



Nina Menke



## Nina Menkes

A singular voice in American filmmaking for over thirty years, Nina Menkes and her confrontational films still feel ahead of their time. Her work sits in direct rebuke to the Hollywood power structure, elevating themes of female subjectivity and isolation, alienated labor, misogynist violence, and the landscape of the American West. With echoes of Chantal Akerman, Menkes' unflinching feminist, leftist films made their mark on modernist filmmakers of the last two decades.

- **BAM program notes, March 2022**

*No less than David Lynch, Ms. Menkes is an artist of the unconscious for whom the creative and the spiritual quest are one and the same. A CINEMATIC SORCERESS!"*

- **Dennis Lim, *The New York Times***

Nina Menkes on her work:

**[Visions in the Night, Talkhouse](#)**

**[VIEW RETROSPECTIVE TRAILER](#)**



## THE GREAT SADNESS OF ZOHARA

(1983, Color, 40 min) **NEW 2K RESTORATION**  
PRODUCED, DIRECTED & SHOT BY: Nina Menkes  
EDITED BY: Nina Menkes and Tinka Menkes  
STARRING: Tinka Menkes

Text adapted from Job, with additional poetry by Tinka Menkes.

Alienated from her Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem, a young woman opens to the world of the spirit. Surrounded by dark sounds of the 'Other Side', she is drawn into remote and increasingly desolate regions of Arab lands. Her journey, like a mystical quest through her own inner landscapes, culminates in her return to Jerusalem. There, indelibly marked, she confronts her deeper loneliness and devastating sense of exile.

Zohara's quest follows the stages of separation, initiation and return which Joseph Campbell made famous, but differs enough from the traditional model that the social and psychological significance of the journey is substantially altered. It involves no helpers, no perilous tasks, no union with the opposite sex and no reconciliation with father and mother figures. Furthermore, her return is not clearly victorious. As Annis Pratt found in her study of original works by women, a female protagonist whose quest results in rebirth or transformation has difficulty re-entering society, "she is met upon her ascent...with a forceful backlash, an attempt to dwarf her personality and reaccommodate her to secondary status."

**Special Jury Prize, San Francisco International Film Festival**

Restoration partially funded by Interbay Cinema Society/  
Lightpress Grants.

*"This highly sensual, richly textured film of striking images creates a powerful sense of timelessness."* - **Los Angeles Times**

*"Menkes shot this gloriously moody film herself and acted as her only crew with actress/sister Tinka Menkes captivating as a young woman searching for spiritual connection in an alien male world. Some of cinema's most insanely beautiful landscapes—**one of the decade's best films!**"* - **Allison Anders**

*"While all cinematic endeavors are inevitably about manipulation, Menkes' work manipulates in a sophisticated, subtle and perhaps mystical way. The mysticism evoked by Menkes can also be found in Maya Deren's work; both artists use the tools of cinema to sculpt new forms of narrative. Their films are not formal exercises in reductivism, but spiritual exercises—mantras guiding us towards a new language—or perhaps outside of language"*  
- **Filmmaker Magazine**

**"ONE OF THE TEN BEST FILMS EVER MADE"--**  
**James Benning, Filmmaker, 2025**



## MAGDALENA VIRAGA

(1986, Color, 90 min) **NEW 2K RESTORATION**  
PRODUCED, DIRECTED, WRITTEN & SHOT BY: Nina Menkes  
EDITED BY: Nina Menkes  
STARRING: Tinka Menkes, Claire Aguilar

Set in decaying boudoirs and bloody dance halls, within the brutal confines of an oppressive regime and the back reaches of the protagonist's mind, *Magdalena Viraga* is a tale of murder and crucifixion, alienation and friendship, past and present. It leaves us empty of hope but full of desire. It is a story of a story that cannot be told, a story that has been forgotten for all time; it is a tale of the Second Coming that has been and can never be.

In Menkes's first feature, Tinka Menkes brilliantly portrays the inner life of an alienated sex worker, as she battles the walls which surround her—both material and psychic.

**Winner of the *Los Angeles Film Critics Association* award for "Best Independent Film of the Year," *Magdalena Viraga* was featured in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Biennial as well as in over 40 film festivals worldwide.**

New restoration by Arbelos and the Academy Film Archive.  
Co-presented with Eos World Fund.

*"I have not been so moved since watching Tarkovsky; a uniquely compelling intellectual and visual experience."*

**- Radio France Culture**

*"Boldly imaginative—Menkes can hold a shot as long as Antonioni and get away with it—MAGDALENA VIRAGA is a stunner!"*

**- Los Angeles Times**

*"Is American underground cinema dead? Proof that it is not—MAGDALENA VIRAGA, Nina Menkes' first feature—sensually existentialist."* - **Liberation**

*"A dreamlike blend of brothel, prison cell, and baroque cathedral—the bias is metaphysical, menstrual blood transubstantiated into the blood of the lamb."* - **Village Voice**

*"Aspires to a new form of cinema"* - **Le Monde**

*"This unique film is a poetic narrative that explores the spiritual evolution of a prostitute who has been accused of murder. Menkes expresses her heroine's internal drama in an inventive, rigorously stylized manner. The film is at once extremely sensuous—with close attention to subtle physical details—and symbolic, with prostitution serving as a vivid metaphor for psychic imprisonment. MAGDALENA VIRAGA is a powerfully disorienting film, with rare spiritual intensity."* - **American Museum of the Moving Image**



## QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

(1991, Color, 77 min.) **NEW 4K RESTORATION**

PRODUCED, DIRECTED, WRITTEN & SHOT BY: Nina Menkes

EDITED BY: Nina Menkes and Tinka Menkes

STARRING: Tinka Menkes, Emmeldda Beech

Critically acclaimed for her radical feminist body of work, Nina Menkes' *Queen of Diamonds* (Sun-dance '91) is the second title in a quartet of films (alongside *The Great Sadness of Zohara* (1983), *Magdalena Viraga* (1986), and *The Bloody Child* (1996)), that Menkes produced, wrote, directed, and shot, all of which star her sister, Tinka Menkes.

*Queen of Diamonds* follows the life of Firdaus (Tinka Menkes), a Blackjack dealer in a Las Vegas landscape juxtaposed between glittering casino lights and the surrounding barren desert landscapes. Negotiating a missing husband and neighboring domestic violence, Firdaus' world unfolds as a fragmented but hypnotic interplay between repetition and repressed anger. Shot with beautiful compositional rigor, *Queen of Diamonds* is a remarkable and demanding masterpiece of American independent filmmaking.

New restoration by The Academy Film Archive and The Film Foundation, with funding provided by The Hobson / Lucas Family Foundation. Selected for the Library of Congress, National Film Registry, 2023.

*"QUEEN OF DIAMONDS may become for America in the 90's what Jeanne Dielman was for Europe in the 70's: a cult classic using rigorous visual composition to penetrate the innermost recesses of the soul."* - **The Chicago Reader**

*"One of the Year's Best Films"* - **Artforum**

*"Taxing, shimmering, hypnotic, demands being seen more than once to fully absorb its beauty and meaning. One of the year's ten best films."* - **Los Angeles Times**

*"Defies convention boldly and masterfully... Internationally recognized as one of US' most challenging underground filmmakers, Menkes finds images which stick in the mind and gain power as one dwells on them."* - **Daily Variety**

*"No matter how much of the unconscious, or of the subconscious, is injected into the movie's images and sound, nothing here is aestheticized. This is not a 'dreamy' film. Its moments of disconnect from 'ordinary' reality, as when a character holds up a hand to show a long set of fresh and spiky-looking sutures on her wrist, are meant to provoke — specifically, in a way that's anticapitalist and feminist. Even at a terse 76 minutes, 'QUEEN OF DIAMONDS' is not an easy film. But it's an essential one."*

- **The New York Times, Critic's Pick**

*"An utterly unique movie that has to be seen to be believed."*  
- **Talkhouse**



## THE BLOODY CHILD

(1996, Color, 86 min.) NEW 4K RESTORATION

PRODUCED, DIRECTED & SHOT BY: Nina Menkes

EDITED BY: Nina Menkes and Tinka Menkes

STARRING: Tinka Menkes, Russ Little, Robert Muller, Jack O'Hara, Sherry Sibley

A young US Marine, recently back from the Gulf War, was found digging a grave for his murdered wife in the middle of the California Mojave. Inspired by this real event, Menkes turns the man's arrest—a single moment in time—into a harrowing hallucinatory journey. Shot in North Africa and 29 Palms, California, *The Bloody Child* brings together Marines from Operation Desert Storm, playing themselves, with text from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to create a brutal and profound look at the desolation of violence. Newly restored, Menkes' acclaimed third film was an official selection for the 2021 New York Film Festival.

New restoration by the Academy Film Archive and The Film Foundation, with funding provided by the Hobson / Lucas Family Foundation.

*"One of the year's greatest films from one of my favorite filmmakers!" - Gus Van Sant*

*"Brilliant!...an awe-inspiring, rigorous work of art on the highest level. One of the year's top five films!" - Los Angeles Times*

*"A masterpiece!" - Screen Slate*

*"Mesmerizing... Weaves a spell that's hard to shake for days, and offers an object lesson in the cinematic possibilities standard narrative misses." - Variety*

*"THE BLOODY CHILD taps into something central and irreducible about the pervasive role of violence in contemporary American culture that no other picture gets at—something at once chilling and clarifying—the Menkes sisters have allowed us to look into an abyss...A must see!" - The Chicago Reader*

*"THE BLOODY CHILD plays a fascinating game with time and point of view, resulting in a powerful experience unlike anything in the marketplace." - The Hollywood Reporter*



## MASSAKER

(2005, Color, 98 min). UHD

CO-DIRECTORS: Nina Menkes, Monika Borgmann,  
Lokman Slim, Hermann Theissen

PRODUCERS: Monika Borgmann, Hermann  
Theissen

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Nina Menkes

CAMERA: Nina Menkes

In Arabic with English subtitles.

From September 16 to 18, 1982, for two nights and three days, "Sabra and Shatila," the capital of the Palestinian civil, political, and military presence in Lebanon, was subjected to a brutal massacre performed by Lebanese Christiana, supervised and directed by the Israeli occupying army. Twenty years later, six participants in this massacre recount for the first time their murderous and barbaric excesses.

Menkes's cinematography creates an underworld of terror unlike any other film.

Neither a parody of a tribunal nor a therapy session, Massaker lets the killers speak, opening a reflection on collective violence.

Shot and Co-Directed by Nina Menkes

*"A great work."*  
— *Positif*

*"Leads its audience in an inevitable claustrophobic experience with its extreme concentration on the language of murderers. The film shows in an oppressive way how people lose all human, moral and ethical constraint under terrible circumstances of civil war."*

— *Berlinale Jury Statement*

*"This is no tale of survival or fable of redemption, nor is it an ethically convenient outright trial, and conviction that these men whose faces are never shown never faced punishment and daily lead normal lives, makes it all the more disturbing MASSAKER is not an enjoyable ride-- critical soul searching never is."*

— *Cahiers du Cinema*

**Official Selection: Cannes Int'l Film Festival  
L'ACID section**

**Winner,  
FIPRESCI Award, Berlinale Int'l Film Festival**

**Winner,  
IDÉE SUISSE Award  
Visions du Réel Int'l Film Festival, Nyon**



## PHANTOM LOVE

(2007, B&W, 87 min.) 35MM FILM OR HD REMASTER

DIRECTOR-WRITER-EDITOR: Nina Menkes

PRODUCER: Kevin Ragsdale

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Christopher Soos

CAMERA: Nina Menkes

STARRING: Marina Shoif, Juliette Marquis, Bobby Naderi

*Phantom Love* is a surreal drama about an enmeshed family, in which violence and trauma are steadily percolating, just beneath the surface.

The main character, Lulu (Marina Shoif) appears at first to be a continuation of the frozen heroine Tinka represented in Menkes's earlier films and refers to her directly: she has alienated sex (like in *Magdalena Viraga*) and works in a casino (like in *Queen of Diamonds*).

But midway into the story, this character explodes – literally. The ice shield shatters and a wounded, raw interior comes crashing out, finally leading to glimmers of light and liberation.

**ONE OF THE YEAR'S TEN BEST FILMS-**  
*Los Angeles Times*

*"Stanley Kubrick's confident statement 'if it can be written or thought, it can be filmed' receives stunning confirmation in PHANTOM LOVE... not since Bela Tarr's WERCKMEISTER HARMONIES has black-and-white looked so stunning and mesmerizing...radical and beautiful, pure cinema!" - Variety*

*"Potent and luminous... a seductively powerful vision. Menkes is one of the most provocative artists in film today."*  
**- Los Angeles Times**

*"With PHANTOM LOVE Nina Menkes adds another masterwork to her oeuvre. Its story of a woman's trauma and healing is told with a virtuosic use of fundamental film techniques: BW 35mm photography, exquisite framing and resonant sound design. It is a triumph of visual intelligence and aesthetic integrity."* - **A History of Minor Cinema in Los Angeles**

*"PHANTOM LOVE and DISSOLUTION define what cinema is all about-or should be. Electrifying!" - Keyframe*

*"Evocative, challenging and very rewarding, PHANTOM LOVE gripped me with such intensity I probably would have jumped if a pin had fallen. Among the welter of films I am watching in the course of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, it is the images from PHANTOM LOVE that continually haunt me. PHANTOM LOVE is the sort of work that keeps cinema alive."* - **Eye for Film**



## DISSOLUTION

(2012, B&W, 88 min) **UHD**

DIRECTOR-WRITER-EDITOR: Nina Menkes

PRODUCERS: Michael Huffington, Marek Rozenbaum, Itai Tamir, Tony Copti

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Itai Marom

CAMERA: Nina Menkes

STARRING: David (Didi) Fire

In Hebrew and Arabic with English subtitles.

Loosely inspired by Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, *Dissolution* combines an almost surreal fairy-tale energy with brutal black-and-white realism to explore the condition of violence which permeates contemporary Israeli society. Shot in Jaffa (the predominantly Arab area of Tel Aviv), the movie follows the moral collapse and possible redemption of a young, morose Israeli Jew, powerfully played by a non professional actor, David (Didi) Fire.

*"A visionary who trusts in the power of image, movement and composition to communicate narrative, meaning and emotion...Nina Menkes always gets it right.*

*DISSOLUTION is arguably Menkes's not only most accomplished but also her most accessible work."*

—Los Angeles Times

*"Exquisite and Remarkable."* - New York Times, Critics Pick

*"An absolutely masterful, sensuous, succulent, repellent as a baby rattlesnake, primally affecting film!"* - **Matthew David Wilder**

*"Menkes has more to say on the subject of violence than any American director since Peckinpah and Cassavetes"* - **LA Weekly**

*"Cinematically, the film has traces of Bela Tarr's SATANTANGO entwined with Shakespeare's MACBETH—where themes of morality haunt one's psyche with poetry and striking visuality...Relevant and courageous!"* - **The Huffington Post**

*"One of the year's top five films!"*  
- **Sight and Sound**

*"Didi Fire's performance is brilliant. Menkes's unclassifiable cinema, whose fascination lies in the interplay among characters, space, and filmmaker, is truly all her own. Extraordinary and original."* - **Boston Phoenix**

*"This quiet, observant film is perhaps Menkes' most fecund exploration of mankind in microcosm."*  
- **UCLA Film & Television Archive**



## BRAINWASHED: SEX-CAMERA-POWER

(2023/color/107 minutes) **4k**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Tim Disney, Abigail Disney, Susan Disney Lord

PRODUCER: NINA MENKES

DIRECTOR: NINA MENKES

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:

SHANA HAGAN ASC

EDITOR: CECILY RHETT

Feminist film theorists have been exploring the issue of the "male gaze" and its various nuances and implications for decades. The term "male gaze" was first used in 1975 by Laura Mulvey-- who is also a key interviewee in *Brainwashed*. Nina Menkes builds on the vital work of Mulvey and other essential feminist writers including Judith Butler, bell hooks and Angela Carter, bringing her own perspective as a working director and cinematographer. Using almost 200 film clips from A-list and other notable movies, from 1896 through the present, Menkes

exposes specifically how shot design itself (POV, framing, camera movement, lighting, and even sound design) has functioned to perpetuate the sexist binary throughout cinematic history--and its serious implications for our real lives.

*"BRILLIANT - A film of great significance!"*  
—*Le Monde*

*"One of the Top 5 films to see this year!"*  
—*Bob Mondello, NPR*

*"Fierce and focused... 'Brainwashed' is a bracing blast of critical rigor. One of the Year's Top Ten Films!"*  
—*Peter Bradshaw, THE GUARDIAN*

*"Nina Menkes' eye-opening documentary will forever change how you look at films."*  
—*Kate Erbland, INDIEWIRE*

*"Menkes is a real no-bullshit breath of fresh air. With a torch. And with any luck, she's heading your way to set fire to something, soon."*  
—*Finn Halligan, SCREEN DAILY*



## Nina Menkes

*“For me, cinema is sorcery, a creative way to interact with the world in order to rearrange perception and expand consciousness, both the viewers and my own.”*

- **Nina Menkes**

Considered a cinematic pioneer and one of America’s foremost independent filmmakers, Menkes has shown widely in major international film festivals including the Berlinale, Cannes, Rotterdam, Locarno, Toronto, La Cinematheque Francaise, the British Film Institute, Whitney Museum of American Art, MOMA in New York and the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art (LACMA). Her most recent documentary feature *BRAINWASHED: Sex-Camera-Power* (2023) is her fourth feature to premiere at the Sundance Film Festival.

Her films have often been met with hostility, as she confronts and expresses violence in an unusual way, creating and following her own rules. Menkes has referred to herself as a witch, and Dennis Lim, writing in *The New York Times* called her a “Cinematic Sorceress”.

For many years, Menkes worked closely with her sister Tinka Menkes, who was both her actress and creative collaborator and Nina credits Tinka for many of the key radical aspects of their work. Menkes was among the first women to present a feature film at the Sundance Film Festival (*QUEEN OF DIAMONDS*, 1991 in dramatic competition). She has won a Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award for her first feature *MAGDALENA VIRAGA*, a Guggenheim Fellowship, two Fellowships

from the National Endowment for the Arts, an Annenberg Foundation Independent Media Grant, an American Film Institute Independent Filmmaker Award, three Western States Regional Media Arts Fellowships, three Fulbright Research Awards to the Middle East and a Creative Capital Award.

In 2012, The Menkes sisters’ feature film *THE BLOODY CHILD* was selected as one of *the best five films of the past fifty years* by the Viennale International Film Festival, Austria.

Menkes's early films have been restored by the Academy Film Archive and Scorsese’s Film Foundation, with funding provided by the Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation. Arbelos Films and the Academy Film Archive have additionally restored *MAGDALENA VIRAGA*.

*QUEEN OF DIAMONDS* was selected for the US Library of Congress National Film Preservation Registry in 2023.

A first-generation American, Menkes has received two DAAD Artist in Residence in Berlin Awards. During her residencies she tried to face the brutal truth of her family history. Her mother’s parents were German Jews who fled Hitler’s genocide, settling in Jerusalem in 1933; her father’s Austrian Jewish family were murdered by the Nazis in the death camps: trauma, alienation and violence are central to her work. In 2002 Menkes shot and co-directed a feature-length documentary, *MASSAKER*, about the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Beirut, which premiered at the Berlinale and received a FIPRESCI Award (2005).

In 2018-2019 Menkes toured widely with her cinematic talk, *“Sex and Power; The Visual Language of Oppression”*, presenting at multiple high profile venues including AFI Fest, BFI London, Rotterdam Int’l Film Festival (IFFR), the “Voice of a Woman” series at Cannes, and Sundance’s Black House. This talk became the basis for her latest film, the feature documentary *BRAINWASHED: Sex-Camera-Power*, (2023) created with major support from Tim Disney, Susan Disney Lord and Abigail Disney. The film became a viral hit and is considered a cultural game-changer.

Nina Menkes has an MFA with honors from the UCLA Film School (1989). She has taught film directing at the USC School of Cinematic Arts, the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), and California Institute of the Arts. She is on the AMPAS Executive Committee, Directors Branch at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).



For more information:

[www.ninamenkes.com](http://www.ninamenkes.com)

[www.brainwashedmovie.com](http://www.brainwashedmovie.com)

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