



Treut, Monika (b. 1954)

by B.J. Wray

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Monika Treut in 2009.
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For nearly two decades, German filmmaker Monika Treut's films have unselfconsciously depicted worlds that the mainstream media tends to treat as "deviant." Her work consistently explores challenging and controversial issues surrounding minority sexual and gender identities.

Born in Moenchengladbach, Germany, Treut studied literature and political science in Marburg/Lahn and wrote her doctoral dissertation on the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. It has been published as *The Cruel Woman: Female Images in de Sade and von Sacher-Masoch* (Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1984).

From 1978 until 1982, Treut was in charge of programming for media centers and art houses in Berlin and Hamburg. In 1984 Treut and Elfi Mikesch co-founded Hyena I/II in Berlin and Hamburg, a film production company.

Mikesch and Treut's first film, *Verführung: Die Grausame Frau (Seduction: The Cruel Woman, 1985)* was inspired by the novel *Venus in Furs* by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. *Seduction* examines the psychological aspects of sadism and masochism through the tale of Wanda (Mechthild Grossmann), a German lesbian dominatrix who runs a gallery where audiences pay for the privilege of watching her humiliate her slaves.

Treut's second feature film, *Die Jungfrauenmaschine (The Virgin Machine, 1988)* tells the erotic story of a young journalist, Dorothee (Ina Blum), who leaves Germany for San Francisco. Her sexual adventures include encounters with a male impersonator, Ramona (Shelly Mars); a charming Hungarian bohemian, Dominique (Dominique Gaspar); and Susie Sexpert (Susie Bright), a barker for an all-girl strip show.

Treut's next film, *My Father Is Coming* (1991), continues her exploration of sexual subcultures. Vicky (Shelley Kastner) is a German actress in New York City who tries to impress her visiting father and hide her bisexuality by concealing her job as a waitress and by having her gay roommate pose as her husband. Meanwhile, her father explores a world of transgendered individuals and transsexuals, and has a fling with ex-porno-queen-turned-performance-artist Annie Sprinkle (playing herself).

Treut's best-known film, *Female Misbehavior* (1992), is a compilation of four shorts about "misbehaving" women: "Bondage" (1983) looks at the appeal of lesbian S&M, tit torture, and bondage; "Annie" (1989) showcases the performance art of Annie Sprinkle; "Dr. Paglia" (1992) is a portrait of the controversial critic Camille Paglia; "Max" (1992) documents the transsexual journey of Max Valerio from his former life as Anita, a lesbian Native American, to his new identity as a heterosexual male.

The director's most recent work includes shorts, documentaries, and feature films, but all are focused on aspects of sexuality.

In 1996, Treut directed the segment "Taboo Parlor" for the critically acclaimed collection of seductive vignettes, *Erotique*.

Didn't Do It For Love (1997) is a documentary that chronicles the flamboyant life of Eva Norvind. The Norwegian-born Norvind became a sex starlet in B-movies in Mexico, then moved into prostitution, where she serviced some of the country's most prominent politicians. Years later she became a professional dominatrix in New York City and a major player in the sex industry.

Treut's most recent film, *Gendernauts* (1999), won the Teddy Award at the 1999 Berlin Film Festival. *Gendernauts* explores gender fluidity at the end of the millennium in the Bay Area of California.

Treut's career is profiled, along with six other prominent lesbian filmmakers, in Marc Maucerie's documentary *Lavender Limelight: Lesbians in Film* (1997). She currently lives in Hamburg and New York City.

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About the Author

B.J. Wray lectures in the Department of English at the University of California, Davis. She is revising her dissertation on nationalism and sexuality in English-Canada lesbian cultural texts into a book-length study of the performance of sexual citizenship in the United States and Canada. She has published on lesbian performance art and queer choreography.