



HOLLYWOOD

# A MOGUL'S DIY ETHIC

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IMAGES COURTESY SUSAN MOGUL



Silverlake denizen Susan Mogul has been handcrafting film diaries about her 'self' for over four decades. Among other roles, she's been iconic video and performance artist, feminist vaudevillian, devoted Angelino, filmmaker. Her witty yet self-effacing works archive sustaining herself here, despite the allure of Hollywood. Novelty seekers soon surmise her intrepid humor and madcap insights refer to a solidly art-based practice, as Mogul has perfected facing her own lens since relocating to L.A. in 1973. Though born into a large (6 kids) Jewish family in New York City, she was incited to move 3,000 miles west by the seminal Feminist Art education program being launched at California Institute of the Arts.

Once present, Mogul began documenting the consecration of a visionary feminist space within an erupting art scene. Thirty-seven years later, Otis College of Art and Design commissioned *Susan Mogul's Woman's Building* (2010, 9 minutes), in conjunction with the Getty sponsored exhibition *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Women's Building*. An exhibition, scheduled in 2011, will take place at the Ben Maltz Gallery.

Revisiting the spontaneous, beautiful, ritualistically chaotic nature of personal life as meaningful for one's politics/art comes into focus through continually making work, which has grounded Mogul. Fast forward to being a Guggenheim Fellow, receiving numerous grants, fellowships and prestigious commissions, her groundbreaking shorts, ensconced in several permanent museum collections, are appropriately representative of feminist art and activism in this nation's history.

So many monologues later, Mogul is more deeply exploring dialogue and therefore, collaboration. In discussing a current project undertaken with Ilene Segalove, the influential multimedia artist also her contemporary, Mogul relishes their burgeoning partnership and muses about inspired possibilities for her future works. Some months ago, she attended her first retrospective at Visions du Reel, in Switzerland. Audiences in Europe and Japan respond especially warmly to her voice, keeping her busy on the film festival circuit. Vivacious performer that she is, off-camera she's more pensive, reminding me that although I may think I know her



intimately, having only just watched these autobiographical works, I only know what she wants me to.

Hardly facile, even in this age of over-processed reality, Mogul's tireless relationship with her camera finds her performing, observing, examining. Ultimately it is all just to aid and abet her mastery in the art of self-discovery. Impacted by consciousness-raising, she still investigates the everyday, the ordinary, the mundane. She speculates on how, for all that was fought for, in many ways, not much has changed, for women.

"My work teeters between several worlds and several genres. It always has. Not quite documentary, not really avant-garde, yet not mainstream either. My work, like my life, falls into a space in between, fitting in and not fitting in."

Mogul's characteristic schtick does lighten the existential load she relentlessly presents. With the belief that they may also produce similarly engaging texts, the inspired everywoman may take up her habit, only to discover the serious devotion to craft that belies her casual manner.

"Since 1973, my work has confronted the way a woman's life is supposed to 'look,' and be lived. And although it was never my original intention, my body of work turned into the story, or autobiography of a never-married woman. It is also the story of a woman with a camera."

Committed to expanding her range, Mogul recently began directing and producing what she terms 'Docu-Memoirs.' Her 'slice of life melodramas,' *Everyday Echo Street: A Summer Diary* (1993, 32 minutes) and *I Stare At You and Dream* (1997, 56 minutes), ambitiously display her signature insider's view, tenderly cutting through layers of complexities to divulge her subjects' desires, wounds, and hopes. It is compelling to think of this former Guggenheim 'Fellow,' who once made her vibrator the subject of early video art/performance (*Take Off*, 1974), turning her disarming interview style, a blend of the informal and the intimate, upon other 'regular' folks, in order to craft an authentic reflection of their lives and the people in it. That Mogul's individualized films, replete with her trademark humor and grace, as well as the option of 'conventional or unconventional' representation, can be commissioned, to enhance celebratory events, golden anniversaries, milestone birthdays, or private screening with close friends, appears to be another form of the more collaborative art Mogul is embracing of late. 'Sifting through the past, piecing it together with the present,' for others to actually see themselves, through the eyes of those closest to them, and then to have those closest eyes seen and meticulously shaped by Mogul, the process and result might well be priceless. Without a doubt, the films



BODY SCULPTURE - 1971





MOSES MOGUL PARTS THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS - 1977



MOSES MOGUL RECEIVES THE 11TH COMMANDMENT - 1978

she makes are artful, and often collectible. Howard Rosenberg, the Los Angeles Times television critic, said “Susan Mogul has a talent for swiftly getting you interested in people about whom you know nothing- so interested that the hour you spend with them zooms by.”

In response to being quizzed about her Silverlake neighborhood, Mogul enthusiastically proclaimed her love of Video Journeys, an independent film/video store with over 20,000 titles, many of them specialty and rare. Of course they carry *Driving Men* (2008, 68 minutes), her first feature length work, a poignant 'road movie' she calls 'a culmination of the motivations, intentions, and aspirations of my previous work.'

“I would say there are no models in making the shift from avant-garde video to feature-length films. The shift was organic, not strategic. I never set out to be an avant-garde artist nor a feature length filmmaker...when I was eight I wanted to be an actress. And when I went off to college I planned to study journalism and become a roving reporter. I wanted to travel. I wanted to be moving. I wanted momentum.”

Generous in crediting her film education to this local, albeit hip, video store, she's clearly more than casually familiar with everyone who works there. This, I am gathering, is what drives her wondrous nature. Her quest to connect with people, by asking them about themselves, being truly interested, and then by extension, compassionate, has lit a quiet wisdom within her. Simply, she has taken the time to know herself. Is this the key to being able to know another? Literally loving the light, the air, the sense of space here, Susan Mogul as adventurer, maverick, and a seer of all sorts embodies the emotional resonance L.A. still seethes with, somewhere deep down.

*Susan Mogul is represented by Jancar Gallery ([www.jancargallery.com](http://www.jancargallery.com)) in Los Angeles.*

*More information about her work can be found at: [www.susanmogul.com](http://www.susanmogul.com)*

*Susan Mogul's titles can be purchased or rented from: [www.reframe.org](http://www.reframe.org) or [www.VDB.org](http://www.VDB.org)*



WANDERING MOGULS INVADE THE PROMISED LAND - 1979