

WOMEN'S WORK

NW Film Center series pairs queer perspectives
with emergent Russian cinema

by Kelly M. Bryan

Some very different visions are hunkering together under the umbrella of a women's film series at the Northwest Film Center, but the association is a friendly one. The series is called "Imagination and Identity: New Works by Women," and introduces several U.S. films to one Australian film, two from infant Russia and three from the bygone Soviet era, including one that was banned by censors for 20 years. The series runs two weekends, beginning July 24 and ending Aug. 3.

Cinema

YOU DON'T KNOW DICK: COURAGEOUS HEARTS OF TRANSEXUAL MEN

Testosterone. As the divide between the genders gaps wider than ever, the male hormone has often been made the butt of jokes—and the subjects of this frank and heart-grabbing documentary are laughing right along. But they also know, more acutely than most men, that their very identity hinges on it.

These six pioneers began life in women's bodies, as women in the eyes of the world. Within themselves, however, each knew—vaguely or distinctly, early or late—that something was not right. While these men are quite different, they share a similar experience. At puberty: the expectation of beards, the shock of breasts. In adulthood: the sense of being denied the life that was due them, the sense that they were living a lie.

In the process of trekking over the journey of six particular human beings, the film kicks up big dust clouds of larger societal issues. One example: James, articulate and charismatic, says that in his belief it is really our cultural expectations that demand that transsexuals undergo a medical change. People have been changing gender for millennia, he says, and communities did this by agreement. But in this culture, things must look like what we take them for—no gray areas allowed. If you want to be seen as a man, you must look like a man. He adds that he doesn't like the term "genetic men" used to refer to men born in men's bodies. He asks, How do we know that genetically I'm not male as well?

Far beyond the average talking heads documentary, this film elicits an intimacy and a candor from its subjects, who very givingly open their hearts on screen. Acceptance is bred of understanding, and these men's bravery is a giant step toward that goal.

(With *Juggling Gender*, a look at a woman who sports a beard, at 7:30 pm Thursday, July 24, and again Sunday, July 27, at 7 pm. Candace Shermerhorn, director of *You Don't Know Dick*, will be present July 24 to speak after the screening.)

JODIE: AN ICON WITH HIDE AND SEEK

Every inch a work of reverence, Pratibha Parmar's *Jodie: An Icon* begins with a song of praise, The Pretenders' "Hymn to Her." As Chrissie Hynde croons "Let me inside you, into

your room/ I've heard it's lined with the things you don't show," Jodie Foster's hallowed image fills the screen.

Disciples gathered for commentary—Jewelle Gomez, Lea DeLaria, Nicole Conn, Guinevere Turner—pore over the icon's every aspect, and comb her films looking for signs.

Speaking of what she doesn't show, much talk centers on the fact that no one knows for sure that Foster is gay. Nevertheless, we can still perfectly sensibly discuss whether she's butch or femme (and we do, and they do—at length). Undefined, Foster can be all things to all people, which is befitting to and most enticing in an object of worship.

For a virtual Jodie fix when the movie's over, stop by Professor Mary Cardenas' Web page, as seen in the film. It has photos categorized to fit your fetish (see Jodie in dresses, in suits, etc.), plus gossip and interviews (www.tcp.com/~mary/foster.html).

Su Friedrich's *Hide and Seek* is another of the filmmaker's fresh and quirky contributions to lesbian lore. In her own distinctive brand of cinematic collage, this time merging fiction and documentary, she places the tale of a young tomboy in the 1960s against archival footage from propaganda/instructional films and interviews with lesbians who relate reminiscences from their queer girlhoods. Friedrich, who directed, edited and co-wrote, presents the pack-

age—as is her wont—in a shimmering black and white that spreads in liquid silver tones across the screen.

The most riveting element in the film is the fictional one, portrayed with impressive believability by young actors, in particular Chels Holland, as tomboy Lou. As with a novel where you're tempted to skip through the exposition to get to the "good parts," the wait between the segments with Lou and her pals can seem awfully long. Perhaps this is because so much of what the interviews set out is familiar and not particularly earth-shaking, while the sex-education and other "how to be the right kind of human" films are appalling and

ludicrous in a nostalgic way. Taken together, though, the parts flesh out and amplify the whole. For those old enough to remember the era, the appropriate notes of fondness, humor and outrage will be sounded.

(9 pm Friday, July 25, and again Saturday, July 26, at 7 pm.)

Other films in the Imagination and Identity series (which could not be screened before deadline) are *Elixir*, shown with *Larisa* and *One Doll's Story*; *The Mini-Skirted Dynamo*, shown with *Women without Implants*; *The Asthenic Syndrome*; and *Brief Encounters*. The latter, made in the Soviet Union in 1967 by Kira Muratova, was banned and its director blacklisted until the mid-1980s brought perestroika. *The Asthenic Syndrome* (1989) marks her return to work as a (comparatively) unconstrained artist.

Programs are screened at the Berg Swann Auditorium, 1219 SW Park Ave. The cost is \$6 general; \$5 seniors, students and museum members. Call 221-1156 for more information.



Jodie Foster



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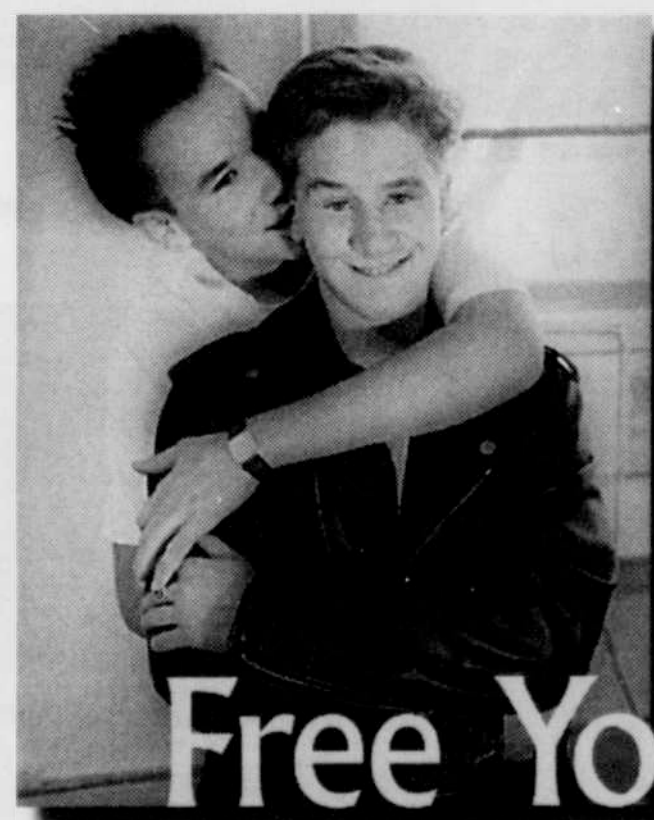
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