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OUT AT THE MOVIES

ANTONIA'S LINE

Willeke van Ammelrooy, Els Dottermans,
Jan Declair
Directed by Marleen Gorris

Dutch filmmaker Marleen Gorris has proven with each of her films that feminism can shape art that is powerful, politically charged, intelligent and stunningly original. Her first film, *A Question of Silence*, which portrays three shoppers who spontaneously bludgeon a chastising store manager to death and mutilate his genitals with a piece of glass, is perhaps the most radical

Cinema

film ever made about women who kill. These women, who are strangers prior to the killing, kill because they despair—not because they're psychotic, and kill together because their oppression has a common source—patriarchy. Prison is their escape, and they laugh in the face of the justice system that tries to declare them insane.

Similarly, Gorris' second film, *Broken Mirrors*, portrayed a woman who starves herself to death while being held captive in a basement, rather than be executed by her serial killer kidnapper.

Whew! This is perhaps why fans of her early work are really shocked by her latest film, *Antonia's Line*, which in comparison is totally vanilla. But a certain lightheartedness and humor don't negate the integrity that has become Gorris' signature.

Antonia's Line, nominated for this year's Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, follows the extraordinary daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters of matriarch Antonia, who returns to the village of her birth to claim the farm she has inherited. She is determined to live her life and raise her family on her own terms. As the years go by, her "family" grows to include several lost souls and strays, along with her beautiful and complicated offspring.

Ironically, Gorris' most mainstream film contains her most central lesbian character: Antonia's daughter, Danielle. When Danielle falls in love with the local school-mistress, you can feel the sparks down to the tips of your toes! For this reason and many more, *Antonia's Line* is a total delight. It's a thinking feminist's fantasy for all of us who don't mind finding a little inspiration out at the movies.

FRENCH TWIST

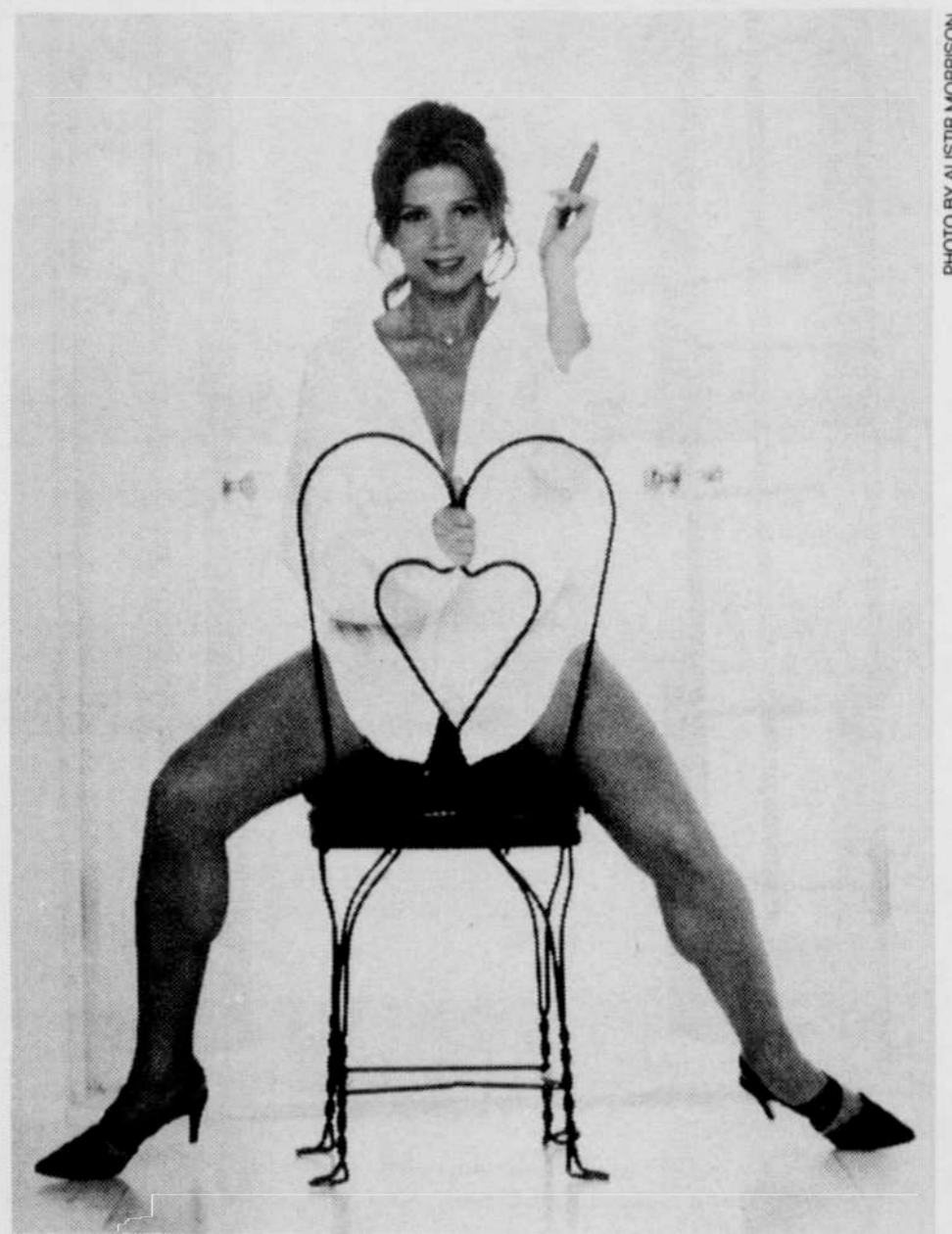
Victoria Abril, Josiane Balasko, Alain Chabat
directed by Josiane Balasko

What happened to all those feminist-PC-hippie lesbians from the late '60s-early '70s, and how have they adapted to the dyke-chic '90s? Perhaps they all own property in San Francisco, or they all became therapists? But how would we know, since these are not the women that Hollywood—or even queer independents—are making films about?

This is perhaps why the romantic comedy *French Twist* was made in Europe, and it's one movie I wouldn't mind seeing a big studio rip off and

remake here in the States. The story goes a little something like this: Marijo (Balasko) is a middle-aged stone butch dyke, driving around in a bright yellow VW van with a huge sunflower painted on the side. She's hit the road to get away from her last dead-end relationship, but she runs out of gas in an affluent suburb and knocks on the door of an irrepressibly sexy housewife, Loli (Abril). After Marijo fixes the plumbing, Loli asks her to stay for dinner, and sparks fly. When Loli finds out that her husband, Laurent (Chabat), has been cheating on her with every tramp in town, she feels the time is right for Marijo to move in and become part of her family.

Two of Europe's most popular actresses—Abril, the sexy siren best known to Americans through the films of Pedro Almodovar (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *High Heels*) and Balasko, who also wrote and directed the film—play the film's leads. Can you imagine two of Hollywood's top actresses (say Jessica Lange and Demi Moore or Jodie Foster and Julia Roberts) taking on such roles? And if they did, can you imagine the film becoming a surprise box office hit? Unlikely, but this is exactly



Victoria Abril

I know what you are thinking: Even in France things aren't so progressive that a mainstream audience is going to embrace just any film about a dyke, a bisexual and eventually a threesome, who also have children together.

what happened in France with *French Twist*.

I know what you are thinking: Even in France things aren't so progressive that a mainstream audience is going to embrace just any film about a dyke, a bisexual and eventually a threesome, who also have children together. But the hook is that on top of the talent it's a well-written, funny script with a universal upbeat message about how love can change your life. And the lesbian character is so real that Josiane Balasko has caused many journalists to exclaim that they can't believe she's not the real thing! (Sorry, everyone—she's not.) No doubt some dykes will wish Loli's husband was out of the picture, but the happy ending, which will be somewhat uncomfortable for gay and straight alike, makes the film even more progressive. *French Twist* is definitely my first favorite film of 1996!

Reviews by Cathay Che, who is a regular contributor to POZ magazine and Time Out in New York.