

# Foreign Film in Review

by David MacDonald

## *Artemisia*

## *Ma Vie En Rose*

I still can't quite figure out how the inequalities between women and men came to be.

Sure, we all know that they've existed throughout time. But how and when did somebody, in their supposed wisdom, cook up the idea that women, for example, weren't supposed to write, or express themselves, or to make a living from any kind of work, or even (shudder) to be paid equally to the men, and to have these ideas perpetuate throughout many thousands of years? A recent film called *Artemisia* doesn't exactly explain that germ of a concept enough to satisfy me, but it still is another example of the silliness that arises to discourage something as innocent as personal and artistic freedom.

The story is about Artemisia, an Italian woman from the 17th century, whose father is a well-respected painter of religious art. She wants to follow in her father's footsteps, but many obstacles are in her way, not least of which is that everyone thinks it is improper for a woman to do such a thing.

For example, it is not considered moral for a woman to paint male nudes, so right in the middle of working on the project, Artemisia's father, to her chagrin, orders his partners to place a large sheet in front of her so she won't be corrupted by such a sight. Artemisia is no stranger to nudity, however, as she has already drawn a nude portrait of herself, and also lures a young man with a crush on her to disrobe so she can finally get a chance to draw a male form.

A famous artist shows up to help work on the project, and Artemisia is fascinated by him. Eventually, she becomes his pupil, learning all the tricks of the trade. Eventually, however, they become lovers, and this is where the real trouble begins. The artist is charged by Artemisia's father for having raped her, and Artemisia's world begins to fall apart.

The film is really about art, and not about sex, although you wouldn't know it from the video box, in which blurbs from respectable critics say things like "erotic" and "sexy." The box also points out that Miramax successfully appealed the ratings board's original NC-17 rating, and therefore made it a mere R rating. So apparently this is a soft-porn extravaganza, right? I don't know. I think it's more that some people will get turned on by anything, and to absolve their guilt, they rate a film that's about art with a classification that, when it was still the X rating, ended up being associated with hard-core pornography. Recently, I've seen *At First Sight*, with Val Kilmer and Mira Sorvino, and certainly I found that to be much more erotic than anything *Artemisia* had to offer, and that film was rated PG-13. In actuality, there is nothing in this film to suggest that this is anything more than a story of a woman who determined to be as curious and as free as any other artist would be.

Rating: \*\*\*

*Ma Vie En Rose* is a French film from a couple of years ago, and, like another movie, *Ponette*, this deals with a difficult subject from a child's point of view. However, unlike the other film, about a little girl's reconciliation with her mother's tragic death, *Ma Vie En Rose* may inspire some controversy with its subject.

The young boy in this particular story has a very unusual tendency to dress up as a girl.

This is the source of much embarrassment for his family, even in the first scene of the film during their house-warming party, when the boy appears decked out in a bright pink dress and lipstick. His father attempts laughing it off as the boy's sense of humour, but soon after, it becomes clear that this family will be in a heap of trouble for their son's habits. The biggest source of the trouble is the boy's obvious adoration (I'm a bit wary to call it an attraction) with his father's boss's son. The boy says that when they grow older, he will become a girl and the two will then be allowed to get married. The two even play wedding at the boss's house, and get caught by the boss's wife. After this point, relations between everybody become a bit shaky.

The movie takes a very serious turn at the two-third point when it becomes clear that this friendly neighbourhood will no longer be friendly toward the boy or his family. Even a viewer who feels uncomfortable about this child's habit ought to feel some pity and outrage over what follows.

I'm sort of two minds about this issue. It's easy to say that the kid should be able to discover their own identity. Then at the same time, it is really embarrassing for the family, and it would be frustrating to try rightfully to convince this boy that he is a boy. Most people would probably even say that a seven-year-old person is far, far too young to even be thinking about any "deviant" behaviours, and could pay the price later on. (I also somehow wonder how the young actor's family and friends reacted to the performance he gives, and in turn what his young mind has absorbed by playing this character.)

It would seem easy to say that this kid should just grow up and realize he can't do everything he wants, because there are other people to consider in making choices. But then I'd be right back to where I started: children have rights as well, and he is exercising his right to express himself. For me, this conflict added to the entertainment value of the film. That, along with its comedy of embarrassment and dramatic power, makes for a quite intriguing experience.

Rating:\*\*\*

## HIP HOP HISTORY

Four of hip hop's biggest names are currently making history.

Jay-Z, Method Man, Redman, and DMX have embarked on The Hard Knock Life Tour. The tour began on February 27 in Charlotte, North Carolina and is slated

for approximately 46 North American venues. The tour will be in Toronto on the 11 of March at the Air Canada Center and in Montreal on March 10 at the Molson Center. (MTVNEWS <http://www.mtv.com/news/headlines/990301/story10.html>)

All of these artists have recently released solid albums and are four of the most successful solo rappers in the game. The tour has also picked up one of Method Man's fellow Wu-Tang members Inspectah Deck (the DSC <http://www.thedsc.com/news.html>).

Jay-Z, Method Man, Redman and DMX are all able mates on Def Jam and it would be an amazing experience to see just one of them, but to have them all perform together is truly a historical event.

- Marc MacDonald