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Mustang (2015)

The Watermelon Woman (1996)

Daisies (1966)

Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles (1975)



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WASTELAND RATINGS

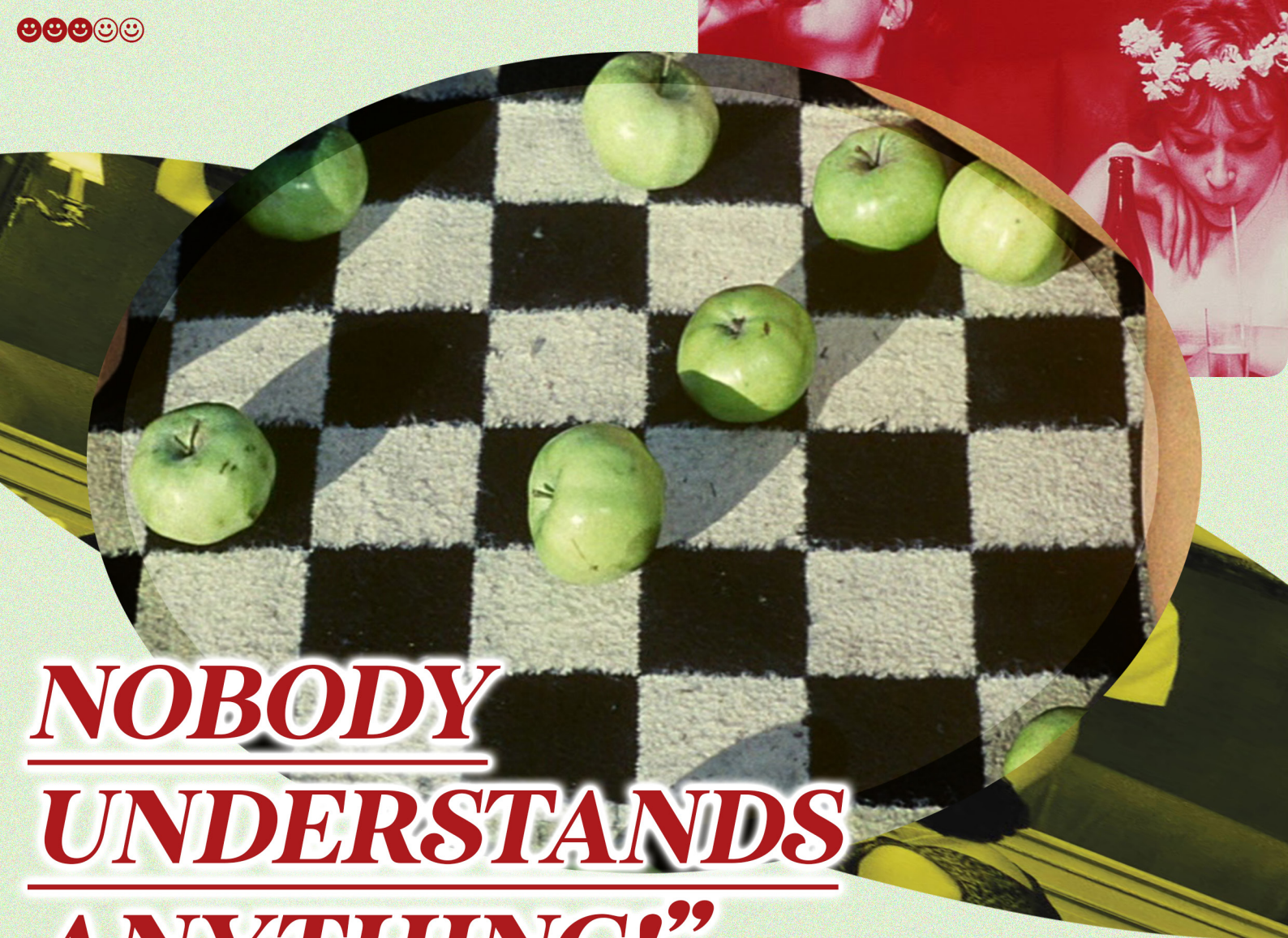


GUILTY PLEASURE
ICONIC
MUST-SEE
MASTERPIECE
PERFECTION

Daisies

A 1966 film by Vera Chytilova
Artwork by Lydia Gooding



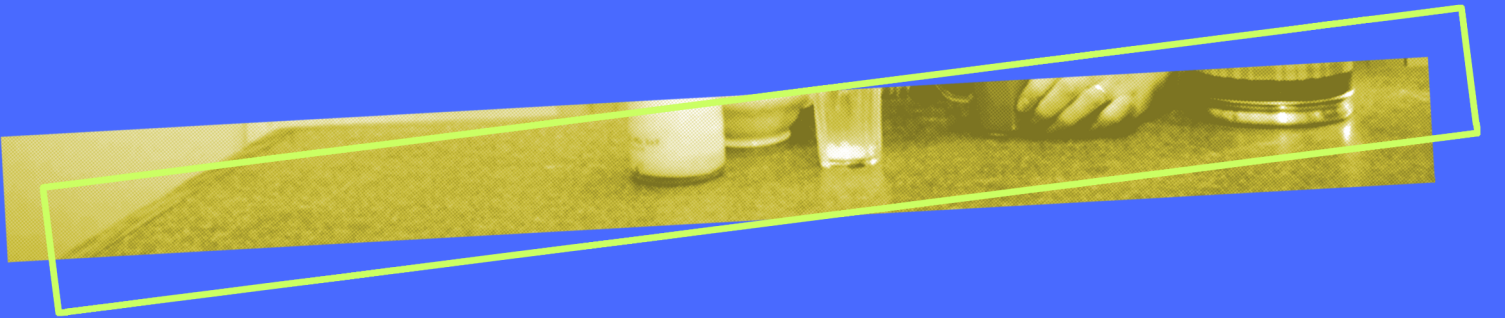
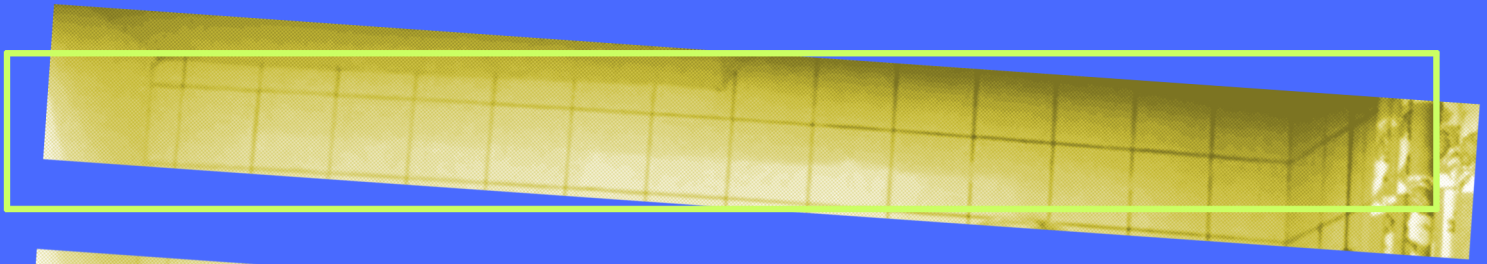


NOBODY UNDERSTANDS ANYTHING!”



Věra Chytilová’s masterpiece of the Czech New Wave is a neo-dadaist force of inventive, feminist filmmaking; a champion of anarchy and technical finesse. It follows the two Maries as they rebelliously decide to mirror the spoiled, postwar world in which they occupy. With youth as their currency, and the world as their dressing-up box, they revel in life’s artifice through multiple personas and fleeting, interchangeable role-play.

Chytilová certainly knows how to make a film, but in *Daisies* she annihilates the blueprint. She dethrones the seriousness of the medium through hedonistic splendour and intelligent playfulness. The result is a banquet of chaos, a farcical ode to duplicity and theatricality, and perhaps the greatest, most endearing commentary on film aesthetics to date.



**JEANNE DIELMAN, 23, QUAI
DU COMMERCE 1080
BRUXELLES**



Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* is an arthouse drama following the quiet existence of a widow and her son, and the ways she maintains their stasis as a family through prostitution. The titular Jeanne (Delphine Seyring) is at the centre of the 'narrative', if one can call it such, as she resides in the kitchen, bathroom or bedroom of her home, in front of a camera which is noticeably static. Akerman's decision to fix the camera, facilitating long unwavering takes, yields an uncompromised focus on Jeanne's experience. And while our exposure to her experience certainly intimates a realistic or representative quality, it is deliberately obscured, and utterly superficial. This is because Akerman denies us access to Jeanne's subjectivity. The camera's immobility limits our spectatorship to that which feels utterly private: Jeanne's rituals of cooking, cleaning and grooming in solitude. These mundane activities themselves certainly indicate naturalism, and their qualification as cinematic content absolutely mark the film as feminist, yet their static exhibition is jarringly, deliberately invasive. It reminds us of the inevitable distance between the static, leersome camera and its observed subject, and the emotional consequence this distance generates is both abstracting as well as deeply immersive. *Jeanne* is an essential example of Akerman's auteurship, and perhaps one of the clearest incidents of cinema at its most self-aware and utterly estranging.

The
immobility
spectatorship
camera's
limits
our



"I guess



we have a

thing or two in

common Miss

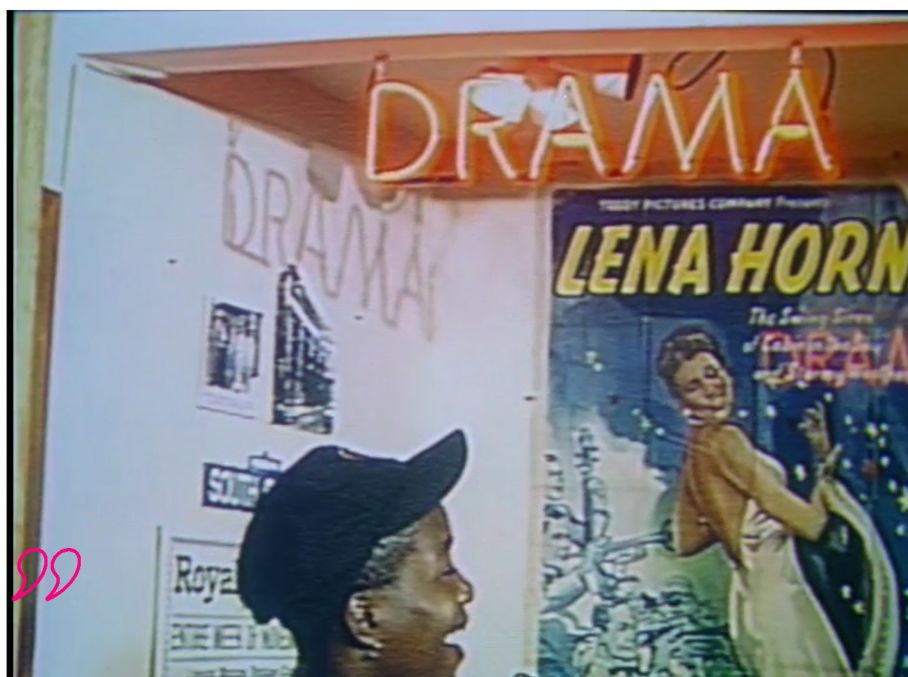
Richards...

the movies



and

women"





the watermelon woman

For Cheryl Dunye, the art of documentary is self-insertive. It facilitates an encounter with fact by exposing its proximities, while urging us to examine structures of visibility and access. Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* is an identikit, faux documentary and the first feature film directed by an "out" Black lesbian. It follows Cheryl, a young Black lesbian filmmaker, and her discovery of the actress Fae Richards (credited only as "the watermelon woman"), her ubiquitous "mammy" roles, and her sapphic, interracial relationship with frequent director, Martha Page.

What is most striking about this feature, aside from its vanguard in the New Queer Cinema, is its study of authenticity. Rather than creating an investigation into the real actresses to whom "mammy" roles were relegated, Dunye made up her own. That is, Fae Richards, the subject of Cheryl's research, did not exist. This invention does not merely qualify the 'mockumentary' aspect of the film, it signifies the political reality of Dunye's filmmaking. Fae Richards, played by Lisa Marie Bronson in the constructed footage, stands for the erasure of Black actresses of the 30s/40s. She stands for Dunye's limited access to Black lesbian history, an inaccessibility actualised brilliantly during Cheryl's visit to the C.L.I.T., where

she is confronted with white feminists who gatekeep the Black lesbian archives. Dunye's exposure to her Black queer history, both in the film and in actuality, is restricted; controlled and reclaimed by white feminists. Thus in order to emulate an encounter with this forgotten history, Dunye fabricates and fills in the gaps. By creating *The Watermelon Woman*, she creates a new history, one she can access and connect with.

Throughout the film, we see the development of Cheryl's own interracial relationship parallel the contents of her research, a parallel authenticated brilliantly by the medium of faux documentary. It is, perhaps, the most liberating medium to express Dunye's experience as a lesbian and a filmmaker. A faux documentary of Black actresses in the 30s/40s reminds us of their erasure, one simply cannot conduct a real research with such limited resources, all the while 'documenting' and therefore autonomising the experience of Black lesbian filmmakers. The specific history *The Watermelon Woman* describes may be fiction, but its message emerges as invaluable truth.



MUSTANG



Deniz Gamze Ergüven's debut feature is an evocative insight into the lives of five orphaned sisters and their proximity to conservative ideologies. Set within a rural Turkish village, under strict familial patriarchy, each sister encounters a fate which threatens to break the synergy of their unity and uniquely sororal kinship, that which sustains and nourishes them in the absence of fair adults.

What is especially staggering about this film, and a testament to its directorship, is the nuance with which Ergüven treads a line between criticism of patriarchal injustice and quotidian experiences of childhood. While the sisters exist in

a continual confrontation with their unjust surroundings, they are always together, laying in the sun or braiding each other's hair, evidencing the film's beautifully attentive characterisation of their togetherness. Its nostalgic aesthetic and orientation of sisterhood is often categorised with Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides*, but this comparison ignores Ergüven's dexterity as a director and her culturally specific perspective. Ergüven's debut navigates Turkey's cultural hostility towards women, that which has, especially recently, predicated a climate of femicide as not only prevalent, but known internationally. Her directorship serves as a point of entry for us to understand how these political realities are established in childhood, and how processes of inscribing violence upon the female body begin at the first signs of independence.

Mustang is a meticulous and breathtaking study into the effects of conservative ideas, as seen through the lens of feminine, childhood specificity. It navigates a patriarchal reality from a stance which is both feminine and emotionally autonomous. Its result is a stunning blend of social critique and authenticity, one which advocates for the power in focalised, subjective storytelling inasmuch as the exposure to collective, national violence.

**Embroidery
by Isobel
Wise.**



NEW ISSUE MONTHLY
NEW ISSUE MONTHLY

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