



WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

The Headless Woman (La mujer sin cabeza)

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Directed by: Lucrecia Martel

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Production Companies: Aquafilms, El Deseo, Slot Machine, Teodora Film, R&C Produzioni (Rome), Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía y Artes Audio, ICAA – Instituto de Cinematografía y Artes Audiovisuales, Arte France Cinéma, Fonds Sud Cinéma
With the participation of: Fonds Sud Cinéma, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication
Executive Producer: Verónica Cura
Produced by: Pedro Almodóvar, Agustín Almodóvar, Esther García, Verónica Cura, Enrique Piñeyro, Lucrecia Martel, Marianne Slot, Vieri Razzini, Cesare Petrillo, Tilde Corsi
Aquafilms Productions: Carolina Farinella, Roberto Servera
Production Supervisor: Juan Pablo Miller
Production Co-ordinator: Gastón Graziade
El Deseo Production Accountant: Beatriz Gordo
Slot Machine Accountant: Zahra Daoudi
Administration Co-ordinator: Natalia Núñez
Location Manager: Fabiana Pucci
Post-production Supervisor: Ileana Novas
El Deseo Post-production Co-ordinator: Ascen Marchena
Assistant to the Director: Fabiana Tiscornia
1st Assistant Director: Federico Dauria
2nd Assistant Director: Gonzalo Fernández Amarante
Script Supervisor: Carola Jalife
Casting: Natalia Smirnoff
Written by: Lucrecia Martel
Director of Photography: Bárbara Álvarez
Camera Operator: Bárbara Álvarez
Focus Puller: Mariano Pariz
2nd Assistant Camera: Mariano Benchimol
Gaffer: Daniel Hermo
Key Grip: Anibal Cattaneo
Video Assist: Italo Díaz
Stills Photographer: Ivana Salfity
Special Effects: FX Stunt Team
Graphic Design: Juan Gatti
Editor: Miguel Schverdfinger
Art Director: María Eugenia Sueiro
Costumes: Julio Suárez
Make-up: Marisa Amenta
Hairstylist: Alberto Mocchi
Colourist: Daniela Ríos
Sound Director: Guido Berenblum
Sound Supervisor: Gina Barbier
Sound Mixer: Emmanuel Croset
Boom Operator: Guido Valerga
Cast:
María Onetto (Verónica, 'Vero')
Claudia Cantero (Josefina)
Inés Efrón (Candita)
César Bordón (Marcos)
Daniel Genoud (Juan Manuel)
Guillermo Arengo (Marcelo)
María Vaner (Lala)
Alicia Muxo (cousin Rosita)
Pía Uribelarrea (cousin Tere)
Andrea Verdún (motorbike girl 1, 'Cuca')
Maira Juárez (motorbike girl 2)
Liliana De Lafuente (fat woman)
Elizabeth López (Zula)

Introduced by Zeina Durra

In Argentine writer-director Lucrecia Martel's disquieting psychological thriller, a woman collides with something while driving her car. She initially believes she hit a dog, but paranoia grows that the incident may have been more serious. Zeina Durra, the director of *Luxor* and *The Imperialists Are Still Alive!*, will introduce this immersive, unsettling film, highlighting Martel's influence on her own work.

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Two worlds come into sharp contrast at the beginning of Lucrecia Martel's third feature *The Headless Woman*, a contemporary thriller where plot gradually gives way to metaphor. There's the world of Argentina's 'haves', embodied by the film's elegant, disengaged protagonist Vero and the privileged bourgeois society she's part of, and the 'have nots', the cleaners and gardeners who labour silently in the background. When Vero fears she may have killed a child from the other side of the tracks, the patriarchs of the family close in to protect their interests. The storm that hangs over the early part of the film may not have wiped away all traces of Vero's hit-and-run accident but the family will ensure that any evidence is disposed of, decisively and definitely.

While Martel's previous features, *The Swamp* (2001) and *The Holy Girl* (2004), can also be read as allegorical tales of domestic decomposition, *The Headless Woman* is her most overtly political film to date. Her visual and sonic landscape highlights the social schisms that underpin Argentine society: we see the poor who wait for treatment at the bleak local hospital; the elderly garden-centre attendant and his underage assistants struggling with the large pots Vero buys to adorn her garden; the shadowy servants only ever partially in view. These people's stories are filtered through windows, glass doors and water, keeping the primary focus firmly on María Onetto's alluring, mysterious Vero.

Water is a conduit in *The Headless Woman*: it is bought to Vero by a kindly attendant as she weeps uncontrollably in the changing rooms; it transports the body of the disappeared boy down the canal. Rain doesn't wash away Vero's sin but rather confines her to wander as if suspended in a fish tank. The film charts her journey from a shock-induced zombie-like lethargy to a re-engagement with the people and places around her.

Martel constructs a society in denial. Only Lala, Vero's elderly bedridden aunt, a character who might have been lifted from one of co-producer Pedro Almodóvar's early features, recognises that something is amiss. 'That voice doesn't appear to be yours,' she whispers ominously to Vero. This is a family haunted by the living dead: why are there children's clothes in Vero's house when her own daughters are supposedly grown up? What lies under Vero's garden? Are the children's prints on Vero's car window those of her friends' children or those of the child she may have killed? Martel provides no concrete answers. It's the moral questions that resonate, repeatedly, through the film.

The Headless Woman underlines the multiple ways in which a society eschews

Andrés Siarez (*man at nursery*)
 Carlos Roberto Sánchez (*builder*)
 Maximiliano Garros (*car wash boy*)
 Catalino Campos (*Changuila*)
 Camilo Sueldo (*boy with harelip*)
 Nilda Suárez (*poster nurse*)
 Ana Carolina Beltrán (*radiologist*)
 Julia Camisay (*hospital cleaning woman*)
 María Fernanda Aparicio (*secretary*)
 María Soledad Tovi (*Verónica's daughter*)
 Raúl Chunco (*hotel manager*)
 María Cecilia Sutti (*girlfriend 1*)
 Silvia Colletti (*girlfriend 2*)
 Miriam Díaz (*girlfriend 3*)
 Melina Balbuena (*girlfriend 4*)
 Gonzalo Gomez (*teenager 1*)
 Sebastián Montagna (*teenager's son*)
 María Del Carmen Valverdi (*masseuse*)
 Hilda Guzmán (*woman saying rosary 1*)
 María Isabel Marcone (*woman saying rosary 2*)
 Blanca Giarda (*woman saying rosary 3*)
 Carlos Fernández (*seminarian saying rosary*)
 Enzo Gutiérrez (*Zula's little boy*)
 Julia Tejerina (*director*)
 Sandra Aguirre (*guitar teacher*)
 Yamil Nogales (*Changuila's friend 1*)
 Cristian Laguna (*Changuila's friend 2*)
 Carmen Avendaño
 (*Alicia, old woman with rolls*)
 Mirta Aguirre (*Changuila's mother*)
 Elena Guerrero (*bath nurse*)
 José Flores (*male nurse*)
 Rosa Rojas (*injured woman at hospital*)
 Melina Gayote (*bathroom girl*)
 Ramón Yapura (*gardener*)
 Alva Luna (*woman crying*)
 Juan Manuel Castillo (*boy 1 at clinic*)
 Facundo Castillo (*boy 2 at clinic*)
 Carina Arias (*assistant orthodontist*)
 Paula Romina Apaza María
 (*young woman at vets*)
 María Soledad Figueroa Recchiuto
 (*young woman in reception*)
 Brian Gaspar (*footballer*)
 Gregorio González (*adult on road*)
 Santiago Albano (*young man at garage*)
 Olga Quispe (*woman at Changuila's house*)
 Lucrecia Peralta (*nurse in corridor*)
 Federico Curiotto (*hotel bellboy*)
 Elba González (*hotel maid*)
 Enriqueta Leticia Burgos (*woman ironing*)
 Guillermo Pedernera (*taxi driver*)
 Alicia Nelly Benayas (*woman saying rosary*)
 Argentina-Spain-France-Italy 2008©
 89 mins

Woman with a Movie Camera is generously supported by Jane Stanton

social responsibility. Vero even avoids discussing the amorous advances of her feverish adolescent niece. No wonder the prophetic Lala asks, 'Why does everyone in our family go crazy?'

While Martel has written that the film emerged from her own nightmares, the subject of 'the disappeared' remains a powerful trope in the New Argentine Cinema. Israel Adrián Caetano's *Buenos Aires 1977* (2006) and Lucía Cedrón's *Lamb of God* (2008) are just two of the many recent films to address it. Martel differs, however, in rooting her story in an ostensibly contemporary world – the northwestern Salta landscape of her earlier films – that alludes only obliquely to the junta and its horrors. The 1970s infiltrates this world largely through the soundtrack, with a version of Nana Mouskouri's 'Soleil, Soleil' and Julio Iglesias' 'Mammy Blue' serving to position Vero and her family firmly within the ideology of the dictatorship. The grainy wedding footage Vero watches at Lala's house includes *Saturday Night Fever* dance routines that recall those recreated by Pablo Larraín in *Tony Manero* (2008). As with Alfredo Castro's deluded disco-dancing obsessive in Larraín's feature, Vero reinvents herself anew – by dyeing her peroxide-blond hair a warm brown.

The Headless Woman may, on the surface, be the least accessible of Martel's features, but it is ultimately the most enigmatic, accomplished and rewarding. Martel's camera here appears as a further character, a mode of implicating the viewer within the unfolding trauma: a silent witness in the car with Vero; another member of the extended family at the social gatherings; a constant reminder of the absent 'other', the crime that no one will acknowledge. This elegant, disturbing film offers a commentary on contemporary Argentina as a 'house full of ghosts', and firmly undermines the conservative advice of one character: 'If you don't look at them, they just go away.'

María Delgado, *Sight & Sound*, March 2010

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