

A meditation on the social responsibility of the film artist

The Other Eye examines Pabst's art and politics

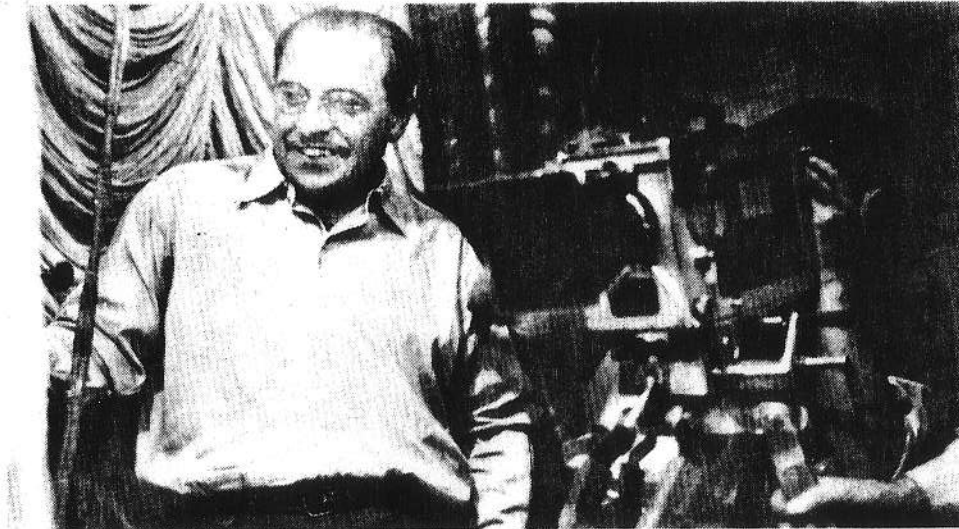
by Geoff Hanson

When Melanie Griffith donned a short black wig and the pseudonym Lulu in the 1986 film *Something Wild*, she was paying homage to Louise Brooks' character of the same name from G.W. Pabst's classic film *Pandora's Box*.

Though remote to popular audiences, the conception of the character was testimony to the endurance of Pabst's best-known film. So too, the wide interest in Brooks' 1985 autobiography *Lulu in Hollywood*.

Now, Pabst and his oeuvre are the subject of *The Other Eye*, a documentary co-written and co-directed by Joanna Heer and Werner Schmiedel, which will be screened at the Mason's Hall Cinema Saturday at 8:15 p.m., and at the Nugget Theater Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

Heer, who also served as cinematographer on the film, comes from a visual arts background primarily in photography, video and independent filmmaking, in addition to having served as cinematographer on a number of feature films.



G.W. PABST directs. Pabst's career is the subject of *The Other Eye*.

Heer has also written various film criticisms.

For Heer, the Pabst documentary was a logical step in terms of her artistic progression and because of her profound appreciation for Pabst's films.

"The film is a portrait," she says. "A portrait is an image which comes from painting and there are also portraits in a literary sense. For me, it was a logical consequence to work on a film portrait which we call an essay film. And plus, both Werner and I were drawn to Pabst's films and intrigued by his life and work."

The Other Eye refers to both Pabst's camera lens and to the eyes of the people

who knew him. Pabst's story is therefore told through footage from his films and through interviews with people who had different relationships with the director, ranging from Pabst's son Michael, to Francis Lederer who played opposite Louise Brooks in *Pandora's Box*, to Jan-Christopher Horak, curator of film at the George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y. (Horak will be in Telluride this weekend representing the rediscovered silent film *Lucky Star*), to one of Pabst's producers Carl Szokoll. What emerges, according to Heer, is a look at Pabst as family member, director, colleague and friend.

"The participants in the film not only

had different points of view but totally different experiences and different approaches to Pabst," she explains. "We tried to treat all the people we interviewed in an equally important way, to tell their story and convey how their meeting with Pabst affected their life. In a sense each person becomes a mini-portrait."

Not only does *The Other Eye* examine one artist's affect on the various people he encounters, but the film also looks at the social responsibilities of the artist.

"An integral part of the film and an important motive for us to make the film was to look at why Pabst chose to stay in Austria during Hitler's occupation," Heer says. "One thing we did is compare Pabst's films to other films made during the Third Reich. We really did a tremendous amount of research on this part of Pabst's life because we couldn't understand why Pabst, who made films like *Comradeship*, *Three Penny Opera* and *West Front*, which tried to affirm the brotherhood of man beyond all cultural and governmental restrictions, decided to work under Hitler.

"By looking at this period, we are asking what is each artist's responsibility? And the questions are still relevant today. In Russia, the military almost took over and here in Vienna we are only 200 miles away from a civil war in Yugoslavia. I'm not comparing it to the Third

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Reich, but people are dying, and the question comes up 'Am I as an artist someone who is trying to do something which I really believe in, and which I stand behind, or am I trying to do something to make an easier life and be associated with the ones who are in power?'

While the content of *The Other Eye* is intriguing, it is technique that distinguishes the film from other documentaries.

"It has always been my intention to interpret cinematography in a way in which the visual image becomes part of the content," Heer says. "In that sense, we didn't want to simply present the life of Pabst. We wanted his life to unfold like a dramatic story. One of the ways we helped weave the story was through an elaborate color structure and different styles of cinematography. For instance, Berlin from 1922 to 1933 was a completely different Berlin from Hitler's Berlin. The same can be said of Austria before the Third Reich and Austria after 1944. The different periods are reflected in the cinematography. We also use a color structure which is based also on the historical period, the different phases of Pabst's life, and one which reflects the different fears or auras of the people we interviewed."

After Telluride, *The Other Eye* will

appear at the New York Film Festival. Heer is not sure if a wider audience will have a chance to see the film, as she concedes there doesn't seem to be much of a market for a two-hour documentary on Pabst. But Heer considers it a small victory that her film is making the festival rounds.

"We're already happily surprised," Heer says. "Festival directors in New York and Telluride want to show the film, and there are hundreds and thousands of European films that didn't get invited. This is a very interesting development. For every filmmaker, the most important thing is to make the next film. That's something Pabst says at the end of *The Other Eye*. We're glad to see the film is getting a chance with audiences."