

CINE ACCIÓN NEWS

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CINE ACCION PRESENTS

WOMEN OF THE AMERICAS FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL

by Elaine Vergelin

Although finding a woman behind the camera in Latin America was possible as early as 1917 in México (Mimi Derba), and 1928 in Brazil (Carmen Santos), only in



photo: Women Make Movies

Bakery Scene in TIEMPO DE MUJERES by Mónica Vásquez

the last decade have we begun to recognize and respect the achievements of Latinas in film. Like their counterparts in the filmmaking world, women in Latin American cinema were primarily

found in front of the camera, as the object d'art or alongside the director with script, costumes or coffee in hand. With the advance of technology and the feminist movement of the 60's, a growing number of women were able to demonstrate their technical expertise and creative talents in production, assistant camera work, editing and sound recording. But, it wasn't until the early 70's, with the nearly simultaneous release of hallmark films by women in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, that some of these directors were added to the annals of feature filmmaking.

Argentina's María Luisa Bemberg, Brazil's Susana Amaral and Tizuka Yamasaki, Mexico's Matilde Landeta and
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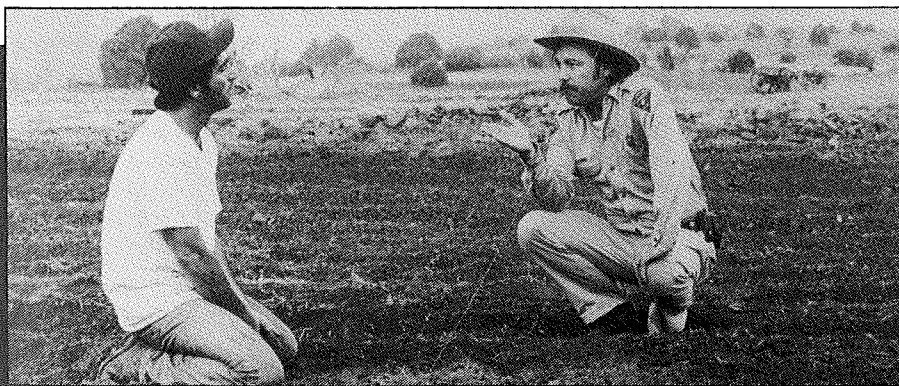


photo: Universal Pictures Chick Vennera and Ruben Blades In THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR

Moctesuma Esparza:

A Rising Voice in Latino Film Production

BY ADRIAN CARRASCO

Moctesuma Esparza, a leading Latino film producer, was born and raised in East Los Angeles. He has played a prominent role in the Chicano movement as well as in the advancement of Latinos in film and television production. His early credits include the 1973 Emmy award production for NBC CINCO VIDAS (Five Lives), a poignant look
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An Interview Lilith Video:

A BRAZILIAN WOMEN'S VIDEO COLLECTIVE

b y L i z K o t z

In October 1987, the independent Mexican film distribution company Zafrá hosted the first *Cocina de Imágenes*, a 10-day festival of film and video by Latin American and Caribbean women. The event provided the first forum for the exhibition of work by Latin American women. Throughout the ten days of the *Cocina*, directors and producers initiated a dialogue on issues related to women in film, production and distribution strategies and the role of video as alternative format for low-budget productions. One of the important agreements reached by the participants was to continue this historic event in other countries. *Cine Acción* offered to host the second of these encounters in San Francisco in October 1988. (See article in this issue.)

Highlights of the video portion of the festival included the work of Lilith Video, a collective of seven Brazilian women based in Sao Paulo. They showed several of their interview-based videos about the experiences of women in Brazil, ranging from discussions with Sao Paulo prostitutes (*BEIJO NA BOCA/KISS IN THE MOUTH*) to women who work in sugar cane fields talking about their lives (*MULHERES NO CANAVIAL*) and Black women talking about racial pride and racism in Brazil (*MULHERES NEGRAS*). Fast-moving and often humorous, these incisive works explored the strength and diversity of these women's approaches to their lives. The following are excerpts from an interview by *Cine Acción's* representative to the *Cocina de Imágenes*, Liz Kotz with three members of Lilith, Jacira Melo, Silvanna Afram and Marcia Miereles.

CA-. What are the most important issues for you in your work? How do you see your work as related to the women's movement in Brazil?

SA-. Right now, the feminist movement in Brazil is very active, very organized around health issues, which is an area of great political importance. We have developed work around these social issues - prostitution, health, violence against women, women and work, childcare, these kinds of things. In my opinion, it is very important now to develop projects about love, especially love between women.

CA-. In the women's movement in the US, this has been a very controversial subject — this issue of representations of sexuality, in general and in work by women. How has this question been raised in Brazil?

JM-. I think that in Brazil, women, especially women in the feminist movement, are trying to start a serious discussion around questions of what pornography is and what eroticism is. We perceive differences between the two. Right now, there are new issues. For instance, I don't think we can talk about sexuality now without talking about AIDS. The only work we have done on sexuality has been *FEMININO PLURAL*, where we included interviews with many women. I think we arrived at a very profound and varied assortment of views on and questions about sexuality, exploring this subject in depth.

CA-. The videos from Brazil shown here strike me as quite different in style and in form that those of other Latin American countries. What have been the major influences on your work?

SA-. I think that the main influence on our work is always television — we

are from a generation that grew up with TV, always watching TV since we were kids. You can't negate that kind of influence, especially in a place like Brazil, where TV is very powerful and diffuse and where the level of technical quality — with stations like TV Globo — is very high. Everyone who works in video — women, independent producers, everyone — are very aware of this. We aren't making TV like what you see on TV Globo, but it's impossible to ignore this influence, this influx of images.

MM-. I think that, as video producers, we are very concerned with the problem of how to make programs that explore important political questions — important cultural questions — which are also attractive to look at, visually stimulating, with good sound, hard-hitting and also emotionally-involving. It's a question of how to do this, how to make video inside of what is already there? I don't think that video has a standard pace or an established form. In Brazil we are trying to develop forms for video, working in many different genres. People do a lot of documentary work, but there is also a lot of fiction work, videoart and experimental work. However, many of the works screened at the *Cocina* have a pacing, a rhythm that is very slow.

CA-. For me, a North American who has also grown up with on television, some of the videos like those from Nicaragua, were too slow moving. My attention span is too short. I think for a public that has been so influenced by television, it is necessary to find ways other than straight documentation, straight presentation of material.

JM-. I think it is very important to play with the media and explore its possibilities. You have so much freedom with video to develop approaches and discover a rhythm that suits the material, since it has so little tradition. For example, our work *MULHERES NO CANAVIAL*, made in a rural area with women who cut cane, has a different rhythm than projects we shot in the city. It was an attempt to make a work close to the rhythm of the these women's lives. They have a very different pacing of moving, of talking, a different rhythm of expressing themselves. I think that these questions of pacing, language, and form means a constant search for each subject.

MM-. It's hard for me to compare video made in Brazil with that of other Latin American countries because in Brazil very little Latin American work is shown. From what I've seen here, videos from Colombia and Nicaragua, for instance, approach social conflicts, political issues, in a very "objective" manner. I think that even in the documentary work in Brazil there is a search for greater subjectivity, to work on how people experience the things that happen.

JM-. The Nicaraguan video on prostitution (*ROMPIENDO BARRERAS*) bothered me — I have a very deep connection to this issue. Much of the work that I've done — *BEIJO NA BOCA*, the earlier film *MULHERES DA BOCA* — is with prostitutes. That tape scared me a little because it is made so much from this "objective" stance, without subjectivity, in a tape that is about the oldest job in humanity, which didn't start with capitalism

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and won't fade away with socialism. What scares me is this discussion as a "social problem" without looking at the nuances, the ambiguities. And it leaves out, what for me is such an important part of documentary, which is emotion, the feelings people have about their lives.

LK-. What struck me about the Nicaraguan piece, especially in comparison to your work made up of interviews with working women, is that - with all the material of government officials talking about prostitution and about the social problems prostitution represents— no prostitutes appear in the tape to talk about their life and about what it's like for them. It's a completely different way of treating the subject. But then, you are an independent producers, while the Nicaraguan piece is made by a government agency.

JM-. And one with a very clear ideology about this subject. But for us too this problem arises when we do contracted work, when we do videos funded by government agencies.

CA-. What foreign work in video does get shown in Brazil?

MM-. Video from the first world, mostly. Stuff from the US, like Nam June Paik. Even with women's film and video, we know much more the work by German women, French women, U.S. women, than work by other Latin Americans. But this is starting to change. With the growth of the ABVMP (Brazilian Association of Popular Video) there has been much more communication. Right now, they are doing an exhibition of popular video and clandestine video from Chile. This is a very new thing for us.

CA-. How does your work relate to the popular video movement in Brazil?
JM-. In Brazil, popular video is fairly similar to a lot of the tapes shown here. It is very concerned with the political content, with documenting events such as strikes, meetings and demonstrations. This work gener-

ally does not experiment very much with the form. But it is a very active movement and things are changing. The producers are very interested in learning more, getting access to more complicated technology. Like many people here, at first people doing popular video in Brazil just had cameras, then very basic editing systems.

MM-. Right now independent producers have a great desire to organize. We have an organization now, the Sao Paulo Association of Independent Producers, who are organizing to get more work in television. They already work in commercial production, making training tapes, doing the festival circuit, but it is very hard for these producers to work in television, which is a very closed system. We are now beginning to have regional stations. There are no cable systems since it is too expensive. But there are pirate stations in Rio and in Sao Paulo- the democratization of the airwaves.

CA-. Where is your work shown?

JM-. Well, for example, FEMININO PLURAL was a project made with an educational TV station and was offered to all the educational TV stations in the country. It's already been shown in more than 10 states, which is fantastic. It was watched by a fairly sizable audience. The other works were shown in small videotheques and by women's groups. But, in my opinion, the small videotheques have no impact. We need more structured, more stable places.

CA-. Could you talk a bit about the role of women in cinema and video in Brazil, especially in comparison with other countries in Latin America?

JM-. There are more than 100 videotapes made by women in Brazil, which is a lot. I don't know if there are more women working in cinema in Brazil than in other parts of Latin America. In the Brazilian Video Festival, which takes place in Sao Paulo and is the most important video festival, 30% of the work shown in VHS was done by women, with technical services, camera, editing, etc., for those tapes done by women. In the 3/4" works as well a large number were directed or written by women, although less of the technical work was by women. In professional TV, there are very few women who are producers and assistant producers. I think there was a report that said that fewer than 1% of the technicians in TV were women. Women work more in independent video, in popular video. And these are mainly young women. Everyone in Lilith is under 35.

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Women's Festival

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NOT ASKING FOR A TRIP TO THE MOON (Mexico), by Mari Carmen de Lara, a look at the mobilization of women garment workers after the 1985 earthquake, and WOMEN'S TIME (Ecuador) by Mónica Vásquez, exploring labor immigration patterns in the highlands. Other selections include Ana María García's THE OPERATION (Puerto Rico), a ground-breaking reformulation of feminist concerns over reproductive rights examining the practice of mass sterilization of Puerto Rican women, AN ISLAND SURROUNDED BY WATER (Mexico) by María Novaro, a poetic insight into the life of a girl in search of her mother ;, MYRIAM'S GLANCE (Colombia) by Clara Riascos, a moving portrait of a single mother working to improve living conditions in her community, and UNFINISHED DIARY, (Chile) by Mairilú Maillet, a poignant film that tells the story of a Chilean woman exiled in Canada where realism surrenders to the power of feeling.

Suzana Amaral, Mari Carmen de Lara, Chiara Varese, Estela Bravo Tete Moraes, Tizuka Yamazaki, Zydnia Nazario, Lourdes Portillo and Gloria Ribe are among the filmmakers participating in seminars, panels, and open forum discussions. Innovative, poetic, political and provocative, the festival selections are as varied as the women behind them. The overwhelming number of entries is further evidence that La Cocina de Imagenes, literally "the place where images are cooked" is an appropriate metaphor illustrating women's contributions to new forms in film and video.