

Diamond video cuts through difference

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THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM, PARTS 3 AND 4, written and directed by Sara Diamond. Produced by Sara Diamond, The Women's Labour History Project, and The Knowledge Network. At the National Film Board John Spotton Theatre tonight (Thursday, May 2), 9:30 pm. 973-3014. Rating: NNN

By CAMERON BAILEY

Sara Diamond's work is about challenging old truths.

So forget "a woman's work is never done." It's scarcely ever acknowledged.

Vancouver-based Diamond is both video artist and social historian. For more than a decade she's been exploring the unwritten histo-



Sara Diamond's video *The Lull Before The Storm*, parts 3 and 4, traces the experience of Sikh and white women millworkers in an effort to show how gender bridges cultural and racial differences.

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ries of British Columbia's working women, first through research and interviews, and now with a series of complex, compelling tapes.

The latest is *The Lull Before the Storm*. Produced in four one-hour segments, it's a massive undertaking that uses both drama and documentary to dismantle the happy fictions of the post-war boom years. This was an era when women were sold fantasies of homebound bliss while they worked long hours for low pay (in factories) or for no pay (in those same dream homes).

The *Lull* is part of Diamond's continuing work with the Women's Labour History Project. That work has included oral histories, photo exhibits, and now videotapes "which serve to explore certain kinds of histories for women in the province, but also try to look at the problem of representing history."

Parts three and four of the tape, screening this week at Mayworks, take the form of a documentary about the lives of women working in and around BC's lumber industry.

The tape combines interviews of the women whose labour was a cornerstone of those mill economies, with archival footage from 50s industrial films that serves as both illustration and ironic counterpoint.

On the line from California where she's teaching this year, voluble

and articulate as ever, Diamond lays out the ideas that lie behind the project.

"The thing that we don't try to do is make huge generalizations about all the women in British Columbia. We've tried, if anything, to look at difference."

Lumber community

In *Lull*, that difference takes the form of exploring the different experiences of WASP and Sikh women in the lumber community of Paldi.

"The East Indian community was involved from the beginning of its immigration with the forest industry," Diamond says, "and were often in a kind of mediated relationship with employers through labour contractors."

"But they did very similar work to the white working class. Then when the mills got set up there was a division of labour there that was affected through both race and gender."

"In the post-war period, for example, there were a lot of identifications made between women who worked in the mills and East Indian workers, because they did very sim-

ilar kinds of jobs, were underpaid and faced very similar kinds of conditions. So there is a hierarchy based on race within the labour force in British Columbia. There's no question about that."

Collaborating with one of the daughters of this original Sikh community, Diamond juxtaposes interviews with those women with former members of a white Women's Auxilliary. The idea is to find "places where women's experience, constituted on the bases of class and gender, bridges cultural difference and race, as well as places where cultural difference and race do articulate themselves."

"It's been written many times that feminists look at domestic labour as a form of labour and understand its role in the process of creating value in the economy," she says.

"We've accepted a notion of labour as not simply an institutional, organized version, but more the British social history definition, which includes both domestic labour and all work that is constituted

within the workforce.

"On the other hand, the way we've looked at doing this kind of social history has been to look at very specific situations, especially in documentary work. The exploration in *The Lull Before The Storm* that uses documentary methods is very centred within a community.

"Both communities feel well represented and I think they feel comfortable being placed in relationship to each other," she says. "They said it gave them new insights into some of the things they shared that they hadn't realized, and some of the differences too."

Deconstructed drama

Unlike *Keep The Home Fires Burning* and other previous tapes, Diamond decided to split this four-part series into two "fairly deconstructed dramas" and two documentaries.

She says that *Lull* works in a more traditional format than her earlier tapes, but she intends to keep, pursuing the work that pushes at the formal margins.

"I just did an installation called *Patternity*, with two Ts, at the Vancouver Art Gallery," she says. "It was very much an art project. It deals with father-daughter relationships, history, memory and problems with documentary style, landscape and autobiography. It's a critique of all those histories."

"So I'm still very interested in working within an art context and dealing with the theoretical debates — that kind of rich ground."

"I've always been interested in taking those concerns to a different audience."