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Nina Foch, Actress in Sophisticated Roles, Dies at 84

By ANITA GATES

Nina Foch, the Dutch-born actress who epitomized the cool, aloof blond sophisticate in films and on television for six decades while thriving as an acting teacher, died on Friday in Los Angeles. She was 84 and lived in Los Angeles.

The cause was complications from myelodysplasia, a blood disorder, said her son, Dr. Dirk de Brito.

Ms. Foch is probably best remembered by moviegoers as the rich, manipulative socialite who tries to buy [Gene Kelly's](#) character, as well as his artwork, in [Vincente Minnelli's](#) 1951 musical, "An American in Paris." Or as Bithia, the pharaoh's daughter, who finds and adopts the baby Moses in [Cecil B. DeMille's](#) 1956 epic, "The Ten Commandments."

But Ms. Foch (pronounced fosh) received her highest acting accolades for a lesser-known film, "Executive Suite" (1954), a drama about corporate power. She received an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of a grief-stricken secretary.

Ms. Foch, who grew up in New York, made her Broadway debut in "John Loves Mary," a comedy about a soldier and his eager bride-to-be, in 1947. Brooks Atkinson, writing in The New York Times, called her "an especially attractive young lady with a gift for sincerity."

She played four more Broadway roles between 1948 and 1960, including Cordelia to Louis Calhern's King Lear in a 1950 production. She directed "Ways and Means," a short play by Noël Coward, as part of "Tonight at 8:30," which had a short Broadway run in 1967.

By that time, she had found new career purpose in teaching and coaching actors and directors. She was affiliated with the [University of Southern California's](#) film school for four decades and with [the American Film Institute's](#) film studies center in the 1970s.

Nina Consuelo Maud Fock was born in Leyden, the Netherlands, on April 20, 1924. Her father, Dirk Fock, an orchestral conductor, moved to New York in 1928. He was soon involved in a fierce, highly publicized divorce and child-custody battle with his wife, the former Consuelo Flowerton, an American-born actress. Nina ended up living with her mother.

After graduating from the Lincoln School in Upper Manhattan, Ms. Foch attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Her first screen appearance, at the age of 19, was in "Wagon Wheels West" (1943), a short. She made her feature film debut the following year in a horror film, "The Return of the Vampire," in which she played a professor's vulnerable granddaughter who had been attacked by a vampire as a child.

This led to another horror film, "The Cry of the Werewolf" (1944), and a string of crime dramas including "Shadows in the Night" (1944), "Boston Blackie's Rendezvous" (1945) and "The Dark Past" (1948), which left Ms. Foch with something of a reputation as a B-movie queen.

"An American in Paris" changed that, establishing her image as a knowing, often controlling character. She played Marie Antoinette in "Scaramouche" (1952), and the manipulative Helena Glabrus in "Spartacus" (1960).

Her television work did much to keep that image alive. Beginning in 1949, with an appearance on “The Chevrolet Tele-Theater” and including a very recent recurring role as David McCallum’s eccentric mother on the CBS series “NCIS,” Ms. Foch could be seen on more than 90 series. The shows ranged in tone from “Studio One” to “That Girl” and “Route 66.”

She appeared in at least a dozen television movies and mini-series. Her best-remembered roles include portrayals of the grim housekeeper Mrs. Danvers (when she was only 38) in an NBC version of “*Rebecca*,” a Nazi-era countess in “War and Remembrance” and an alcoholic socialite in “*Tales of the City*.”

Directing had always interested her, and she was said to have been an uncredited assistant director and dialogue consultant on “*The Diary of Anne Frank*” (1959), set in Amsterdam. In 1996 she and the actress Deborah Raffin were co-directors of “*Family Blessings*,” a television movie based on a LaVyrle Spencer novel.

Periodically she returned to film acting, appearing in “*Mahogany*” (1975), the AIDS drama “*It’s My Party*” (1996) and “*How to Deal*” (2003), in which she played a marijuana-smoking grandmother.

“I’ve been busy in my career and all my life,” Ms. Foch said in a 2007 interview. “But I think the biggest thing I’ve done in life is teach. Breaking down every scene, every line, every beat, and putting the piece together. That’s my contribution.”

Ms. Foch married and divorced three times. Her first husband (1954-58) was James Lipton, the host of Bravo’s “*Inside the Actors Studio*” series, then an actor. Her second (1959-63) was Dennis de Brito, a television writer, with whom she had her son. In 1966 she married Michael Dewell, a theater producer. They were divorced in 1993, a year before his death.

She is survived by her son, Dr. de Brito, of Los Angeles, and three grandchildren.