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a tale of love



A Film by
Trinh T. Minh-ha

With Mai Huynh; Juliette Chen; Dominic Overstreet; Mai Le Ho; Kieu Loan. *Music by* The Construction of Ruins (Greg Goodman, J. A. Deane); *Line Producer & Production Manager* Erica Marcus; *Director of Photography* Kathleen Beeler; *Co-Director, Lighting & Production Designer* Jean-Paul Bourdier. *Directed, Written & Edited by* Trinh T. Minh-ha.
A Moongift Films Production. 35 Alamo Ave. Berkeley California 94708, USA. (510) 527-2584

M O O N G I F T F I L M S

35 Alamo Ave, Berkeley, CA 94708

Tel: (510) 527-2584

Fax: (510) 527-2584

A T A L E O F L O V E

Credits

Kieu Mai Huynh
Juliet Juliette Chen
Alikan Dominic Overstreet
The Aunt Mai Le Ho
Verse Singer Kieu Loan

Director, Producer, Writer, Editor
Co-Director, Co-Producer,
Lighting & Production Designer

Line Producer/Production Manager
Director of Photography
Art Director

Assistant Editor/Location Manager
Post-Production Consultant/Re-recording Mixer

Music by
Constructors:
Sound Recordist

Steadicam Operator

Trinh T. Minh-ha
Jean-Paul Bourdier

Erica Marcus
Kathleen Beeler
Angela D. Chou
Corey Ohama
Jim Kallett
The Construction of Ruins
Greg Goodman, J.A. Deane
Lauretta Molitor
Craig Peterschmidt

A TALE OF LOVE

by Trinh T. Minh-ha
35mm. Color. 108 mins
(Synopsis)

Set in the framework of contemporary American life, A TALE OF LOVE follows the quest of a woman in love with Love. The film is loosely inspired by *The Tale of Kieu*, the Vietnamese national poem of love, written in the early 19th century. The poem tells of the misfortunes of Kieu, a martyred woman who sacrificed her "purity" and prostituted herself for the good of her family. Vietnamese people (both in Vietnam and in the diaspora) see the poem as a mythical biography of the "motherland," marked by internal turbulence and foreign domination; they recognize their country in the karma-cursed and passion-driven Kieu.

The film portrays the Vietnamese immigrant experience through Kieu, a free-lance writer who sends money to her family in Vietnam by working for a women's magazine and posing for a photographer. Yet, while caught between different cultural and emotional worlds, our modern day Kieu broadens the role of the nineteenth century woman of *The Tale of Kieu* by exposing the link between sex and the virtual decapitation of women in love stories.

Kieu struggles with her Aunt, a single mother and a social worker, over traditional values and the demands of modern life. In his studio, Alikan the artist photographs Kieu sheathed by transparent veils, shrouded in mystery. Idealizing the headless female body, he exposes the voyeurism of both the camera eye and the spectator's eye in the consumption of images of love. Kieu's relationship with Alikan is, however, based on mutual agreement and their dialogues hint at a larger conversation between cultures and genders. The two are playing a match of chess where desire drives the game.

Away from the photographer's studio, Kieu is working on an article about the legacy of *The Tale of Kieu* for a women's magazine. Kieu's mentor Juliet, the editor of the magazine, is a woman who loves through the sense of smell and believes only in a "great love," a *la* Romeo and Juliet. With Juliet, Kieu comes to understand how the poem resonates in her own personal life. In the end, overcoming the sorrows of love and exile is, for Kieu, to reinvent both herself and the 200-year-old poem.

Voyeurism runs through the history of love narrative, and voyeurism is here one of the threads that structure the "narrative" of the film. Is the film about love? Is it a love story? As the title suggests, it is above all a "tale"; a tale about the fiction of love in love stories and the process of consumption; a tale that marginalizes traditional narrative conventions such as action, plot, unity of time and realistic characters. Opening up a space where reality, memory and dream constantly pass into one another, A TALE OF LOVE unfolds in linear and non-linear time. It offers both a sensual and an intellectual experience of film and can be viewed as a symphony of colors, sounds and reflections. As a character in the film says, "Narrative is a track of scents passed on from lovers to lovers."

Kieu acts as a foil to a multiplicity of desires embodied in the other characters. With Alikan, Minh, Java and Juliet, she experiences love through sight, sound, smell and touch. Similarly, the film offers the spectator more than one way into its own "love stories." Rather than being homogenized, the relationship between the visuals and the verses remains layered and elliptical. Light, setting, camera movement, sound and text all have a presence, a logic and a language of their own. Although they reflect upon one another, they are not intended to just illustrate the meanings of the narrative. The film also works with a subtly "denaturalized" space of acting. In the way the shots and the dialogues are carried out, both spectators and actors share the discomfort of voyeurism: the unnaturalness of those who "look without being looked at" (the makers, the spectators) versus the self-consciousness of those who "know they are being looked at while they are being watched" (the actors).

Festivals:

Toronto Festival of Festivals (Canada 95)
Berlin International Film Festival (Germany 96)
San Francisco Asian American Film Festival (96)
Film Fest New Haven (96)
Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones de Barcelona (Spain 96)
Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival (96)
Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival (Taiwan 96)
Umea International Film Festival (Sweden 96)
Feminale Women's Film Festival (Köln, Germany 96)

Biographical Summary

Born in Vietnam, Trinh T. Minh-ha is a filmmaker, writer and composer. Her works include: the films •*Reassemblage* (40 mins, 1982), •*Naked Spaces - Living is Round* (135 mins, 1985), •*Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (108 mins, 1989), a film on identity and culture through the struggle of Vietnamese women, •*Shoot for the Contents* (102 mins, 1991), a film on culture, art and politics in China, and • *A Tale of Love* (108 mins, 1995), a newly completed narrative feature • the books, *En minuscules* (poems, 1987), *Un Art sans oeuvre* (on contemporary arts, 1981), *African Spaces - Designs for Living in Upper Volta*, (in coll. with Jean-Paul Bourdier, 1985), *Woman, Native, Other* (on post-coloniality and feminism, 1989) *When the Moon Waxes Red*, (on representation, gender and cultural politics, 1991), and *Framer Framed* (on film, 1992).

The recipient of several awards and grants (including the AFI National Independent Filmmaker Maya Deren Award, fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment of the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute, and the California Arts Council), her films have shown widely in the States, in Canada, Senegal, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as in Europe and Asia (including in Italy, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Japan, India, Taiwan, Jerusalem, with twenty retrospectives in the US, the UK, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Japan and Hong Kong) . *Reassemblage* was exhibited at The New York Film Festival (1983) and has toured the country with the Asian American Film Festival among other festivals. *Naked Spaces* received the *Blue Ribbon Award* for Best Experimental Feature at the American Int'l. Film Festival and the *Golden Athena Award* for Best Feature Documentary at the Athens International Film Festival in 1986; it toured nationally and internationally with the 1987 Biennial of the Whitney Museum of American Art. *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, has received the *Merit Award* from the Bombay International Film Festival, the *Film as Art Award* from the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art (SF Museum of Modern Art) and the *Blue Ribbon Award* at the American Film and Video Festival. Her more recent feature-length film, *Shoot for the Contents* won the Jury's *Best Cinematography Award* at the 1992 Sundance Film Festival and the *Best Feature Documentary Award* at the Athens International Film Festival, and toured internationally with the 1993 Biennale of the Whitney Museum.

Trinh Minh-ha has traveled and lectured extensively--in the States, as well as in Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand--on film, art, feminism, and cultural politics. She taught at the National Conservatory of Music in Dakar, Senegal (1977-80); at universities such as Cornell, San Francisco State, Smith, and Harvard; and is presently Professor of Women's Studies and Film at the University of California, Berkeley.

RETROSPECTIVES OF FILMS BY TRINH T. MINH-HA

- *Feminale Women's Film Festival*, Köln, Germany, October 2-6, 1996
- *Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography*, Tokyo, Japan, Sept. 2-8, 1996
- *Frauenkino Xenia*, Zurich, Switzerland, April 4 - May 2, 1996
- *Hong Kong Arts Centre*, Wanchai, Hong Kong, August 10-17, 1995
- *Filmhaus*, Vienna, Austria, June 14-18, 1995
- *Shedhalle*, Zurich, Switzerland, June 10-13, 1995
- *Filmmuseum & Kunstverein Muenchen*, Germany, June 5-9, 1995
- *Kino fsk*, Berlin, Germany, June 3-7, 1995
- *American Center*, Paris, France, June 1-3, 1995
- *Colgate University*, Hamilton NY, October 11-26, 1994.
- *Eldorado, Centrum Voor Beeldcultuur*, Antwerpen, October 8-21, 1993.
- *The Banff Center*, Canada, October 5-17, 1993.
- *Institute of Contemporary Art*, London, UK. November 22-24, 1992.
- *San Francisco Cinematheque*, October 24-26/1991
- *Cornell Cinema*, Ithaca, New York, February-March/1991
- *National Gallery of Canada*, 5/3 - 5/20/1990 (Ottawa)
- *Film Studies Association of Canada*, 5/14-5/18/1990
- *Athens International Film Festival*, 4/26 - 5/4/1990
- *Sheldon Film Theater*, Lincoln, Nebraska 11/3-11/4/1989
- *Rainbow Film Festival*, Portland, Oregon 5/7-5/9/1989