

# A Woman

a film by Jeanine Meerapfel



## logline

»A Woman« is a documentary essay, a very personal look into the life of a French orphan woman, that starts on the coast of the Saône in Burgundy and ends on the shores of the Río de la Plata in Argentina.  
A film about emigration, remembering and forgetting.















# synopsis

This is the story of Marie-Louise Chatelaine, from childhood through marriage and emigration: a twentieth-century saga that takes us from Burgundy to Alsace, from Alsace to Germany, Holland and finally Argentina.

What does it mean for a woman to lose her parents and make a family of her own, only to end up alone? What does it mean to move from country to country, from language to language?

“A Woman” is a cinematic essay about identity. A search into the wounds of exile and a reflection on the function of memory. A haunting and intimate portrait of the director’s own mother. It is the story of an imitation artist, trying to adapt to the challenges of real life ... as a woman.











# director's statement

*... Whoever seeks to approach his own buried past must behave like a man who digs. Above all, he must not be afraid to come back to one and the same situation again and again – to disperse it as one disperses earth, to dig it up, as one digs up the earth ...*

Walter Benjamin

*... The intent to forget prolongs the exile, and the mystery of salvation is called remembrance ...*

*Rabbi Baal Schem Tov*

This cinematic essay tries to reconstruct the biography of a woman who no longer lives. The story of Marie Louise Chatelaine, called Malou. It talks about the function of memory and its blurriness. A journey through Germany, France, Holland, and Argentina today. At the same time, it travels through time, from 1911 to the present. A deep research into the wounds of imposed exile, which comes in as many forms and shapes as there are people who must

leave their countries, their ancestral lives – which is true for all families that have to leave everything behind today.

The decision to make this film goes back to my earlier attempts to reflect on emigration. The home of my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents is also a part of my identity. Inherited homeland if you like. An innate feeling that I wanted to describe in pictures.



As in my earlier documentaries (»Melek leaves«, »Desembarcos – When memory speaks«, or »In the country of my parents«), the radically personal and emotional should be paired with a clear political attitude. Ultimately, the film is also about the socially unanswered question: What does it mean for a person to feel alien? Alien in a country, in life, in language ... Something which is twice as difficult for a woman, whose surprising luck ended when her husband left her.

The biography of Marie Louise Chatelaine, my mother, is the starting point, but several stories are added and told in parallel. A constant, broken reflection of yesterday and to-

day. There is my father, an attractive, cosmopolitan Jewish merchant from Southern Germany, and there is the short story of my sister who died when she was only nineteen. Fragments of life and death.

The different locations (Strasbourg, Chalon sur Saône, Untergrombach, Amsterdam, Buenos Aires) mark chapters that give the film a structural rhythm and orientation. Images of the Atlantic Ocean, of rivers (the Saône, the Río de la Plata), of landscapes (the fields of Burgundy, the endlessness of the Argentinian Pampa) play an important role in the aesthetic description of distance and emigration. Old, restored 8mm film snippets illustrate the atmosphere of

the time: the 30s and 40s in Europe, the first steps of the immigrants in Latin America.

As with any film essay, its style and dramaturgical structure act like an associative stream of consciousness. The images flow accompanied by an inner monologue, of letters read, anecdotes told, narratives and found texts. Sometimes also by fuzzy, phantom images that show absence better than crisp ones, because we need to make an effort to decipher them. This meditative character of the cinematic narrative simultaneously examines the effect of memory and describes its fragmentary nature. What is remembered, what is forgotten? And why?

Thus, »A woman« appeals to the association and fantasy of the audience, who can reflect on their own story, check on their own memories, and better understand them –based on the fates of strangers.

To »remember« derives from the Latin word »re-cordis«: to pass through the heart again.

Jeanine Meerapfel











# Jeanine Meerapfel



Jeanine Meerapfel was born in Argentina in 1943, attended Journalism College in Buenos Aires, and then worked in Argentina as an editor and journalist. From 1964 to 1968 she studied under Alexander Kluge and Edgar Reitz at the Institute for Film at the Ulm Academy of Design, having been one of the first women to be enrolled

there. Until the end of the 1970s she continued working as a freelance journalist, and teaching in Ulm and at the Goethe Institute in various countries. In 1980 she made her first feature film, »Malou«, which won the FIPRESCI award in Cannes and received top awards at the San Sebastián and Chicago film festivals. This was followed in

1981 by the documentary »In the country of my parents«. Her next documentary »Die Kümmeltürkin geht« (Melek Leaves) won the Interfilm Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and the German Film Critics Award at the Berlin International Film Festival. In her 1987 feature film »Days to Remember«, Jeanine Meerapfel tells the story of the young

generation of guest workers trying to find their true home, torn between their parents' homeland and the place they have spent their childhood.

Between 1986 and 1989 she worked on the documentary »Desembarcos« (When Memory Speaks), dealing with the time of military dictatorship in Argentina, for



which she received the City of Strasbourg Award and the El caimán barbudo award at the Havanna Film Festival in 1990. In 1988 Jeanine Meerapfel also completed the feature film »La Amiga« with Liv Ullmann in the lead. A wealth of awards and nominations followed: The German Film Award 1989, award for Best Actress at the San Sebastián Film Festival, the OCIC award in Havana 1988. »La Amiga« went on to be Argentinean entry for the Oscars.

In 1990 Jeanine Meerapfel became professor for Film and Television at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. In 1995 she completed work on the feature film »Amigo-mío«, for which she received

the Saarland Screenplay award. Her filmmaking was recognized with the North-Rhine Westphalian Female Artists Award in 2000.

2001 saw »Annas Sommer« (Anna's Summer), with Angela Molina and Herbert Knaup in the lead, which received a Special Mention at the Argentinean Mar del Plata film festival.

In the documentary »Fictional lies on right occasions« (2003), Jeanine Meerapfel portrays the two Greek musicians Floros Floridis and Babis Papadopoulos.

In 2007 Jeanine Meerapfel made the documentary »Mosconi – o a quién le per-

tenece el mundo« (Mosconi – or to whom the world belongs), in which she follows the fight for survival of a north-Argentinian town affected by privatisation. In 2008, good!movies released a DVD Edition featuring nearly all of Jeanine Meerapfel's films.

In 2012 at the International Film Festival Innsbruck she received the honorary award for the body of her work. Her feature film »My German Friend« from 2012, was nominated for the Hessen-Best Film Award. Together with musician Floros Floridis she completed the audiovisual essays »Confusion/ Diffusion« 2018 and »Moving Sand/Topos« 2019. Her latest film »A

Woman« was completed in 2021.

Since 2015 Jeanine Meerapfel is the president of the Akademie der Künste, the Academy of the Arts, in Germany.











crew

writer / director.....Jeanine Meerapfel  
editor.....Vasso Floridi  
cinematography .....Johann Feindt  
music.....Floros Floridis  
mix.....Kostas Varympobiotis  
musicmix.....Christos Champilas and Titos Kariotakis  
voice over.....Jeanine Meerapfel  
sound .....Thomas Keller, Manja Ebert

production manager.....Tina Haagmann

commisioning editor rbb .....Jens Stubenrauch

co-producer .....Jeanine Meerapfel  
co-producer .....Pablo Ingercher

producer.....Titus Kreyenberg



production

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# information and contact

Format.....digital HD 4K  
length .....96 min  
original language .....German, Spanish  
other versions available .....English, French  
distribution Germany .....Real Fiction Filmverleih

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