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MELINDA CAMBER PORTER

IN CONVERSATION WITH

WIM WENDERS



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MELINDA CAMBER PORTER
IN CONVERSATION WITH
WIM WENDERS
Paris, Texas, 1983

[FIRST CONVERSATION]

Melinda Camber Porter:

The first thing that I have been noticing on the set is that everyone is very confused.

It seems that every decision of yours gets changed at the last moment, and I wondered if this was conscious choice. That's to say that, you know, like in sculpture, if you're dealing with marble, let's say, you knock away at something, and if you're dealing with clay, you build up. I was wondering if it was a conscious artistic choice.

Wim Wenders:

We decided to keep ourselves totally open. And in a sense, I wish, myself, I hadn't been that open, but I think it was for the good of the movie because we really found out a lot of things about what should actually happen at the end. And I don't think anybody could have conceived the ending that we have now, a month ago.

Melinda Camber Porter:

But is that the way that you normally work? I mean people—a few people today said that you have this idea that there are two films, both the film that is actually created and the film you thought or hoped you would create. I mean I know that from writing, you know. Not necessarily—well, a little bit of journalism, but I've done novels and things, and I know that you end up where the material, in a sense, takes over. Is that what you really want to happen? I was sort of imagining that you wanted that, that you really—

Wim Wenders:

Yes, I know. I always want that. You see, I can't stand working on a movie if the work itself and the movie isn't also some sort of a discovery, isn't also some sort of an adventure. If it's just executing a certain idea that you had before, then I really lose interest in the screenplay.

Melinda Camber Porter:

Yes.

Wim Wenders:

Right now I'm at a state of exhaustion and I wish I had found out some of these things earlier.

Melinda Camber Porter:

What sort of discoveries are they? Are they discoveries about characters and their motivations?

Wim Wenders:

Yes. One really can't discover the characters prematurely. Not on paper. Of course a lot of the last-minute changes spring from a discovery about a character. Now the ending really comes out of them and they "wrote" this story to the point where it is now. But it's also really a discovery about the story that this movie is telling. The story also has discovered where it was leading to, why it has finally uncovered itself.

Melinda Camber Porter:

How would you describe that, or don't you want to?

Wim Wenders:

No, I don't really want to, because the process is still going on. It's exciting now we know what we have and what's going to happen over the next three weeks. It will be pretty exciting. But we're still working on the changes, and the wardrobe ladies now have to dress three new people.

And the art department has been making up the set that didn't exist and it doesn't exist yet.

Melinda Camber Porter:

There's also an additional factor, and I didn't quite follow that, which is that Sam Shepard and you wrote the screenplay together. I mean, did you write it long distance, over the phone, or did you write just the first draft together, or how did it—

Wim Wenders:

This thing there, that you've read, we more or less worked on it together. And the idea was that Sam was going to finish it to the end and be with us and we were both always aware of the fact that this movie would certainly undergo changes as it was being shot. And I always hoped that Sam would be with us and he hoped that too. But we had to postpone the shooting several times, and finally we started this movie three months later than we initially wanted it to start. And by that time Sam had a commitment for a movie as an actor and he's now in *Country* with Jessica Lange. And so he is shooting and he is far away in Iowa and we are having phone conferences in the evening and I tell him what's happening and I send him stuff and changes and he dictates dialogue over the phone, or he did last week. I mean it was also getting so complicated with the structure, to keep it all kind of together, that I asked Kit [Carson] if he would come in and help me.

Melinda Camber Porter:

Why Kit? I saw *Breathless*, and whilst I could understand really clearly how you could work with Sam Shepard, I don't see what the link was with Kit. I mean, what the similarities are. By the way, can I ask you something? Is this too late to talk? I mean, are you totally worn out?

Wim Wenders:

No, I'm waiting for my food.

Melinda Camber Porter:

Could I, by the way, order some coffee, or not?

Wim Wenders:

You could if you want. You're bleeding.

Melinda Camber Porter:

Am I? Oh my God! Oh dear.

Wim Wenders:

Do you want some Kleenex or something?

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MELINDA CAMBER PORTER
British, 1953–2008

Melinda Camber Porter was born in London and graduated from Oxford University with a First Class Honors degree in Modern Languages. She began her writing career in Paris as a cultural correspondent for *The Times* of London. French culture is the subject of her book *Through Parisian Eyes* (published by Oxford University Press), which the *Boston Globe* describes as “a particularly readable and brilliantly and uniquely compiled collection.”

She interviewed many leading cultural figures in film and literature from Europe and America over her career. These included Nobel Prize winners Saul Bellow, Gunter Grass, Eugenio Montale, and Octavio Paz, writers including Joyce Carol Oates, Joan Didion, and Frances Sagan, and filmmakers Michael Apted, Martin Scorsese, and Wim Wenders, among many others. [Audio recordings are available for more than fifty of these cultural interviews.]

Her novel *Badlands*, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, was set on South Dakota’s

Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. It was acclaimed by Louis Malle, who said: “better than a novel, it reads like a fierce poem, with a devastating effect on our self-esteem,” and by *Publishers Weekly*, which called it, “a novel of startling, dreamlike lyricism.”

A traveling art exhibition celebrating Melinda’s paintings, curated by the late Leo Castelli, opened at the French Embassy in New York City in 1993. This exhibition, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the French Embassy, traveled to cities across the United States through 1997.

Peter Trippi, Editor of *Fine Art Connoisseur* magazine said: “In our era of slickly produced images, teeming with messages rather than feelings, Melinda’s art strikes a distinctive balance between the achingly personal and the aesthetically beautiful. This equilibrium has developed, at least in part, through her discerning openness to a range of historical *mentors*, William Blake being the figure she has admired most passionately,” and “not surprisingly

she finds particular pleasure in Gauguin's notebooks, which erase the boundaries between image and word."

A film documenting the creation of her paintings featured in the art exhibition *The Art of Love* showed regularly on Public Television stations nationally, and a collection of her poetry and paintings, also entitled *The Art of Love*, served as companion to the show.

Her paintings have also served as the primary inspiration and as backdrops for several of her theatrical works. She created the backdrops, book, and lyrics for the musical *Night Angel*, with music by Carmen Moore, which was originally performed at The Clark Theater Lincoln Center, in New York City. She created the book, lyrics, and backdrops for the rock-opera-in-progress, *Journey to Benares*, with music, direction, and choreography by Elizabeth Swados, which was performed at the Asia Society and Museum in New York City in November 2003.

Robin Hamlyn, noted world expert on William Blake and senior curator of Tate Britain's Blake and Turner collections, delivered a lecture and wrote a book on her watercolors entitled *William Blake Illuminates the Works of Melinda Camber Porter*. Mr. Hamlyn writes about her, "I believe that all great art is, in its essence, defined by fearlessness. Both Melinda Camber Porter's and William Blake's works exemplify and illuminate the fearlessness that is part of the very essence of all great art."

Melinda Camber Porter leaves a prolific and creative legacy with thousands of paintings; more than two hundred hours of audio and film interviews with global creative figures in the arts, film, and literature; and tens of thousands of pages of writings: novels, plays, essays, journalism, and volumes of poetry. Her creative and spiritual works will be enjoyed for generations to come.

www.MelindaCamberPorter.com

Melinda Camber Porter:

When you say men have certain exapaectations of women, what exactly do you mean?

Wim Wenders:

We still have to find out what we mean by that, because the character hasn't really understood that yet. The character is getting ready to confront the issue. I do not work so a film is laid out and people can spell it out. I work much more on intuition. Sometimes filmmaking is very much based on very subconscious choices or intuition.

On location of the 1984 film *Paris, Texas*



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