

S U S A N M O G U L

**Documentaries
1991 - 2010**

Catalog in Progress

This catalog in progress is not in chronological order, but is organized thematically.



The Girls Across the Street on Myra Avenue. (1974) Myra Avenue was the first street I lived on in Los Angeles, located a few blocks east of Sunset Junction in Silverlake.

Photo credit: Susan Mogul

INTRODUCTION

In my early work I wore my fears, conflicts and aspirations on my sleeve as a female artist. I sat or stood alone in a room with blank walls around me and regaled the video camera with anecdotes. Feminism gave me the courage and validation to be outrageous (I had those inclinations anyway.) and I produced nutty absurd ballsy solo video pieces. They called it video art.

My non-fiction films or first person documentaries, which came much later, are less fraught and boisterous than those early videos. Why? Was it youth? My videos are like yelps. Exclamation points. Confessions. Sales pitches. My films on the other hand are personal investigations, and, they are edited. And although editing speeds time up it also slows things down. Editing gives me time to consider, reflect, digest, and put my voice over experience.

Once I began making films, I shot people in my vicinity - a physical vicinity and/or an emotional one. My Los Angeles neighborhood, Warsaw, Poland, boomer women who were childless by choice. I got closer to people when I turned on the camera. One to one. With filmmaking, I was no longer an isolated artist flapping my arms in the wind not knowing where I would land next. I had a compass that was leading me towards solid ground.

MULTI-LAYERED NARRATIONS

“Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere”. This rebellious adage could serve as a short biography of Susan Mogul’s life. However, to reduce this filmmaker and video artist to the undifferentiated embodiment of “bad” would be to do her an injustice. And if we search for other adjectives? Militant, feminist, Jewish, neurotic, intelligent, humorous, charming, exhibitionist, romantically-incompatible, provocative, passionate, sexy, shocking – the list could go on forever, for, as almost no other filmmaker. The creative and uncompromising manner in which she recycles and reprocesses her world, and her personal evolution from feminist video artist to the creation of a film language all her own, makes Susan Mogul a compelling candidate for our reprocessing reality category, which is dedicated to the convergences between film and video art.

Susan Mogul’s works throughout her 40-year artistic career all exhibit a disarming self-irony, yet never drift into the farcical. Her short films, which were conceived in the context of the Feminist Studio Workshop (at the Woman’s Building and the Feminist Art Program at CalArts) in the 70’s, virtually abound with untamed experimental exuberance and bellicosity. However, in contrast to much feminist discourse, the images are not only provocative, they are funny and full of joie de vivre.



Driving Men is the culmination of her entire filmography - here, she revisits all her core themes, shedding new lights on them at the same time. In this road movie she seeks out the men who have been involved in her life in an attempt to discover the reasons behind her fear of relationships. As Susan Mogul told Jean Perret (Visions du Reel Festival Director) in an interview last summer, for her filming is a constant opportunity to order her thoughts while piecing the footage together, a chance to “provide a framework for herself”. Susan Mogul casts a curious eye at her counterpart only to be catapulted back to herself. Her intelligent and humorous narrative voice leaves no doubt that her protagonists - family, lovers, friends and neighbors - always function as mirror images through which she articulates her quest for warmth and identity.

- **Sascha Lara Blueler**, Excerpts from Visions du Reel Film Festival Catalog, 2009
Translated by Nathan Fritz from German.

Driving Men had its’ world premiere at Visions du Reel International Film Festival in Nyon, Switzerland, 2008. Mogul had her first retrospective at this same festival the following year in 2009.

A few years before I moved to LA.
A few years before I was a woman who recorded her life.
I was in a car accident when I was 20 years old.
My first love was killed in the accident. And the accident haunted my life.

DRIVING MEN –opens with the car accident.
It's my first film that truly explores the accident and it's impact on my life.

Why did it take me so long to make a film about that?
Someone who makes autobiography?

Well, it takes a long time to get from here to there - or there to here.
To get from one place to the other.

But perhaps the car accident was always in my work.
The car accident got me going. It got me to LA.
It got me to learn to drive.
It got me to make work about my life.
It got me going. It really got me going – in ways I can't explain.
It got me.

DRIVING MEN is a journey.
It's about finding a guy in the course of making a film about losing a guy.
It's about the desire to connect.
It's about my long time love affair with the camera .

And DRIVING MEN is about my relationship with my Dad.

Over the last 35 years I have recorded, edited and ultimately crafted my own life making videos, photographs, performances and feature length films. I sift through the past and piece it together with the present.
I transform the raw material of my life to make sense of my life.
I reprocess reality in order and create my own reality. My own fiction.

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.



Excerpt from "Investigating Myself" a keynote presentation by Susan Mogul at a national documentary film conference, Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland, 2011.

ARTFORUM

Movie Mogul

8.15.08

FREUD IS AN unlikely touchstone for a feminist film—unless the doctor appears in costume as a punching bag—but Susan Mogul takes such incongruities in stride. The video artist and filmmaker's new feature-length work, *Driving Men*, teeters charmingly between art-house cinema and Hollywood flick, all the while provoking questions about the slippery nature of identity, memory, and subjectivity. Freud's ghost seems to haunt the film from behind the wheel of a shiny new convertible.

In this film, Mogul (nearly) tosses aside the erotic-neurotic ethos of much of her previous work and dives headfirst into autobiography. The film opens with lighthearted music and footage that recall vintage road movies, but the levity is quickly undercut by a voice-over that explains, in clear, simple language, a car wreck that the filmmaker experienced as a young woman. The accident was fatal for the driver, her boyfriend, and the emotional fallout for Mogul is the singular trauma that informs the film. Using her subsequent relationships as a starting point, Mogul invites men—former lovers, friends, and family members—to be interviewed on camera, though it is quickly apparent that they are not the ones on the couch. In a series of disparate conversations, Mogul rides shotgun with her interlocutors, discussing past romances, the Jewish diaspora, societal mores, and, repeatedly, why she, a woman in her fifties, never married.

The emotional tenor of this latter topic at times threatens to maroon more subtle, repressed themes. At one point, while the filmmaker attends a reunion, a photographer asks members of the Mogul clan to pose together in family groups. The scene and voice-over could have been snatched straight from *Sex and the City*; over her smiling image, Mogul asks rhetorically, “But I am not a family—where do I stand?” Throughout, Mogul poses more questions than answers, allowing her driving partners to define her. She is variously described as “intense,” “funny,” and “like a balloon filled with helium.” Several men point to her incessant need for documentation, which one perceptive friend describes as a search for something she doesn't really want to find. This sense of seeking ripples through the hilarity, heartbreak, and homecomings that constitute the events of *Driving Men* and fluidly stitches questions about the shifting constructs of woman and man, identity and truth, into a poignant love story.

Driving Men has its North American premiere at Los Angeles Filmforum on Sunday, August 17, 2008.
— Annie Buckley

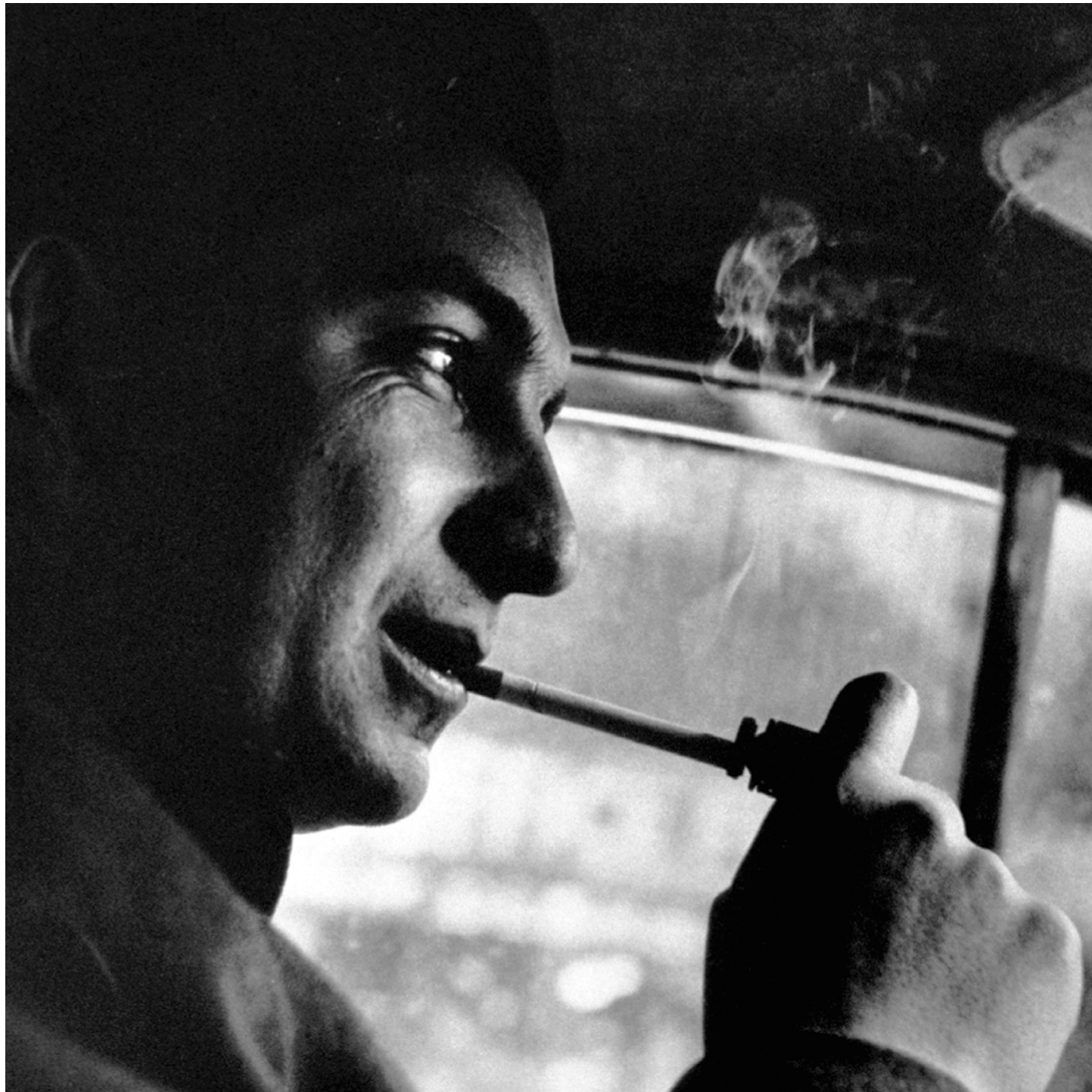


Photo of Gene Mogul, the filmmaker's father.

Photo Credit: Rhoda Blate Mogul

DRIVING MEN
2008 68 minutes

Artforum Review 2008

September 16, 2008

Dear Susan,

It's quite a film. I wasn't at all prepared for the death at the beginning nor for the happiness at the end. I did expect the lively middle, having known you (if only slightly) and your work (more so) for decades. It's fascinating to watch you mature through honest self exposure, while staying as brash and funny and sexy and a bit wistfully intense as I remember you.

Your men, lovers or friends or relatives, are a wild bunch. As a serial monogamist myself, I got a kick out of all the very different characters and their ways of relating to you. From the tragically lost Larry, to Ed the porn prince, to Ray, who had met his father in San Quentin and vanished, to Eric? the handsome aloof older man, to Barry, your friend and perennial married escort, to the charming blues freak Ron who finally gives you what you wanted all along. (Do you think it could have happened before your father died?) Bettina Aptheker wrote once about the Jewish daughter: "To inherit a father's dreams makes you the eldest son."

With that "insatiable need to record," you give viewers the tools to analyze you and themselves. Mixing in your father and brothers (and Larry's brother) was a good idea, though your mother remained a sort of frustrating mystery, since we got to know you so well, but only through men's eyes. (Yes, I know, that was the idea...) I loved the collage of Jewish identity and feminism, intellectual ponderings and let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may sexuality, self searching and narcissism, warmth and sadness. It's a great way to (not) write a memoir. Congratulations!

Lucy Lippard

Lucy Lippard Review 2008

January 25, 2009

Mogul on Mogul

I knew that it was going to be a good night when I walked into the Walter Reade Theater in Lincoln Center. What a beautiful theater with seats that were comfortable and plenty of leg room for my 6'3" frame.

Driving Men directed by Susan Mogul was a pleasant surprise with a dramatic opening scene which had the audience drawn in immediately. The videography of what was going to happen was excellent leading up to the auto accident. This is a story of the love life of the director of the film discussing this with her male friends, brothers and father over the years. The additions of film clips of demonstrations of the 60's and other events gave this film some added dimension. The music in the film was terrific. Perhaps being the brother of the director the nudity part was not my favorite but would leave that review to others. Too bad the father of director could not hang on a few more years to see this feature work of his daughter the director. He would have been proud! Go see the film you will be moved.

Rating 2 thumbs up

Sandy Mogul

To my surprise the day after my brother Sandy Mogul - one of my three brothers who appears in *Driving Men* - attended a screening in New York, he wrote and e-mailed the entire family a review of my film. Sandy is a salesman extraordinaire, a jokester on the go, and I never imagined that he would or could sit down and write anything but an invoice to a customer. This was the first time Sandy expressed anything to me about my work.

Sandy Mogul, Filmmaker's Brother, Review 2009

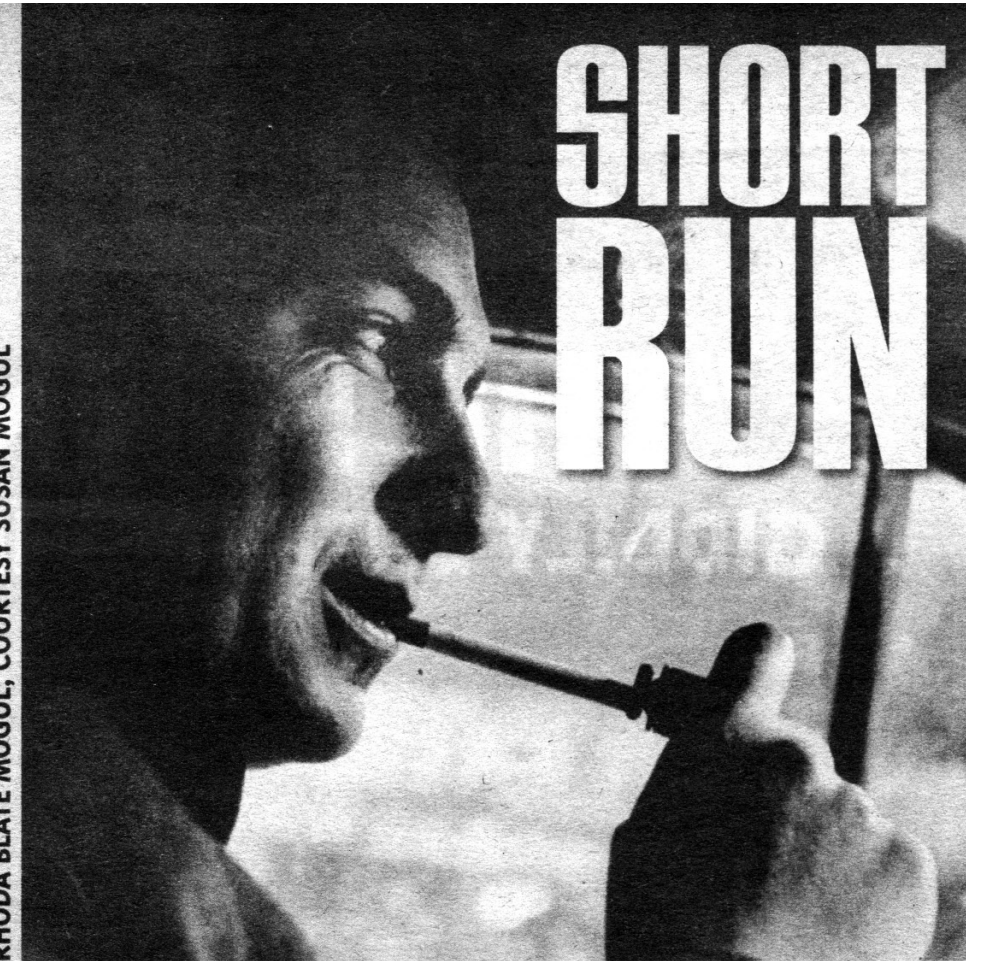
...rather than merely being a diary, *Driving Men* is finally about the challenge of crafting a life.

MINI MOGUL

In *Driving Men*, a vanguard Los Angeles video artist maps out her love life

An iconic image in *Driving Men* (2007), the newest work by L.A.-based videomaker Susan Mogul, shows Mogul's own shadow on the ground, a darkened shape with elbows bent and the boxy outline of a video camera hovering at eye level. For several decades, Mogul has been chronicling her life and the people around her, filling in the shadow areas with detail. Her videos include the feminist classic *Take Off* (1974), with its celebrated assessment of the acute effects of a vibrator; and *Everyday Echo Street: A Summer Diary* (1993), a self-portrait built through the specifics of Mogul's L.A. neighborhood. In *Driving Men*, a captivating 68-minute saga, Mogul looks at the men in her life, starting with her tragic first love and ending with a road trip with a new boyfriend more than 40 years later. The often funny video tackles sex, desire, loss, family and the twisted threads of identity, as Mogul ponders being single and 50. As with all of her work, though, *Driving Men* is very much about a woman with a video camera. At one point, a friend speculates about the camera's constant presence, telling Mogul, "It increases the possibilities for your connections in your world," which is true — and Mogul is nothing if not interested in connecting. But this compelling portrait is also very much about editing — sifting through the past and piecing it together with the present. Mogul does this with insight, humor and a willingness to stand naked — literally and metaphorically — so that rather than merely being a diary, *Driving Men* is finally about the challenge of crafting a life. (*Filmforum at the American Film Institute, Mark Goodson Screening Room; Sun., Aug. 17, 7 p.m. lafilmforum.wordpress.com.*)

RHODA BLATE MOGUL, COURTESY SUSAN MOGUL



—Holly Willis

Credits

Producer/ Director/ Writer/ Editor/ Cinematographer

Susan Mogul

Executive Producer

Michael Mayer

Creative Consultant

David Zeiger

Additional Editing

Elise Ludwig

Original Music/ Sound Design

Wayne Peet

THE DRIVING MEN

Ed De Roo
Barry Markowitz
Eric Martin
Eugene Mogul
Jess Mogul
Mark Mogul
Sandy Mogul
David N. Myers
Pierre Picot
Ron Schneck

SUPPORTING CAST

Ray Aguilar
Margaret Decker
Joseph (from Krakow)
Rhoda Blate Mogul
Philip Taylor



Susan Mogul and Ron Schneck

Utterly original and constantly surprising. Driving Men is impregnated with an honesty that has vanished from today's films. Loss and identity have been treated many times in cinema, but rarely like this. - Walter Salles, Director, *Central Station* and *Motorcycle Diaries*

Screenings

Nyon International Film Festival, International Competition, Switzerland, 2008

LA Filmforum, Los Angeles, 2008

Kansas International Film Festival, 2008

Festival dei Popoli, International Competiton Florence, Italy. 2008

India International Women's Film Festival, New Dehli, 2008

San Francisco Jewish Film Festival at Yerba Buena, SF, 2009

Beldocs, International Competiton, Belgrade, Serbia 2009

New York Jewish Film Festival at Lincoln Center, 2009

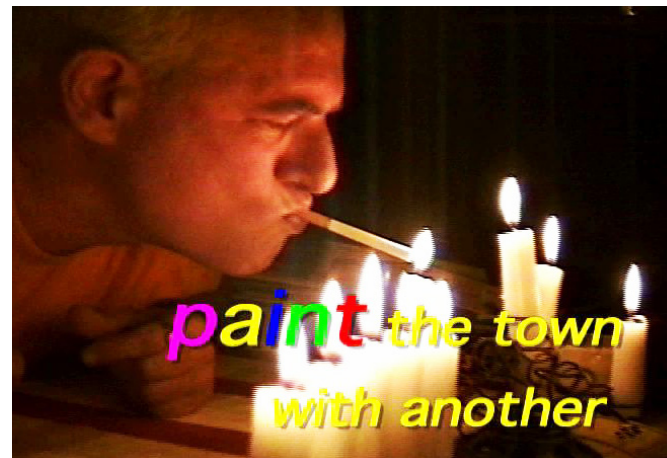
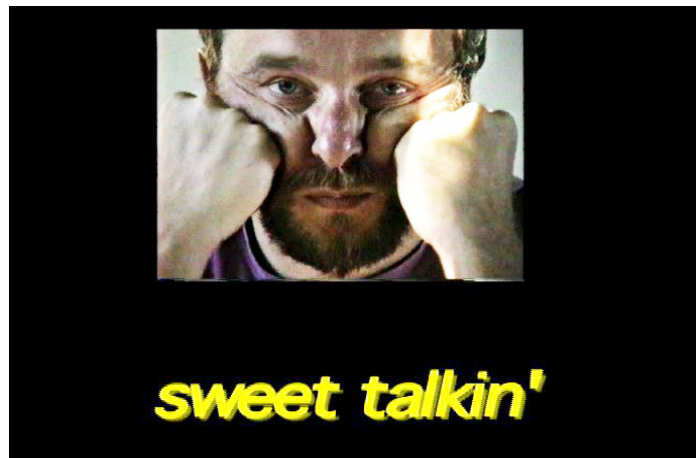
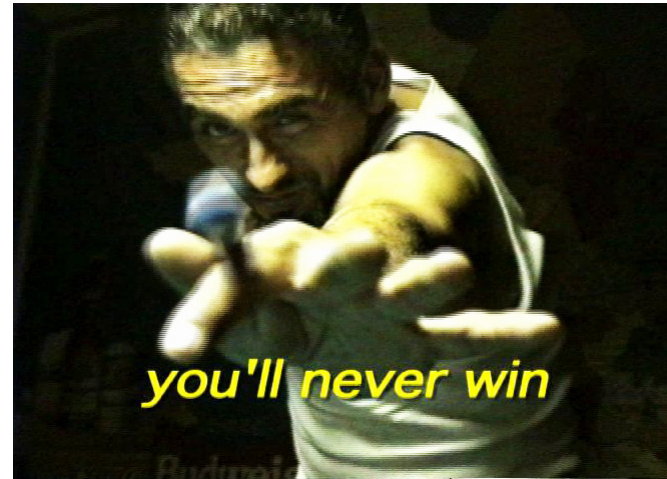
Doclisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, 2009

Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, International Competiton, Japan, 2009

Krakow Film Festival, Poland, 2010

Les Spectacles du Reel + Taiwan Focus, Taipei, Taiwan, 2010

Kino Xenix, Zurich, Switzerland, 2011



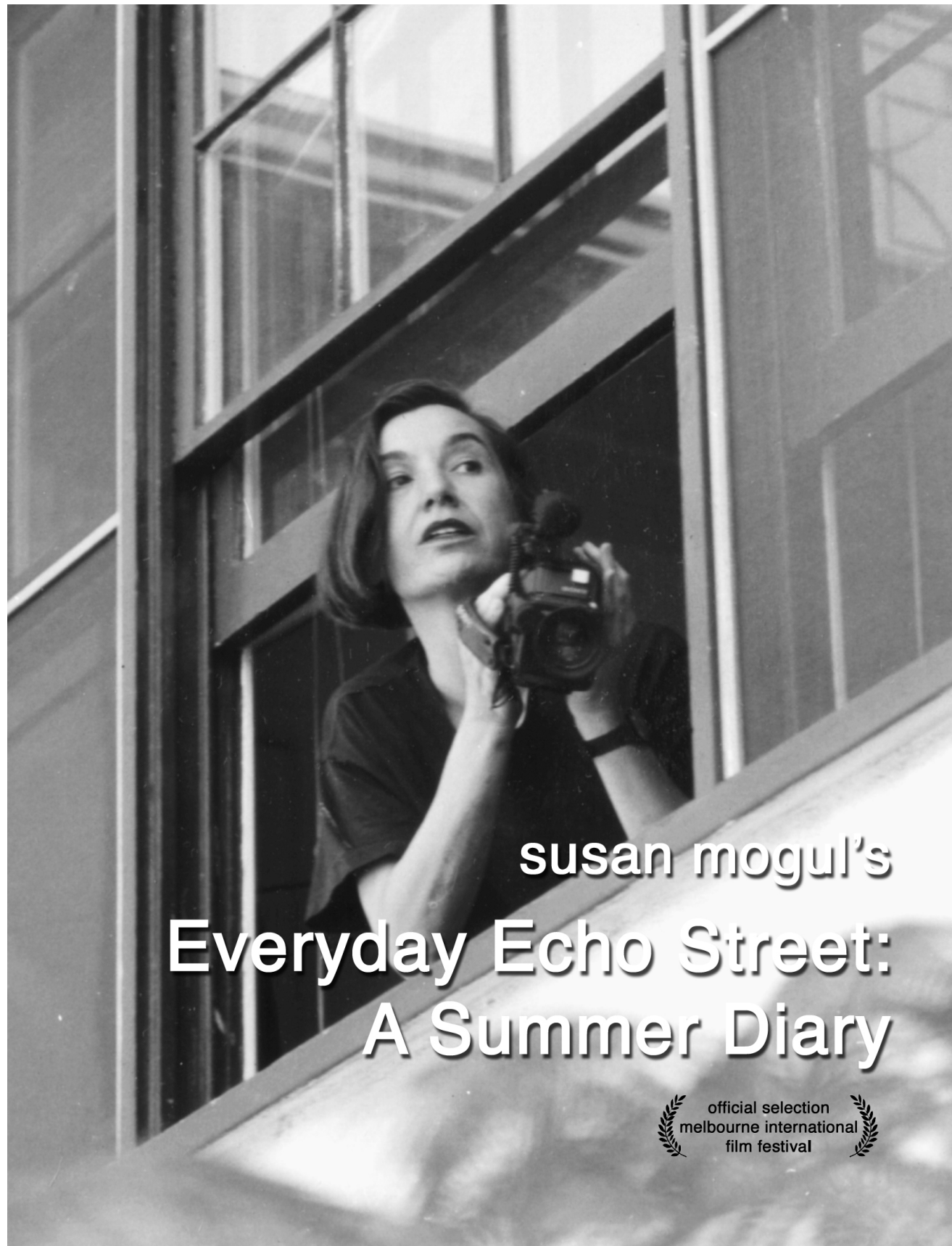
Sweet Talkin' Guy is a karaoke video commissioned by L. A. Freewaves, a city-wide video festival founded in 1989, that often has screenings in unconventional venues. *Sweet Talkin'* screened at a karaoke bar in Koreatown in Los Angeles in fall 2002, at the closing celebration of Freewaves.

This work was one way to get my feet wet before I began filming *Driving Men* in 2003. *Sweet Talkin'* was composed with archival footage of men in my life from the "Susan Mogul" archives. I was surprised to discover how many guys from my short-lived trysts had been documented in one way or another. The lyrics from this pop song of the 60's expressed with humor the ways in which a sweet talkin' guy is not to be trusted and will only disappoint.

This was the first piece I edited on Final Cut Pro with my new digital editing set up purchased with funds from the Guggenheim Fellowship I received earlier that year.

SWEET TALKIN' GUY
2002 2 MINUTES

*The diary has a trick of turning into a narrative almost without meaning to.
Suddenly we are at the climax of a story we hadn't even realized was a story.*



susan mogul's
**Everyday Echo Street:
A Summer Diary**

official selection
melbourne international
film festival

EVERYDAY ECHO STREET
1993 32 minutes

**Program Notes for Premiere Screening of *Everyday Echo Street*
September 18, 1993**

In 1998 I went to live in Budapest for a month simply because I was intrigued with Eastern Europe. The “wall” had not come down yet. Most visitors from the West were those who had relatives living in Budapest. I did not. Throughout my stay, people kept asking me the same questions:

“Why are you in Budapest? Do you have family here?”

“No.”

“Then why are you here, *alone*, in Budapest?”

This question, when slightly altered is more poignant now as I finish *Everyday Echo Street* my summer diary in Highland Park, a neighborhood I have lived alone in for 12 years. “Why are you here, living alone, in Highland Park?” is the question my diary asks and attempts to answer. “Am I a tourist in my own community?”

Although I have lived in Los Angeles since 1973, and Highland Park since 1981, I have never thought of Highland Park as my “neighborhood” or “home.” Echo Street, the Mexican-American working class block I live on is not like the Long Island Jewish middle-class suburban block where I was raised.

I am 43, have lived alone most of my adult life, never married nor have I had any children. My parents and five adult siblings live 3,000 miles away. Most are married, have children and own their own homes. My life is not like theirs. So what is *my* definition of home?

The process of making *Everyday Echo Street* was intense and revelatory for I had to confront my everyday life, both past and present. Which ultimately meant I had to confront loss – the loss of childhood and the “letting go” of my original experience of home and family.

I now realize that, over the last 12 years I actually staked out and defined a very clear sense of neighborhood within a one-mile radius of my one-bedroom apartment on Echo Street. I developed various kinds of relationships with individuals of different ages and nationalities: the Nassar brothers at Green Valley Produce; Rosie Sanchez at Armando’s restaurant; Reverend Cruver and Grace Proffitt of the Pillar of Fire Church who live next door; and the Escalante family who live in my courtyard building. These are some of the people and places that have provided me with a sense of family, home and neighborhood in Highland Park; *I really do not live alone on Echo Street.*

Funded by the Ford Foundation and commissioned by Peter Sellar’s Los Angeles Festival.



Rosie Sanchez with her sister behind the counter at Armando's restaurant.



Rosie's nephew, Susan, Papa Sanchez, and Rosie during the LA Festival.

Echo Street was commissioned by Peter Sellars' Los Angeles Festival. The commission was to produce a project in a Los Angeles community about home, place and memory.

Echo Street premiered September 18, 1993 at Armando's, the Sanchez family restaurant, and was a venue in the Los Angeles Festival. Rosie Sanchez and some of her family members appeared in *Echo Street*. Additionally, because Rosie's large extended family hosted the premiere, I got to know Rosie Sanchez and her family in a deeper way. That, in part was the inspiration for the unofficial sequel, *I Stare at You and Dream*.

A Peaceful Existence on 'Echo Street'

HOWARD ROSENBERG
TELEVISION

When it comes to taking risks, public television usually teeters perilously on the cutting edge of convention.

Thus, public-station KCET's decision to air Susan Mogul's "Everyday Echo Street: A Summer Diary" is as refreshing as her 1993 film itself, in which she and her Highland Park neighbors co-star as an extended family.

The kind of "family" we should be seeing more often to offset TV's constant depictions that equate Angelenos with warring factions in Haiti.

Throwing praise at Mogul's film can raise unrealistic expectations for such a low-budget (\$20,000), inelegant documentary whose very petiteness is what makes it perfectly tailored for the small screen. Yet this video journal—or "docu-poem," as Mogul calls it—is indeed something to

Continued from F1 cheer, at once loads of fun and the kind of intimate insider's journey through a Los Angeles neighborhood that you seldom see on television.

Although Mogul said by phone recently that her film has no social agenda, it tends to unify segments of society rather than polarize them. It's 32 minutes of seductive ordinariness—an affirmation, home-movie style, of just how transfixing the peaceful, everyday trivia of life can be.

More transfixing even than nightly news footage showing Angelenos as victims or oppressors.

Actually, Mogul is a kind of outsider/insider, a former New Yorker who has lived in Los Angeles for more than two decades, the last 13 years alone in a one-bedroom apartment on largely working-class Echo Street, a rare Jew in a section of town that is predominantly Latino.

Participant as well as observer, she is seen leaning out her window in a sort of signature stance, as if inhaling the neighborhood so affectionately on videotape with her hand-held camera. "My name is Susan, and I live alone," she says at the start of the film. "I'm 43, and I've spent most of my adult life living alone."

Well . . . not entirely alone. In addition to the 13-year-old neighbor practicing her violin, we meet Mogul's friends, the Sanchezes, who operate nearby Armando's restaurant, and Eddie (the Animal) Lopez, a talkative ex-heavyweight boxer with spaces in his front teeth beneath an enormous mustache. We meet the guys at Abdul Shell station, the Gonzalez sisters, the "UPS guy" and the mailman.

And we see Rick—who "lives there across from the mail boxes"—ask Mogul out for a platonic evening of country dancing. She accepts, and this scheduled date provides an opportunity for her to tenderly recall the death of a boyfriend in a car crash years ago.

Everyone on camera here seems

remarkably loose, as if speaking only to Mogul, not her lens. "I was dealing with people who are a part of my life," Mogul said on the phone about the comfort level of her subjects. "And I don't think people took me seriously. You know, here was little Susan with her camera. Sometimes being a woman can work to your advantage."

More than merely a friendly neighborhood tour, though, this is a highly personalized film threaded by the filmmaker's self-effacing wit and candid introspection about her life as she settles into middle age.

Mogul's exploration of her self-identity began at an early age, as evidenced by old home-movie footage of her parents' 35th wedding anniversary party that introduces a separate, unaired video sampler of her other films. While dancing with her mother in front of the camera her father is operating, a 6-year-old Susan suddenly lifts her dress and pulls down her underpants.

Her self-exposure now assumes a different form. From her window tonight, she observes male and female pigeons "doing it," and jokes (apparently) about being jealous. "They have such a good sex life. They *have* a sex life."

Soon, however, we're introduced to a man Mogul met in the produce section of Ralph's. He becomes a romantic interlude, although Mogul frets when he waits more than a week to phone her after their first date.

Part of the film's whimsical charm comes from Mogul's willingness to face the camera herself in unflattering moments. Looking like a candidate for embalming, she says after pulling herself from bed: "It's 8:30 in the morning . . . without coffee."

No one else does *that* in front of a camera.

"My work has never fit neatly into any category," Mogul said when asked to define what she does. "It's really about filming this everyday banal stuff and looking at the uniqueness of it, the absurdity of it, the humor of it."

Uniqueness, absurdity, humor—presented by Mogul in ways that are accessible to middle-brow audiences. Maybe that's not so risky after all.

■ "Everyday Echo Street: A Summer Diary" airs at 10:30 tonight on KCET-TV Channel 28.

Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1994

One year after its premiere at Armando's, KCET, the L.A. PBS station, aired *Echo Street*. This was my first work to air on television and to be reviewed by a TV critic rather than an art critic. I never had such a big audience for my work and to my surprise even got fan letters. They were from people of diverse ethnic, age and class backgrounds. A couple of guys wanted to take me out on a date, others told me they identified with me because they also lived alone, and others were pleased to see Los Angeles represented as a city with a vibrant soulful neighborhood where multi-ethnic people got along.

Los Angeles Times TV Review by Howard Rosenberg 1994

Dear KCET,

I am not in the habit of writing fan letters to anyone about tv programming, but I cannot let "Everyday Echo Street" become just a fond memory. That piece should be rebroadcast on a regular basis. It was wonderful!

It did more to promote the idea of multiculturalism in 30 minutes than heavy-handed "documentaries" could do in hours of prime time exposure.

It almost made me want to move back... almost.

Bravo to you for broadcasting it, and Brava to the filmmaker for creating it.

Sincere thanks

Middle aged woman who lives in La Jolla, California.

DEAR SUSAN,

LAST NIGHT I HAD THE PLEASURE OF VIEWING YOUR LATEST VIDEO WORK ON KCET YOUR HONESTY, FRAILTY, VULNERABILITY AND GENUINE CHARM TOUCHED MY HEART. YOU SHARE YOUR PERSONAL WORLD WITH ME IN A WAY THAT WAS BOTH INTIMATE AND REVEALING. I WAS A GUEST IN YOUR HOME AND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND I FELT WELCOMED.

DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO MEET FOR COFFEE OR SUPPER SOMETIME I WOULD LOVE TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO THANK YOU IN PERSON FOR THE PRECIOUS GIFT YOU SHARED WITH ME. YOU SHOWED GREAT COURAGE IN YOUR VIDEO AND I FIND THAT ADMIRABLE. MAYBE WE COULD TALK, EXCHANGE IDEAS AND POSSIBLY BECOME FRIENDS. I ASSURE YOU, MY MOTIVES ARE PURE, MY LETTER GENUINE AND MY WORDS TRU

ENCLOSED IS A PHOTO AND RESUME. I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.

FREDDIE

Thirty something Latino Artist, Resident of downtown LA.

Credits

Producer/Director/Writer/Editor

Susan Mogul

Camera

Susan Mogul
Dave Ries

Creative Consultant

Don Keith Opper

Online Editor/Sound-Mix

Joe Leonardi

CAST

Ray Aguilar
Alan D. Allison
Mark Bain
S.J. Bennett
Reverend William Cruver
Andres, Angelica & Ersilia Escalante
Otto Escobar
Olivia & Ursula Gonzalez
Mike Ibrahim
Joel Lengson
Barbara John and Lorenzo Leuvano
Eddie "the Animal" Lopez
Jose Madrigal
Teresa Maldonado
Rick Munyon
Afif & Jihad "Jack" Nassar
John Nino
Joe J. Meza
Lillie Mae Philo
Grace Proffitt
Rosie Sanchez
Armando, Jesus, Sylvia, & Teresa Sanchez
Betty Sanders
G.R.T. Simmons
Priscilla Vasquez

Screenings

Kino Xenix, Zurich, Switzerland, 2011

Visions du Reel International Film Festival, Switzerland, 2009

KCET, Los Angeles PBS, 1994 - 2000

Long Beach Museum of Art, 1995

43rd Melbourne International Film Festival, 1994

AFI National Video Festival, 1994



Funded by the Ford Foundation and commissioned by Peter Sellar's Los Angeles Festival.

Additional support from the Long Beach Museum of Art Video Access Program.

Rosie Sanchez poses for Mark Bain, amateur photographer, who Susan met in the neighborhood post office.

Photo credit: Susan Mogul



I STARE AT YOU AND DREAM
1997 56 minutes

“*Stare* offers earthy charms, humor and intriguing insights that come from locating and gently probing common denominators that make up the routines of ordinary lives.”

- Howard Rosenberg, Los Angeles Times

Set in Los Angeles’s Latino Highland Park neighborhood, filmmaker Susan Mogul and her three friends reveal their struggles, wounds and romantic entanglements in the context of their everyday lives. Rosie Sanchez, a single Mom, works in her parent’s restaurant; Rosie’s teenage daughter, wise-cracking and voluptuous Alex, is a poet whose jobs range from clerking at Thrifty’s to being a phone sex operator; and Ray Aguilar, a single Dad, is an enigmatic contractor with a prison past.

Mogul dwells on both the stability and fragility of personal relationships with amazing candor: her long-standing friendship with Rosie, Rosie’s comical mother/daughter tensions with Alex, and her own conflicted romance with Ray. Deceptively funny, but full of mournful undercurrents, *Stare* is an intimate film about loss and longing, love, sacrifice, and hope.

I Stare at You and Dream was produced for the Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funds from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.



John Harb in his auto body shop.

Photo credit: Rhoda Mogul

Susan Mogul Presents:

***I Stare at You and Dream* on the 1997-98 Southern Circuit**

When Susan Mogul chose the title for *I Stare at You and Dream* she turned to a line from the young poet, Alejandra (Alex) Sanchez, whose story is one of four that make up this 1997 film. Alex's phrase with its hint of confession, and its open door to a world of emotional images, is perfectly suited to Mogul's work. *I Stare at You and Dream* is a film about longing and loss, about the tides of love, sacrifice, anger, and hope that run through the lives of its maker and her friends, and all of us in her audience who stare at the screen and dream. It's a charming diary, deceptively funny but full of mournful undercurrents, that uses a visual language of contrasting images.

The most striking are water and fire, which serve as analogs for emotion as a life-giving, healing source, and as a consuming inferno. It's easy to separate the subjects in *I Stare at You and Dream* into fire and water personalities – Ray Aguilar, the man Susan falls for, is a real hot head; Alex seems ablaze with sexuality, anger and creativity, while Alex's mother, Rosie, and Susan are the conciliatory, go-with-the-flow types. But nothing is quite that schematic. The Ray who can't seem to keep out of a fist fight is also the Ray who tries to win his abusive mother's approval by rebuilding her house after it is destroyed by fire, the tender grandson, and Susan's affectionate companion. Alex, who dresses to kill and marks herself with a tattoo Aztec god of fire, writes poetry and still grieves for the father she never had, while her mother sacrifices herself on the altar of family responsibility. And Susan? Swimmer, storyteller, possessed of a bright and generous voice, and a self-deprecating sense of humor...she's the one who put a continent between herself and her family, the one who abandons herself to a man who can't return her love, the one who, in a moment of misery, pictures her comfortable apartment, and by extension her independent life, as a prison whose shadowy bars echo those that held Ray in San Quentin so long ago.

As I recount them, all these mirrorings and polarities sound like the work of a character-obsessed screenwriter. And in a way, Mogul is a screenwriter, but her craft lies in covering the trajectory of experience rather than fabricating it whole. As a documentarist, she offers us the pleasures of her medium: spontaneity, intimacy, and the spectacle of life unfolding before us. There's a sense of community in her work that's worlds apart from the intense temporary ties that often arise between documentary filmmakers and their sympathetic subjects; that's because what Mogul captures really is rooted in shared history and enduring relationships. Does she tell us the truth (the whole truth) about Alex, Rosie, Ray and herself? Who can say? At the close of her film, Mogul admits that she's guilty of wanting people and things to turn out the way she'd like them to turn out, of "trying to make my life like a movie." She has, in fact, made her life into a movie. Luckily for us, it doesn't have a Hollywood ending.

Program Notes by Linda Dubler

The Southern Circuit is a tour through the South of exceptional filmmakers. It is a program of the South Carolina Arts Commission, with support from the Catherine T. and John D. MacArthur Foundation and local sponsors.



Ray Aguilar and Susan Mogul

Photo credit: Dave Ries

The absent father, literally and/or psychologically, was an important theme that emerged in *Stare* (1997). Rosie and Alex were direct and forthcoming. Alex had never met her father. And Ray's story, how and where he met his father for the first time when he was eighteen, was a powerful scene towards the end of the film. Even a secondary character in the film, John Harb, a tattoo artist, and owner of an auto body shop, unexpectedly while giving Alex a tattoo, spoke about his estranged relationship with his Dad.

But my father remained in the background. I said practically nothing about my father or our relationship, even though the film was built upon the ways in which our four lives mirrored one another. However, *Stare* opens with a home movie of my Dad. "That's my Dad putting together the dollhouse for me." is the first line in the film. The voice over continues and I discuss the dollhouse, looking out the window, and notions of home.

Ten years later, in the course of editing *Driving Men*, it became clear that my relationship with my father was at the heart of this new film. Although it wasn't my original intention for the film I recognized that fact and embraced it.

Making autobiography can be a circuitous process. Perhaps it's because I am essentially a diarist and collagist. I don't walk or talk in a straight line and it is in my nature to digress. This working process is labor intensive and full of surprises. Filming other people's lives has not only been a way connect to others, but has allowed me to move to the center of mine. Sometimes, however, getting there can take a very long time.



8mm Film Still of Gene Mogul, the filmmaker's father.



Credits

Mrs Margaret Decker, a co-star, in *I Stare at You and Dream* Photo Credit: Rhoda Mogul

Producer/Director/ Writer /Camera /Editor

Susan Mogul

Co-Producer

Don Keith Opper

Co-Editor

Elise Ludwig

Original Music

Miriam Cutler

Sound Design

Gary Zacuto

Still Photographers

Rhoda Blate Mogul

Dave Ries

CAST

Chad Aguilar

Ray Aguilar

Petra Arroyo

Margaret Decker

Sam Eisenstein

Fernando Galaz

John Harb

Henry Iglesias

Eugene Mogul

Rhoda Mogul

Susan Mogul

Peggy Rodriguez

Alejandra Sanchez

Rosie Sanchez

The Sanchez Family

Screenings



Susan Mogul and Rosie Sanchez

Photo credit: Rhoda Mogul

PBS Stations, 1997 - 2001

San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, 1999

Visions du Reel International Film Festival, Nyon, Switzerland, 1998

“Eye and Thou: Jewish Autobiography in Film and Video”, 1998

A national academic conference at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles

NY Expo of Short Film and Video, 1998: Bronze Medal

**International Women in the Director’s Chair Film Festival, 1998:
Opening Night Film**

Louisville Film and Video Festival, 1997: Juror’s Prize

Southern Circuit Tour, 1997

Southern Circuit is a tour of Independent Filmmakers, that brings filmmakers and their films to communities in the Southeast.

Susan Mogul: At Home in Los Angeles
by James M. Moran

Published in Wide Angle Volume 20 No.3 (July 1998) pp 132-143

Histories of film production, typically constructed as stories of “great men” responsible for innovations in studio management, formal techniques, and audio-visual technologies, frequently overlook the accomplishments of independent cinema in their celebration of mainstream Hollywood fare. This marginalization of non-commercial experimentation is, perhaps, not merely a reflection of the publishing industry’s bias toward classical narrative, but also symptomatic of the ways in which traditional historiography writes out the contributions of women. Such an oversight is indefensible in any chronicle of artistic production in Los Angeles, where female film, video, and performance artists have significantly shaped the avant-garde movements in this country, and continue to redefine and test their conceptual boundaries. The pioneering work of filmmakers such as Maya Deren (*Meshes in the Afternoon*, 1943), Sara Arledge (*What Is a Man*, 1958), and Chick Strand (*Soft Fiction*, 1979) illustrate the underlying content in much of women’s cinema: the exploration of identity in relation to the self, the other, and art. These themes have come to preoccupy the avant-garde community itself (men included), and over the last twenty years, have been inflected and re-invigorated by a new wave of feminist artists.

This second generation of women filmmakers has also been centered in Southern California, where institutions of higher education have produced some of the country’s seminal media programs and working artists: Judy Chicago (Cal Arts Feminist Art Program), Julie Dash (UCLA Ethno-communications), and Ilene Segalove (UC Santa Barbara), as only a few examples. At a time when women’s liberation expanded consciousness, questioned feminine stereotypes, and celebrated female sexuality, younger artists turned to more intimate interrogations of self—to autobiography, the body, and family history. The colloquial, the everyday, and the diaristic thus became dominant modes of expression well-suited to their concerns with women’s work, domestic ideology, and non-canonical aesthetic production.

Like many artists working in this quotidian vernacular, home movies have had a pivotal influence on the work of Susan Mogul, if not an uncanny prescience. As the story goes, at age eight, during the celebration of a thirty-fifth wedding anniversary party for her grandparents, a spry and eager young Susan began dancing with her mother, who handed the family’s super-8 camera to her husband in order to capture this most typical home movie attraction. No sooner had mother and daughter adopted the smiling poses proper for their sex, did Susan boldly lift her dress, drop her panties, and expose her crotch to dad’s paternal gaze. As Susan so fondly remembers this notorious episode, her mother deeply blushed, while the artist-in-the-rough laughed hysterically.

Appropriately, Mogul introduces a video sampler of her work with this interlude that functions as a witty, ironic allegory for the trajectory of her career over the last twenty-five years. From the past to the present, Mogul’s provocative response to the camera and her love of performance have mediated her life and her art, at times blurring the distinction. Her self-exposure, the impulse of every autobiographical artist, has resulted in a necessary exhibitionism of the most private parts of her experience to the public eye. Yet unlike the home movie’s paternal gaze so typical of the fifties during which it was shot, Mogul’s own video self-portraits and ethnographies illustrate her feminist and feminine reappropriation of the apparatus as an act of self-determination.

Significantly, not until she had moved to the West Coast was Mogul able to achieve the aesthetic and literal distance she needed to investigate her New York, Jewish, and female identities against the liberating relief of the Los Angeles art scene. Growing up in the middle class suburbs of Long Island, she had never consciously identified herself as an artist. Coming to Los Angeles, Mogul finally found her artistic voice: “While I’m not obsessed with the city in and of itself, LA has been a place where I can explore the new sense of freedom it gave me. Here I can create my own reality—not that my reality is a fantasy—but one that is separate from my biological family. Ultimately, and ironically, it has been the place where I have sought a new family constituted by individuals from the different groups I belong to.”¹

Enrolling for six months in the germinal and influential Feminist Art Workshop at Cal Arts under the tutelage of Judy Chicago, Susan began to take risks and define her unique sensibility. Although not particularly influenced by the works or genres of her fellow artists in residence, she absorbed the climate of openness and support that this environment fostered. Encouraged to explore her female identity and sexuality, liberated from her family, and reborn as an artist, Susan recognized her new achievements through a most quintessential Los Angeles ritual: the acquisition of her first driver’s license. Having suffered a near fatal automobile accident years earlier, after which she developed a fear of driving, Susan picked up the pieces of her past and pasted them together on a postcard collage announcement, “Mogul is Mobil,” in which she and her car fly effortlessly above the Hollywood freeways. Both liberating and frustrating, the paradox of Los Angeles, like the dream of a flying car, has been a driving tension of her work.

An outsider working in a man’s world and residing in a Latino neighborhood, Susan Mogul may always be looking inside, but through the equitable lens of her personal experience and comic recollections, we may also glimpse something of ourselves.

Hollywood Mogul: Waiting at the Soda Fountain

Living in the shadow of the Hollywood Hills but working far from its studio gates, Mogul jokingly calls herself a “co-dependent filmmaker” at the mercy of private donations and government grants. The lure of “big time” success in the world capital of commercial entertainment and the desire for recognition by the established art world haunts much of Mogul’s work, but in the guise of a friendly ghost rather than a Faustian demon. Susan’s fantasies of success have always a comic, congenial twist, as in *Dear Dennis* (1988), a video letter to Dennis Hopper inspired by her discovery that they share the same dentist. The central irony of this witty piece is that, despite Hopper’s popular persona as an innovative, sub-cultural filmmaker and performer, the actual distance between his so called “independent” films and Mogul’s experimental, non-commercial videos prevents Susan from finding any common ground from which to address Hopper other than the subject of dental work.

In the first scene, for example, Mogul brushes her teeth to the tune of “C.C.Rider,” a play on *Easy Rider*, Hopper’s claim to alternative fame, and opens wide to show the camera her cracked tooth that needs a root canal and a 500 dollar gold crown. The third, and best segment, introduces Susan reading in bed, hidden behind the pages of the *L.A. Weekly*, whose cover story about gang warfare is counterposed to Streisand’s rendition of “Something’s Comin” from *West Side Story*, playing in the background. Susan eventually lowers the paper to address the camera, and reveals a bruised and swollen face. She tells Dennis that she recently saw his feature, *Colors*, in her east side neighborhood, and while she never offers her opinion of the film per se, she does imply that the riot which ensued during the screening ultimately saved her an expensive dental bill, as the problem tooth, which she raises for his inspection, has been conveniently knocked from her head. By putting *Colors* in a context juxtaposing a journalistic account of real city gangs with a pop song that romanticizes gang warfare as a musical fantasy, and by suggesting that the film’s worth can best be measured in terms of its exchange value, Mogul subtly implies that Hopper’s work neutralizes sub-cultural practices and renews their potential as Hollywood commodities.

In the work’s final segment, set to a German rendition of “Mack the Knife,” Mogul presents to Dennis a necklace made from her own teeth, a ludicrous piece of folk art that oddly is designed to attract Hopper’s attention in the probable absence of his interest in her video. The entire premise is ridiculous, but Mogul’s deadpan panache gives the work an ingenuous urgency that creates drama out of the mundane. And unlike the man whom her letter addresses, Mogul never sells out her integrity as an artist (or as a woman) in her efforts to earn recognition. The video retains her episodic, low-tech, unpretentious signature style and avoids trying to impress Hopper with flash and glamour. That Hopper has never responded to Mogul’s letter is telling in itself; as a video whose diaristic vernacular resists cinematic appropriation and whose seduction denies sex, *Dear Dennis* exposes little that the man can sink his teeth into.

The ways in which women have had to present and even degrade themselves in order to impress men, gain attention, and succeed in Hollywood are lampooned in Mogul’s performance video, *Waiting at the Soda Fountain* (1980). Set at the Columbia Coffee Shop, the piece parodies the rags to riches fantasy of Lana Turner, who, as the legend goes, walked up to a Hollywood soda fountain, ordered a chocolate malted, and became a star. Dressed in a beret and a bad attitude, Mogul masquerades as a “male” movie director who callously evaluates the auditions of the women in attendance, discarding those who fail to meet “his” stereotypical image of who they should be rather than who they are. The “wannabes” in the tape are all well-known personalities associated with West Coast feminist art, including Arlene Raven, Cheri Gaulke, and Nancy Angelo. As performance artists dealing with personal concerns, they have already developed recognizable ways of presenting themselves, but in the tape, they are pretending to be actresses who are pretending to be someone else. Forced to attend to hair and makeup, take dictatorial direction, conform to type, and enact humiliating scenarios, they give over-the-top performances which poke fun at women’s traditional passivity.

Mogul directed the affair as a three-hour on-location happening, providing scripted scenarios but calling for unscripted responses. This balance of structure and improvisation, these layers of reality and artifice, here exploited primarily for comic effect, find a more profound and mature expression in her later work. Her parodic impersonation of the movie director, while debunking the sexist imperatives associated with his power, disguises Mogul’s latent ambitions to direct a feature film. This desire finds its concrete expression in the photo collage she designed for the coffee shop, entitled “Crisis in Capitol.” Reduplicated *en masse*, the artist is featured as conqueror of Hollywood: reigning from skyscrapers, demolishing the Capitol Records building, and taking over tinsel town. The poignant irony, of course, is that Susan herself has taken over only a tiny soda fountain, now torn down, and remains waiting to this day.

Diary Essays: Everyday Echoes and Dreams

Since the completion of *Everyday Echo Street: A Summer Diary* (1993) and *I Stare At You and Dream* (1997), Mogul has become more firmly identified as a “diary filmmaker.” Yet, in contrast to the strategies of Mekas, Brakhage, and Auder, who operate the camera apparatus as an immediate extension of their subjective interaction with the environment, whose cinematic techniques strive to document time and place without the imposition of a supplementary consciousness, and whose footage privileges the present instant of composition over post-production manipulation, Mogul’s strategies have always reassembled the heterogeneous moments of shooting in the service of prearranged scenarios or thematic concepts.

Mogul resists the literal mandates of autobiographical “truth to life.” Her biography is her palette, whose colors she chooses according to the mood, effect, or idea she has in mind. All art that draws on raw experience, in her philosophy, is by definition a reconstruction, a tension between spontaneity and intentionality, “a way to figure things out in my personal life, or personal issues, or personal conflicts. It gives me a structure to look at my life, things, people.” Mogul’s diaries are meant to be published, communicated, received. Gregarious, her recollections turn outward, exploring personal identity and social relationships as mutually constitutive.

In her most recent pieces, shot in Highland Park, primarily a community of Mexicans-Americans, Mogul culminates what is perhaps the most salient theme throughout all of her works—a search for home through a process of interpersonal communication. While retaining elements of the diaristic vernacular—digression, impression, intimacy, revelation—Mogul experiments with scripted improvisations, framing the presentation of non-actors within a narrative that endows them with double signification: at once real people in her neighborhood and figures of her poetic design. Their representation is not, therefore, a process of editing out, but editing in: the stories Susan constructs around her everyday meetings with ordinary folks inscribe their public appearances in her personal anecdotes, transforming the most mundane behavior as the stuff of private fantasy.

In this way, Mogul is able to uphold the ethnographer’s integrity by presenting her neighbors as they really are, but of course only as she can see them. By framing their stories within her own scenarios about family, friendship, loneliness, and love, the particular becomes universal. Latinos and Jews, men and women, old and young are different, but somehow the same, refracted and refocused through Mogul’s camera lens: “I look for the common denominators that I experience with other people. By focusing on personal connections, for what we’ve got in common, I’ve been able to smash stereotypical representations of Angelenos that have kept us apart.”

For example, in *I Stare At You and Dream*, race, class, and ethnicity wash away when universal needs, such as filial recognition, come to the fore, linking everyone from Susan the artist and Ray the ex-con to Sam the college professor and Alex the aspiring poet. And when *Everyday Echo Street* premiered at Armando’s, a local restaurant in Highland Park, people from inside and outside the community gathered together to observe a slice of life typically absent in media exhibitions: “It was the first time that I showed my work in a context where there were people from the art world mixing with everyday people, which was very exciting.”

Mogul’s vision of her neighborhood is thus a rare alternative to the mainstream: “Highland Park is a neighborhood that has escaped Hollywood representation. It’s not well-known like Beverly Hills or Watts. The inhabitants are neither universally affluent nor gangbangers. So, in the tapes, you see, first, people who are normally invisible in Hollywood productions, and second, three-dimensional human beings rather than caricatures.” Take for instance, Mogul’s on and off

boyfriend Ray Aguilar: although first introduced as an ex-con, he reveals himself over the course of *I Stare At You and Dream* as “an intriguing very complex man who is both tender and aggressive, hardworking and fun-loving, at times distant from me, but also quite close to his grandmother.” After living in the neighborhood for fifteen years, the artist herself comes to know its inhabitants more intimately through the creative process. For instance, in *Everyday Echo Street*, Mogul dramatizes her discoveries by formally dividing her piece in roughly equal halves, the first representing her initial isolation, and the second, her re-integration. A single, Jewish, middle class artist living in a Latino, working class neighborhood of closely knit families, Mogul introduces herself once again as the outsider, far from home, family and friends. Memories of loss haunt her: the young lover who died in a car wreck; the sale of the house on Long Island in which she grew up; the week at Grandma Sonia’s on Long Island where, abandoned by her parents during their vacation, she did nothing but look out the window. Now forty years later, Susan continues to look out windows in Highland Park, a vantage point allowing her to observe her surroundings, but from a private space and self-imposed distance. The impulse to film from her window, she confesses, began when a man she was dating went off to Italy for a month, but never returned. In the meantime she watches pigeons making love on her roof, self-conscious of her loneliness. Even when Mogul and her camera leave her apartment window and move about the community, we see the neighborhood primarily from her first person point of view, one with which we identify and whose effect causes a radical separation: “our” self looking out upon the other. Susan’s presence is marked only by her absence in the scene, as her disembodied voice foregrounds our awareness of the camera between her and her subjects.



Alejandra “Alex” Sanchez holds up her journal.

Photo credit: Rhoda Mogul

The video's second half, however, registers a subtle but perceptible change, largely because Mogul more frequently begins to appear in front of the camera, which she has handed to a hired assistant. Her presence in the frame thus splits our identification between her and the viewfinder, so that rather than watching with her from the outside, we now join her as a member of the community, her invited guest. We follow her to the local grocery store, post office, gas station, and restaurant, where soon we grow to understand that Susan's minor exchanges—the greetings, courtesies, jokes, and small talk—make up the fabric of her everyday life. The UPS man who delivers a package and a smile to her door, the waitress who brings her a burrito and a piece of juicy gossip, the postal clerk who stamps her letter and wishes her the best—these people whom she encounters every day, who she can depend on, are after all, we come to realize, much like members of a family.

The echoes of home have reverberated full circle, as Susan recognizes that what she's been missing has been out on the street all along. Setting her sights beyond her apartment window, she pursues the neighborhood men, transformed by her camera's aggressive gaze into objects of her desire. Visited by Grace, an aging, unmarried friend content to live alone, Susan can face a similar prospect with equanimity. Bumping into Mark, an amateur photographer and Polish survivor of World War II, she discovers that she's not the only Jew living in Highland Park. Consequently, in *I Stare at You and Dream*, an unofficial "sequel," Mogul explores in even greater depth and with greater familiarity the close relationships she had developed while shooting *Everyday Echo Street*. "As I began to identify with the stories I was telling, I felt inspired to explore our lives together." In both works, by documenting her neighborhood, not only has Mogul achieved her finest mode of self-expression but, in the process, surprisingly discovered that, "although Highland Park is 3000 miles from where I grew up, it feels very close to home."

Notes

1. Susan Mogul, personal interview, 27 February 1998. All subsequent quotations are from the same interview.
2. *I Stare at You and Dream* was produced in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) with major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting



Susan and Mrs. Margaret Decker, a co-star, in *I Stare at You and Dream*.


Photo Credit: Rhoda Mogul

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JUL 03 1991	to make a video tape <i>Susan Mogul</i> Álákás - Signature - Unterschrift

Adnotacja urzędowa

"Prosaic Portraits
Ironies, and other er
Intimacies"



**SUSAN
MOGUL**

**PROSAIC PORTRAITS,
IRONIES AND
OTHER INTIMACIES:
An Eastern
European Diary**

Installation:
January 17-
February 3, 1991

Performances:
February 1 & 2, 8 pm

Opening Reception,
Thursday,
January 17, 7-10 pm

**PROSAIC PORTRAITS, IRONIES AND
OTHER INTIMACIES:
An Eastern European Diary
1991 46 minutes**

In retrospect I can't believe I proposed this Artist Project to the Santa Monica Museum of Art: travel to Eastern Europe for eight weeks and produce a video diary and installation for an exhibition that would open three months after I got back from my journey. That's a short turn around time. Not to mention, this was my first documentary film. I based my proposal on the fact that I had lived in Budapest in 1988 for a month – before the wall came down and before it was hip to go to Eastern Europe.

Initially I planned to go back to Budapest where I had made new friends and colleagues: mostly poets, artists and intellectuals. But I equate travel with adventure. Why go back to a place you have already been? I had never been to Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Yugoslavia. On September 1, 1990 I landed at the Warsaw airport with one contact and a flat to rent and began filming.

Prosaic Portraits was also the first piece I edited with my new Sony Video Hi8 editing deck. It was the first editing equipment I ever owned. The funding from the museum and an NEA Individual Fellowship enabled me to buy the \$6,000 equipment. Now I could edit at home. Cuts only. And *Prosaic Portraits* is a cuts only documentary. No fade ups. No fade downs. No dissolves. A great way to learn to edit.

Prosaic Portraits touches, and I mean touches, upon many of the themes I fleshed out in subsequent documentaries: relationships with men, female friendship, Jewishness, the camera as a device to meet and to connect to people, as well as my inclination to uncover irony and humor in the everyday.



Top to bottom, left to right. Mateus Kos, Malgorzata Potocka, Gdansk seaside, Kaya, Janusz Szczucki and Marek Grygiel.



SUSAN MOGUL

VIDEO SCREENING

**PROSAIC PORTRAITS, IRONIES AND OTHER INTIMACIES:
AN EASTERN EUROPEAN DIARY**

In the fall of 1990 I went to Poland and rented a flat in Warsaw. I did not know a word of Polish and had one contact there. Using a diary format, I chronicle my interactions with artists, intellectuals and those I meet by chance. I also seek out the few remaining Jews living in the homeland of my Jewish grandparents.

The tape is filled with frank and inquisitive monologues and dialogues revealing personal aspects of myself, the people I visit and the relationships we formed. The diary creates a collage of moments from everyday life; an eventful drive to Gdansk, the annual Polish film festival, borscht boiling in a Krakow kitchen flat. Although this video is often couched in humor, charm and flirtation, underneath it is my own odyssey in the country of my ancestors where I have no Jewish peers.

--Susan Mogul

2437 Main Street

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**Prosaic Portraits, Ironies and Other Intimacies:
An Eastern European Diary
January 17 - February 3, 1991**

Prosaic Portraits, Ironies and Other Intimacies: An Eastern European Diary, the fourth project in the *Santa Monica Museum of Art Artist Projects* series, is Susan Mogul's video diary and performance based on her recent travels in Eastern Europe. Mogul first went to Eastern Europe in 1988, and lived in Budapest for a month. In the fall of 1990 she went to Poland for five weeks and rented a flat in Warsaw for a month. Although Mogul did not speak a word of Polish and only knew one person in Warsaw, her video diary chronicles the many people she met during her travels in Poland, with brief excursions to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

Mogul's videotape documents her interaction and relationships with those she meets, generally artists and intellectuals. She often appears on camera talking with people or speaks directly to the audience; occasionally she hands the camera to others to tape her. Even when she is not on camera, her voice is always present and the tape is filled with frank, inquisitive and candid monologues or dialogues that form an intimate portrait of both herself and those she visits. The fragmented frames and fast-cut editing style of the videotape creates a collage of slices of every day Polish life, seen from a close vantage point that most Americans do not experience.

We meet a well-known Polish cameraman, who refers to the capital of the country's film industry as "Holly-Lodj" (pronounced as "Holly-Wudj"); a charming 18 year-old student who recites "To be or not to be, that is the question" in 14 different languages; a female rock celebrity who comments on Lech Walesa and a host of others. As with Mogul's previous works in video and performance, this videotape is about her interactions with specific people and her personal relationships: "Surprisingly, despite the differences of lifestyle between Warsaw and Los Angeles, I reconstructed my life in this new place in the same way as at home."

Karen Moss, Curator, Santa Monica Museum of Art



Kora, rock star, in her kitchen in Warsaw.

Screenings

Visions du Reel International Film Festival, Switzerland, 2009

Santa Monica Museum of Art, 1991

One year after the fall of the Berlin Wall Susan Mogul takes her camera on a trip to Eastern Europe, as it emerges from a long post-communist hangover. During the journey from Warsaw to Prague she travels to her source of Jewishness in Poland – the birthplace of her grandparents- and documents her meeting with a host of Eastern European artists including Jerzy the sexy cameraman, Kora the anti-Communist rock star, Natalia the filmmaker and alter ego, and Mateus the passing student who recites “To be or not to be” in 15 different languages.

Prosaic Portraits Ironies and Other Intimacies could have just been a fastidious exercise in style, but instead it overflows with joyous energy. The director has the capacity to seize whatever reality offers, as if it has been ready-made and set in movement for her, and creates a combination of pure imagery and un-common sense...

The Mogul trademark, biting irony, drives the film. “We have a Mercedes Benz, but no bags to carry the cabbages,” complains one of the characters about the shortages in Poland. This lightness of tone goes hand in hand with that of the film’s form as in the very beautiful, sensitive sequence at Majdanek concentration camp, where Mogul takes her place as part of a traumatic genealogy, while still marking her presence in the world; a shadow with a camera.

- **Emmanuel Chicon**, Visions du Reel Film Festival Catalog, 2009

Translated from French by Helen Swain



Bohdan Holomicek



Wife of Bohdan Holomicek, Susan Mogul and photographer Ivan Lutterer in the Czech countryside.

Photo credit Bohdan Holomicek

Ivan Lutterer, a Czech documentary photographer, and I took a four hour bus ride from Prague to visit Bohdan Holomicek, another documentary photographer, out in the countryside. Bohdan photographed incessantly and showed me hundreds and hundreds of photographs. He was like the Garry Winogrand of Czechoslovakia. A long time friend of Vaclav Havel, and when Havel became president Bohdan became his unofficial photographer. However, my favorite photographs were of Bohdan's three wives - it was clear he loved them all.

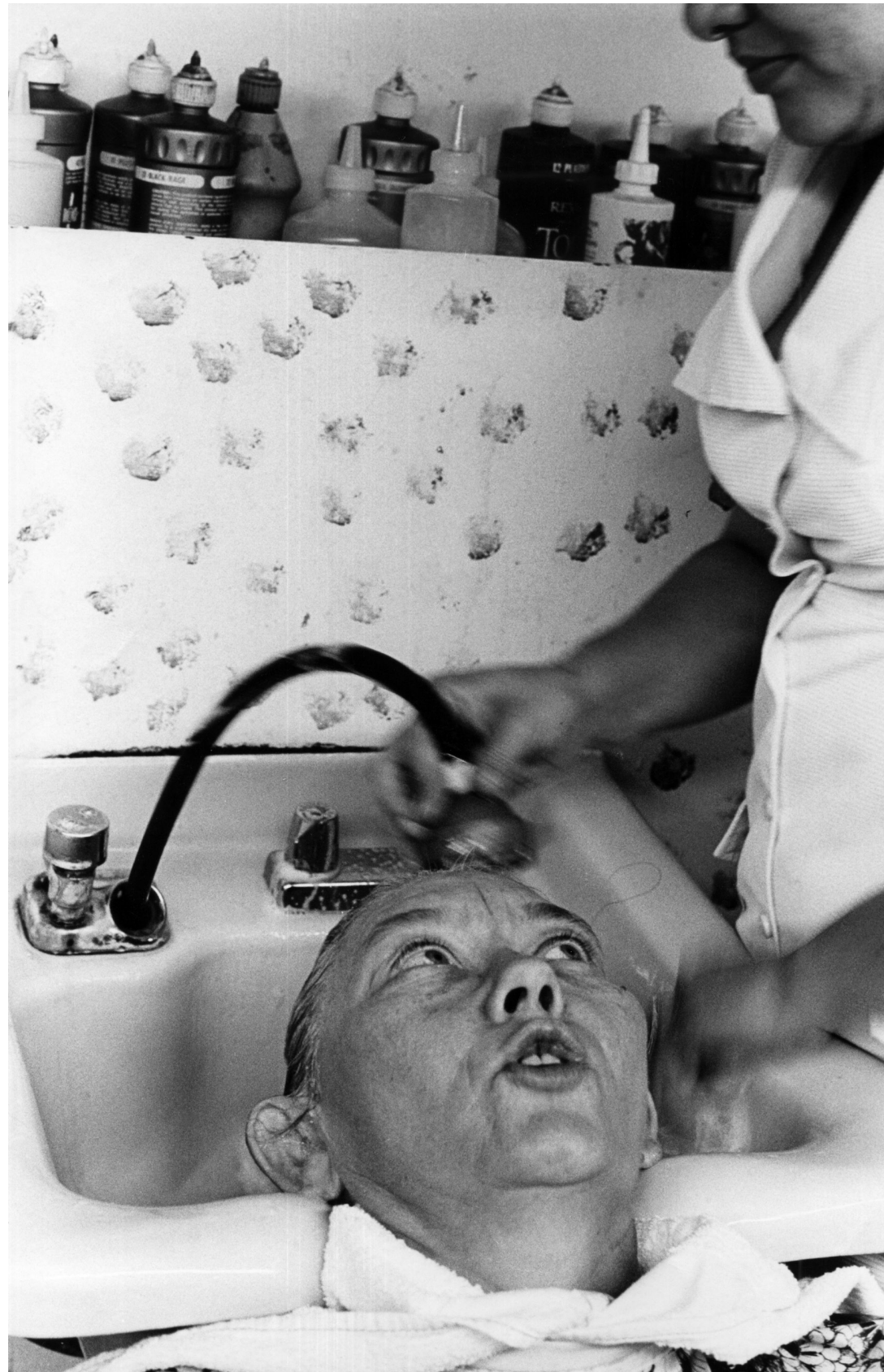
First Documentary Project

The Beauty Parlor Photographs, 1973

In 1973 I produced a documentary photographic series set in a local beauty parlor in Newhall, California, a small town a few miles from CalArts where I was going to school. It had to be close as I did not know how to drive yet. I probably walked or took the bus to get there.

This was an “old school” beauty parlor even by 1973 standards. (Well, Newhall was pretty old school, sparsely populated, practically rural.) The clients of this shop were middle-aged working class women. Many went there every Friday for a wash and set – very few haircuts. So I went every Friday for a month in order to take pictures of the same women each week.

This was my first documentary project. The parlor was owned by an Italian-American couple from New Jersey. The wife ran the place, did the ladies’ do’s and the husband helped out, and stayed in the background. My impetus to make this documentary was two-fold. I loved beauty parlors. Growing up I went to the beauty parlor with my Mom and loved sitting, waiting and watching the women get transformed. I also had a political/social agenda. Feminists in the seventies were criticized and scorned for being separatists. So I wanted to document an all female environment that was accepted by the mainstream - the beauty parlor.





While we're on the subject of photography, a little more about my mother.

“The darkroom was the only place I could go where it was nice and quiet. Everyone was asleep. I'd stay up till one or two in the morning.”

Mom always used to say she went to the darkroom to get away from her six kids and have some time to herself. So I always assumed she took up this hobby after she got married. But actually my mother was an avid amateur photographer before I was born.

She set up her first darkroom when she lived with her parents. And when she got married – Mom never lived on her own – she printed pictures in the kitchen of our two-bedroom apartment in Fresh Meadows in Queens, New York. At night Mom took out her enlarger, trays, and chemicals from the kitchen cabinets and printed her black and white photos. When it was time to make breakfast for Dad and the kids the next morning all traces of her darkroom were gone. We moved to the suburbs in 1955 and Mom set up a permanent darkroom in the basement in our new house.

My five brothers and sisters were the primary subjects of my mother's photographs. However she did not take “family photos.” She hated posed pictures. We were always doing something - even if it was thinking. Mom took photos of us jumping in sand dunes at Jones Beach, blowing balloons, or getting a Buster Brown haircut. And she never put pictures in photo albums. Mom mounted her enlarged photos on boards, unframed, and hung them on the walls of our modern split level home.

As a teenager, I hung out with Mom in the darkroom and helped her select photographs for the monthly contests at her camera club, the Fresh Meadows Camera Club. That club fascinated me. Located in a basement of an apartment building, it was like another world - all men. Mom was the only woman in the club.

I used to think that my mother's creative work was her lowest priority in a given day. And it was always the last thing she did – never the first. And that fact frustrated me. But Mom carved out a distinct space for herself. She took pictures alone. She went to her darkroom alone. She drove to the camera club alone. It was the one and only way in which she was independent from the family. Rhoda Mogul, the photographer, gave my mother a separate identity from all the other suburban mothers and housewives that lived in our neighborhood. And that's the way in which I identified with her.



Photo credit: Susan Mogul



Susan, 1965 and 1954

Photo Credits: Rhoda Mogul

Mom For Hire, 1995

One of the deliverables required by ITVS/ Corporation for Public Broadcasting for my production of *I Stare at You and Dream* were publicity shots of all the people in the documentary. Although I could have taken these pictures, there was a budget for a photographer. So why not “hire” my mother who lived on Long Island 3,000 miles away. I knew she would do a good job, refuse a fee and it was an opportunity for us to collaborate for the first time.

Mom took black and whites, color slides and did a beautiful job. She particularly enjoyed photographing handsome co-star John Harb, the tattoo artist who owned a body shop a few blocks from my apartment. The only photographs she took that I didn't like were the ones of my leading man, Ray Aguilar and myself together. A few months later, I hired photographer Dave Ries, to take additional shots of Ray and me. There are just some things you shouldn't ask your mother to do – like photograph you and your lover.



Rhoda Mogul taking photographs in Death Valley in 1976. Photo credit Susan Mogul

Until well into the 20th century, almost all distinguished female achievement in literature came from women without children.

- Tillie Olsen, author of *Silences*, mother of four.

Coming Up with *Sing O Barren Woman*, 2000

Although, my mother never expressed a desire to be a full time professional photographer, I always wondered what her life would have been like if she had become one.

I never had burning desire to have kids, my mother didn't pressure me to have them (she had eleven grandchildren from my other siblings), so I never gave being childless much thought. However in 1998, at the onset of fifty, I was a participant in an academic film conference at USC, "Eye and Thou: Jewish Autobiography in Film and Video." Five of us, the invited filmmakers, had presented our films over two days and a closing discussion ensued. I looked around the auditorium and noted that four out of the five filmmakers did not have kids. It was a moment of thinking out loud in public. "We're all making films about family, but none of us are making family." My comment dangled in the air and fell flat on its face. Dead silence. At the end of this session, Janis Plotkin, the director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, a childless boomer, introduced herself, "Susan, I think you've got a great idea for a film."

I needed a new idea for a project and proceeded with extensive research about women who were childless by choice or chance. I read academic and popular books in history, sociology, literature, and religion on the topic. I also learned that many prominent women throughout history were/are childless and disproportionately high for our numbers. And the same was true for women in the arts. The research became the basis of a proposal for a one-hour documentary that would demonstrate that the childless woman has contributed in unique and significant ways to family, alternate forms of kinship, community, culture and history.

But I don't make those kind of films. I'm not that kind of documentary filmmaker. I discarded the proposal and decided to satirize the stereotype of the childless woman: incomplete, distraught, deviant, defective and "barren." Now that's juicy raw material to pluck. I wrote an anthem to being childless, and produced a "coming out" film with old school seventies feminist energy. My childless gal pals made up the cast, told their stories, and off we marched through the empty sidewalks of LA with our anthem blasting from our boomboxes.



Dee Balson

I've been accused of being cold, selfish, wierd...

O

Barren

woman

official selection
visions du reel - nyon
international film festival
switzerland

official selection
amascultura
international film festival
portugal

"A hilarious and poignant meditation on all manner of life choices and the necessity of living with their consequences." - LOS ANGELES TIMES

"I was truly amazed at how much wit, insight, creativity, artistic imagination, spunk, beauty and fun you could wrap into 11 minutes! Bravo!" - Elaine T. May, "Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness"

An awkward silence surrounds women who have not had children. Part documentary, part music video, *Sing, O Barren Woman* gives voice to ten middle-aged women who "come out" as non-mothers through word and song.

There has been a dramatic increase in childlessness in the United States - and most of it voluntary - since the peak of the baby boom. This short film confronts the stereotype of the childless woman with irony, humor and pathos, and stimulates public dialogue on a taboo topic that confronts increasing numbers of women. This is the first U.S. film or video on voluntary childlessness.

SING, O BARREN WOMAN
2000 11 minutes



Ruth Olafsdottir

A humorous and caustic take on a subject that is rarely dealt with. *Sing O Barren Woman* is also a reflection on changes that have affected the female condition. And an entertaining treatise, on people's freedom to control their reproductive functions.

Sophie Guyot, Excerpt from Visions du Reel Festival Catalog, 2001

In between unpegging her laundry from the washing line, an attractive woman with large green eyes keeps turning to address the camera "A lot of people, especially men, have said that my breasts are an indication that I should have children. And that I am wasting them. I was obviously made to have children - lots of them and obviously breast feed them, and that my breasts are being wasted -wasted."

Susan Mogul's *Sing O Barren Woman* starts with the statistic that nowadays one in five women in her early forties in the USA has not had a child by choice or chance. Apparently that figure is twice that of 1975. The woman with the perceived matronly bosom is one of ten middle-aged women to whom this film gives voice, allowing them to redress the balance. These women are often criticized for being selfish, or irresponsible, after all the argument goes, nature intended them for the perpetuation of the species.

Mogul has cleverly constructed her audiovisual montage as a documentary that gradually turns into a music video. At the end of the film, with ghetto blasters hoisted on their shoulders, the women make their way through the streets of Los Angeles, swinging their hips and snapping their fingers; they are singing in clear confident voices. Exuding wit, pluck, and a good dose of self-irony, they make it absolutely clear to anyone watching that they are anything but frustrated, dried-up barren old maids.

Christine Bloch, Excerpt from Visions du Reel Film Festival Catalog, 2009

Credits

Cast

Dee Balson
Keiko Fukazawa
Janet Klein
Michele Kort
Claudia Kunin
Susan Mogul
Robin Palanker
Ruth Olafsdottir
Karen Pedersen
Ewa Wocjiak



Janet Klein

Creative Consultants

Barry Markowitz
Michael Mayer

Additional Camera

Elise Ludwig
Goran Pavicivec

Online Editor

Kate Johnson/EZTV

Original Music

Miriam Cutler

Lyrics

Susan Mogul

Producer/ Director/Writer/Camera/Editor

Susan Mogul

Screenings

Kino Xenix, Zurich, Switzerland, 2011

Videozone International Video Festival, Tel Aviv, Israel, 2004

Black Maria Film/Video Festival, Director's Choice Citation, 2004

Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, New York, 2003

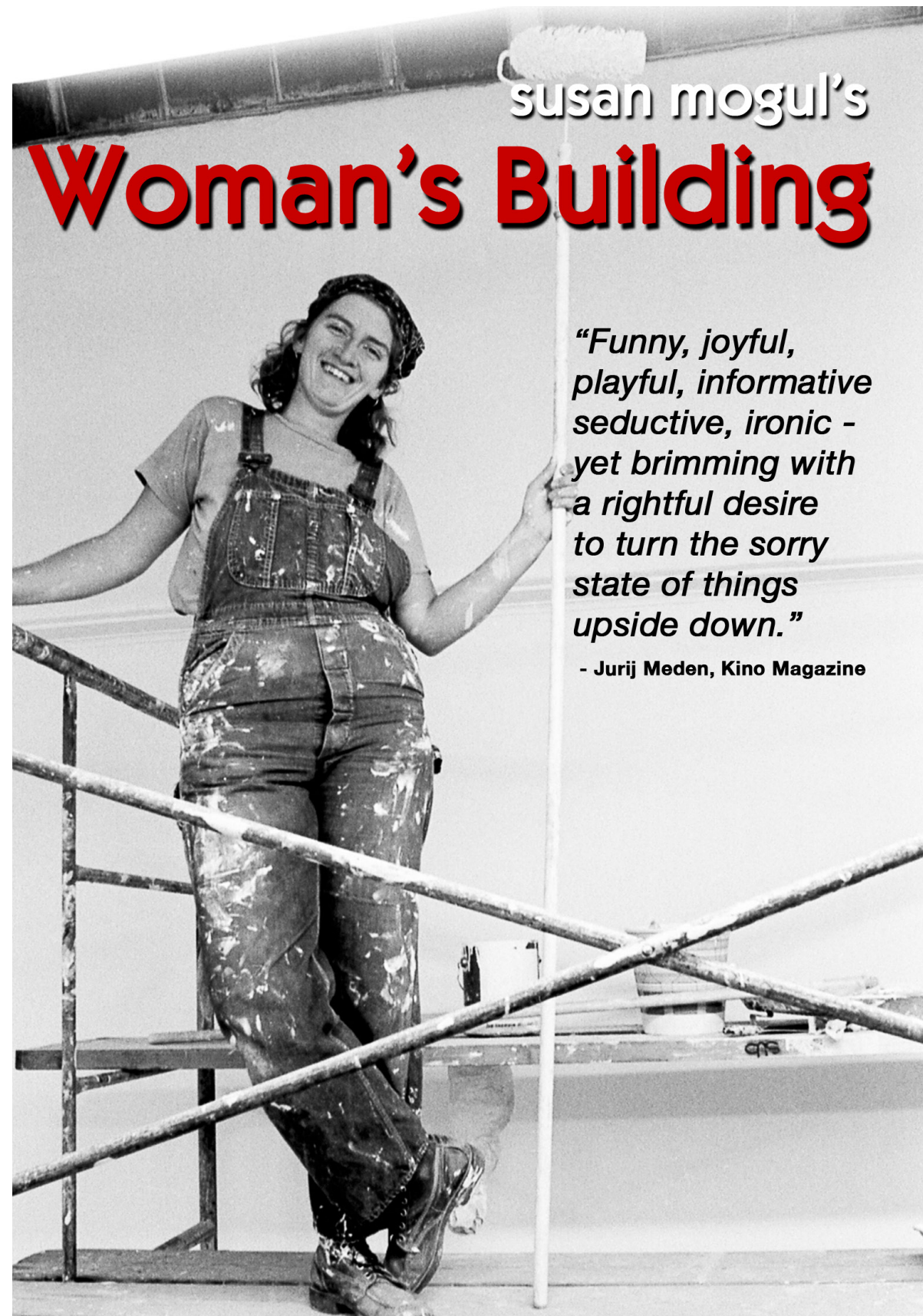
Visions du Reel International Festival, Nyon Switzerland, 2001

Amascultura International Documentary Film Festival, Portugal, 2001

Life and Times, KCET, Los Angeles PBS, 2001

"COLA 2000", Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2000





susan mogul's

Woman's Building

*"Funny, joyful,
playful, informative
seductive, ironic -
yet brimming with
a rightful desire
to turn the sorry
state of things
upside down."*

- Jurij Meden, Kino Magazine

The Los Angeles Woman's Building (1973-1991) was the first independent and longest running feminist cultural institution in the USA. Because of my participation during the early years of the Woman's Building, Otis College of Art and Design commissioned me to produce a short film for their 2011 exhibition *Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building* at the Ben Maltz Gallery.

Since it was a short film, I focused on a small cohort of mine in the early seventies and titled it, *Susan Mogul's Woman's Building*. I wanted to make clear that this was a personal film reflecting one woman's perspective.

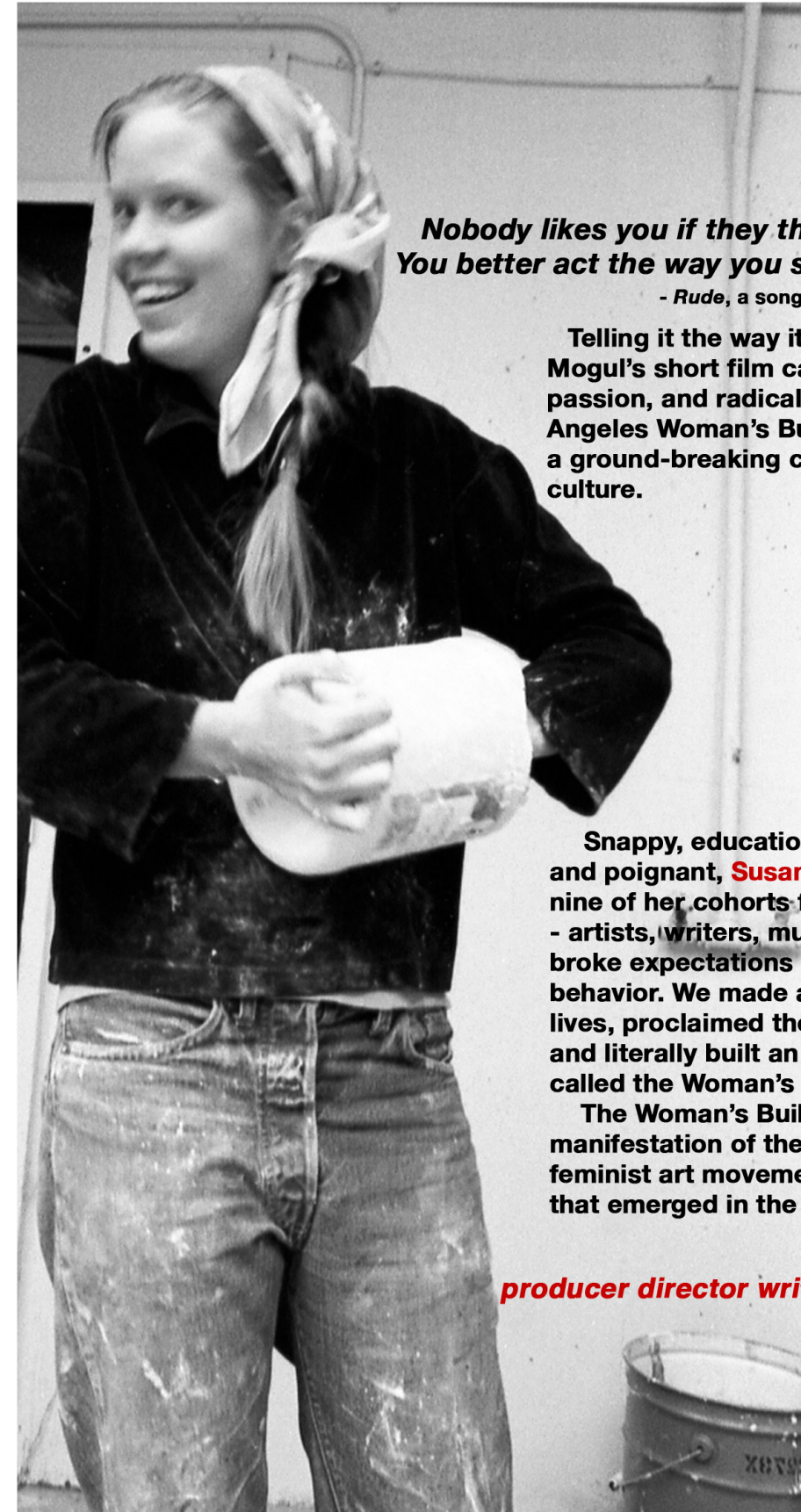
I filmed nine Woman's Building gal pals and selected them because of their sense of performance, energy, humor and the rapport that exists between us. My goal was to produce a piece about a historical moment that was visceral, personal and "musical."

The women tell their collective tale about Los Angeles female artists getting together in the early seventies to construct a space devoted to female culture. Produced with a low budget in four-months, I created this work from ten hours of interviews, as well as archival materials. The film focuses on working in an all female environment, making art out of one's life, and what it meant for women to literally build a space of our own.

SUSAN MOGUL'S WOMAN'S BUILDING
2010 9 minutes

Opposite Page: Susan King renovating the Woman's Building, 1973 Photo Credit: Susan Mogul

“People would always ask,
‘Why is there a Woman’s Building?’
Where’s the men’s building?
And our answer was always,
Every other building in town.”



***Nobody likes you if they think you’re rude.
You better act the way you should.***

- Rude, a song by Miriam Cutler, 1976

Telling it the way it was lived, Susan Mogul’s short film captures the energy, passion, and radical spirit of the Los Angeles Woman’s Building (1973-1991), a ground-breaking center for women’s culture.

Snappy, educational, musical and poignant, **Susan Mogul** interviews nine of her cohorts from the seventies - artists, writers, musicians - who broke expectations of proper female behavior. We made art out of our own lives, proclaimed the personal political and literally built an alternative space called the Woman’s Building.

The Woman’s Building was a manifestation of the highly influential feminist art movement in Los Angeles that emerged in the early seventies.

producer director writer camera editor
susan mogul

Credits

Cast

Jerri Allyn
Miriam Cutler
Cheri Gaulke
Susan King
Laurel Klick
Michele Kort
Lili Lakich
Susan Mogul
Phranc
Ilene Segalove

Director/Producer/Camera/Editor

Susan Mogul

Co-Producer

Michael Mayer

Music Courtesy

Miriam Cutler
Phranc

Susan Mogul's Woman's Building was commissioned by Otis College of Art and Design for the exhibition *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building*, October 1– December 3, 2011, in the Ben Maltz Gallery as part of *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980* sponsored by the Getty Foundation.

Screenings

Doin it in Public: Feminsm and Art at the Woman's Building, 2011/12
Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles
Kino Xenix, Zurich, Switzerland, 2011

For a complete listing and update of all my films and screenings please go to the Video/Filmography on my website susanmogul.com.