

# Woman on Film

an Interview with Marta Sanchez by Kathryn Xian

*Marta Sanchez is a multifaceted filmmaker, film festival director, and feminist activist. She's the kind of woman other women admire—not only for her Spanish beauty, European accent, and elegant demeanor but also because of her ability to imagine creative and political projects and then make them happen. Perhaps that's a necessary talent of filmmakers, but Marta goes a step further than the rest because she makes it a point to use her experience and knowledge to help other filmmakers voice their visions to the world—visions that evoke, inspire,*

*challenge, or make viewers think outside of their cultural comfort zone.*

*I first met Marta nearly a decade ago and we immediately hit it off. Just like me, she was a filmmaker, a Capricorn, and a woman unafraid of self-labeling as a feminist. Over the years, we did as most determined women bent on changing society for the better do: we lost touch. I remember our last telephone conversation, when she was Director of Distribution at Women Make Movies in New York City. It was during the George W. Bush Administration. She said, "We're going to take a stance*



*against Bush. We're nonprofit, I know, but he's got to stop. We don't care if we lose our nonprofit status."*

*That's pretty hot.*

*Thankfully, we have reconnected. In the last decade, Marta Sanchez has created a short film festival in Spain called Short Metraje and another travelling film festival called Pragda, which exposes the work of Spanish filmmakers to the world. Amazed—but not surprised—by what she has accomplished in the last ten years, I decided to share her vision with our readers.*

**HWJ: Where are you from, where do you live now, and what did you want to be when you were a child?**

MS: I am from Madrid. After ten years in New York and some time in Brighton, I moved to Barcelona, where I have my permanent residence.

When I was a child, I was very sensitive to the unfairness of the world and I wanted to change that [injustice]. When I became a teenager, I decided I wanted to change the world in an active manner, but it took time to decide how. I didn't want to be a politician or a lawyer. I finally got an idea—film. Film affects people's views. You reach millions of people, and it is fun. So I decided to be a film director at the age of about thirteen. I have to say that I come from a family of film lovers.

**HWJ: What inspired you to start Short Metraje and Pragda?**

MS: After school, I started working for 20th Century Fox in Madrid as a distributor. But that was taking me away

from my goal [to be a film director], so I quit and moved to New York City. I wanted to learn how independent filmmakers do it. In New York City, I felt at home. I started meeting activist filmmakers—independent filmmakers with the same vision. I also worked for Women Make Movies for many years, among other institutions, but I still had in my heart the idea of working with Spanish films. I created Short Metraje, a showcase of Spanish short filmmakers that premieres at the Film Society of Lincoln Center every December. I am very interested in new visions and I love daring young filmmakers. [ShortMetraje] was my way to help young Spanish filmmakers come to the U.S. Now, after nine years, it is a reference for many. But showcasing short films wasn't enough after a while, [so] I created Pragda.

Pragda is an initiative to promote feature-length Spanish films to the world through public exhibits in theaters, in schools, and through the Internet. Now we are developing a project called the Spanish Film Club—probably the most ambitious [project]

to date. Our goal is to show new visions of Spanish filmmakers. We do not care so much about format, but we do care about risk. We program all kinds of genres. We also do classic films because we believe that this is a genre Spain lacks: bringing to the world our phenomenal older filmmakers. We also organize master classes with the filmmakers in local universities and high schools.

**HWJ: What kinds of films have you created? What stories did you choose to tell? What kinds of challenges, if any, did you face?**

MS: My last [film] was a political documentary about the reasons why Americans and Spaniards react so differently regarding terrorism. It is really an essay on national identity and the power of history and how that affects our daily lives as civilians. I have made other short films—all of them about people escaping [something]. *Jaja!* The major challenge is always to combine family life and responsibilities with a full-time job and filmmaking. I

combine family life and responsibilities with a full-time job and filmmaking. I never made enough as a filmmaker to sustain myself without an extra job. I do not know many women filmmakers who do.

**HWJ: What is the most pertinent challenge facing women filmmakers today?**

MS: Film is a men's issue. It is run by men in all capacities. Female and male approaches are different, so when a male producer is deciding to give money to a filmmaker, he probably will connect more with work made by another man. That's why it's important to have women as directors, producers, directors of photography, art directors, festival programmers, and film curators. How many women do you know are directors of the top ten film festivals in the world? None. But what's the percentage of women actually working in festivals? Huge! It is ridiculous how women still need to fight every minute to be respected and how much we have to work to get to a regular position. It's much less than for men. Also, men don't like to have women over them, and they are very protective of their space. Maybe this sounds very bad for the interview!

**HWJ: What motivates you most about filmmaking?**

MS: The power of images—the power [of film] to take you by the hand to different worlds you have never seen, the power [film] has to open your mind, the power of bringing people together in a theater—emotionally and intellectually. It's a miracle.

**HWJ: Where do you see Spanish filmmaking as being in twenty years?**

MS: Bigger productions, more commercial [productions].





**HWJ: Do you feel that Hollywood has a responsibility in contributing to American culture? How does Hollywood affect the perception of America to the rest of the world? Does Spain have an analogous conglomerate that controls media?**

MS: Hollywood *is* America. [The world] thinks America is what Hollywood conveys. Even in love! We all wait for the typical American love story with a happy-ever-after [ending]. Hollywood is about dreams, not reality. Yes, I think [those in Hollywood] should have a commitment to contribute to American culture in a smarter way. Some try, but not enough.

[Regarding the media,] we do have Mediapro [in Spain], for example, but nothing else. In any case, media is not free media, is it? I do not know of any news in Spain that isn't controlled. [Comparatively, the situation with media is not as bad] in America.

**HWJ: What are your future goals and plans?**

MS: We had last year fifteen festivals. And this year it will be twenty. I want Pragda to try new projects, like the

Spanish Film Club, and also to use the Internet not only for sales but [also] to educate about films and Spanish filmmaking.

**HWJ: Where do you think the future of filmmaking is headed?**

MS: The future is exciting. [People] will have access to films regardless of where they live. They will be able to make films freely without waiting for a fat check from Hollywood. We are ready. We have the freedom. But do we know how to use this freedom? I am afraid of self-censorship. Last week in Berlin, we opened a retrospective of Spanish clandestine filmmakers during Franco's time. I invited the filmmakers, who were on average around seventy years old, and they presented the dangerous films they made during sixties and seventies. I want to see that spark in young filmmakers today, as well as that commitment with *subjects*, not concern over money. Those old filmmakers didn't have the tools, yet they made films. Now filmmakers have everything. It's exciting as long as we do not think that one gig will make us millionaires. Film is about communication, not fat

checks. But both at the same time would be perfect!

**HWJ: What kinds of advice would you give a young filmmaker?**

MS: Persistence, persistence, persistence. Risk, risk, risk. ❖

**Read more about Marta's current and past projects:**

**Short Metraje**

[www.shortmetraje.com](http://www.shortmetraje.com)

**Pragda**

[www.pragda.com](http://www.pragda.com)

**Women Make Movies**

[www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com)

photos courtesy of Marta Sanchez

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