



DOCUMENTING DRAMA

November 2006. Continental Magazine - Producer Lydia Dean Pilcher brings a unique sensibility to her movies. by Glenn Kaufmann

Film producer Lydia Dean Pilcher is confident enough in her vision to spell it out for us. "The challenge," she says, "is to make

significant and meaningful work that can reach a popular audience and still not compromise the artistic merits.”

It’s a challenge Pilcher has met working behind the scenes with many of today’s visionary directors to produce some of the most message-oriented films in recent memory, including *Cradle Will Rock*, *Iron Jawed Angels*, *Normal*, *Disappearing Acts*, *Hysterical Blindness*, and *Vanity Fair*. (Her credits also include non-message movies, such as *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.)

Initially intent on making documentaries, Pilcher attended New York University Film School. Most of her classmates were interested in making dramatic films, and upon graduation Pilcher found few opportunities in documentaries. As she turned toward dramatic films, she retained the documentarian’s desire to create works that would affect people and be “about” something.

Pilcher is consumed with creating films that make a difference. To succeed in the film business, she believes it is crucial for producers to have a guiding vision. They need to learn to trust themselves, and by extension trust their vision, she says. When the time came to produce her own films, Pilcher was naturally attracted to projects with strong visionary directors whose work had a compelling point of view and a strong message. In considering projects, she asks herself, “Will [the story] impact the way somebody understands the world or interprets the changing times we live in?”

And with 10 diverse projects in various stages of development, it’s clear that Pilcher casts a wide net when searching for that all-important message. Upcoming projects include *The Probable Future*, based on the novel by Alice Hoffman; an as yet untitled film with an environmental-justice theme set in a small African American community outside New Orleans; and a film about Nigerian musician/activist Fela Kuti, who is considered by many to be the father of Afrobeat.

During her work on a film adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake*, due for release in March 2007, Pilcher found herself teamed once again with longtime collaborator Mira Nair

(they've made seven films together) in shooting locations that included Calcutta and New York. As someone who loves to travel, Pilcher finds inspiration in "visiting new places and exploring new environments." Despite the rigors of combining production with travel, she has made the effort to include her two children (ages 6 and 11) in these experiences whenever possible, exposing them to a worldview that she says has enhanced her understanding of how other cultures view the world. "The challenge," Pilcher explains, "is to embrace the differences and to find a way to bridge them."