

The Heart of No Place

a film by Rika Ohara



“Funny and smart” — Carl Deal, co-director, *Trouble the Water*; co-producer, *Capitalism: A Love Story*

“Intelligent, multilayered and mesmerizing” — Denise Uyehara, playwright/artist

“Brave” — Jean-Gabriel Périot, filmmaker

“Uncompromising” — Rajele Jain, Director, Film Awards Films on Art

The Heart of No Place is the first feature-length film by Los Angeles-based artist Rika Ohara. It premiered in March 2009 at Festival International Films de Femmes de Créteil (France) and won the “Best Film (International)” award at London Independent Film Festival (April 2010).

Originating where Ohara’s own experiences as an artist and a Japanese woman meet the life and work of Yoko Ono, *The Heart of No Place* builds its multilayered narrative on a series of tableaux that began as ideas for dance-theater performances and installations. Although the film pays tribute to Ono and her work, it is not to be taken as a bio-pic. Rather, it is about Other Wars and Losses, seen through the eyes of a reimagined character.

The year is 1999; the place, a city in the Northern Hemisphere. Artist Y. surfs the Web looking for shadows of her dead husband, The Artist Known As John. Through encounters with Andrea, a young journalist with wild ideas about art and technology, and with Daniel Mohn, the visionary founder and CEO of Monosoft Corporation, Y. begins to find her way through the post-Cold War landscape, where borders are redrawn with milk, sugar and glass.

Shot entirely on Digital 8 on location in Berlin, Tokyo, Liverpool, Los Angeles, Death Valley and Ho Chi Minh City, *The Heart of No Place* took nine years to complete, with mid-production fellowship awards from the California Arts Council and the California Community Foundation. The film features a song by Yoko Ono, along with music by Dieter Moebius (Cluster) and Michael Rother (Neu, Kraftwerk), Anna Homler and the Dark Bob, with the onscreen participation of many other art- and Krautrock luminaries.

Ascending to the frontal lobe of the Western psyche as a creative, political and sexual being just 25 years after WWII, Ono presented a huge threat even to the “enlightened” members of the ‘60s counterculture. *The Heart of No Place’s* disclaimer/dedication begins: “Although the following story is a work of fiction, it was thoroughly inspired by the life and work of Yoko Ono, who changed the way we view art, music, celebrity and, above all, Japanese women...”

Synopsis (long)

The year is 1999; the place, a city in the Northern Hemisphere. Artist/rock widow Y. surfs the Web looking for shadows of her husband John. At the opening of her exhibition she is introduced to Andrea, a young journalist with wild ideas about art and technology. She surprises Y. by reinterpreting her decades-old conceptual- and performance-art works through the latest trends in global money flow and IT.

Through flashbacks, we learn that Y. and John also outraged and shocked the public with statements like “It’s time to talk about vagina envy” at a news conference for nuclear disarmament. These antics on one hand endeared them to fans worldwide, while on the other created enemies — especially for Y., who defied the Western notion of a “submissive Japanese female” by being as outspoken and creative as her husband. Some even blame her for having been planted by her father’s corporation to break up John’s band.

Following John’s murder by an unidentified gunman, three men — a critic, a musician and a producer — are interviewed for “TheTV.” Their eulogies and emotional confessions that they all “loved his guitar” are met by a single putdown by an (also unidentified) diva: “Yeah, you loved his ass, too.”

Returning to her studio after scattering her husband’s ashes, Y. contemplates a new artwork in which she would hammer a nail into a cross. Her grief is shared by her Assistant, who also lost his partner. Y. confides in him her frustration that what she finds on the Internet about her husband does not resemble the man she knew. The Assistant reminds her that it’s because his songs tend to “get under your skin,” and that we have created a virtual heaven for departed souls in our imaginations, and on the Internet. Y. continues to grapple with her questions as to why the end of Cold War seemed to signify a turn in the artistic climate in the West, coinciding with John’s death.

As Y. returns from her daily walk, the Assistant informs her that computer firm Monosoft requests the use of John and her music and likeness in its marketing campaign. Y. is unaware that Monosoft has been gobbling up competitors and now plans to expand to the “content” market via acquisition of music and film outfits.

Attending her longtime gallerist-friend’s opening, Y. is introduced to Daniel Mohn, who turns out to be the visionary founder and CEO of Monosoft. Mohn resumes his effort to win Y. over by stating that “the Cold War wasn’t won by missiles. It was won by people like you and your late husband. It was the arts of the Free World that kept leaking through, until it became the flood that broke down the Berlin wall.”

Y.’s now-grown son visits. As she prepares a sandwich for the young musician, she has an apocalyptic vision of a thousand suns heating up the sky. That night, she contemplates a heap of spilled sugar and creates a chess board on her glass desk, thinking of wars and their consequences, and of women — with all their men gone — rebuilding ruined cities, maybe with bricks and stones, or with potatoes.

During her walk, Y. encounters a group of joggers wearing headsets and portable music players — products created through exchanges of Japanese and American technologies. Upon her return, she announces to the Assistant that she has decided to finally perform her “Nailing” piece, which she had previously thought would never be realized.

Written & directed by Rika Ohara
Original soundtrack by John Payne, with songs by Yoko Ono, Anna Homler,
The Dark Bob, Dieter Moebius and Peter Fletcher
Length: 85 minutes 33 seconds
Contact: Rika Ohara

<http://www.bluefat.com/TheHeartofNoPlace.html>

Synopsis (short)

Was Yoko Ono “planted by a Japanese corporation to break up the Beatles”? Wasn’t an American company — with the country’s hardware industry rapidly sinking, and the hopes for its cultural exports rising — more likely to profit?

The year is 1999. Rock widow Y. surfs the Web looking for shadows of her husband John. Through encounters with Andrea, a young journalist with wild ideas about art and technology, and with Daniel Mohn, the visionary founder and CEO of Monosoft, she begins to find her way through a post-Cold War wasteland where maps are redrawn with milk, glass and sugar.

Written & directed by Rika Ohara

Original soundtrack by John Payne, with songs by Yoko Ono, Anna Homler,
The Dark Bob, Dieter Moebius and Peter Fletcher

Shooting format: Digital 8

Screening format: Digital Beta (NTSC/PAL), DVD

Length: 85 minutes 33 seconds

Award: The Best Film, London Independent Film Festival, 2010

Premiere: Festival International de Films de Femmes de Créteil, March 2009

Contact: Rika Ohara

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Director Biography

Rika Ohara’s mother and grandmother lost their homes three times to air raids during WWII. She came to the U.S. as a painter and studied photography with Czech surrealist Vilem Kriz. She began making performance art works when the “trade war with Japan” was prominent in the American consciousness during the 1980s. She has exhibited her performance- and media installations at Rencontres Internationales Paris-Berlin, Monaco Dance Forum, New Territories Festival (Glasgow) and other venues in Europe and Japan. Ohara is also a recipient of C.O.L.A., California Community Foundation and California Arts Council fellowships.

Film- and Videography:

The Heart of No Place (2009)

The Potato Woman (2004/2006), 4:37

Shelter 9 (2000/2002), video installation, 60:00

1,332 Feet Below the Sea (1999/2001), 18:00

Touch (ReAnimation) (1999), 18:00

Cast & Crew

Written and directed by Rika Ohara

Original soundtrack by John Payne

Featuring "Ask the Dragon" by Yoko Ono

"Meltaway" by Dieter Moebius and "Dô Ya Sa 'Di Dô" by Anna Homler and Bernard Sauser-Hall

Cast:

Rika Ohara	Y.
Charles Lane	The Assistant
John Payne	The Former Artist Known as John
Daniel Lynch Millner	Daniel Mohn
Sarah Holbert	Andrea
Judith Lewis	Interviewer
Tress MacNeille	Art Collector
Penelope Sudrow	Seeker, 1979
Carl Stone	as (almost) himself
Dave Shulman	as (not quite) himself
Holger Czukay	as himself
Dieter Moebius	as himself
Michael Rother	as himself
Bob & Bob	Art Critics
Manuel Boecker	Filmmaker A
Peter Schulte	Filmmaker B
Tracy Rhoades	Man in photo
Julia Worm	The Potato Woman
Bernadette Colomine	Le TV Reporter
Brian Nahas	American journalist
Shogo Rupert, Severin Costa & Nathan Ihara	Boy
Ross Crutchlow	Art Dealer
Chis Maher (AKA Supermarky)	Atlas
Barry Morse	The young bearded man in desert
Yuka Tojo	Y. as a girl

Crew:

Camera	Rika Ohara Barry Morse
Editing, effects and animation	Rika Ohara
Camera, Berlin	Johannes Daniel Münch Anastasia Vinokurova

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Additional camerawork, Berlin/Glasgow/
Ho Chi Minh City/Rome John Payne
Additional camerawork, Death Valley/
North Algodones Dunes Charles Lane
Second unit director Peter Schulte
Assistant director, Baitz (Brandenburg) Ferdinand Maubrey
Footage of Tokyo From *Bob Sucht Yoshiko*
by Brigitte Krause/Trigon Films
Footage of Havana Chris Maher
Sound Debbie Spinelli
Debbie King
Lighting, gallery scenes and Milk & Glass Dance Jamie Hunter
Translation: French Bernadette Colomine
Translation: German Jan Martin Harbst
Groundwork, Baitz Susken Rosenthal
Hair & make-up Mr. Barry of Hollywood
Costume Rika Ohara
Tress MacNeille
Mohammed Hanif Rashid

Music:

"Takeda Lullaby" performed by Charles Lane	"Ask the Dragon" by Yoko Ono performed by Yoko Ono and IMA	"Meltaway" by Dieter Moebius, performed live by Dieter Moebius and Michael Rother at Star Pine Café, Tokyo December 1999
"Mad at God" "Candy Wrapper" "Room to Breathe" "Blind People" written by Peter Fletcher, performed by The Pipelayers Union	"Dô Ya Sa 'Di Dô" written, performed and produced by Anna Homler and Bernard Sauser-Hall Pharmacia Poetica Publishing, BMI/Bug Music	"War of '99" written and performed by The Dark Bob

Production Notes

Yokology, name-dropping, heat stroke and a paranormal experience

Yokology — *We are all Yoko.* (From an e-dialog with the Dark Bob):

"Peter [Fletcher] was getting all misty and extravagantly emotional during the shoot. I asked him if he was recalling his reaction to Lennon's death and he said he was actually thinking about his friend's.

You're right — a lot of this movie came from what I was thinking and feeling in the wake of my own friend's death in '93. What Lennon's death is to a generation is a crystallization of that sort of brutal, wrenching farewell and the feeling of injustice it leaves behind. So we are all Yoko in a way."

The Potato Woman:

My grandmother and mother were bombed out of their homes three times during the last winter of WWII. Having been raised on tales of food rations and the terrors of air raids, my images of war have always been overwhelmingly feminine in tone. When I first visited Germany in 1988, I was intrigued by the idea that the country was "rebuilt by women." Since then I had an image of a woman lovingly building a structure — a house, a wall, even a tower — one potato at a time, like rebuilding Dresden brick by brick.

I got to shoot it years later, in Baitz, formerly East Germany.

War of '99 – Shot on 9/10/01:

We shot the daytime scene of me working with sugar cubes on September 10, 2001. That night, I animated the sugar cubes on the chessboard, building a city and "flying" over and into it with the camera. The next morning, I woke up and smelled the smoke: The World Trade Center.

The Dark Bob gave me his song "War of '99," which he had left out of his CD because he felt it was too dark. I fell in love with its haunting refrain and the rage in the last line, "Jesus follow me down to hell and save you all from me," but hesitated because it sounded like a story told from a suicide bomber's p.o.v.: "Could He forgive what I'm gonna do?" I was not worried about threats on my life — I just didn't want to be too literal. Until it hit me one day: It's Jesus, not Allah. *Duh.* The song and the video form a mirror image of a sort.

1979 Gallery Opening:

The Art Dealer (Ross Crutchlow) has a British accent in 1979 and an Eastern European one in 1999. The Art Collector is played by Tress MacNeille, the famous voice behind *The Simpsons*. Kateri Butler, former fashion editor of the *L.A. Weekly*, plays Connie the guru; Penelope Sudrow (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 3*), her follower.

Meltaway & Guitar Envy:

I met Michael Rother (Kraftwerk) and Dieter Moebius (Cluster) in Tokyo during my exhibition and videotaped their shows. I heard Dieter compare artists who are not appreciated in their own time and place to prophets and tried to recapture it in a noisy café — only to find a perfect version by Michael later. This seemed a private joke between them.

I photographed Can members Irmin Schmidt, Michael Karoli and Jaki Liebezeit in Cologne at their old recording studio Schloss Nörvenich — where I later filmed the Atlas sequence. Holger Czukay was photographed in Los Angeles.

Atlas (The Monosoft and "Ask the Dragon" scenes):

Atlas (Chris Maher) is a Titan given the task of holding up the heavens by Zeus. The globe he is holding was originally a celestial sphere. His main job has recently been selling maps, but in the post-Cold War world he could be redrawing them. Although powerfully muscled, he is a vulnerable hatchling — "soft-boiled." As Daniel Mohn, the president of Monosoft, points out, "Software isn't just for computers...the 'soft' used to refer to the human factor: the cultural and intellectual."

The main reference here is Dali's *Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man*. I was fortunate to be able to film at Schloss Nörvenich near Cologne — famed as Can's first recording studio — which has a collection of Dali pieces. But there probably was a subconscious connection with Annie Leibovitz's famous photograph of Lennon curled up naked in fetal position next to Yoko. He was a 20th century man who decried the use of force and admitted to owning emotions. A lot of men could not handle that image, because it made their hero look "weak."

Desert Scenes:

Charles Lane ("The Assistant") was my guide to the desert locations. We (Charles, Chris, Loren Quintana and me) arrived at Death Valley just before sunset, for the scene of Atlas carrying an easel/ cross. We shot the chess scene the next morning.

Emboldened by success, we decided to shoot additional scenes at North Algodones Dunes at the Arizona border. We drove all night, arriving at dawn. After shooting all morning (I was a little worried about Charles' shaved and hatless head), we headed back to L.A. around 11 a.m. It soon became apparent that my 1985 Toyota's cooling system was on the brink. I turned on the heater, and that was it: Charles got sick and we had to stop. When I resumed driving, I hit a rock on the shoulder of the freeway, finishing off the cooling system. (I drove the Toyota for another three years until it was stolen.)

The Envy suite:

Bernadette Colomine (librettist for Rugos Wainwright's opera *Prima Donna*, playing "LeTV Reporter") translated the introduction on the set. Suzanne Smith and Bernadette read the English and French versions simultaneously and — *Voilà!* One take. Only later did I realize that now both the French and the American anchors were named "Ted." So a single actor (Loren Quintana) plays both Teds.

The Guitar Envy scene was entirely put together from simulated interviews. The three interviewees were told that:

1. John has just been shot.
2. They were to conclude their interviews by declaring "I loved his guitar!"

Everything else was improvised on the spot.

Peter "wrote" the Lost Weekend into the story. I then threw the "Tampax incident" at him (my voice was dubbed by Mitsu Salmon). Peter intensified it a notch by adding, "I still have it somewhere...I think it's gathering ants," which I, regrettably, had to cut.

Arse Longa:

I had originally wanted German DJ Dr. Walker and his friend to play the two filmmakers. We tried to shoot it in Cologne twice, then in Greece, but it just didn't work out. I met filmmaker Peter Schulte at Filmlichter festival in Detmold. He videotaped me for his Brotcasting project and agreed to direct the scene in return. I am quite happy to have the scene in German (translation: Jan Martin Harbst), since the joke is funnier read than heard.

Cast and Crew Bios

Charles Lane (The Assistant) is a Los Angeles Master Chorale tenor and performs regularly with the L.A. Philharmonic and the L.A. Opera.

Carl Stone (almost himself) is a pioneer of live computer music, and has been hailed by *The Village Voice* as “the king of sampling,” and “one of the best performers living (in the U.S.A.) today.” He has used computers in live performance since 1986. Stone was born in Los Angeles and now divides his time between California and Japan. His works have been performed in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Asia, Australia, South America and the Near East. In addition to his schedule of performances, composition and touring, he is on the faculty of the Information Media department at Chukyo University in Japan.

Michael Rother (as himself/performer, “Meltaway”) is a German music pioneer and a founding member of Kraftwerk and Neu.

Dieter Moebius (as himself/composer-performer, “Meltaway”) is another German music pioneer and a founding member of Cluster.

John Payne (composer/The Former Artist Known as John) is a Los Angeles-based composer, journalist and amateur actor. He has recently appeared as himself in Pop Levi’s road movie *You Don’t Gotta Run*, directed by Lucky Beaches.

Tress MacNeille (Art Collector/costume) is an actress best known for providing various voices in the animated series *The Simpsons*, *Futurama*, *Rugrats*, *Tiny Toon Adventures* and *Animaniacs*. She has also voiced several key roles in English versions of Hayao Miyazaki animations.

Daniel Lynch Millner (Daniel Mohn) is an actor, dancer and independent producer and since 1992 has been a member of the Nuclear Family, with whom he performed in *Shelter’s* live and video versions and in *Tokyo Rose*. He currently serves as General Manager for the Department of World Arts and Cultures within the School of Arts and Architecture at UCLA.

Performance Art pioneer **The Dark Bob** (Art Critic/composer-performer, “War of ‘99”) began his career in 1975 when he co-founded the infamous art duo Bob & Bob. His multimedia shows, paintings and sculpture have toured U.S. universities, large theaters, nightclubs, county fairs and honky-tonks as well as the world’s museums and galleries.

Bernadette Colomine (LeTV Reporter) is a French singer/lyricist/actress working in Los Angeles. Her recent credits include the libretto for Rufus Wainwright’s opera *Prima Donna* (2009).

Sarah Holbert (Andrea) is the Entertainment Media Manager for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). She lives with her husband, Kyle, in Venice, California.

Judith Lewis (Interviewer):

“I’m actually kind of a science writer. I cover environmental stuff.”

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Susken Rosenthal (First Jogger/groundwerk, Baitz) works and lives in Baitz, Land Brandenburg, Germany. She was awarded the first prize for her *Unter Kiefern* in Kunstwanderweg Hoher Fläming in 2007. Her recent project includes Village Resort Brandenburg — Art in Public Spaces, Beelitz (2008), which she curated and produced.

Dorothy Jensen Payne (History Professor):

"I'll have to call this my acting debut, since my high-school senior play was not filmed. Fortunately. I then spent three years in two art schools, before joining the WWII effort, first as an aircraft draftsman and then as a control tower operator in the Navy. At war's end I got married and basically stayed home raising eight children, which was not unexpected in those exuberant days. When the youngest was in school I (literally) happened into (but never regretted) getting a BA. I've traveled some, and read a lot, and will probably spend the rest of my life tracing my children's genealogy."

Barry Morse/Mr. Barry of Hollywood (Young Bearded Man in Desert/camera/ hair & makeup) is a hairstylist, artist and filmmaker living in Los Angeles. His short film *Mouse's Birthday* recently won an Audience Award at Fear No Film Festival.

Dave Shulman (not quite himself) is a writer and visual artist in Los Angeles, best known for his columns "Sitegeist" and "Column Dave" in *L.A. Weekly* from 1998 to 2007. His writing has also appeared in the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Book Review*, *The Village Voice*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *O.C. Weekly*, *San Jose Metro*, *Cleveland Free Times*, *Cincinnati CityBeat* and *AfterNet.org*. "Exhibit Dave," a solo exhibition of his artwork and writings, was held at Track 16 Gallery at Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, in spring 2008.

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