

THE KITCHEN

Video Music Dance Performance Film Literature

FOCUS



Lunch Date with a B-Movie

Illustrated Warfare

Cartoon Gooroo
Vaughn Bode



PHOTO BY BETH B

WAR IDYLL

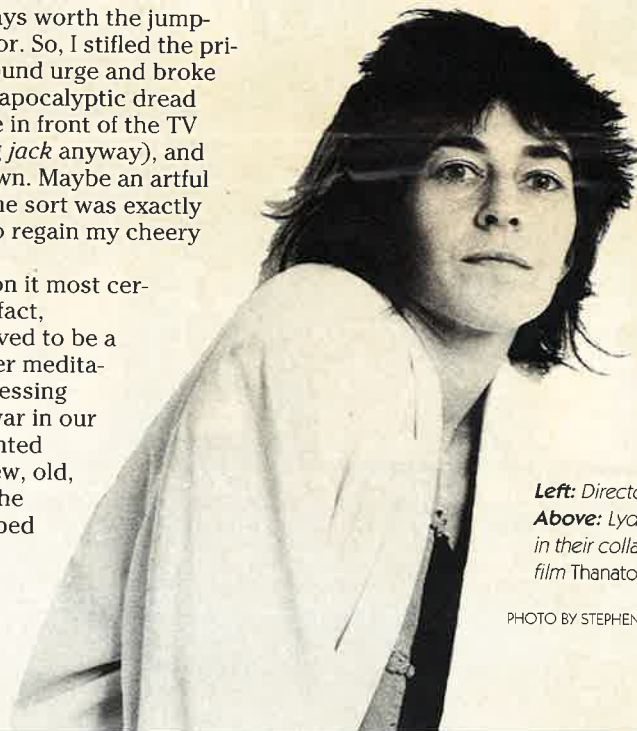
On the day that *Thanatopsis*—Beth B's new short film with Lydia Lunch—was to premiere at the Kitchen in NYC, the smart-bombs had been nose-diving down Iraqi air shafts for nearly a week. I had been feeling so incredibly depressed—convinced of the imminent armageddon we had co-wrought—that the very *last* thing I felt like doing that night was hauling off to see some damn art film and engage in trivial social intercourse with the loathsome individuals that frequent such events (hunkering solo in the rooftop bunker is the way I prefer to contemplate civilization's end).

But, it was true, the pair responsible for this film were two whose work I find almost always worth the jumpstart out the door. So, I stifled the primal going-to-ground urge and broke the paralysis of apocalyptic dread that'd frozen me in front of the TV (wasn't showing *jack* anyway), and headed downtown. Maybe an artful diversion of some sort was exactly what I needed to regain my cheery demeanor . . .

Well, diversion it most certainly *wasn't*. In fact, *Thanatopsis* proved to be a fierce but somber meditation on the depressing inevitability of war in our testosterone-tainted world order—new, old, or otherwise. (The film's title—copped from early 19th-century romantic poet William

Cullen Bryant—should've clued me in). It was chillingly understated, elegiacally affecting, and somehow transcendently purgative—exactly the anti-ambivalence tonic my moral-bludgeoned corpus required at that grim moment.

And while it seemed like a direct response to the then-raging mediasphere war, it actually arose out of a far less specific impulse. "We began working on *Thanatopsis* early in the summer of last year—at least a month before the [August 2] invasion of Kuwait," says director Beth B—who's been using that single-initial surname (no period) since the late '70s, when she and then-partner Scott made punky 8mm home/art movies like *The Black*



Left: Director Beth B
Above: Lydia Lunch
in their collaborative
film *Thanatopsis*.

PHOTO BY STEPHEN McHATTIE