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**The glamor that disempowers and the special effects that try to hide the macho violence**

**How does the cinema look at women? The question posed by Nina Menkes**

The Mar del Plata Festival dedicates a retrospective to the American filmmaker, owner of a radical and dreamlike cinema.

By Astrid Riehn



Menkes gave a masterclass and participated in a forum about cinema and genre.

"I know that my films are strange and are not for everyone, but I hope you like them," **Nina Menkes** said excitedly when she received an **Astor on her career at the Mar del Plata Film Festival, which dedicates a retrospective** . Then *Queen of Diamonds* was screened , premiered in 1991 at the Sundance Festival and a faithful exponent of her **film, radical and dreamlike** .

In addition, Menkes **provided a masterclass and participated in the second Forum of Cinema and Gender Perspective** , where he talked about a topic that he is passionate about: the way in which cinema looks at women. Professor at the California Institute of the Arts, had been addressing this issue for a long time inspired by feminist theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Judith Butler.

However, a few days after the scandal around Harvey Weinstein was uncovered, he wrote an article entitled "The visual language of oppression: Harvey did not work in a vacuum" for *Filmmaker* magazine that went viral. Now he prepares his own documentary on this subject, *Brainwashed*, for which he even recorded images in Mar del Plata.

**-What can you say about *Brainwashed* ?**

-The central idea is that the design of the shots is marked by gender and that the directors film women and leading men in a very different way. And I show it by analyzing films of class A directors, winners of major festivals such as Wim Wenders, Jean-Luc Godard, Sophia Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Spike Lee. From 1940 until today there is a very precise pattern that is repeated and that consists in disempowering women making us believe that they are showing them in a glamorous way. However, glamor is just a way to cover up violence.

**-What aspects do you analyze specifically?**

-The way of filming women in terms of framing, light or camera movement is different. From the point of view, the subject is always the man and the object is the woman, whose body is usually shown in a fragmented way. Straight men are never filmed like this. They are also usually filmed under a more artificial light and men under a more natural light; or they are shown disconnected from the narrative space. A typical example is when, suddenly, in a movie, a sexy girl who has nothing to do with history walks by, men stop to look at her and tell her things, and then continue as if nothing.

**-Why did he make the distinction of straight men?**

-This way of filming is so associated with the feminine that when you see a male body filmed like this, for example the tail of a man, one tends to associate it with a gay man. And in fact only gay men are usually filmed like this because they are put in a feminine position of lack of power and objectification. In the movie I include an example of a straight man filmed in this way that is the exception that confirms the rule. This is a scene from the 1975 *Mandingo* movie, in which the owner of a plantation in the southern United States forces a slave to have sex with her or, otherwise, will say that she raped her. In that sex scene, the slave is filmed exactly as a woman is filmed.

**-Because there is an unequal power relationship ...**

-That is why I say that it is the exception that confirms the rule: the only time I found that a heterosexual man was filmed like this is because he was black and slave. The funny thing is that when I show the scene to my students and see how the camera travels through the body of this black man everyone is horrified. But when they see the same mechanism in a woman's body, the reaction is "wow, what a body." Even women think about it.

**-Has being the daughter of Holocaust survivors had an impact on your cinema?**

-I think that family trauma was translated into the idea that you cannot necessarily trust a government, or majorities, or that people will be reasonable. In my case it translated into trusting a kind of inner wisdom, so I don't need to ask anyone: "Did you like it?" On the other hand, my mother always told me: "Don't forget that Hitler was chosen!" It also reminded me that Coca Cola is the most popular drink in the world even though it rots your teeth and hurts your health. In other words, popular does not necessarily mean good. It is usually the other way around.

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