

A Conversation with Maria de Medeiros



LostReels met with the multi-talented Maria de Medeiros in January 2023 to discuss *Henry & June*. The following is a complete transcript of the interview.

LR: Hello Maria. Thanks so much for joining me and helping to present the film again to UK audiences. How did you first get involved with the film?

MdM: I was very young, I'd been studying in Paris for one or two years and there was a very important casting director, Margot Capelier, a very important person in French cinema, who saw me in the theatre. She was working with Phil Kaufman and told him, 'There's this girl, she looks just like Anais Nin'. That's how Phil and I met, and it was a very important artistic encounter. Since I knew very little about Anais Nin it was also a very quick immersion into her world and her writing. But it was really the physical resemblance that started it. What's very interesting is that in the film they used both her original photos and photos of me, and there was no perceptible difference.

LR: What was your preparation to play Anais Nin? Today she's very much a feminist icon.

MdM: Also at the time, and it seems increasingly to be so. She had such a strong feminine view towards affirming herself as a woman - and a desiring woman. Her curiosity is very contemporary. I remember getting all her books and reading as much as I could.

LR: I saw Phil Kaufman introducing the film at the Paris Cinematheque with Phillippe Rousselot a couple of years ago and they said everything fell into place after finding you.

MdM: Meeting Phillippe Rousselot was also fantastic. I missed that screening in Paris, but I saw Phil two days later and was so happy to see him and Peter [Kaufman] after so many years. Fantastic guys, with all their intelligence and thoughts- I remember all the heads of department for the film, they were really brilliant, they chose all the brilliant people. Of course Philippe Rousselot has an amazing eye. He's an artist with light and cinematography, and a very sensitive person. Also Guy-Claude François the Production Designer. The clothes were incredible. Most of them were either reproductions, or actual clothes from the thirties, so very precious. Everything was done to the very highest level, so it was an incredible privilege. And those friendships have stayed over the years, with Philippe Rousselot, with Phil and Peter Kaufman.

LR: Talking of collaborators, what are your memories of Fred Ward? There was a huge outpouring of sadness and loss when he passed away last year.

MdM: He was such a wonderful partner it was lovely working with him. He was a very sweet man, and he was passionate about his character. It was his dream to play Henry Miller and he put so much into it. For me as a young European actress it was very interesting. It was my first time working with American actors and their methods, and also British - Richard E. Grant was wonderful - and Uma. It was such a lovely group of actors with different backgrounds, but it all melded very well, because that's also what the film's about. That moment in European history of great open-mindedness and the desire to exchange ideas. That cosmopolitan feeling of Paris in those years was reflected in the group of actors and technicians the film brought together.

LR: It's an absolutely stunning production and I'm delighted we're screening a 35mm print. I don't think it's played in England since it was first released.

MdM: That's incredible, I was shocked when I read the film was more or less lost.

LR: It's not in circulation.

MdM: I couldn't believe it because after all these years it's left such a mark on so many people. In countries I've never been, even more than *Pulp Fiction*, people bring up *Henry & June*, women especially. It's a film that's left a very, very strong mark, and even after all these years people are thrilled to talk to me about the film. It's incredible that although it has more or less disappeared from circulation it remains in people's minds. Which is art really.

LR: Yes to English language audiences you're probably still best known for Henry & June and Pulp Fiction. After these successes in the early 90s were you ever tempted to set up a base in Hollywood and make more American films?

MdM: I never thought of establishing myself in the United States especially because in those years I was also preparing my first feature film as a director, *Captains of April*. It's a big war film about the Portuguese revolution, a very ambitious project. This was at the forefront of my mind at the time, so it was my priority to come back here and organise the incredible adventure of making that film, something that couldn't have been really made after because it meant entering the centre of Lisbon with all those armed cars, and all those soldiers. It was kind of a miracle I could do it at that moment when the constellation of people were there to make it possible. That's why at the moment when I could have moved to America I didn't do it. But I still work all over because that's what I most love in this profession, its precisely the discovery and immersion in different cultures. I've worked with Canadians like Guy Maddin, who I love, and also does very special films, and I'm always interested in particular projects where I can discover something.

LR: You recently worked with Abel Ferrara in Pasolini.

MdM: Yes, I play Laura Betti, a very close friend of Pasolini, a very special woman.

LR: Back to Henry & June, what are your memories of the shoot? You're in almost every scene.

MdM: I remember we shot for four months. It was very long, I'd never done such a long shoot, I had only one or two days off. But in my mind, it's very related to youth. I was Anais Nin's age - she was also very young when she went out to devour the world - and I was in the same state of mind. I was ready to work like crazy and discover the world in artistic ways. I hope some of that has stayed with me, but what was very clear at the time was the synergy of our youths – the character's and mine.

LR: Any final thoughts on the legacy of the film?

MdM: Thank you for doing this fantastic thing of bringing back *Henry & June* because it's such a sophisticated piece of work and cinema. Someone I'd like to mention is Rose Kaufman. She was Phil Kaufman's partner and Peter Kaufman's mother, and it was beautiful to see how this triangle functioned. Peter was very young, but he was the producer of his parents' film, and the value they gave, and very much Rose, to the literary qualities of cinema. They had just come from *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which was also a very literary project. I know it was very important for Rose to talk about feminine perspectives on love, desire, on relating to society, and to the world. She was very modern. It was important for her to put a feminine imprint on the work, and sure enough she's very present in this film.

Special thanks to Maria de Medeiros for this interview.