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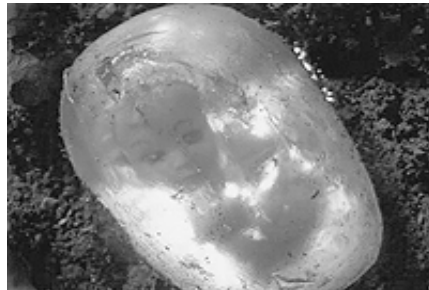
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Women in the Director's Chair International Film & Video Festival

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[Sharony! \(See "Exploding Cinema"\)](#)

The 22nd annual Women in the Director's Chair International Film & Video Festival, featuring narrative, documentary, animated, and experimental works by women, continues Friday through Sunday, March 21 through 23. Screenings are at WIDC Theater, 941 W. Lawrence; LaSalle Theatre, LaSalle Bank, 4901 W. Irving Park; School of the Art Institute Auditorium, Columbus Drive at Jackson; and Hayes Investment Center, 4859 S. Wabash. Tickets are \$8, \$6 for students, seniors with a valid ID, and members of Women in the Director's Chair. Festival passes are also available; for more information call 773-907-0610. Films marked with a * are highly recommended.

Friday, March 21

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Media Girls: New Video by Young Women

Eight videos, most of them by young amateurs chronicling their own lives. In *Between My Mother and Me* (2002), Nicole Nelson turns her video camera on her single parent, criticizing her mother's obsession with bowling. Mom defensively promises she'll devote more attention to her teenage daughter, but Nelson, getting in the last word, reports that nothing has changed. Nikki Isham's *Walking Alone on the Road of Depression* (2001) is a moving testimonial of her seven-year battle with

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depression, poignantly conveyed in tight close-ups. Ramalah Yusufzai asserts her Muslim-American identity in the language of the typical American teen in *Me . . . Myself . . . and I* (2002); the shot of her sister giving a Bronx cheer while wearing a head scarf may be an on-screen first. 75 min. (Fred Camper) (Hayes Center, 3:30)

Drag Racing

Elvis impersonators are a dime a dozen, but Mexican-American musician Robert Lopez has found his niche as "El Vez," whose variations on the King's hits include "You Ain't Nothin' but a Chihuahua." Marjorie Chodorov's video documentary *El Rey de Rock n Roll* traces the evolution of Lopez's act, which began as a media stunt but developed into a vehicle for him to address issues like imperialism, cultural stereotyping, and immigration policy ("Suspicious Minds" becomes "Immigration Time"). Sincere and self-effacing, Lopez hopes to raise the political consciousness of young people who might be intimidated by such thorny matters, but Chodorov undercuts this with commentary from pretentious academics who inflate the act's importance to absurd levels. Lopez may have noble intentions, but he's still jumping around in an Elvis costume and a Cantinflas mustache -- and even he admits that he can't speak Spanish. Also showing: *XY Drag* by Robin Deisher. 89 min. (Reece Pendleton) (LaSalle Theatre, 7:00)

*** NYC, Just Like I Pictured It**

This valuable program of experimental films about New York City -- many of them vintage -- was compiled by Ariella Ben-Dov for the San Francisco-based MadCat Women's Film Festival. *Skyscraper* (1959) by pioneer documentarian Shirley Clarke exuberantly chronicles the demolition of old buildings and the erection of a skyscraper; the sound track juxtaposes the voices of architects and construction workers with jazz and beat poetry. *In the Street* by photographer Helen Levitt (1952) is an evocative silent montage of street scenes on the Upper East Side circa the late 40s. Marie Menken's *Go Go Go* (1964) combines found footage with scenes shot from a moving car to create an impressionistic stop-motion look at New York landmarks. Also on the program: Johanna Hibbard's *Vanilla Egg Cream* (1999), Abigail Child's *Some Exterior Presence* (1977), and two versions of Clarke's *Bridges-Go-Round*, set to different musical scores. 70 min. (Ted Shen) (WIDC Theater, 7:00)

*** Dyke Night**

A program of 12 lesbian-themed shorts.

Dayna McLeod's animated *Master Libation* (2002) -- in which a woman searches her house for a mislaid dildo -- borrows its backgrounds from a 50s interior design book and imbues the bourgeois decor with a provocative sexual charge. The similarly bright colors of Elisabeth Subrin's *Well, Well, Well* (2002), a music video for the feminist band Le Tigre, help make it that rarest of things: a rock video that actually heightens the experience of the song. Cheryl Furjanic wittily decodes body language in a lesbian bar in *Bar Talk* (2002). Carolyn Caizzi and

Laura Rodriguez's *Camouflage Pink* is a high school drama with a good feel for the uncertainties of teen sexuality: arguing that hetero institutions are bad, a militant lesbian discourages her friend from attending the prom with a boy, but then decides to go herself when asked out by a girl. With eight other videos. 103 min. (Fred Camper) (LaSalle Theatre, 9:00)

One War, Many Fronts

The war in question goes unnamed, but each of these five shorts of varying quality has a bone to pick with the status quo. Best of the lot is Deborah Stratman's creepy *In Order Not to Be Here* (2001), which draws on surveillance camera footage and infrared video to explore the modern obsession with high-tech security and delineate the threat it poses to civil liberties. Rachel Rinaldo's video *Division + Western* (2002) draws simplistic parallels between the gentrification of Wicker Park and Humboldt Park and the American colonization of Puerto Rico. Also on the program: videos by Sedika Mojadidi, Hrafnhildur-Hrabba Gunnarsdottir, and Carol Jacobsen. 99 min. (Ted Shen) (WIDC Theater, 9:00)

Saturday, March 22

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Exploding Cinema

Founding member Jennet Thomas curated this program of seven videos by women from London's Exploding Cinema Collective. The plot of Kobayashi Kazushi's *Pellet* -- in which a woman plans to dispose of her boyfriend's corpse by feeding it to his pet owl -- conforms to the group's penchant for "extreme" content, but this time the grotesquerie is formally redeemed by elegant swooping camera movements and slow zooms. Thomas's *The Local Sky Enlarger* (2002) concerns the appearance of a "scab in the sky" that causes giant objects to fall to earth, events obscurely related to the divine impregnation of a man who gives birth to a lizardlike creature. *Sharony!* (2000), also by Thomas, works hard at weirdness -- two girls dig up a pulsating egg in their garden, which hatches into a plastic doll -- but aside from a few pornographic flourishes the video plays like a paean to the love of girls for their dolls. 87 min. (Fred Camper) (WIDC Theater, 2:00)

Right Road Lost

The strongest of these seven videos, Monique Zavistovski's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2002), is a nuanced riff on antidepressants that balances recognition of their benefits with barbed skepticism about overprescribing doctors and the redefinition of "freedom of choice" as one among available pills. As a critique of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, Meredith Holch's *And Night Also Never Comes for the Rest* (2002) is sarcastic and politically muddled, but Holch's playful use of colored paper cutouts and miniature figures is visually inventive, with a surprising erotic flourish at the end. Marina Petrovskaja proclaims her guilt at having used her camera as a tool to "manipulate" her aged aunt

into discussing her past as a Nazi collaborator in *Confession* (2001), but she includes the resulting interview all the same. Kim Wood's *On My Knees* (2002) is based on the diaries of a Victorian housemaid embroiled in a sadomasochistic relationship with her master. The diary excerpts, heard in voice-over, are fascinating, but the reenactments are banal. 86 min. (Fred Camper) (WIDC Theater, 4:00)

Homeland Insecurity

A program of recent shorts about dysfunctional families, the longest of which, Jennifer K. Midlin's *Kitties* (2001, 37 min.), synchronizes home-movie footage with a sound track of the filmmaker, her two sisters, and their blue-collar parents candidly giving their bleak opinions of one another, exposing a loveless family history. Georgia Lee's *Educated* is the harrowing yet elegant story of a Chinese-American teen driven to suicide by the academic expectations of her parents. Megan Sanchez-Warner's *The Stream* -- in which a girl misguidedly sets her baby brother afloat on a stream in a basket to save him from her quarreling parents -- has the look and feel of a film-school thesis, as does Marianna Haniger's brief ecological vignette *Little Lamb*. Also on the program: works by Carol Jacobsen, Sandra Contreras, Marzena Grzegorzczuk, and Sheila Sofian. 97 min. (Ted Shen) (SAIC Auditorium, 5:00)

To Be Happy for Such a Short Time

A mixed bag of recent shorts. Erica Peng's *Orange Juice and Knitting Needles* is a tender meditation on the filmmaker's aged grandparents, their six-decade-long marriage, and the Buddhist spirituality that infuses their everyday lives. Diana Logreira's *I'm the One Who Suffers but I'm Still the King* is a sincere but amateurish documentary about a Colombian immigrant in New York who makes his living salsa dancing on the streets with a life-size female puppet. Adapted from a short story by surrealist writer Jose Pierre, Jenny McCracken's *Water From the Moon* is a marionette piece about a laundress who finds a winged stranger in her closet. Also on the program: works by Thea St. Omer, Pearce Williams, Eileen Anastasia Reynolds, Monique Zavistovski, Cris Sequiera, and Kristin Solid. 90 min. (Ted Shen) (WIDC Theater, 6:00)

A String of Pearls

Camille Billops has been documenting the lives of her extended family in Los Angeles since 1979; in this sixth installment (2001), codirected by her husband, James V. Hatch, she focuses on the men, profiling her middle-aged nephew, his grown son and nephews, and an 82-year-old longtime friend of the family. Drawing on footage that spans two decades, Billops does deliver numerous "pearls," but she's allowed herself way too much string. The film's 55 minutes are cluttered with peripheral family members, thematic intertitles, voice-over from emergency-room doctors commenting on the mean streets of LA, and the musings of poet/martial artist Afaa M. Weaver. (J.R. Jones) (SAIC Auditorium, 7:00)

Unnatural Order of Things

An assortment of recent shorts whose goofiness and low-rent production values meet the selective criteria of the Chicago Underground Film Festival. Amy Hicks's *Hatching Beauty* is a bewildering melange of found footage, live-action clips, and optical effects that ostensibly has something to say about the hazards of biotechnology. *The Reach of an Arm* by Nancy Andrews employs puppets, found footage, and intertitles to tell the story of a misshapen couple heading west by wagon train, in a manner reminiscent of Czech animator Jan Svankmajer. Three video journal entries by the irrepressible Ximena Cuevas - *Natural Instincts*, *Staying Alive*, and *Alma Gemela* -- are sublimely ridiculous takes on beauty ideals, the Frankenstein myth, and schizoid behavior. Also on the program: works by Jennet Thomas, Julia Sarcone-Roach, Meredith Root, and Abigail Child. (Ted Shen) (WIDC Theater, 8:00)

*** Reno: Rebel Without a Pause**

As a forum for social satire, stand-up has deteriorated badly since the days of Mort Sahl, Lenny Bruce, and Dick Gregory; this video by comedian Reno, taped in a small Manhattan club in December 2001, provides welcome redress with its mordant commentary on September 11 and its political aftermath. Upon hearing that terrorists are on the loose, the lesbian Latina's first reaction is to ask, "How come they didn't call me?" Her monologue progresses from the surreal experience of seeing the twin towers burn from her apartment window (she has to turn on her TV to make sure it's real), to joining the refugees of "Tribecastan" on their way up Sixth Avenue (the first thing she packs is her vibrator), to the weirdly euphoric sense of community that swept the city in crisis. The latter part of the show -- in which she skewers Bush, Giuliani, Ashcroft, and Larry King -- isn't quite as funny, but her radical take on the national psychosis is bracing, especially when she catches herself wondering, "Where the hell was the CIA?" Nancy Savoca (*Household Saints*) directed. 72 min. Also on the program: *We Too Sins America* by Yun Jong Suh (2001, 12 min.). (J.R. Jones) (SAIC Auditorium, 9:00)

Whether You Like It or Not: The Story of Hedwig

Created by former Chicago actor John Cameron Mitchell and songwriter Stephen Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is a "neo-glam post-punk rock musical" about an East German "girly-boy" whose botched sex-change surgery leaves him with an "angry inch" of genital flesh. Mitchell starred in the off-Broadway version, a 1998 hit, and his subsequent film adaptation won awards at Sundance and other festivals. This 2001 documentary by Laura Nix is featured on the movie's DVD; a video diary of the show's genesis, it mixes puffy talking-head interviews, sometimes indecipherable clips of Mitchell's first rock-club appearances as Hedwig, footage behind the scenes of the film shoot, and so on. There's even an appearance by Mitchell's dad, former commander of U.S. forces in divided Berlin during the cold war, who helps explain Hedwig's roots in Mitchell's army-brat upbringing -- and who wonders when his boyish-looking son will go back to

Broadway musicals like *The Secret Garden*. 85 min. (Albert Williams) (WIDC Theatre, 10:00)

Sunday, March 23

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The Edge of Each Other's Battles: The Vision of Audre Lorde

Poet and teacher Audre Lorde (1934-'92) was a consummate boat rocker: she challenged the black power movement for its sexism, the feminist movement for its racism, and ordinary women of color for their homophobia. This 2002 video by Jennifer Abod documents a 1990 Boston conference held in Lorde's honor; the orgy of self-congratulation on the eve of the Persian Gulf war is a jarring reminder of the damage that identity politics have done to the American left. Conference organizers established quotas mandating that 50 percent of the attendees be black and 50 percent "working-class." In addition to alienating excluded white middle-class feminists, the policy spurred the formation of splinter groups as the conference progressed. "We do not have to become each other in order to work together," argues Lorde. Yet the powerful poetry readings -- by Sharon Cox, Nicole Breedlove, Julie Blackwomon, and Lorde -- implicitly repudiate the insular politics of the conference, demonstrating that art comes from individual expression, not group identification. A discussion will follow the screening. 60 min. (J.R. Jones) (WIDC Theater, 1:00)

Making Family

Three videos about families, traditional and otherwise. The longest and best, Joyce Warshow's *Hand on the Pulse* (2002, 52 min.) is a profile of activist Joan Nestle -- schoolteacher, writer, and cofounder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Growing up in a culture that deemed her a "sexual cripple," and with a mother who at one point turned tricks for a living, she refused to stop writing about "butch" and "femme" sex roles when those categories came under attack by other feminists. Barbara Bird combines home movies with commentary from family members in *Album* (2002), chronicling their collective experience of divorce and one child's battle with schizophrenia, but she passes up any opportunity for analysis, instead pairing vacation shots with banalities like "I liked camping." Also showing: Tricia Creason Valencia's amateurish high school drama *We Got Next* (2002). 99 min. (Fred Camper) (WIDC Theater, 3:00)

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