

MEXICAN CHEESE SLICER

Paul Leduc, the author of FRIDA, was together with actress Ofelia Medina in Holland for a trip to some so-called bigger filmhouses. Frida is a beautiful film, carefully made, in which you can hardly see the traces of a difficult production with too small a budget. This has all to do with the inventivity and visual qualities of Leduc's filming. Here we talk with Leduc about the film and the problems of filming in a country like Mexico which has a rich and vital cultural tradition, but which economy has been factually declared bankrupt.

'Mexico is in a way under control by the International Monetary Fund, which doesn't want that films are made. Of course there are very bad films, made by a kind maffiatypes, which could be called filmmaking, but I mean that as a result of the economic crisis no more independent quality movies can be made. Frida was produced in a relatively favorable period, just before the real serious economic problems of this country. But in the financial way it was not easy, the whole crew co-produced by giving part of their income to the production.'

That it is not always easy to solve financial problems, Leduc found out recently: "After FRIDA I made another film, or tried to make, about punks and rockers in Mexico DF. It had to be a film of two hours. At the last moment we heard that the budget had been cut half and we had to end the shooting. From the material we had, we could make a film of an hour and a quarter, but that was not good for the film. It had a fair success in Mexico, but outside Mexico no one will like it in the way it is now."

Money was not the only production problem for Paul Leduc. The way the producer wanted to be involved with the contents led to a big conflict. FRIDA came 'alive' from the battle, but not unhurt:

"FRIDA is a co-production with Manuel Barbachano Ponce, but after filming it he entirely tried to make it his film. Barbachano is a wayward man who hadn't produced a film for 25 years, but before had done for instance the production of Bunuel's NAZARIN. After many difficulties and a law suit which give no solution, we sold the film to Barbachano. It was the only way to have the film released. Barbachano changed some things in the film for which I am not responsible. The text which starts the film is his, I totally disagree. Furthermore he took out some scenes which he thought to be too political. One of these scenes showed Frida while she was painting Trotzki."

That production difficulties also can have a positive effect becomes obvious when Leduc talks about the way the scenario developed:

"Before I made FRIDA I was working on a film by Tina Modotti (model and pupil of Edward Weston, engaged photographer of the twenties and thirties). All preparations were done and the contract signed, but postponement came just before shooting. I had worked very long on Modotti, which should be a silent black and white movie. In order to fill in free time caused by the postponement I started the Frida Kahlo-scenario which I completed in a few weeks. Later on it became obvious that the Modotti-film couldn't be made because of lack of money.

Ofelia Medina, the actress who plays Frida, has been very important for the initiative of this film. As a young girl she was already fascinated by Frida and she wanted something to happen with it, because so many people said she was so much alike Frida. At first I was a bit afraid of it, because it could become a dragon-like melodrama".

Leduc does not feel, now that the 'intermezzo' Frida is finished, to realize the Modotti-scenario:

"I don't want to specialize in portraits of left-wing Mexican female artists. I should prefer to work on other projects, but the problem is to find a suitable producer. Additional problem is that a film in Mexico at this moment can only be co-produced with foreign finances and I didn't find them until now. So if you know somebody..."