

**BITCH**

Shot in Brooklyn Heights

March 1965

Unreleased.

Black and white, 16mm sound, 24fps, 70 minutes

Sharp focus, stationary camera: the penthouse parlor of  
Willard Maas and Marie Menken

with

Marie Menken

Willard Maas

Edie Sedgwick

Gerard Malanga

Ronald Tavel

John

On sound and camera: Buddy Wirtschafter

Andy was so enthralled with Marie Menken's performance in THE LIFE OF JUANITA CASTRO that the following Sunday he had Gerard Malanga and soundman-cameraman Buddy Wirtschafter pack up all the filming equipment and haul it off for an on location shoot: the Brooklyn Heights penthouse apartment of Ms. Menken and her professor-husband, perky Willard Maas.

The hope, obviously, was that the charismatic matron Andrew Sarris was to describe as looking like a lady longshoreman, would reprise her silver screen winning-way, a mixture of beady eyed, alcoholic bewilderment, fishwife shrewdness and shrewishness, sudden baby-like bellowing, and a sorrow with which almost anyone could identify.

But no such thing was to happen. Altogether too lauded, and too self-conscious now, Marie, for the purposes of performance, was forever ruined by her admirers. Faced with the relentlessly grinding Auricon, she found confabulatory improvization without the cicerone of a scenario more than she could master. When the inevitable gallons of drink were brought forth by Willard to prompt her narrations or inspire her outbursts, she was lit in no time at all and, under the great pressure of having to be instantly great, actually passed out.

Buddy Wirtschafter, a filmmaker and filmmaking teacher at the School of Visual Arts, had been drafted for service on JUANITA CASTRO, specifically, to tech it out to circumvent the soft focus blurring the handful of films preceding it. Recalled to duty on BITCH, he discovered setting up in the romantically antique but dollhouse-scaled rooftop suite no easy enterprise, and had particular trouble with the second reel sound. But Buddy would work at my side throughout the entire, busy spring of 1965, and I came to think of him as a very upbeat, if slightly tipsy, right-hand man who made the most of equipment that was anything but state of the art, in often less than optimal circumstances.

Back in January of the year, Andy had taken me to another

penthouse, that of well-healed, Hollywood movie producer, Lester Persky, when Lester was throwing a celebrity-thicketed soiree there. (I got stuck in the stalled elevator with Tennessee Williams who appeared to find every time-passing commentary I offered over his head.) Claspig a cocktail glass in one hand, a cigarette holder in the other, and standing in the center of the party parlor when I finally entered was an arresting, twenty-two year old blueblood sporting a brunette bee-hive, a leopard-skin evening outfit, and a pair of the largest brown eyes I was ever to have discombobulate me. "Nyoka, the Jungle Girl!" I exclaimed. "Do you think so?" she returned smiling irresistibly, and dare I say it, a fire deeply retreated in the iris a-dance at her dilated pupils? "Oh, yes!" I hastened to reinforce, "we'll have you over to the Factory and shoot the grainy, all-new adventures of Nyoka. No one's done her justice since Republic's backlot forties' cliffhanger." And Miss Edith Minturn Sedgwick was very pleased.

We saw nor hide nor hair of her for a good month, and then she emanated from the elevator to beguile her afternoon watching the JUANITA CASTRO shoot. Being a fruit fly from the word go, and so seizing upon Andy's circle as a comfortable and unthreatening salon she just might make her hangout, Edie reappeared for the lensing of BITCH. This time, however, when Marie Menken became intractable, she found herself incorporated into the proceedings - in a "just don't stand around, earn your keep" kind of way; but, green to any kind of enterprise involving real effort, Edie was able to add very little - except of course, her lilting laughter.

Both Marie and Willard were underground filmmakers themselves, and visible in Manhattan's art and academic world. Willard had been Gerard's professor and mentor out at Staten Island College: it was he, in fact, who had introduced Gerard to Andy. Marie and Willard were each fifty-three at the time and, though Willard was aggressively bisexual, an admirable seducer to say the least, they had a grown child and were still very much in love: a love that is obvious and touching when Willard serves Marie her mood-alteratives in BITCH's first reel.

I had come late to the location shoot, if memory serves, to deliver the manuscript of a novella-length article Andy had ordered to promote HARLOT, called THE BANANA DIARY. When I got up there, I walked into what I felt was the halting progress of a fairly hopeless over-effort. In the reel break, Marie warned Andy she wanted to pitch Campbell soups, that she'd grown up on them; but Andy, concerned that winter over possible litigation with Campbell's, told her not to. (The suit - for infringement of copyright, or art theft, as it were - ended amicably with the company's vice-president forking over \$14,000 for a Tomato Soup Can painting - to hang over his bed!)

Though BITCH was intended to be a paean to the couple, and to spotlight Marie, Gerard and a little trick of Willard's, named John, join Edie after the first half hour as if swelling the rank will make cinema: but the deepening twilight of Hart Crane's "chained bay waters" is somehow more interesting than the five figures caught in it.

When the second part got off to a wobbly start, Andy bit his upper lip and turned to me and asked, "You want to step in?"

I do and sit on the back of Marie's chair and hold her hands comfortably for most of the reel. We whisper together and she kisses me a lot. She appears to see me, amongst the unfriendly, as a friend and confidant, but I felt the interplay was too far off kilter for me to find a significant creative purchase. Marie roars, "Hey, are we shooting a movie?" from time to time, a bit of supposed deconstruction which doesn't work at all. And when she cannot draw Marie out concerning her pulling a knife on a black kid in the subway, Edie sublimates her impatience by throwing a drink on John. As an act of frustration and ill-conceived film interest on Edie's part, I quickly made a mental note of it.

When it was over, Gerard rubbed his hands enthusiastically and exclaimed as he always did at the wrap, "It's great, man!"

But Andy, sitting with legs crossed, one elbow resting on his uppermost knee and his thumbnail in his mouth, just stared ahead and said, "No, it's not."

Then he broke his stare, looked at me, and inquired: "You

want writing credit for this?"

I answered, "No."

What's interesting about this is that he considered my on-camera extemporizing to be as much a part of the work's scripting as the typed-up sheets I turned in without fail within a few days of his requests. And lacking a screenplay altogether, did not mean for Mr. Warhol that the film hadn't been written. Of course, I was perfectly aware that these scripts were blueprints for myself, cribs as it were, for when that Auricon began irremediably setting down the minutes for not necessarily friendly future eyes. That is one reason I labeled them scenarios: they seemed to be that in a truer sense than those of most Hollywood films. I refused credit for BITCH because I thought little of the product and less of my small contribution to that (never released) product. It wasn't because I didn't understand his perception of an independent film's writing, or find that intriguing, irresistibly challenging, or the skill-building opportunity it seemed to me it so undeniably was; nor, last but not least, that I wanted him to assume responsibility for this infelicitous entry.

AN  
 ANDY WARHOL  
 DOUBLE BILL  
 "H O R S E"  
 Starring  
 LARRY LATREILLE  
 TOSH CARILLO  
 DANIEL CASSIDY  
 GREGORY BATTOOCK  
 SCENARIO BY  
 RONALD TAVEL  
 DIRECTED BY  
 ANDY WARHOL



GREEN TEST  
 Starring  
 MARIO MONTEZ  
 &  
 RONALD TAVEL  
 SCENARIO BY  
 RONALD TAVEL  
 DIRECTED BY  
 ANDY WARHOL



Friday, August 28th  
 Saturday, August 29th  
 9:00, 11:00 PM  
 Ticket \$1.50  
 Members 99¢

FOR PLACE  
 THE HOUSE  
 Lafayette St  
 2 block west  
 south of  
 Cooper Union)  
 2-4240

from left to right: DANIEL CASSIDY, LARRY LATREILLE,  
 TOSH CARILLO, and GREGORY BATTOOCK