

A Look Into a Lesbian World

By Judy Stone

Although there have been any number of dramatic movies involving male homosexuals, and a few that touched on lesbian attractions, the subject of a lesbian mother seems to have been taboo for feature filmmakers until now.

It took artistic and commercial courage for a Dutch woman writer/director, Nouchka van Brakel, to try to deal honestly and unsensationally with the controversial subject of a housewife and mother who becomes a lesbian.

In "A Woman Like Eve," at the Lumiere, Monique van de Ven, the ebullient charmer of "Keetje Tippel," is considerably more docile as a presumably contented hausfrau until she meets the hippy-ish Liliane (Maria Schneider, the sexpot of "Last Tango in Paris") at a farm commune in the French mountains. Her husband has sent her off on a vacation with a widowed friend after she runs away hysterically from a family dinner party. It's the kind of barbed ritual event that's enough to give anyone the heebie-jeebies.

The warmer, gentler atmosphere of the commune where men, women and children grow organic vegetables attracts Eve. When she returns to Amsterdam, she is struck by the sight of all the housewives doing their own shopping. She begins to organize them for a more sensible distribution of their time and energy. Her husband, Ad (Peter Faber), isn't too keen on the sight of a bunch of women talking it up in his living room, with no hot food in the kitchen; and her mother immediately sees the gathering as a danger signal threatening family stability. Eve also develops what seems to Ad an inordinate interest in studying French.

When Liliane comes to Amsterdam for a woman's



MONIQUE van de VEN
As the wife

festival, Eve is drawn into a lesbian circle and begins uncomfortably to recognize her sexual feelings for Liliane. Her attempt to discuss it openly with Ad results in a dismal — and I felt, unrealistic — blow-up at her son's birthday party.

Eve's subsequent conflicts about entering into a relationship with Liliane and the consequences for her pre-adolescent daughter and the younger boy are deliberately handled with a minimum of dramatic flourish. While this can be effective in more skilled hands, the result here lacks dynamic dramatic tension.

The weakness is compounded because van Brakel fails to establish what is wrong with the marital relationship and just why the sullenly unattractive and waspish Liliane would exercise such an irresistible appeal for Eve. While their initial sexual encounter is treated with artistic discretion, Ad's Peeping Tom behavior is not convincing. Nor is Eve's happy sigh in the sunshine on the morning after.

The director is on stronger ground when she points up the difficulties in the Eve-Liliane relationship in regard to the care and custody of the children. (The same evening I accidentally tuned in to a television discussion with a San Francisco lesbian mother and filmmaker discussing the documentary, "In the Best Interests of the Children," and showing clips from it. Those scenes with real mothers and children were much more revealing and moving.)

The one opportunity for a real discussion at the farm about the effect of a gay lifestyle on children was tossed away for a considerably less significant argument between Eve and Liliane. Because the character of Eve is not clearly defined, it is impossible to grasp what "liberation" from a heterosexual relationship means to her, and the ending thus lacks the strength that can sometimes be achieved with ambiguity.

Nevertheless, "A Woman Like Eve" is bound to provoke a great deal of discussion, and van Brakel, in her second feature film, deserves credit for her sober depiction of one woman's response to the swift changes in lifestyles that have occurred in the last decade.

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