

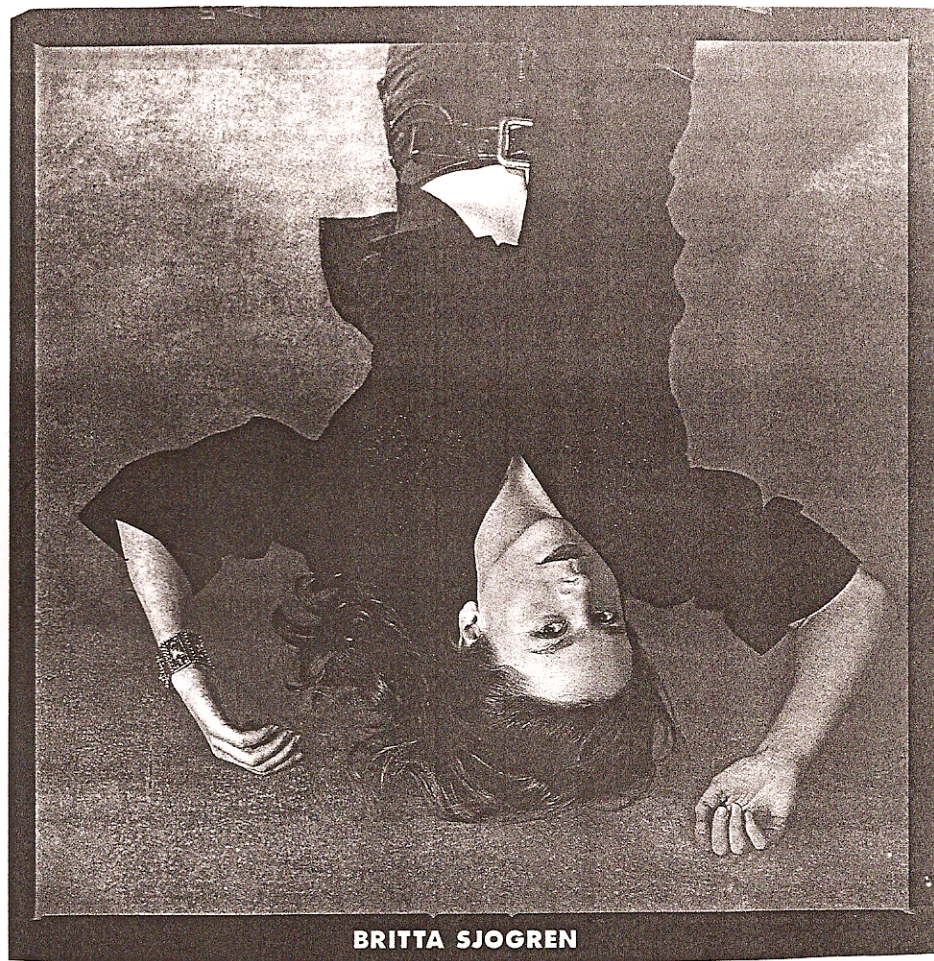
TO LIVE AND SHOOT IN L.A.

IN THE SHADOW OF
HOLLYWOOD,
FIVE DIRECTORS WITH
QUIRKY VISIONS
ARE MAKING MOVIES
THAT MAKE WAVES.

BY RICHARD B.
WOODWARD

The words "Los Angeles independent filmmaker" do not fall trippingly off the tongue. In a company town that measures success and failure by the daily grosses in *Variety*, Arnold Schwarzenegger is easier to pronounce than Charles Burnett. And though Hollywood's studio system died in the sixties, the hydra-headed conglomerates that sprung up in its place are no friendlier to directors who want to work without stars, in a minor key, out of personal conviction rather than primarily for profit.

Following are sketches of five stylish writer-directors happily at work in orbits outside the gravitational pull of the major studios. In a city famous for having no center, this cross-section of talent—linked by friendships or artistic sympathies—is giving independent film here a new kind of critical mass.



BRITTA SJOGREN

BRITTA SJOGREN is well-schooled, like many of today's independent directors—a B.A. from Berkeley, advanced degrees in film production and critical theory from UCLA, two years of postgraduate studies in Paris. Her first feature, *Jo-Jo at the Gate of Lions*, which premiered two years ago at the Sundance Film Festival, shows the afterimages of this academic grounding. The narrative devices (titled sequences, direct address from the actors) are shoplifted

from Godard's store of tricks, and the stark black-and-white cinematography (by Greg Watkins) recalls Rudolph Maté's camera work for Carl Dreyer.

Euro-chic styling aside, the film presents through its title character—a confused young woman who identifies with Joan of Arc—an episodic study of contemporary self-denial. Sjogren's ingenious use of voice-overs moves the story line at odd angles but at a steady clip. Jo-Jo seems to mistake passivity for purity. As played by former fashion model Lorie Marino, she drifts around L.A.

in a troubled state, so disconnected from her own best instincts that she has difficulty hanging up on the phone-sex entrepreneur who hired and then molested her. The other man in her life—an astronomer who likes to bounce around the bed with her—can't overcome her need for martyrdom. As she tells one of her puzzled girlfriends, "If I don't take what I want, maybe I can prevent nuclear war."

Erotic, playful, unorthodox in its feminism (Jo-Jo is a dysfunctional heroine), the film imagines Los Angeles as a place where, if you're holy-minded enough, prophets will address you through the speakers at a drive-in theater.

Sjogren has begun preproduction on *Claire's Bones*, which she describes as "a story about the regression of a young paleontol-

ogist into fantasy after a disappointment in love." Only thirty-one, the writer-director has already proven what wonders she can do with a \$30,000 budget. With dreams of making her new film in color for six times that amount, she can also count on six times the trouble and no guarantee that any but the most faithful of festival-goers will ever see it.