

## Document Citation

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## 7. Ulrike Ottinger

Born 1942; studied art in Munich 1959-1961 and Paris 1962-1969; director of film club in Constance 1969-1972; since 1973 resides in Berlin.

### FILMS

1972/73 *Laokoon und söhne* [*Laocoon and Sons*] (together with Tabea Blumenschein)

50min., 16mm, color

A story of metamorphosis and a parody of mechanistic phenomena in Western culture, based on the classical legend of Laocoon.

1973 *Vostell—Berlinfieber* [*Vostell—Berlin Fever*]

12min., 16mm, color

Documentation of a happening by the avant-garde Berlin artist Kurt Vostell.

1975 *Die Betörung der blauen Matrosen* [*The Infatuation of the Blue Sailors*]

47min., 16mm, color

Distributor: Common Film

Through a panoply of allegorical figures and ritualized scenes, the film presents a critique of behavior roles in everyday life. Constructed as a collage of daily commercialism, kitsch, music, and language, it tries to undermine the rules and expectations of audience identification by means of irony, irritation, and narrative gaps.

1977 *Madame X—Eine absolute Herrscherin* [*Madame X—An Absolute Ruler*]

141min., 16mm, color

Distributor: Filmwelt Verleih

The film projects a utopia of women struggling to shed their socialized roles within the clichés of the traditional pirate film. Madame X, "an inexorable beauty, the uncrowned queen and frightening ruler of the China Sea," is driven to piracy by the loss of her lover Orlando. She sends out a seductive call to seven women to join her and her Chinese cook in the search for "gold-love-adventure." All of the women—parodies of the roles allowed them in a male-defined society—sacrifice security and comfort to escape the monotony of daily life for a dream distilled from the collective triviality of their existence. Later the crew is joined by the shipwrecked Belcampo, a hermaphroditic Fool whom they decide to keep on as a manicurist and hairdresser.

The members of this lesbian matriarchy must learn to live with their newly discovered pleasures and passions. Unused to the freedom of uninhibited feelings, they quickly settle into their old roles, reproducing behavior patterns of jealousy, domination, and subordination. Madame X is not a person, but a symbol of power and hierarchical structures. The women willingly respond to her promise of lesbian love and revolutionized consciousness, yet they can hardly reach beyond the rationally determined roles of female (and male) behavior. Accompanied by scenes of initiation and ritual, they are finally all killed off under Madame X's severe regime. Yet when she seeks out her new crew in the harbor, the same group of women join her: "all the dissatisfaction pent up in them combined into a powerful mass and they sailed away on a favorable wind." Death is the catharsis through which they are reborn with new identities.

Ottinger's camera work and editing purposefully juxtapose disparate elements for humorous effects: asynchronous sound and images, disrupted causality, and exaggerated costumes. Self-conscious stylization characterizes the compositional principle of the film. The behavior of the women, removed from its everyday context to the exotic Chinese junk, becomes ritualized movement and gestures. Violence, too, is integrated as an element of the beautiful illusion. Aggression, leather, chains, weapons, blood—they all become part of the aesthetic of stylization which underlies the stagey disparities throughout the film.

1979 *Bildnis einer Trinkerin—aller jamais retour* [*Portrait of An Alcoholic—Ticket of No Return*]

108min., 35mm, color

Distributor: Basis-Film Verleih

Two very different women from completely different social backgrounds are both alcoholics. The one—wealthy, anonymous, and mute—has come to Berlin to consciously drink herself to death. She checks into an expensive hotel. The other one sleeps at the train station, dragging all her belongings with her in a supermarket basket and constantly talking to herself. She is unconsciously drinking herself to death. The women meet and want to get to know each other. They begin a sightseeing tour through Berlin; however, their visit includes not only the tourists' facade of that city but also a journey through the different social milieus. By means of semi-documentary scenes and highly stylized images, the film shows how alcohol may dissolve social differences while at the same time preventing any real communication. Neither woman is able to break out of her loneliness and isolation.

"I exaggerate so that the viewer will see, otherwise no one will notice what I want to show . . . Today it is no longer sufficient just to show things in a film . . . I work with reality in order to create as many associations as possible for each image. You have to make reality conscious, not simply steal it by means of tape recorders and cameras."