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Presents  
A Film by Barbara Miller



"...a suprisingly intimate  
and life-affirming film."  
*Los Angeles Times*

"Most relevant film of  
our times..."  
*ZDF Evening News, Germany*

"Every woman in this  
film is connected to  
every other woman and  
ultimately to us all."  
*SRF, Switzerland*

"#Female Pleasure  
is an amazing film,  
talking about sexuality  
it goes far beyond,  
showing empowerment and  
how women re-appropriate  
their existence and  
their own body."  
*Vanity Fair, Italy*

"Substantial  
and engaging."  
*Filmforum, UK*



A DOCUMENTARY BY BARBARA MILLER

# #FEMALE PLEASURE

Five Cultures • Five Women • One Story

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EDITED BY ISABEL MEIER. PRODUCED BY PHILIP DELAQUIS. WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY BARBARA MILLER



[WWW.FEMALEPLEASURE.ORG](http://WWW.FEMALEPLEASURE.ORG)

Running Time: 101 minutes

[www.femalepleasure.org](http://www.femalepleasure.org)

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## SYNOPSIS

Barbara Miller's feature documentary #FEMALE PLEASURE portrays five courageous, smart and self-determined women, breaking the silence imposed by their archaic-patriarch societies and religious communities. With incredible strength and positive energy, Deborah Feldman, Leyla Hussein, Rokudenashiko, Doris Wagner and Vithika Yadav are fighting for sexual liberation and autonomy for women, beyond religious rules and cultural barriers. But their victory comes at a high price: they all have experienced public defamation, threats and prosecutions, have been excommunicated by the society they grew up in and even received death threats by religious leaders and fanatics.

#FEMALE PLEASURE shows the universal mechanisms at work that determine the position of women until today, spanning cultures, religions and continents: from Japan and India and the Somali Muslim diaspora to the Hasidic community in Brooklyn and the Catholic clergy in Europe. All protagonists have come to the same conclusion: the female body is subjected to male lust and first and foremost meant for procreation, without any regard for female sexual pleasure and autonomy.

These women decided to speak up and are the ultimate example on how courage, strength and zest for life can indeed alter societal structures.

## THE PROTAGONISTS

**DEBORAH FELDMAN** grew up in an ultra-orthodox, Hasidic family in Brooklyn, New York. At the age of 17, she was married to a young man whom she had only seen once before. It was only shortly before her wedding night that she was told about sex and her duties as a wife for the first time in her life. She soon started looking for ways to leave the community, together with her son.

*Today, Deborah is a successful writer and lives a free, self-determined life in Berlin with her son. Since the publication of their bestselling books *Unorthodox* and *Exodus* she has become the white hope for many women living in ultra-orthodox communities, wanting to leave.*

**LEYLA HUSSEIN** grew up in a devout Muslim family and was genitally mutilated at the age of 7 in the name of Islam, even though this practice is not mentioned in the Quran. Since the birth of her daughter she has been fighting for physical integrity and sexual self-determination of Muslim women in fundamentalist countries, but also in Europe. She is committed to the fight for the right to a lustful sexuality for all women.

*As a psychotherapist and social activist, Leyla now fights against female genital mutilation and spoke before the UN and the English Parliament to finally successfully change the situation of at-risk girls, not only in Africa but also in Europe.*

Japanese **ROKUDENASHIKO** grew up in a traditional Shinto-Buddhist family. As a manga and performance artist, often creating vagina-themed art, she fights against the demonization of female lust and sexuality in Japan. She was arrested and charged with "obscenity" and currently faces two years imprisonment.

*Rokudenashiko vehemently advocates the acceptance of artistic representation of the vagina and artistic freedom in her work. She is hoping for an acquittal in her trial.*

**DORIS WAGNER**, who grew up in a devout Protestant-Catholic family in Bavaria, joined a convent at the age of 19. Here she has experienced sexual abuse and has been fighting double standards and sexual assault within the Catholic Church ever since.

*As a graduate in theology and a doctorate in philosophy, Doris Wagner supports people that have been abused by the Catholic Church and ecclesiastical cults. Her goal is to establish*

recognition of responsibility and a change in thinking by highest bodies of authorities within the Catholic Church.

**VITHIKA YADAV** grew up in a traditional Hindu family in Rajasthan, northern India. From a very young age she was taught not to look a man in the eye and to never go out on the street alone. But all these rules did not protect her from what happens to the vast majority of Indian girls and women on a daily basis: sexual harassment and assault, or "Eve teasing" as Indian men call it. But Vithika fought back.

*In 2013, Vithika won the Award for "Excellence & Innovation in Sexuality Innovation" for her sexual education platform "Love Matters", which has millions of users and followers every day*

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

#FEMALE PLEASURE is a plea for the right to self-determination and a fulfilled sexuality for women. I wanted to find out which universal structures are behind the fact that women, even today, can't celebrate their body and their sexuality freely and if they do, in most parts of the world, they are despised, excommunicated or even threatened. All five women in this film come from different religious and cultural backgrounds, yet this is not a film about religions, and certainly not about faith. I want to show the universal, millennia-old and unfortunately still very topical structural demonization of the female body and her sexuality. The worldwide parallels are frightening

In almost all cultural, religious and social environments, there are forms of abuse of power by men or in which men use hierarchical structures to exploit, dominate and oppress women. The idea that women should not be self-determined sexual beings has changed a bit, in some parts of the world at least, but it is still deeply rooted in our society. In current Internet porn culture, for example, women are mainly there to satisfy men. Their own sexuality, their wishes and desires are often ignored and the clitoris, which is an essential organ for 70% of the women in order to have an orgasm, is simply non-existent.

I have made TV documentaries on these topics before and found that again and again, female pleasure and the appreciation of the female body doesn't seem to have a proper place in our world, for men and women equally. An open discussion about what women really want and need still takes place too little. And I hope these five women can inspire girls and women all over the world to explore their own bodies, to have the courage to talk with their partners about their wishes and to stand up against religious, cultural and social dogmas who still tell them that they don't count. A self-determined female sexuality, a liberation of the female body from the millennia-old moral weight, will be an incredible gain. For women and men.

*Barbara Miller, 2019*

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

**Writer / Director Barbara Miller** was born in Switzerland and studied law, cinema sciences and psychology. Barbara worked on the Oscar-nominated documentary *WAR PHOTOGRAPHER*. She has directed over twenty acclaimed documentaries, ranging from the *ANTI-GLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT* to *DOMESTIC VIOLENCE*, *YOUTH VIOLENCE* and the *THE CLITORIS*. Her award-winning feature-length documentary *FORBIDDEN VOICES* was shown at over 70 festivals worldwide. She is a member of the Swiss Film Academy and the European Film Academy EFA and is the President of the Swiss Filmmakers Association.

### FILMOGRAPHY (Selects)

2018 **#FEMALE PLEASURE**  
2015 **RAISE FROM HELL**  
2012 **FORBIDDEN VOICES**  
2009 **VIRTUAL ADULTERY**  
2008 **SEX ON THE INTERNET**  
2007 **DIVORCED MOTHERS**  
2006 **YOUTH VIOLENCE**  
2005 **CLITORIS**  
2005 **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**  
2004 **BLINDMAN'S BUFF**  
2003 **FULL-FAT**  
2002 **THE SUMMIT STORMERS**

**Producer Philip Delaquis** was born in Switzerland and studied economics and media science before working as a director and producer for Swiss National Television for many years. He is the founder of the production company Das Kollektiv für audiovisuelle Werke GmbH and co-founder of Mons Veneris Films GmbH. He began producing numerous fiction films and documentaries for TV and theatrical release in 2005 and is a member of the Swiss Film Academy and the European Film Academy.

### FILMOGRAPHY (Selects)

2019 **PARADISE WAR** – Niklaus Hilber  
2018 **#FEMALE PLEASURE** – Barbara Miller  
2015 **FRIEDERICH DÜRRENMATT** – Sabine Gisiger  
2014 **YALOM'S CURE** – Sabine Gisiger  
2013 **THE VISIT – THE MUSICAL**  
2012 **FORBIDDEN VOICES** – Barbara Miller  
2011 **GOTTHELF – THE MUSICAL**  
2010 **GURU – BHAGWAN, HIS SECRETARY & HIS BODYGUARD** – Sabine Gisiger  
2010 **DÄLLEBACH KARI – THE MUSICAL**  
2009 **SOUNDLESS WINDCHIME** – Kit Hung  
2008 **SUNNY HILL** – Luzi Rüedi

## PROTAGONISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

### DEBORAH FELDMAN

*Female rebellion against ultra-orthodox Judaism*

Deborah Feldman grew up in an ultra-orthodox Jewish family in the secluded New York quarter of Williamsburg. Absolute devotion to God, obedience, guilt and punishment shaped every aspect of her childhood. Her life exclusively took place in Williamsburg, in a neighborhood characterized by men with black coats, hats, beards and long side curls and women wearing dark skirts, blouses and wigs covering their shaved heads. The leading rabbi ensures that the rules and regulations become stricter by the day and the community-owned religious school teaches exclusively in Yiddish.

Secular New York seemed a world away for Deborah, even though she could see the lights of the city just across the river. Deborah felt out of place as a child, thinking she could never live up to all the expectations, and longed for someone who understood her fears and hardships. She found this understanding in the hitherto unknown and forbidden world of English books, which she secretly read, where problems were addressed, and feelings named. And there were strong, independent women who took their destiny into their own hands. Deborah started dreaming of becoming one of these women herself one day. But she still had a long way to go, and coercion and obedience defined her puberty.

At 17 she was married to a man she didn't know. She heard about sex for the first time just before the wedding night and was taught that she was "impure" during menstruation, meaning she was not allowed to touch her husband, and that she had to undergo ritual cleansing in the bathhouse, *mikvah*, before engaging in sex again. When her son Isaac was born, Deborah decided to break out of her prison, which took her five years. She secretly visited a university and started writing down her story. Once she and her little son crossed the Brooklyn Bridge to the "other" New York, she knew she had lost her family and home forever. Her autobiography *Unorthodox* released a shockwave in the Jewish community. Deborah has since lived with constant death threats. For the many ultra-orthodox women wanting to get out, however, she has become a symbol of hope.

## LEYLA HUSSEIN

### *Sexual self-determination in fundamentalist Islam*

Leyla Hussein was born in Mogadishu into a privileged and devout Muslim family. She was one of the few girls in Somalia that were allowed to go to school. However, her parents' education did not protect Leyla or her younger sister from the brutal operation which would change her womanhood forever. She was 7 years old when she got to wear her party dress and was, together with her 3-year-old sister, brought to her aunt's house by her mother. The women told her that she could be proud, because she would soon belong to the right, "clean" girls. The cries of her little sister irrevocably pierced Leyla's heart and mind.

In around 30 countries, millions of girls and women are robbed of their clitoris. This happens mostly in the name of Islam, even though it is a pre-Islamic pharaonic custom. Over 200 million girls and women suffer from the lifelong consequences of this brutal procedure. Hundreds of thousands are threatened with this every year, also in Europe. Yet most girls - like Leyla - stay silent. At 12, her family fled to London, to the largest Somali expat society in Europe, but even here, her mother vigilantly watched her daughters to make sure they followed the strict social rules. At 21, Leyla married a fellow Somali. The act of sex was anything but pleasant and brought back her childhood pain and inexplicable depressions began as she became pregnant. The birth of her daughter was difficult, and a nurse explained that she was probably suffering from "flashbacks". Leyla swore that this atrocity should never be done to her daughter and from that day on she committed herself to fighting Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the religious dogmas and overriding superstition behind this cruel practice.

Leyla studied psychology and founded the award-winning organizations *Hawa's Heaven* and *Daughters of Eve*, to support affected women and combat FGM. She is also working with the specialized London police unit *Project Azure* to protect vulnerable girls, as FGM has been a criminal offense in Britain since 1986. Since breaking the silence, Leyla has been met with much approval and support in England. She was invited to Downing Street and received countless awards for her courageous commitment. But until today, there hasn't been a single conviction for FGM in England, and only a few in other European countries. Therefore, Leyla advocates for the effective application of the law before the UN, so that Muslim girls in Europe can finally be effectively protected from serious injury. On top of fighting FGM, Leyla also has to deal with brutal reactions from her own community. She has been openly attacked as a traitor and a shame for Islam by fundamentalist. Masked men have attacked her several times. And again, and again Leyla receives death threats. She now has to carry a silent alarm and has installed three different security systems in her house.

## **ROKUDENASHIKO**

### *Artistic liberation of the female body in Buddhism*

Rokudenashiko (Megumi Igarashi) grew up in a strict, traditional Buddhist family in a Tokyo suburb. Her parents raised her in its beliefs and taught her the most important characteristics of a Japanese woman: humility and subservience to her husband. Sexuality was never discussed in her parents' house. From her first sexual experiences Rokudenashiko quickly learned that female desire was not to be talked about and she was expected to be passive and submissive. The innate impurity and sinfulness of the female body justifies this discrimination, according to Japanese Buddhist teachings. Women can only achieve enlightenment by evolving into a male body. Rokudenashiko did not dare to stand up for her needs and was ashamed of her body, up to the point where she hated it. She underwent "labial trimming", a procedure she deeply regrets, and she still suffers from the painful consequences.

But it was this procedure, that forced her to truly deal with her own vagina on the one hand and female sexuality in Japan on the other hand. In a country where pornographic mangas are widely distributed and advertising for porn sites are featured on the metro, but where explicit content is considered obscene, she wanted to confront the taboo of female sexuality as an artist and in her manga comics. She started to make pink and golden plastic figures modelled on her vagina, which gained popularity through her blog "The Art of Vagina". Rokudenashiko also gives workshops to women, creating "vagina selfies": 3D models of their own vaginas to lose insecurities and fears about their own bodies. In July 2014, Rokudenashiko rowed her 2-meter, 3D-printed "vagina canoe" through Tokyo. For this she was arrested and charged with "obscenity", a charge that seems incredibly inconsistent considering the Japanese penis festival, where gigantic phalluses are carried through the streets. Rokudenashiko is currently threatened with 2 years in jail for sending 3D-data of her vagina.



## **DORIS WAGNER**

### *Struggle against sexual abuse in staunch Catholicism*

For Doris Wagner, God has been her most important companion since her childhood. Her parents were devout Protestants who converted to Catholicism in Bavaria. At 19, Doris joined the strict spiritual order "The Work" in the Thalbach monastery in Bregenz, Austria, which holds close relations to the Vatican. Men and women live together here. Even though the nuns don't wear a habit, they have to follow rigid clothing and behavioral rules, and full responsibility for prevention of sexual harassment lays with the young nuns. After a time of "formation" and systematic disempowerment, Doris was sent to the "Holy City". However, neither her perfect behavior nor the shapeless clothing protected the young nun in Rome from the brutal assaults of the order's priest 20 years her senior. Feeling ashamed and guilty, Doris only dared to speak of the rapes to the head nun after several months. But she put all the blame on Doris, forbidding her to report the man who assaulted her.

It took another two years for Doris to leave and finally dared to press charges against her abuser in Germany and Austria. However, the priest claimed the sexual assaults had been consensual and the court ruled that Doris "did not resist the assault enough" for the assault to be considered rape. Amidst the scandal, the Vatican was forced to announce a papal visit to the religious order which gave Doris great hope. Yet no results have been published until today.

Now in her mid-thirties, the studied theologian and philosopher published the book "No longer myself" in 2014 to encourage others abused within the Catholic Church and other ecclesiastical cults. She married a former monk who had also left the order out of protest against the silencing of abuse and their first child was born in February 2015. Doris even addressed Pope Francis personally to create a change in the treatment of abuse victims and to obtain an apology from the church. She has never heard back from him.

## **VITHIKA YADAV**

### *Sexual liberation in ultra-nationalist Hinduism*

Vithika Yadav grew up in a strongly traditional Hindu family in Rajasthan. She was first sexually harassed by a man at age 12; an experience the overwhelming majority of Indian girls and women have had. Indian men call it "Eve teasing". It happened again two years later and Vithika started hating herself for being a woman. She stayed quiet, as sexuality in India is an absolute taboo. Owing to strict Hindu conventions, no aspect of sex may be talked about, be it consensual or non-consensual. Young people in India receive no sexual education at all.

Vithika's parents allowed her to study and she began her engagement against the brutal reality of the Indian girl trade as a UN consultant for the NGO *Free the Slaves* NGO. At the age of 20 she fell in love with a fellow student while studying sociology and at 23, Vithika broke the taboo and announced her "scandalous" love marriage across castes. With the support of Radio Netherlands Worldwide, she founded *Love Matters* in Delhi, the first Indian internet sex education project, and in 2013 won the prize for "Excellence and Innovation in Sexuality Education" from the World Organization for Sexual Health. However, in India, "Love Matters" caused a scandal. Extreme Hindu nationalists did everything to force the 32-year old mother to close her "sinful" website. But Vithika does not let herself be intimidated.

## **CREDITS**

MONS VENERIS FILMS GmbH  
DAS KOLLEKTIV FÜR AUDIOVISUELLE WERKE GmbH  
INDI FILM GmbH

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**#FEMALE PLEASURE**

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**CULTURAL FOUNDATION SUISSIMAGE**

**THIS FILMS IS DEDICATED TO EMPOWERING WOMEN WORLDWIDE**

#### **About Mons Veneris Films**

Mons Veneris Films was founded in Switzerland by producer Philip Delaquis and director Barbara Miller. The production company is recognized for its many films with a focus on current and relevant socio-cultural issues with the central themes of Women's Rights and Human Rights, including award-winning *Forbidden Voices* (2012).

#### **About Abramorama**

Abramorama is the preeminent global theatrical distribution and rights management partner for documentary and music films and is recognized for the consistent high quality of its work on award winning feature films. An innovator in the focused, personalized form of film marketing, promotion, distribution and event cinema, Abramorama provides invaluable alternatives to filmmakers while continuing to trail-blaze exciting new pathways for filmmakers to find their audience.

Over the course of nearly 20 years, Abramorama has successfully distributed and marketed hundreds of films, including Ron Howard's Grammy Award®-winning *The Beatles: Eight Days A Week – The Touring Years*; *The Beatles' Yellow Submarine*; Stanley Nelson's *Miles Davis: Birth of The Cool*; John McDermott's *Jimi Hendrix: Electric Church*; Amir Bar-Lev's *Long Strange Trip – The Untold Story of the Grateful Dead*; *Tabbert*

Filler's *The Public Image Is Rotten*; Danny Clinch and Pearl Jam's *Let's Play Two*; Corbett Redford and Green Day's *Turn It Around: The Story of East Bay Punk*; John Scheinfeld's *Chasing Trane – The John Coltrane Documentary*; Roberta Grossman and Nancy Spielberg's *Who Will Write Our History*; Brett Bern's *BANG! The Bert Berns Story*; Brett Morgen and National Geographic's seminal *Jane*; Charles Ferguson's *Time To Choose*; Asif Kapadia's *Senna*; Neil Young's vast catalog of *Bernard Shakey Productions*; Cameron Crowe's *Pearl Jam Twenty*; Sacha Gervasi's *Anvil! The Story of Anvil*; Banksy's Academy Award® nominated *Exit Through the Gift Shop*; the surprise indie hit *Awake: The Life of Yogananda*; Laurie Anderson's astonishing New York Times critics' pick, *Heart of a Dog*; National Board of Review Winner *Listen to Me Marlon*; 2016 Documentary Academy Award®-nominee and IDA Best Documentary Winner *The Look of Silence*; and the episodic multi-platform series *Deconstructing The Beatles*. Abramorama is a founding partner of *The Seventh Art Stand* program, an act of cinematic solidarity against Islamophobia, that ran in more than 50 theaters across the United States in May of 2017. Abramorama recently launched a conscious films imprint, Mangurama, alongside its music-centric film fund focused on the global release of iconic music documentaries. For more information visit [www.abramorama.com](http://www.abramorama.com)