



Performance artist Marina Abramovic takes her art to the ocean off Thailand in Chiara Clemente's docu "Our City Dreams."

Our City Dreams

(Docu)

A First Run Features release of a Di San Luca Films production. (International sales: Di San Luca Films, New York.) Produced by Chiara Clemente, Tanya Selvaratnam, Bettina Sulser.

Directed by Chiara Clemente. Camera (color/B&W, Super 8, 16mm, DV, HD), Theo Stanley; editor, Martin Levenstein; music, Thomas M. Lauderdale; music supervisor, Lauderdale, Susan Jacobs, Jonathan Friedman; art director, Nathan Kiler; sound (Dolby Digital), Lauderdale; supervising sound editor, Nicholas Renbeck; associate producer, Eva Lindemann. **Reviewed at Hamptons Film Festival (World Cinema), Oct. 16, 2008. Running time: 87 MIN.**

With: Swoon, Ghada Amer, Kiki Smith, Marina Abramovic, Nancy Spero.
(English, French, Arabic dialogue)

By **RONNIE SCHEIB**

The city in "Our City Dreams" is New York, serving as home base for the five powerhouse femme artists profiled in Chiara Clemente's exquisitely crafted docu. While Pamela Boll's recent "Who Does She Think She Is?" imposes a rigid feminist agenda on randomly selected artists, Clemente chooses renowned, wildly eclectic creators who span the spectrum in age, provenance and medium, connected to the city through a complex, ever-changing dialectic. Combining formats and textures with a hypnotic, shape-shifting score, pic itself quite simply ranks as a work of art. Docu is skedded to bow at Gotham's Film Forum in February.

Despite establishing shots of the artists navigating the city on foot, bicycle, bus and subway, Clemente never posits her subjects as static indwellers. Instead, they are shown constantly on the move, redefining their work while shuttling between more far-flung terrains.

Swoon, barely out of her 20s, met with phenomenal success since hitting Gotham in the late '90s. Her life-size "street people" cutouts, carved in plywood, inked, transferred onto paper and clandestinely pasted on the sides of buildings, represent a quintessentially urban art form. The effervescent redhead, worried about keeping her edge in the face of gallery shows and

MoMA exhibitions, leaves town to recharge, riding the rails with an 8mm camera.

Ghada Amer, disturbed by repressive changes she finds on a visit to her hometown, Cairo, produces hand-embroidered paintings that subvert the "feminine" art of sewing with highly sexual subject matter, with texts that question the nature of love, angst and terrorism.

The women's art reinvents itself within the constraints and discoveries of age. Kiki Smith's vast retrospective, landing at New York's Whitney Museum, grants the quirky quinquagenarian ample opportunity to reflect on her many-sided oeuvre, freeing her up to go further afield — to the Venice Biennale with her "Homespun Tales," and to the Olympics in Turin with illuminated ice sculptures.

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Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic utterly belies her 60 years with grueling seven-hour performances at the Guggenheim (the museum's spiral structure makes an ideal theater space). Her "Seven Easy Pieces" features self-mutilation; "God Punishing" finds her ferociously bullwhipping the ocean off Thailand in retaliation for the tsunami.

In contrast, frail, bird-like activist artist Nancy Spero, though still working, seems diminished by both her fragile body and the recent death of her husband and fellow artist, Leo Golub, as she reminisces about Paris and New York in the '60s.

Clemente's compelling group portraiture (with each artist allotted her own space, uninterrupted by cross-cutting) paints a vibrantly diverse Gotham art scene, mimed by Thomas Lauderdale's motif-driven score and lenser Theo Stanley's interwoven swatches of black-and-white, color, Super 8, 16mm, DV and HD camerawork.