

Nina Menkes appears in *BRAINWASHED: Sex-Camera-Power* by Nina Menkes, an official selection of the Premieres section at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival. Courtesy of Sundance Institute.



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Sundance: 'Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power' Exposes the Male Gaze

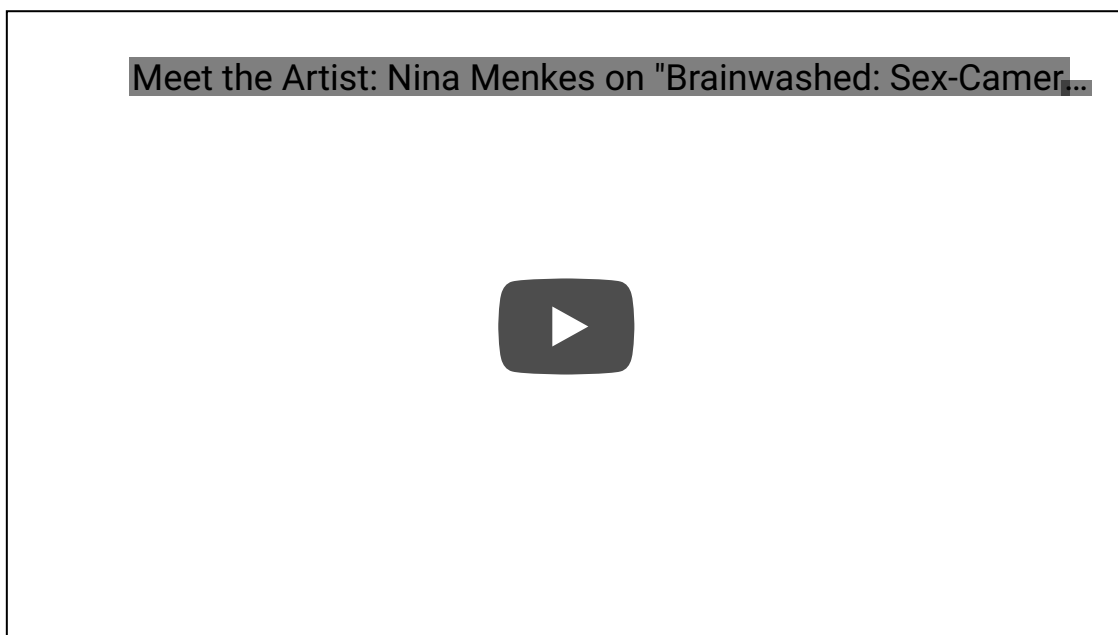
Nina Menkes uses film clips to show a disturbing trend: subtle techniques like framing and lighting can disempower women on the screen.

🕒 January 26, 2022 📺 141 views 📄 0 (<https://cinemacy.com/brainwashed-sex-camera-power-review/>)

Nina Menkes is not only one of America's earliest independent filmmakers but is also considered a cinematic feminist pioneer. Her first feature, *Magdalena Viraga* (1986) tells the story of a prostitute who gets sent to prison for killing her pimp. The film went on to win the Independent/Experimental Film and Video Award at the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards that same year.

Since her bold debut, Menkes has spent the last 30+ years observing a disturbing trend within the film industry, which she exposes in her latest documentary, *Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power*.
(<https://cinemacy.com>)

Playing like a TED Talk, Menkes takes the stage in a packed auditorium to discuss the nuanced but damaging gendered politics of shot design. She opens her argument by playing a clip from *Bladerunner 2049* (2017), that infamous scene (https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/9019ee32b0062d59c9a36678663bb6da?impolicy=wcms_crop_resize&cropH=736&cropW=1102&xPos=192&yPos=5&width=862&height=575) where a naked Ana de Armas interacts with Ryan Gosling.



Over the course of the film's hour and a half runtime, clips like these will prove her hypothesis that shot design is gendered, and males are consistently shot differently than females. Welcome to feminist film school 101.

As Menkes shows, being a filmmaker also means accepting a great level of responsibility. What you create has an effect on those who watch your movie. And for too long, women have been treated less than or objectified more than their male counterparts.

Aiding in Menkes' theory is Laura Mulvey, the film theorist who coined the term the "Male Gaze." Mulvey, alongside film school professors, psychotherapists, and film directors, all contribute stories from their first-hand experiences of misogyny in the industry that has a



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Using over 175 film clips from Hollywood blockbusters and cult classics, Menkes points out how simple, subtle techniques like framing and lighting can disempower women on the screen. For example, women are countlessly shot in fragmented ways, like close-ups on breasts, hips, and butts while men are usually always shot full body (even in hyper-sexualized films like *Magic Mike*). Another point, slow-motion has been consistently used on women to emphasize sexualization or victimization, whereas it's used on men to emphasize action scenes and toughness.

Menkes calls this a vicious triangle of repeated torment: the visual language of cinema can lead to employment discrimination against women which can lead to sexual abuse/assault. All that to say, what we see on screen has real-life consequences, "If the camera is predatory, the culture is predatory as well."

Although the points Menkes addresses are hard to hear (at times I even found myself wanting to defend these films), her points are indisputable. Watching her criticize scenes from some of my favorite films like *Phantom Thread*, *Contempt*, and *Eyes Wide Shut* (okay, that one may be obvious) made me feel uncomfortable—but that's the point. *Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power* is provocative on purpose. Its whole purpose is to shake up the industry to the subliminally victimizing messaging that we've been watching and accepting for far too long.

105 min.

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