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Screwball shorts

Marie Losier's silent flicks celebrate '60s voices

BY SABINE GRUFFAT



Avant-garde film and other delights: Losier covered in tarte 'a la crème in *Eat My Makeup!*

About a decade ago in New York, filmmaker Marie Losier met Richard Foreman, father of the famed Ontological Hysterical Theater, while making props for his play *Hotel Fuck*.

"It was my job," Losier says by phone, "to make the giant penises on wheels."

Auspicious meetings that play out like screwball comedies inspire giddiness and spontaneity in Losier's short silent films, which, in addition to Foreman, honor such avant-garde veterans as Guy Maddin, Genesis P-Orridge and George and Mike Kuchar. Her work is a refreshing reminder that not all artistic expressions need to be calculated and self-conscious.

Born in Boulogne, France, in 1972, Losier developed nostalgia for early cinema because, she says, "those films retained sculptural, painterly and, through their inter-titles, strong handmade qualities that created a sense of infinite possibility." She's particularly fond of the quirky mannerisms and clumsy theatrics of the era.

To emulate a silent film aesthetic, Losier shoots her footage with a vintage film camera, sometimes smearing Vaseline on its lens and often opting for grainy high-speed film stocks. At once amateur and delicate, these techniques produce a feeling of frenzied pathos, enhanced when she edits out moments of clarity in favor of hazier gestures. The resulting imagery, though a recent creation, seems soldered into the viewer's visual memory.

Yearning compels Losier's productions. Her films try to get intimate with people she respects by recording their performances, inserting herself into their worlds, or inviting them to participate in hers. *The Ontological Cowboy*, for example, which screened at the 2006 Whitney Biennial, is her film portrait of Foreman. Most recently, Losier collaborated with Canadian experimental filmmaker Guy Maddin.

"I look like one of the little devils or angels in his films," Losier explains, "so I wrote him a letter asking to perform in his next work, saying I could play a rabbit, a donkey, whatever he wanted." Their resulting friendship led to collaboration, smartly titled *Manuelle Labor*. In the film, Losier plays Manuelle, a mother giving birth to Maddin's hands. Our heroine, however, has a hairy belly that doesn't look like it belongs on the adorable Losier.

The spirit of transgression associated with 1960s anti-authoritarian movements first lured Losier to New York City, where she now lives. Since then, she has introduced herself into the lives of the remaining participants of these same subcultures. Her next film will document the Pandrogyné Project by cult musicians and performers Genesis P-Orridge and Lady Jaye, formerly of experimental band Throbbing Gristle. They rely upon plastic surgery to look as much like one another as possible, so they can, theoretically, inhabit the same body,

complete with breasts and penises.

A symbiotic relationship also exists between Losier's work and life. As a film programmer for the French Institute in New York, she interviews and hosts artists from the worlds of cinema and music, many of whom continue to influence her films. She organizes events for such celebrated figures as director Michel Gondry (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*) and actress Catherine Deneuve. "Jan Svankmeyer was very difficult about what foods he could eat," she recollects of dining with the Czech filmmaker. "He wouldn't eat meat. Of course, the first question I asked him then was, "Why do all your films have so much meat in them?"

It's understandable that Losier might be confused when Svankmeyer, as a person, is not his films incarnate. Losier seems at one with her work. The quirky characters in her life also appear in her films, playing themselves. She understands that by crafting a world for her makeshift family, she produces a version of reality. And if the films survive as the only record of her graceful staging, then perhaps the distinction between her perception and reality is irrelevant.

As part of the New Cinema Series, filmmaker Marie Losier presents a selection of her short films at 8 p.m., Saturday, April 14, at the [Detroit Film Center](#), 1227 Washington Blvd., Detroit; 313-961-9936.

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