

Klaudia Reynicke: Super Heroines, Projects, 'Love Me Tender'

By John Hopewell



CREDIT: Summertime Intl.

In “Mermaids,” a 2014 three-minute short from Lugano-based Klaudia Reynicke, some conventionally beautiful young women practice hand gestures before an underwater show where they’ll perform as mermaids. Older women cleaners look on.

Cut to the show, with a mermaid swimming across a tank. Then, after a cloud of bubbles, a second mermaid appears, performing underwater cartwheels, who looks like one of the far more fulsomely-bodied cleaners.

Reynicke’s second feature “Love Me Tender” world premiered at Locarno Aug. 9, and segues to Toronto’s Discovery section.

It’s a Swiss movie, produced out of its southern region of Ticino. But Reynicke was born in Peru, spent her early adulthood in Florida – where she retained to shoot “Mermaids” – studied at the New York Tisch School of Arts, has lived for the last eight years in Lugano, Italy.

Is she a rising star of Ticino Swiss filmmaking? Or a member of Peru’s burgeoning film-TV generation? Or a Florida emigré? Probably a bit of them all, and all the better for it, and most definitely a filmmaker working a generally international – gender stereotype and authority questioning – idiom.

In “The Nest,” Reynicke’s 2016 feature debut, which played Locarno’s Filmmakers of the Present, for example, Cora takes time off from university to return to her home village, whose economy is increasingly driven by faith tourism, circling around the claimed apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the 1920s. She gradually begins to dig below the village’s pious surface, however and, though she’s told she’s imagining things, realizes that the village is hiding a ghastly crime committed 40 years earlier.

Reynicke calls “Love Me Tender,” her new movie, a “pop drama.” “It’s very flashy, slightly absurd, a bit surrealist, slightly eccentric,” she adds.

Sold by Summerside Intl., it centers on Seconda, a 32-year-old woman who has to confront her deep agoraphobia when suddenly abandoned at her family home by her feckless father.

In her super-human effort to overcome her innermost fears, which she does donning a track-suit, hood up, and stealing through the village with the aimed-for anonymity of a masked crusader, Seconda becomes a super-heroine in her own epic struggle, says Reynicke.



"I'm very attracted to non-conformists, super-heroes and super-heroines, individuals who seem a bit out of touch with reality," she adds.

"The Nest" and "Love Me Tender" have similarities. Both are produced by the prestigious Ticino-based Amka Films, founded by Tiziana Soudani in 1988, whose credits include Alice Rohrwacher's 2018 Cannes Festival best screenplay winner "Happy as Lazzaro" and 2014's "The Wonders" which took a Cannes Grand Jury Prize.

Ticino's rural hills and green valleys form a contrasting backdrop to their dramas. The two films feature strong female protagonists, who are outsiders, played by remarkable young Italian actresses: Ondina Quadri ("Amori e metamorfosi") as Cora, and Barbara Giordano ("Wondrous Boccaccio," "1994") who turns in a remarkably physical performance as Seconda.

In both, parents don't tell the truth to their children. The two films also mock patriarchy and its manifestations: Cora's supposedly upstanding father, also the village mayor; Seconda's suitor who appears to think he can seduce her by simply turning up with a bunch of flowers and saying she's beautiful.

But "Love Me Tender," says Remicke, is in some ways a reaction to "The Nest." In her first feature, "I'd written a huge thing and we had to cut a lot of pages of script, because it just wasn't possible to realize them in production. It was a learning process."

"Love Me Tender," by contrast, "I took the craziest ideas I had and then set them in one location, with just one person. With sets stripped to bare essentials, the camera hugs Seconda so that spectators can sense her inner hell, Reynicke explains.

Peru-born, Florida-bred, Lugano-based, the world is now Reynicke's oyster. Renowned young Peruvian writer-director Diego Vega ("October," "The Mute") is co-writing with Reynicke the screenplay for "Reina," which could be her next feature, set in a turbulent '90s Peru, and to shoot in Lima.

"It's one from the heart for me, which I'm currently positioning," she says. She has another project, set in Florida, where her Peruvian family resides.

"When you leave the different homes you've had, you end up creating your own internal home," says Reynicke. That's what the heroines of "The Nest" and "Love Me Tender" achieve, she adds. Cinema, wherever she makes it, would seem to be Reynicke's own native land.

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