienated in a violent world. Beyond what we might call the "content" of your films, how do you feel that your formal searches connect to this idea of a feminist perspective?

My formal searches are highly related to gender issues and to refusing the traditional way of looking. But it is not only the usual way of looking in terms of the way women have always been photographed, which is, by the way the subject of a new documentary feature film *Brainwashed*, which I am producing –this film is work in progress and we will be shooting during the festival at Mar Del Plata! I am the main subject of *Brainwashed*, discussing this precise subject matter—how women have traditionally been shot in films. The film is based on my cinematic presentation *Sex and Power: The Visual Language of Oppression*. But formal construction of shots and editing is also a larger issue which is-- how do we reproduce reality cinematically? Tarkovsky called film *Sculpting in Time* and I agree with that. Let's say sculpting in time and space. There is a traditional way to construct reality in m

narrative films, and I find this method very dull. It does not reflect the interior truth of reality and experience. So I feel, through the camera, what the inner truth is, of a scene, of a situation- a person in an emotional situation, and then I try to match that inner truth with the shot which I construct, and then again in terms of my editing decisions

Is there any director or are there any directors that you feel are an influence on your work, or with whom you feel in some way "related"?

Surely yes, I would include Chantal Akerman, Antonioni, Pasolini, especially *Accattone* and *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, Sergei Parajanov, Agnes Varda's *Vagabond* (not her other films, but that one), in a certain way Tarkovsky, and I love Lucrecia Martel; she creates alternate realities through shot design and editing, actually my favorite of her films is the first *La ciénaga*. I love the first film *The Wonders* by Alice Rohrwacher and *Los muertos* by Lisandro Alonso. I also love *Balthazar* by Bresson which I've seen at least 7 times and if we're talking about classics, how can anyone not love *8 1/2* by Fellini. These are some of my beloved films. In terms of influence, I was more influenced by writers and painters mainly, like the existential writers, Camus, Andre Breton, also Herman Melville- *Moby Dick*, Gertrude Stein (all!), Sylvia Plath, Sarah Kane (*4.48 Psychosis*). The surrealist painters and photographers were a big influence on me, including Dali, Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varos, Kay Sage, and more contemporary, Cindy Sherman.

All prints are courtesy of the Academy Film Archive.

Masterclass: Nina Menkes

Time: 17:00 hs

Location: Tronador Concert by Campari (Bvd. Marítimo Peralta Ramos 3143)

