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A TALE OF LOVE

A Moongift Films production. (International sales: Moongift Films, Berkeley.) Produced by Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Jean-Paul Bourdier.

Directed, written by Trinh T. Minh-Ha. Camera (color), Kathleen Beeler; editor, Minh-Ha; music, Greg Goodman, J.A. Dean; production design, Bourdier; art direction, Angela Chou; sound, Lauretta Molitor; assistant director, Lori Kay Wilson. Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival, Sept. 11, 1995. Running Time: 108 MIN.

Kieu Mai Huynh
Juliet Juliette Chen
Alikan Dominic Overstreet
Aunt Mai Le Ho
Model Alice-Gray Lewis

Concepts and ruminations abound in author-theoretician Trinh T. Minh-Ha's "A Tale of Love." However, the film is singularly lacking in drama, meaning that finding more than a rarefied audience for this feature-length discussion of art, emotion and tradition is out of the question.

Story centers on Kieu (Mai Huynh), a Vietnamese woman transplanted to the U.S. A writer and sometime model, she has a tight support group of relatives and maintains her palpable links to Vietnam via money sent back to her family.

Threaded through the narrative are references to "The Tale of Kieu," a beloved poem of the heroine's homeland, and songs and dances of the Asian nation. The poem — which deals with a woman's sacrifice and passion — is an obvious allegory for the contemporary Kieu's situation.

But apart from the emotional issues, the heroine seems overly consumed with the dilemma of whether it is better to look or be looked at. One has to accept her contention that love is voyeurism. Dismiss it, and the entire exercise tumbles like a house of cards.

"A Tale of Love" is a decidedly uncinematic venture, especially considering the filmmaker's background. While the film has a visual grace and precision that's arresting, it bogs down in endless chatter, bland performances and a narrative pace well below the legally posted speed limit.

Definitely one for fests and classrooms, the picture is a case study of how theory and practice part company when transposed to celluloid.

—Leonard Klady

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