

Off Hollywood - Anita Rosenberg

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By Jennifer Juniper Stratford

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ANITA ROSENBERG

Writer/Director

Modern Girls (1986), Assault of the Killer Bimbos (1988)

In the video store days it was easier to come across movies by relatively unknown filmmakers simply by cruising the aisles of insane VHS covers. This is how I came to discover *Assault of the Killer Bimbos*. The image of three women flying through the clouds while holding hairdryers as guns, the tagline reading, "Sometimes great bodies disguise great brains"? It was a must-rent.

Assault of the Killer Bimbos finds a convertible of go-go dancers on the run from the cops as they head for the Mexican border. They are armed and dangerous, and still have to deal with jealous boyfriends. If you think this all sounds like *Thelma & Louise*, you're on the right track, but *Bimbos* preceded it by three years. It's lighter and campier than the neo-feminist classic, but the intention is the same: Freedom lies across a state line or two.

Anita Rosenberg, who wrote and directed both these films, was fresh out of NYC film school when she moved to Los Angeles. Her girly, campy ideas were a perfect formula for the 80s as the chick-flick genre began to take off. But after two major motion pictures she said to hell with Hollywood, and is now well-known as a feng shui consultant and BaZi Chinese astrology practitioner.

VICE: Why did you decide to leave showbiz?

Anita Rosenberg: I was tired of the dangling carrot of the movie business that not even a four-hour lunch with George Clooney could cure. I didn't leave the movie business because I didn't like making movies. I left because I found something more interesting that I could earn a living from.

Right before you moved to Los Angeles, you were heavily involved in the 80s graffiti scene. How did this influence your films?

Even though I was in film school during all this, I was influenced by paint markers, tagging, subway burners, and handball courts. Zephyr gave me the tag \$AnitaRock\$ and I proceeded to write this all over town. Following other people's tags became our version of social media; we knew who was where and what messages they were leaving for each other.

Your films always have an underlying subtext expressing a woman's need to be independent, have a career, and to feel free to be a total party animal. The 80s graffiti scene was, as far as I know, male dominated. Did that ever affect you?

Film school and the art world have always been male dominated. My peers in film school were macho guys like Spike Lee, Ernest Dickerson, and Tony Drazan. The first year there were about 30 girls in the class. The second year they asked only three of us back. My work reflects my sensibilities and my interests and these themes are girly and relationship-oriented. Comically, my style is ultra kitsch. I love cult films and anything alternative and independent. It is important to be able to depend on yourself because men come and go. I don't take myself too seriously either.

Why did you leave New York and move to Los Angeles?

If you are serious about being in the film business you have to be in Los Angeles. I moved here right after graduation.

How did you get *Modern Girls* off the ground?

Modern Girls was called "Party Girls" and it was the story of my life going to nightclubs in Los Angeles. These were temporary clubs that changed venues and were frequently raided by the cops. Each had a theme and I wanted to portray that scene. I pitched this project around town for a few years until I finally had a deal.

What do you remember about pitching it to movie studios?

Originally I created a giant board game that I took to pitch meetings. So here I am with a giant three-tier board game explaining to movie producers that you throw the dice and move from square to square as your night unfolds.

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If you wrote the story for *Modern Girls*, why didn't you direct it? Tom Coleman [the executive producer for *Modern Girls*] hired Jerry Kramer because Jerry had produced *The Making of Thriller* for Michael Jackson and was considered "hot." I am sure Tom thought Jerry would bring some music video flair to the project. However, Jerry had no clue how to direct actors, especially twenty-something party girls. I was off-camera helping the girls on many scenes. They would look to me and whisper, "Anita, what should I do in this scene?" And since this movie was based on my life I would give them direction. Jerry would be pissed. It was very frustrating for me. I did manage to put myself in almost every scene as a "special extra." If you look hard enough you can see me in DayGlo as a go-go dancer and in the bathroom looking in the mirror. Years later Tom Coleman admitted to me that he should have let me direct. He just felt at the time I did not have any experience other than film school. Well, we all have to learn somewhere!

I still own a lips telephone because of that film!

That was actually my lip phone in the movie. Most of my apartment on Spaulding was in the set design. That is kinda how my apartment really looked with animal prints and my wacky art. I even took the girls shopping for costumes. Even though I did not direct, I had my hands in every aspect of that film because it was really all about my life. I was very committed.



A few years later, however, you were able to direct *Assault of the Killer Bimbos*. How did that happen?

Charlie Band owned Empire Pictures and they had that title. They had already made a slasher movie using “Assault of the Killer Bimbos” but realized the title was so great they could make a better movie. Charlie had seen a short I made called *Get Tux’d* starring Ice T, Arye Gross, and Jim Le Gros. It was a teaser for a feature length I wanted to set up. Charlie must have figured I would put a unique spin on his project as the only female director he had ever worked with. All he told me was the title and asked if I would be interested in directing it. At first I was insulted. Did he think I was a bimbo? But then I calmed down and thought about it. I rented Roger Corman movies about girls in prison and Russ Meyer pictures about girls with enormous boobs and had an idea. If I could make it my way and make it kitschy and funny I would do it.

I think it’s just as good as *Thelma & Louise*, and funny. Especially when they say things like, “The go-go is a serious art form. It’s interpretive dance in a rock ‘n’ roll format.” How did you come up with that?

Watching Russ Meyer’s epic *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* with my collaborator, Patti Astor. We loved the idea of go-go dancers framed for a murder they didn’t commit. The rest is history. And yes, *Thelma & Louise* stole quite a bit from us. Both characters are called Peaches. I am flattered. Just wish I had Brad Pitt instead of Big Vinny!

The makeover in the desert scene is a fantastic highlight. Can you explain the creative nudity?

In order to be rated R we had to include three nude shots. They were gratuitous, for sure. I had to hire a lead for Lulu who would be willing to expose her breasts. I wanted to be creative with the nude shots but it was actually a bit embarrassing for me. I thought the scene where the three girls lean over the hood of the car in tight jeans and short skirts was far sexier.

After leaving the film industry, you travelled the world and got heavily involved in the healing arts. What drew you to Chinese metaphysics and the Kabbalah?

Since my teens I have been interested in metaphysics. Only then I did not know what it was. Shirley MacLaine opened my eyes when she started writing her books and making TV movies on the subject. I realized then I was not the only person on the planet having these thoughts. By nature I am an intuitive, and having studied for over 40 years everything on the subject, I have arrived at my current career as a feng shui and BaZi Chinese astrology expert.

Fifteen years and multiple degrees later I have built a lovely practice and enjoy working with everyone, from celebrities like Paula Abdul, Rita Marley, Virginia Madsen, Julie Brown, Hill Harper, and Ray J to businesses like The Roosevelt Hotel and W Hollywood Residences.

I'm happy to know you didn't totally leave Hollywood behind.