

by Neil Wilson

If you missed Cinemama '85, you missed a cultural event that is becoming an important international forum for studies and research in women's film.

*Cinemama '85, Her Language, Her Voice*, is a film/lecture series that took place over six consecutive week-ends this fall beginning Nov. 8. Each week-end session focussed on a specific theme or developing trend that contemporary women filmmakers and critics are exploring; for example, Poland, Open Media, Auto/Biography Comedy, Sexuality, and Women of all Races.

"One of the overall successes in the last decade, in which Canada's Studio D (the NFB Women's Unit) has been instrumental, is the extent to which women have begun to show themselves to themselves," the program notes explain.

The picture of a woman seeing a captive image of herself for the first time in a photograph, on film or on video captures the essence of self-examination and self-revelation which has been a major element on the dynamics of this decade. "This single evolution has helped to break down barriers imposed by culture and language and forged a new unity of womankind the world over."

Twenty-four films and videos from 10 countries were screened and critics from Germany, Poland, Canada, Quebec, and the United States participated in workshops and panels. Let's look briefly at the Canadian works screened:

Vera Frenkel's *Censored* (1985, 30' col/video 3/4" Eng.) discusses a crucial question of our time. Who determines what is suitable for public on private viewing? The filmmaker, or a censor board appointed by a government? Who decides when a penis or a woman's breast becomes pornographic?

*Censored* was shot on location at Frenkel's installation work, "The Business of Frightened Desires", part of the "Aurora Borealis" exposition produced this fall by the Montreal International Center of Contemporary Art. Frenkel's video is a documentation of her installation that examines the collusive relationship between censorship and pornography. Not a documentary, this video comes down heavily against censorship based on the vague notion of "community standards." Frenkel's textwork is large, bold, revolutionary.

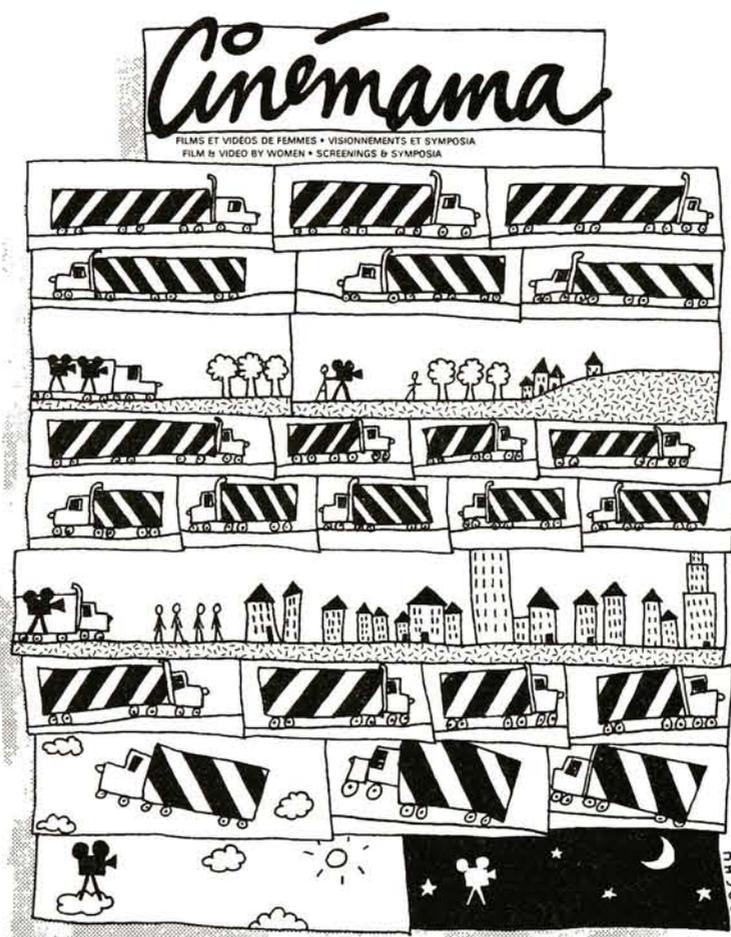
*A&B* (1984, 17'3 col/16mm/sound) by Joyce Weiland is a delightful film. Shot in the early '70's and re-edited in 1984, the film stars Weiland and the late Hollis Frampton playing with their cameras in a spirit of abandon - running through the fields, in the city, in the house, playing hide and seek, and surprise attacking - with hand-held everything. Pure film, playful, without pretention, enlightening and entertaining.

*Dark Lullabies* (1985, 80' col/16mm/Eng.) has a format that is straightforward documentary but the film's content, and the way it is presented, leaves a lot to be desired. The film is the story of Irene Angelico (who co-directed and co-produced the project) and her in-

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# Cinemama '85

## The new unity of womankind



terpretation of the impact of the Holocaust on both Jews and Germans born after the war. Angelico, a child of concentration camp survivors, travels from her home in Montreal to Israel, for the first world gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, and to Germany. The film records interviews with children of survivors who, like herself, are seeking to come to terms with the painful legacy handed to them. In Germany, she seeks out some of her German contemporaries, including the children and grandchildren of Nazis, to ask them about their feelings and experiences.

Regrettably *Dark Lullabies* avoids any historical intelligence of its would be topic, the Holocaust, and as a result, fails to shed any light on this desperate and crucial historical question.

Toronto performance artist Tanja Mars whose *Pure Virtue* had its premiere at Cinemama '85 is a feminist of a rare kind. One with a healthy and unselfconscious sense of humour, Mars' tape investigates the broad topic of

women, power and more particularly the consequences of attaining what are considered to be classical, patriarchal power symbols. In *Pure Virtue* Mars, as an aging Queen Elizabeth I discussed virginity, sex, power and deception. The costumes and music are effectively used in this funny, witty and important piece.

Camille Maheux and Eva Turska's 2 (1984 11' col/video 3/4"/French) is a documentary-style reflection on a relationship between two working artists. The sensitive interplay between the documentary mood and private working lives of the artists weaves a very personal and moving representation. The music and lyrics of Sergio Boisvert and Geneviève Letarte never intrudes and adds another voicing to this interesting video.

*C'est une bonne journée* (1984, 10' col/video 3/4"/French) by Francois Dugré and Johanne Fournier is an experimental video in three parts. The first and third parts show a woman, with

a very prominent mustache, bathing and dressing. The central silence, powerful and ominous, is sweetly interrupted by two little girls making themselves up in adult dress. This video incorporates a theatrical sense of direction and staging with definite documentary overtones which creates an overall impressionistic atmosphere. In spite of her mustache - or is it because of it? - the woman is very attractive suggesting that either beauty is in the eye of the beholder or that mustaches on women are in.

*Tatouages de la mémoire* (1984 30' col/video 3/4"/French) by Helen Doyle uses a psychoanalytic model to explore the world of myth and dream. Doyle opens her inner landscapes giving reign to the archetypes in her subconscious. A woman named Sarah becomes in turn a desert, birdwoman, goddess, neo-woman etc. *Tatouages de la mémoire* is the work of a woman with a well-defined critical sense of personal history whose work has twice won her international awards. Themes of earlier pieces by Doyle include sexual aggression and rape (*Chaperons rouges*) and more recently, women, creativity and madness (*Les Mots/Maux du silence*). Doyle uses film and video to root out stereotypical categories that are inherited from or have arisen as a result of the relegation of women throughout history. Doyle also resorts to fictionalized documentary to explode old myths and useless sexist categories and illustrates that creativity and madness are results of our inner development.

Any man who has been responsible for an abortion, or who has attended the birth of a baby, can't help but appreciate *The Subversion of Hormone Warzone* by the Hummer Sisters (1984, 11' col/video 3/4"/Eng.) The video clearly lays the responsibility for the current confusion about birth control where it belongs - with men.

Anne Ramsden's *Manufactured Romance - Emotional Ground* (1985, 15' col/video 3/4"/Eng.) is the third part of a soap-opera inspired on the subject of modern relationships. But without the context and history of the first two segments, *Emotional Ground* doesn't seem to go anywhere, and is perhaps a little heavy on academic formalism.

Added to this interesting Canadian mix of film and video were works from some of the most talented European filmmakers and the newer non-white women in the "Women of All Races" week-end.

The works screened during Cinemama '85 fit the general development cited by feminist film critics: namely, that films made by women are now less sociological, subject as image or model, and more formalistic and psychoanalytic. Many women are currently questioning the film form itself, and the relationship between filmic image and spectators' expectations.

In order to avoid the criticism of self-absorption, navel-gazing, and generally being an acceptable middle-class and intellectual approach to cinema, Cinemama wisely encouraged output from women representing minority groups. What better way to test the relevance of the formal concerns of existing film criticism than by listening to women whose stories hadn't yet been told!