

IMAGE & NATION

MARGINS OF MEMORY

BY DANIELLE COMEAU

Tracking down Toronto-based experimental filmmaker Midi Onodera is no easy task. Hello, Toronto? No, she's at the New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. New York? Sorry, she's gone to a Yale University conference.

Finally, Onodera is found holed up at the Holiday Inn in New Haven, Connecticut. She's sitting on a film panel at "Inside/Outside," a lesbian and gay conference at Yale. From there she's off to Montreal, where two of her recent films are being featured at *Image & Nation*, the Festival of Gay and Lesbian Cinema and Video.

Midi Onodera is easily one of Canada's premier experimental filmmakers. Her most recent film, *Displaced View*, has just been nominated for a Gemini award for best documentary film.

"It was a shock for me to be nominated for something as mainstream as a Gemini," says Onodera. She mentions the schizophrenia often felt by someone working from the cultural margins, as a lesbian and an Asian, getting mainstream recognition.

Displaced View, which uses elements of experimental documentary and fictional film, is about a



Filmmaker Midi Onodera

third-generation Japanese-Canadian woman's search for her cultural identity through the women in her family. "It touches on issues of the emotional and cultural links between three generations of women," she says.

Onodera made the film for her grandmother, who recently celebrated her 90th birthday. The film is her attempt to deal with the eventual death of her grandmother, and the sense of loss this brings. After a screening of *Displaced View* at a recent film festival in San Francisco, a gay man told Onodera that the film helped him cope with the enormous loss he felt over friends who had died of AIDS.

"The film deals with questions like, 'How does one preserve one's memories, or cope with loss?'" says Onodera.

Image & Nation will also screen Onodera's 1985 film *Ten Cents a Dance (Parallax)*, which premiered at Toronto's Festival of Festivals four years ago. Using an innovative split-screen technique, this film

examines gender roles, and the various discourses which shape sexual orientation. Three 10-minute segments deal with different scenarios: two lesbians at a restaurant; two gay men in a public bathroom; and a man and woman engaged in phone sex.

Onodera's next project is a feature-length film tentatively called *I.D. I Am*, which looks at the construction of gender identity through transsexualism. "This film deals with the construction of film reality, and how people come to perceive actors as real people," says Onodera.

She's done extensive research on transsexuals, partly to dismiss her own myths. "Society imposes all these restrictions on people who want to change their gender—they're considered freaks."

Onodera is also taking part in a panel discussion titled *Representation, Responsibility, and Moveable Margins*, which will address questions of gender and ethnicity in film. She will be joined by fellow Canadian filmmaker Richard Fung, Isaac Julien, and Michelle Parkerson on November 5 at the Goethe Institute.

Both of Onodera's films will be screened November 3. Other productions not to be missed at the fest include Canadian director Marusia Bociurkiw's *Night Visions*, making its Quebec premiere November 2; *But Then She's Betty Carter* by American Michelle Parkerson on November 4; and German filmmaker Monika Treut's *The Virgin Machine* on November 5.

Image & Nation runs November 2-12. Check the listings for details.