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Surname Viet Given Name Nam

Trinh T. Minh-ha

USA, 1989, 108 minutes

Colour/16mm

Producer: Trinh T. Minh-ha

Screenplay: Trinh T. Minh-ha

Cinematography: Kathleen Beeler

Editor: Trinh T. Minh-ha

Art Director: Jean-Paul Bourdier

Sound: Linda Peckham

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In her previous anti-ethnographic films, *Reassemblage* and *Naked Spaces — Living is Round*, Trinh T. Minh-ha dealt with African women, vernacular architecture, and Senegalese village life as "empty subjects". In *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, she turns to her own identity as a Vietnamese woman. More cinematically polished than her previous works, the new film has the same eccentric cinematography, unconventional editing, multi-layered voice and music soundtrack, non-linear structure, and theoretical/political urgency. Archival and newsreel footage and still photographs of the Vietnamese war, beauty contests, and traditional folk dances are intercut with monologues by five Vietnamese women. These deliberately staged, long-take portraits, in which the women speak rehearsed lines in quiet and shy but determined voices, are juxtaposed with more conventional documentary images of the same women in their homes or at work, and with footage of younger women who have been raised in America in conversation with friends. The women speak of their own culture, their experiences of femininity and of immigration, their struggles in the American workplace, and their sense of themselves as exiles. Meanwhile, other voices on the soundtrack and texts on the screen situate their discourse in a discussion of the nature of the documentary, the politics of media images, the fiction of verite, and the truth of dramatic fakery. The film itself thus forms a record of the process of bringing histories and meaning into being.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, born in Vietnam, is a filmmaker, writer, composer, and university professor. Her works include a book of poems, two books on contemporary arts co-written with Jean-Paul Bourdier, and a fourth book on post-colonialism and feminism, "Woman, Native, Other" (89). Her films are: *Reassemblage* (82), *Naked Spaces — Living is Round* (85), and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (89).

Kay Armatage

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