

Janet Merewether

Awards and Critical Reception of films and media art

AWARDS

Reindeer in my Saami Heart (70mins 2016)

NOMINATION for Best Documentary – Biography ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) Awards

NOMINATION for Best Indigenous Resource – ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) Awards

NOMINATION for Best Documentary Script – AWG AWGIE Awards

NOMINATION for Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award

Maverick Mother (52mins 2008)

WINNER - Best Australian Documentary – ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) Awards 2008

WINNER - Best Documentary - Human Interest - ATOM awards 2008

WINNER - PTS Audience Choice Award, TIDF Taiwan International Documentary Festival 2008

WINNER - Jury Special Mention – Documentary under 60 minutes

TIDF Taiwan International Documentary Festival 2008

NOMINATION for Best Directing – Documentary – Australian Directors' Guild Awards

NOMINATION for Best Editing Documentary – Australian Screen Editors' Awards 2008

Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life (52mins 2005)

WINNER - AFI Award (Australian Film Institute) for Best Directing in Documentary 2005

WINNER – IF (Inside Film) Discovery Award for Best Australian Documentary 2005

WINNER - Merit Award – Taiwan International Documentary Festival 2006

NOMINATION for FCCA (Film Critics Circle of Australia) Best Documentary 2005

NOMINATION for AFI Award for Outstanding Craft – Production Design 2005

NOMINATION for AFI Award for Best Australian Documentary 2005.

Palermo - 'History' Standing Still (2004)

WINNER - DENDY AWARD Sydney Film Festival (General Category) 2004

NOMINATION for ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) Award (Best Experimental) 2004

NOMINATION for AFI AWARD (Best Editing in a Non-Feature) 2004

NOMINATION for FCCA AWARD (Best Australian Short Film) 2004

Short Before the Movie (2003)

NOMINATION for BEST EXPERIMENTAL PRODUCTION - 2003 ATOM Awards

(Australian Teachers of Media) 2004

Contemporary Case Studies (2001)

HIGHLY COMMENDED - DENDY AWARD Sydney Film Festival 2001

PLATINUM REMI AWARD – EXPERIMENTAL COMEDY, WorldFest-Houston, Texas 2002

NOMINATION for BEST SHORT FILM & BEST EXPERIMENTAL PRODUCTION – ATOM AWARDS 2002

Cheap Blonde (1998)

HONORABLE MENTION Jury Award - Ann Arbor Festival USA 1999

Making Out in Japan (1996)

HONORABLE MENTION - VideoBrasil (Sao Paulo) 1996

WINNER BEST AUSTRALIAN VIDEO - St Kilda Film Festival 1997

WINNER BEST AUSTRALIAN SHORT FILM - Melbourne Fringe Festival 1996

Tourette's Tics (1994)

WINNER AAV AWARD FOR BEST AUSTRALIAN VIDEO - St Kilda Film Festival 1994.

A Slice of Life or the Crumbs of Existence (1993)

SPECIAL CRAFT AWARD - St Kilda Film Festival 1995

A Square's Safari (1992)

WINNER WRITERS' GUILD AWARD for Scriptwriting - St Kilda Film Festival 1992

4th PLACE in Short Film Category - Edinburgh Film Festival 1992

VOTED by audience as one of the 5 most popular shorts at the festival - Seattle

International Film Festival, USA 1993

CRITICAL RECEPTION

WHAT CRITICS AND AUDIENCES WROTE ABOUT *REINDEER IN MY SAAMI HEART*

“The courage to address other ways of being...a rich and engaging work.”
(Dan Edwards – *Realtime*)

“We were captivated by your film.”
(Margaret Mead Film Festival Selection Committee)

“Very poetic and moving..Great work.”
(Michael Frankel – Entertainment and Indigenous Rights lawyer)

“Congratulations – I just loved the documentary and am full of admiration for what you have achieved – let alone doing it nearly on your own and on a shoe string. I think it is a very important documentary – and beautifully and evocatively made.”
(Ace Bourke – Indigenous Art curator and Writer)

“Screening your doco in a packed full cinema! A very inspiring journey you’ve had with the film!”
(Gina Rubiano - NSW Festivals, Events & Marketing Coordinator Palace Cinemas)

“At the Melbourne premiere of her new film '*Reindeer in My Saami Heart*'. Janet gives a voice, through a herstory, to the poet Inghilda Tapio. The Saami are Sweden's own stolen children and this gives audiences a personal insight in to a fight to preserve culture, whilst also sharing that culture with audiences. Congratulations Janet and best of luck at the prestigious Margaret Mead Festival (at the New York Museum of Natural History in October)!”
(Professor Lisa French, Dean, School of Media RMIT)

“Really loved the film; so beautiful, so moving! She is wonderful and so is the culture. It's a real tribute to your film-making skills that you serve her and her community so faithfully to their lives...I think it's your finest work ever...which isn't to diminish your other films, but this is something else. Loved the sound score and music too and the lovely fluidity to the image track..and the way you did the poetry. Congrats Janet and go well with the film as it makes its journey. I am sure it will have a great life!”
(Jeni Thornley – Filmmaker and Documentary Scholar)

“Saw your beautiful film this afternoon at Norton StreetI thought it was wonderful – moving and poetic and politically sensitive, making important points organically - not obtrusively - through an appealing character. Of course it was beautifully photographed – which didn't hurt - by you and, in this case, only you could have done it, I think. And the editing was lovely.What a beautiful, authentic documentary!!! So much in it.”
(Martha Ansara – Filmmaker, cinematographer, feminist scholar)

“Thanks for getting this gem up to Brisbane. The audience was totally transfixed. Myself included.”
(Taezar – Scandinavian Film Festival audience - Palace Barracks Cinema Brisbane)

“Thanks for making this awesome doco that enriches our Saami understanding.”
(Sonia - Scandinavian Film festival screening - Palace Barracks Cinema Brisbane)

“Congratulations Janet. *Reindeer In My Saami Heart* is profoundly beautiful.”
(Carmen Galan – Film editor and DAF donor)

“The audience response was very positive! Full house.”
(Julie J Whitehorn - Nordic Lights Film Festival, SIFF Film Centre Seattle, 2017)

WHAT THE CRITICS WROTE ABOUT **MAVERICK MOTHER**

TIDF Jury (winner Jury Special Mention and Audience Choice awards)

"With a humorous and engaging narrative, the filmmaker tells her very personal story of becoming a single mother. Blending serious moments and comical situations of her life with surrealistic photo-montage episodes, Janet Merewether frequently expands the borders of documentary."

Taiwan International Documentary Festival Jury 2008

Inside the experience of living

Keith Gallasch admires Janet Merewether's Maverick Mother

"Baroque is the right word for this film, it's neat chronological structure, its tri-partite framing and witty fantasy-making and, as with the best Baroque music, the emotional power unleashed by careful, ostensibly casual crafting by writer-director, cinematographers, composer, editor, and production and post-production designers collaborating seamlessly."

Realtime 85 – Onscreen p17, Keith Gallasch

<http://www.realtimearts.net/article/issue85/9023>

5 stars – Pick of the Day

"Historically you couldn't be a single woman and raise a child. Here is a documentary that blends traditional storytelling and horror reconstructions to crack that time-honoured myth. One single woman's attempt at becoming a mother raises the contentious debate of the value and need for a father figure in a child's life... Janet's story blossoms into a frantic and funny tale challenging the archetypal nuclear family. Fascinating."

Time Out Sydney - 30/1/08 p82 Ellice Mol

Future Families: Maverick Mother

"What's a lass without a regular source of semen to do? Merewether shies from nothing in this experimental excursion into the conception of her son. Merewether analyses the role of the father in modern families against the figure of her own father, an unapologetic relic of a bygone era. The Howards will no doubt switch channels rather than watch this heresy... but others might find its candour and emotional honesty – plus an undeniable case of the warm fuzzies that future generations are in pretty safe hands with mums like these - rather appealing."

Age - Green Guide 31/1/08 p34 Larissa Dubecki

Television - Maverick Mother

"..this is a frank, funny and brutally honest look at the life of single mother Janet Merewether...A revealing and at times gory (birth, baby poo and spew – it's all here) look at one woman's bold, emotional and some will say controversial approach to parenthood, lightened by an at times comic approach."

West Australian – Seven Days 26/1/08 p38

Sugar and spice and all things biological

"As a bold illustration of the dilemma of some women – keen to have babies but with no eligible, willing men in sight – this documentary comes up trumps.."

Weekend Australian – Review 26/1/08 p38 Jill Rowbotham

"Loved your film! 'Maverick Mother' presents a single woman's journey to become a mom in a light-hearted yet ultimately touching and serious way... I can see why your film won so many awards.."

Jane Mattes – writer and founder of SMC, Single Mothers by Choice

WHAT THE CRITICS WROTE ABOUT *JABE BABE – A HEIGHTENED LIFE*

“Blisteringly inventive and visually out-there, the latest film from acclaimed Sydney film-maker Janet Merewether is nothing if not genre-shattering....The film offers a stimulating examination of illness, the aberrant body and social conformity from a colourfully personal perspective.”

Lynden Barber – Director - Sydney Film Festival 2005

“..This is a documentary with a difference. It's more like a drama, an art film and Jabe is performing her life. It's one of the most visually original films in the festival.”

Julie Rigg ABC Radio National – ‘The Deep End’ programme – Sydney Film Festival Review 13.6.05

“Jabe Babe is exemplary, inventive documentary filmmaking, a rich hybrid of imaginative projection and documentary reflection..It's a great addition to the body of experimental work that Merewether has created over many years, a work to which she brings both her sense of humour and formal inventiveness...”

Keith Gallasch – ‘Factual Fantasy’ – Realtime - RT 68 Aug/Sept 05 p18

“Images are embedded in images in a *tour de force* of directorial imagination..”

Frances Bonner – Brisbane International Film Festival

“Inspired by films like *American Splendor*..Errol Morris documentaries and *Alice in Wonderland*, the film is highly stylised and wildly imaginative, an extraordinary film for an extraordinary life..”

Brisbane International Film Festival - BIFF Offline article - Aug 2004

“(Jabe Babe’s) story, which emerges with verve and optimism in this imaginative doco, is provocative. With so many people striving ineffectually to be different – according to advertising standards of individuality – here is a woman, an outsider most of her life, who longs to live an ordinary, acceptable and quietly useful existence. Jabe Babe is an inspiration.”

Doug Anderson, TV Review, SMH Entertainment, Nov. 29, 2005.

WHAT THE CRITICS, CURATORS AND ACADEMICS WROTE ABOUT *JANET MEREWETHER’S DIGITAL MEDIA ART AND SHORT FILM WORK.*

“...*Cheap Blonde*...ties in so neatly with what we do here at the Pacific Film Archive (PFA). When I saw *Cheap Blonde* I thought we could start each of our screenings with this commentary on cinema. *Cheap Blonde* before Bresson, or Shinoda, or Fassbinder, or Ford, or Wellman...”

Steve Seid, Video Curator, Berkeley Art Museum, Pacific Film Archive, 1998.

“As usual the curtain raisers are a mixed bag. One exception is Australian filmmaker Janet Merewether’s *Contemporary Case Studies (as Witnessed from Life)*...a tartly funny take on sex and romance, couched as an old-fashioned training film and updated with various split-screens and irreverent observation. Merewether is the NYFF’s latest female discovery from downunder, following in the footsteps of Jane Campion and Alison MacLean.”

Village Voice New York Review of *Contemporary Case Studies* in New York Film Festival program by Amy Taubin 2001.

“The four films of Janet Merewether exploit manifold visual icons of graphics, designs and texts to undermine the myth of hysteria as a typically feminine mental disorder and to criticize the patriarchal and commodified filmmaking that fetishizes images of women. Visually and intellectually enjoyable, her experimental works consistently reflect on femininity, the performativity of language, women’s psychology and mass media.” (Other filmmakers in program included Tracey Moffatt.)

Women’s Film Festival in Seoul, Introductory notes to *Deep Focus - Australian Experimental Film/Video Program*. Curated and reviewed by Kwon Eun-sun, 2003.

“This experimental video has something to say about gender, language, television, representation and culture. The director, Janet Merewether, has produced many short films and videos that would be useful texts for curriculums which are interested in cultural studies. For example, *A Square’s Safari* (1991) touches on constructions of masculinity; *Surplus Government Asset* (1993) considers the Sydney Showgrounds as a site which has become a historical icon in Australian culture. *Tourette’s Tics* (1993-94) and *A Slice of Life or the Crumbs of Existence* (1994) both have myth as a central focus. *Making Out In Japan* (1996) deconstructs and recontextualizes Japanese television and iconography through an exploration of the language of intimacy as presented in a language lesson tape; and *Cheap Blonde* can be read as reflection on spectatorship. Virginia Baxter has said that *Cheap Blonde* is ‘every abstract gaze theory you’ve every heard made wittily and powerfully palpable.’”

Metro Education, Lisa French reviews *Cheap Blonde* 1999.

“Curiously interactive, seductively simple, Janet Merewether’s five minute video *Cheap Blonde* lures its audience into playing along with no hands-on and not a mouse in sight. We’re offered an apparently limited set of images, instructions and a computer generated voice which switches from male to female. This is a work so constructed that we laugh as sentences implode and explode like a poetry machine, as an image of a ‘cheap blonde’ who might have fallen out of some shampoo advertisement becomes a site of intimate reflection, as the twelve word sentence (“ A famous filmmaker said ‘Cinema is the history of men filming women’ ”) transforms radically into meaningful nonsense. This is every abstract gaze theory you’ve ever heard made wittily and powerfully palpable.”

Virginia Baxter (OnScreen/Realtime #26) August 1998

“As a visual artist, Merewether’s feminist perspective is unmistakable. But what...impresses me most is not her distinctive feminist standpoint, but her capacity in visually depicting all kinds of issues, be they societal, cultural, gender, environmental or linguistic in nature, from that perspective. Feminist, in her words, is no longer a gesture or a banner, but a perspective [from which] to view the world, to evaluate life or even a philosophy.”

Kuo Li-Hsin 2003, p. 25 Review of JM retrospective, Women Make Waves festival Taipei.

INTERVIEWS / CRITICAL REVIEWS / CITATIONS – JANET MEREWETHER’S WORK AS DIRECTOR OF FILM, DOCUMENTARY AND DIGITAL MEDIA ART

Magazine Feature Articles

Bradley, S. 2007, ‘The F Word – Feminism. Outdated or something every Australian woman counts as a given? We asked 12 women what it means to be female – and a feminist – today,’ Janet Merewether interviewed for *Marie Claire Australia*, February 2007, no. 138, Pacific Magazines, Sydney, p. 64.

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Taffel, J. 2005, 'High Roller,' *Sydney Morning Herald – The Guide*, Nov 28-Nov 4, John Fairfax Publications, Sydney, p. 6.

Magnussen, T. 2005, 'Jabe Babe – In My Own Words,' *Sunday Telegraph – Sunday Magazine*, News Magazines, Sydney, p. 17.

Brady, N. 2005, 'Rising Above it All,' *The Age – Green Guide – Thurs* Nov 24, 2005, John Fairfax Publications, Melbourne, p. 14.

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Kaufman, T. 2005, 'Style and Conceptualisation in Hybrid Documentary,' *Screen Director ASDA Magazine*, Winter 2005, Australian Screen Directors' Association, Sydney, p.8.

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