# WOMEN IN SERS

**ISABELLA WALTON** LINDA COVIT **KOA PADOLSKY KALINA PETROVA MARLEN PUELLO TALITHA BELLA SEWELL** EWA ABANA SHIRY LEE PRICE MARCIA PESCHKE WILMA CASAL KARA CHAMBERLAIN SARAH SAWYER MCCARTHY INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S CINEMA





### SPECIAL EDITION WOMEN

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WomenCinemakers offers its over 300'000 readers insight into the work of emerging directors in the short film and experimental cinema sections. Women Producers, Writers, and Directors from around the world have the opportunity to present their films to the wide attention of the English-reading audience. Since 2012 WomenCinemakers has been promoting new experiments by creating the section Nine New Women Filmmakers that awards debuts and and innovative films. With a mixture

OF NEWCOMERS AND ESTABLISHED DIRECTORS, OUR ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY HAS FEATURED MORE THAN 100 ARTISTS, WITH MANY OF THEM COMPETING IN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS INCLUDING THE CANNES FESTIVAL, BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, AND THE VENICE BIENNALE. FILM DIRECTORS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN DETERMINING HOW WE SEE OURSELVES AND THE WORLD AROUND US. GENDER OF THE STORYTELLER MATTERS. THE WORLD NEEDS THE CREATIVE ENERGY AND VISION OF WOMEN. JOIN WOMENCINEMAKERS.

COVER. WILMA CASAL

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04

K. Chamberlain & S. S. McCarthy Raw Chemistry

44

Linda Covit & Koa Padolsky The Legacy

84

Marcia Peschke Seek Body Contour

114

Talitha Bella Sewell The Valley

132

**Isabella Walton**Izzy Aman: The Joy of Drag

152

Ewa Abana MIESZKO

184

Shiry Price Elisheva and Ruthi

210

Marlen Puello HOMO FEMINA

236

Kalina Petrova Multiplicity of Oneness

280

Wilma Casal An Ocean Away



## Kara Chamberlain & Sarah Sawyer McCarthy

A zombie virus has spread around the world, slowly turning all the men into zombies, but AJ is still hopeful that she can find love when Duncan asks her out to dinner. In this zombie rom-com, AJ risks it all to go on one last first date.

From the creative team behind award-winning web series RETAIL IS HELL, this short film raises awareness for the risk of violence against women in dating and relationships.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Kara and Sarah, and welcome to WomenCinemakers. For this special edition we have selected Raw Chemistry, an extremely interesting genre film that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article.

Blending romance and horror in an inventive take on the zombie genre, your film uses the zombie apocalypse as a backdrop for a commentary on modern dating. The story manages to balance its lighter romantic elements with darker undertones, and we appreciate the way you crafted such a genre-bending tale that





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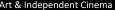
serves both as entertainment and thoughtful social commentary. Romance and zombie horror. These are two genres that don't often go hand-in-hand, yet you've managed to use them to create a powerful social narrative. How did you approach merging these genres during the writing and directing process, and were there any moments where you worried about one overshadowing the other? What collaborative methods did you employ during the film's development?

**Kara:** We didn't set out to make a horror film, but the idea of zombies really supported the message we wanted to portray so we leaned into it. It took quite a few rewrites of the script to really get the blend right. The horror elements were added in very intentionally, whereas the rom-com structure was the foundation of our story.

**Sarah:** We had a conversation early on about how we are not horror people, so this was never going to be a true horror film. I think that was a good conversation to have because once we released the idea of adhering perfectly to the horror genre it really helped. Someone who watches this who is a horror person might think



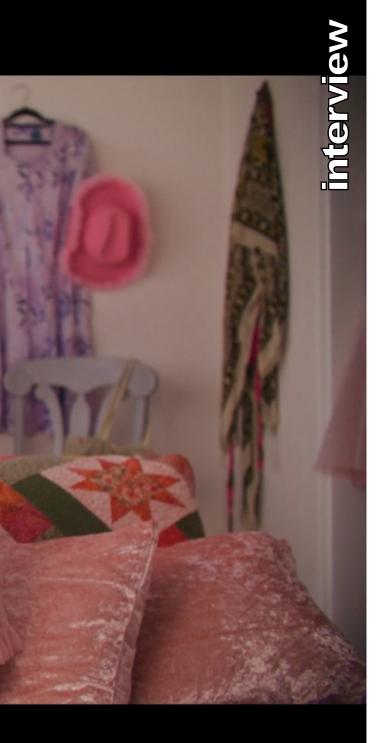












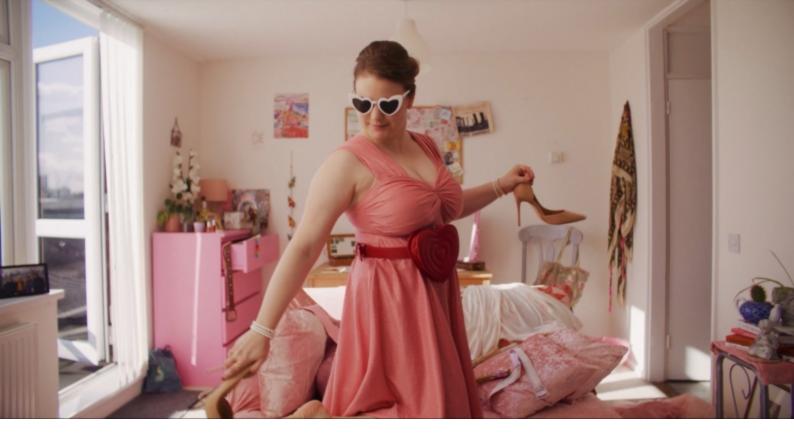


'this isn't horror enough for me', but the reality is that it sits more in the rom-com genre. When we were at the Oxford Shorts festival 2024, they programmed us in a section called "Romance is Dead...?" – that was really a perfect motto for the film.

**Kara:** We really focussed on making the comedy work in the script, that was really important to us, and left the horror and the romance to the visual and performance side of things where we got to bring in the actors and the art department. This was an extremely collaborative process. At every phase of development we put the script and the story in front of people to test it out. That fed into the whole process from pre-production to post. It meant we were never precious about making changes and adjustments, and the whole project really flourished that way.

**Sarah:** Also, a lot of *Raw Chemistry* had to be collaborative for me as a director because I was very pregnant by the time we were shooting. That was an interesting process because I had to let go of the reins a little bit. I came in with a vision and a direction of how things were going to go, but I also encouraged people to bring in their ideas as well. I don't usually have a perfectly thought out game-





plan per se, and I know that is different to how a lot of directors work where they know exactly what they want shot-by-shot and how it's going to look when it's done. I have a pretty good idea, but I am always open to things being changed.

**Kara:** The film feels so well-rounded from all the departments – the performances, the design, the edit, the writing, all of it feels very equal in terms of how much effort was put into it and that comes down to all of the heads of each

department being able to really run with it. The clarity of the vision for us meant that we were able to give everyone a very clear box to create in. We knew what we wanted to achieve, and we were open to how we actually achieved it which meant everyone could bring their own ideas to the table.

We're particularly impressed with your use of confined spaces - both AJ's flat and Tonya's restaurant. Could you discuss the technical





challenges of filming in these locations?
We're especially interested in how you
managed depth of field and framing to
enhance the sense of isolation versus threat.

**Sarah:** That was a big challenge. We had a small budget and so we were using the best spaces we could find but had to do a lot of problem solving about how to make them work. It was a good thing in the end, it lead to us creating this

very closed-in environment and in many ways a much more realistic version of living in London.

**Kara:** We purposely had very realistic, relatable spaces. There was such a heightened set and costume design, so having grounded and normal spaces was important. They needed to feel like real places that these women would live and work in on their own. It did mean that the technical challenges were vast, in our behind the



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scenes photos you see the chaos of kit and crew rammed into tiny spaces to be out of shot.

**Sarah:** We had to think a lot about the blocking, about what lenses we were going to use, and about how to light these spaces, especially since we were shooting in winter so the light was changing very quickly. We really had to work closely with the camera team, the directing team, and the producers to create a schedule that would get us through the changing light and allow us to get the shots we needed in the time we had and still tell the story well. The framing we used reflected classic rom-com framing especially inspired by the '80s and '90s. We wanted it to feel subconsciously like a vintage romantic-comedy, and that lead to the isolated feeling for the characters because we were shooting smaller, closer frames to make it feel a bit like you're watching on a vintage television.

**Kara:** Because we are all so used to seeing a specific framing stye in most romance films, when you add in the layer of horror it naturally feels jarring in a way you can't quite put your finger on. What we are used to seeing in that type of rom-com framing is two people falling in love,















and what you are actually seeing is danger. We really wanted to capitalise on that juxtaposition.

The film's nostalgic 1980s haze is a fascinating aesthetic choice, and creates a sort of *emotional buffer* for the audience. What influenced your choice of using 1980s aesthetics to frame this rather contemporary narrative? Was it purely a stylistic decision, or does it have thematic ties to the story, perhaps commenting on cultural attitudes of that time?

**Sarah:** Let's go back to any film in the '80s and '90s, like *Pretty in Pink*, or *She's All That*, that are supposed to have some sort of female redemptive plot or some hoorah for the girls and see if it still feels progressive today. Usually I watch them and know that I'm supposed to feel empowered but just feel like I'm not really rooting for anyone.

**Kara:** The last few years have revealed that although we are wearing new outfits women haven't progressed as much as we think in terms of our safety, how we are viewed by men, how we are treated in the workplace, and so on. Having a story that reflects modern dating dressed up as if it was in an earlier time gives the audience a chance to reflect on the similarities between then and now.





We immediately understand the tropes that are being represented by the costumes that the female characters are wearing, and maybe those outdated stereotypes aren't as far away as we think they are.

We're particularly drawn to how your film uses the zombie metaphor to explore real-life fears. Could you share more about *the metaphor's origins* and how it evolved during the storytelling process to reflect the

#### complexities of gendered violence?

**Kara:** The metaphor didn't evolve much at all, it was always clear. The zombie virus was a metaphor for the male characters' potential for violence towards women, and that was the root of the story from day one.

**Sarah**: It's a fantasy conversation, but allows people to talk about real things. The reference I gave the actors for the way the zombies behaved





was the feeling of being drunk. It was inspired by that feeling of danger when you're on a date with a guy and he has had a couple drinks and suddenly there is more risk. This is how a woman feels when a drunk guy is hitting on her, or on a date with her.

**Kara:** The key thing with the zombies is that they aren't really listening, it doesn't feel like you can communicate with them rationally. They are expecting you to behave a certain way and if you

don't behave that way it could become dangerous. They are unpredictable. They could be completely harmless, or they could attack you at any time.

**Sarah:** That's a big part of it. A lot of zombie-enthusiasts we ran this idea past had issues with our concept because typically when there are zombies in a horror film there is no doubt they will attack right away. But in the world of *Raw Chemistry*, like in the real world, you can come



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into contact with someone who feels dangerous or a situation that is hard to judge and if you are nice and placating you may end up being totally fine – attack is not guaranteed – but the danger is palpable and you don't know which way it's going to go.

Kara: The zombies are a way to discuss men's violence against women, and women's perception of the threat that men can pose, without casting blame or re-traumatising audiences. It's very much a buffer space where everyone can get on board with the idea that zombies are unpredictable and can be dangerous, and we don't exactly know how they will react. It's a way to come to the conversation indirectly so that people feel comfortable talking about it. Our zombie virus is an infection, it isn't necessarily something that people go and seek out, the people don't decide they are going to become zombies, it is something people are exposed to and that seeps in. In the same way that most of the time people don't decide to be misogynistic, it is a symptom of a larger cultural influence, how the people around you see the world, what people engage with online. Our hope with this message is that we can start to chip away at people's thinking and make audiences question

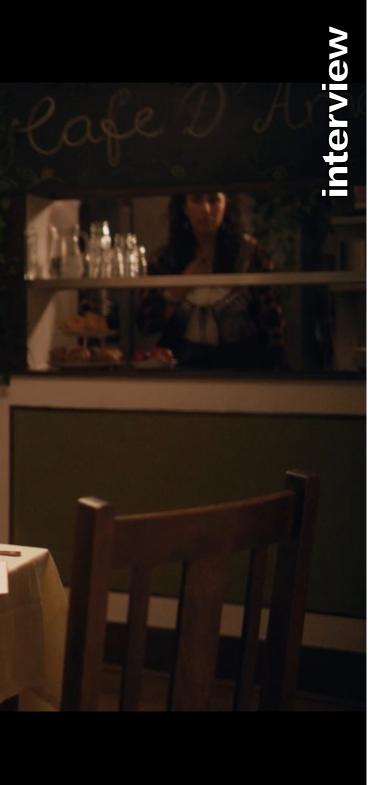








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why someone might think this way, why they might think this way, where they were influenced.

We're fascinated by your use of the 'romantic denial' concept. What influenced this particular psychological approach to AJ's character, and how does it speak to broader patterns of human behaviour in crisis situations?

**Kara:** It is a sort of weird domestic shut-down. AJ lives in this pink fluffy world, romanticising her life and escaping emotionally from the reality outside her front door. For me, that part came out of the experience of covid – trying to make isolation bearable.

**Sarah:** The "trad wife" trend is also a great realworld example of what we were playing with. We shot this before all of the "trad wife" accounts went fully viral, we were onto something that was just starting at the time and went on to become very wide spread. It is this obsession with the concept of domestic bliss, the white picket fence, and AJ found the last man on earth who could make it a reality. But she realises very quickly that it isn't reality at all, that ideal doesn't exist.





**Kara:** It's important that she was isolated when that was happening, it is an unhinged maladaptive coping mechanism to deal with being alone, vulnerable and scared. At the end of the film she is no longer feeding that fantasy because she has community and friendship.

Tonya's journey - running her restaurant while fending off zombie men - appears to be a

compelling metaphor for female resilience. Her path through the narrative, compared to AJ's, showcases different dimensions of women's experiences. What inspired her character's evolution? Did real-world situations or specific social challenges influence how you crafted her story? We're particularly interested in how you managed to balance her fortitude with moments of vulnerability to create such a





#### multi-layered character.

**Sarah:** Raw Chemistry is about people who were completely isolated finding one another, and it was important to us as writers that all of our main characters feel equally whole. We wanted to tell a story about people who were true to their identity in a world where that identity could make them vulnerable, and while AJ was very clear to us from

the start we went on to spend a lot of time figuring out Tonya.

**Kara:** For AJ we had a very clear aesthetic vision - the vintage, romantic look was always her vibe. In contrast, we left a lot of the characterisation and costuming for Tonya open to interpretation so how she manifested was very collaborative. What was most important to us was her motivation and



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creating her world and her business clearly, and that she clearly contrasted AJ's character.

**Sarah:** When we cast Lydia Bakelmun in the role of Tonya it really made a difference. Hers was a really special audition, she brought something that we weren't able to pin down about Tonya until we saw it – when we found Lydia it made it so much easier to really expand the character. We really wrote a lot of the role for her. Directorially, I knew that there may not be a lot going on the page in terms of dialogue but there is a lot going on under the surface for Tonya. I made sure when we were shooting that we prioritised a lot of coverage of Lydia's looks and little moments and we ended up using a lot of that in the final edit.

**Kara:** It was important for us to show that Tonya has a completely different outlook and experience of the zombie situation to AJ. We really spent time crafting the two different reactions to the zombies. AJ has decided to people-please, isolate, and try to get on with 'normal' life as best she can alone. On the other hand, Tonya has adjusted to new circumstances and stepped into her power, she is holding her own as the world collapses around her.











**Sarah:** For me, AJ represents that inner voice that says 'the world is falling apart, but you can still be perfect' and Tonya represents 'the world is falling apart, what can you make of the pieces.'

You've mentioned the importance of avoiding re-traumatisation while still allowing women to feel seen in your film. Could you expand on how this influenced your decisions during the scriptwriting and directing process? Were there specific scenes or moments where this balance was especially tricky to achieve?

**Sarah:** As a director, filming violence or intimacy can be the trickiest thing to navigate because you have to ask how much you really want to show, and what you don't want to show. I never felt that we needed to show a lot to get the point across in the film.

**Kara:** There is a scene between AJ and Duncan where they start to dance together, it is at the end of their date and Duncan has obviously transformed into a zombie but is still trying to fight it off. Watching that scene brings up deep sadness for me. There is so much being lost, so much being risked, there is danger and pain and also care. That was achieved through proximity, which creates a



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romantic closeness and an emotional intimacy. At the end of the scene we get the classic 'end of the rom-com' kiss, when the two romantic leads finally come together and have their first kiss. It ties into that classic '80s rom-com energy, and we feel the connection between them and also the fear and the pain because at that point Duncan has become a zombie and is a threat. We see his fight between toxic masculinity, his potential for violence, and the desire to be a good person. In terms of actually showing intimacy, the kiss is very simple - not much needed to be done in the performance because the references are really doing the storytelling in that moment.

**Sarah:** That is the scene I am most proud of. The way that scene was performed, the way it was shot, everything about that scene works for me in terms of our message and it feels like a new way of approaching that kind of intimate danger. There's empathy for everyone involved, and there is nothing shown in that romantic moment that would be re-enacting a moment of trauma. I really felt strongly that it would not help us get our point across to replay a traumatic moment, we didn't need to go down that route and show any non-consensual acts. We always talked about AJ

wanting the relationship so a big part of it is consent – she shows up to the restaurant, she decides to drink, she continues the date, she agrees to dance, she consents to the kiss that happens at the end.

**Kara:** Our film is not without violence, but it is used and filmed so specifically. In the moment after the kiss, Duncan and Tonya end up in physical confrontation. It is shot in a way that highlights the emotions that are going on as opposed to the physical violence itself. There is violence in our film, there is an attack and there is death – the last shot we have in this romantic restaurant scene is AJ covered in blood because she has just murdered her date. You don't actually see Duncan get stabbed, you just see AJs response. It isn't about how good we are at faking violence, it is about the emotional impact of violence that is being shown.

**Sarah:** As a director and writer I wanted the zombies to pull us away from reality a little so that when people are watching it they don't feel their own stuff. The point is that the trauma is always there, under the surface, we are still talking about traumatic situations and danger and violence, but







it is not being shown in the graphic way we usually see.

Raw Chemistry has been screened on numerous occasions, including your recent participation at OFFA 2024, Oakville and Rich Mix, London. What specific strategies or narrative choices did you use to ensure the film encourages reflection among male viewers? Have you received any particularly unexpected or impactful feedback from men after screenings?

**Sarah:** I was really taken back by a question we got at Oxford Shorts from a man who asked a question about the future of freedom of speech for women in the wake of Trumpism, specifically if we as women were worried about losing our freedom of speech.

He seemed genuinely concerned about it after watching our film. To me, that question was more about him seeing us as female filmmakers doing something different in the field and worrying that at some point we could be stopped, that films like ours wouldn't be able to be made. I've reflected on that question a lot. I think that means that *Raw* 

Chemistry, being so female-gaze oriented, was something he hadn't seen before and it really struck him. That was a really interesting response to have from a man watching our film.

**Kara:** Among our production team, our coproducer Mathias Swann has mentioned to me a couple of times now that he always tears up when watching the moment in the dance scene with Duncan and AJ, when Duncan says "I don't want to be like them" just as the zombie virus is really taking hold.

That choice to give Duncan pathos and to make him a real human who is trying to fight off zombification was us really signalling to the men in the room that we see them too. That moment is a sad loss, we are sad to be losing Duncan and this is not a flippant part of the story or a finger pointing moment.

The impact of that can be felt, we've had men engage with us in Q&As and after screenings, I had a lovely male audience member come up to me after one of our screenings and talk to me for a long time about the film. He wanted to talk further, ask questions, and that is the key thing — men are coming up and they want to engage with what we have made.



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**Sarah:** Yeah! That's the big thing, the film has not ostracised anyone and that was a huge goal for us from the beginning: to start conversations.

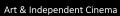
It's important to highlight that 50% of the team behind this project are women, including the lead roles of writer, director, and producer. Could you discuss how this balance impacted the production process, and do you think it influenced the way the story was told or how the characters were brought to life?

**Sarah:** As a woman working behind the camera, when I come on to a set that is 50% women I feel so confident that my voice will be heard. Also I was pregnant when we were filming, so I needed a lot more support than I normally would have. The team came in and everyone got behind me and really helped. I don't think that would have happened in many other spaces.

What an amazing accomplishment for me to be able to say that I directed this, that we finished shooting this, while I was pregnant. That is something I really noticed, that women running the project made it easy to have inclusivity and accessibility.















**Kara:** Nothing about the set itself, or about the way it ran, felt significantly different to any other set. And I think that is very important. We had a team of 50% women, 50% men, who worked together seamlessly, who were efficient, effective, collaborative, inclusive, and supportive. So people should hire women as much as they hire men. I think it's a shame that women still struggle to get into the industry. The fact that it is not more common to have projects with an equal number of women in roles behind the camera, the fact that this was a notable success to have achieved this 50/50 split, is a sign that there is still work to be done. I hope our project has helped everyone we worked with move forward in their careers and fill the industry with all these wonderful people we were able to work with. I would recommend everyone on our team, they were all amazing.

**Sarah:** I think part of the issue is that people tend to bring in who they know, and when that happens to be a lot of men who know a lot of men it becomes a cycle. There needs to be an awareness that if you're bringing in people you know, you have to be intentional about creating diversity in the team. There has to be accountability in all departments.







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**Kara:** There is something that was so powerful about having a diverse team, not just across genders but also so many international people, people from different cultural backgrounds, people from the LGBTQIA+ community. To be in a room with so many different perspectives and ideas and experiences made the project so much better.

Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your thoughts with us, Kara and Sarah. Finally, would you like to share with our readers any insights into your future projects? Are there any personal or political ideas you're eager to delve into further? Additionally, are there any lessons from *Raw Chemistry* that have influenced the direction you'd like to take moving forward?

**Kara:** We're both still very inspired by the complexities of the human experience, especially the human experience as a woman. We learned so much from *Raw Chemistry* – the learning curve on this project was so steep at every point, but in the most exciting way. From learning about prosthetics, shooting on location at night time with a pack of zombies, building such an





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aesthetic world, and then really finding that female gaze within a horror space. It was thrilling to work on this film.

**Sarah:** I've learned a lot about leadership. I learned how to be the kind of leader that I want to be. It taught me a lot about working with different people with different skillsets. I saw an interview with Ricky Gervais the other day where he was talking about creating as a process where you have this brilliant idea in your mind and then the work is getting rid of all the things that stop the brilliant thing from working.

Kara: I love that!

**Sarah:** I was thinking about that with *Raw Chemistry* and that was literally it. We had this idea: what if there were zombies, and all the women need to leave, and there is one woman who stays and she is dressed in retro garb and we weren't sure why she's dressed that way, but we knew she had to be. We had to go through this whole process asking what it was about this idea that we were so attracted to, and get rid of all the things that kept the idea from working. We had to get back to the core of it again and again.

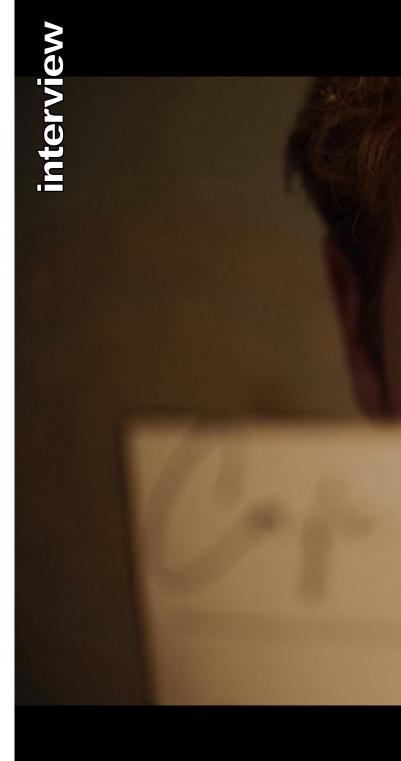


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**Kara:** That process is definitely something I'm going to take forward. We're working on a few new projects now, including a short that was written by our co-producer on *Raw Chemistry*, Mathias Swann. It is about long covid and invisible illness. It is a much more naturalistic film, much closer to real life, and also explores themes of isolation and feeling a need for community and not necessarily being able to experience that in a normal way.

**Sarah:** I'm interested in exploring the postpartum experience, and am developing a film concept around that at the moment. I'm so proud of the film we made, and it is just the beginning of us telling stories.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com









# Linda Covit & Koa Padolsky

The film on "Lord Stanley's Gift Monument" (Ottawa) by Covit / Nguyen / NORR, features captivating images of this artwork-monument in the public square. Sited in the nation's capital, steps away from the Parliament buildings, the War Memorial and from where the original cup was gifted, it is accompanied by commentary by the artist Linda Covit, Mona Hakim (art historian, critic, independent curator) and Jean-Yves Bastarache (public art consultant). Context, design and historical relevance are explored in this powerful commemoration of one of Canada's most cherished national emblems.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Linda and Koa, and welcome to WomenCinemakers. For this special edition we have selected The Legacy, an extremely interesting short film that produced by Linda and directed by Koa, that can be viewed at https://vimeo.com/365670006. The monument's location seems to create a powerful dialogue with Parliament and the War Memorial. We're particularly impressed

with the synergy between the monument and its surroundings in Ottawa. Linda, could you share your thoughts on how the location influenced the design process? And Koa, how did you use cinematic techniques to emphasize this relationship?

LC: The development of site responsive sculptural installations is central to my art practice. This influences both the artwork's physical features and how it engages with its environment. Here, we are in downtown







Ottawa, Canada's capital, a setting steeped in history with many important memorials and buildings just steps away. While contemporary in approach we took into account the built and historic context into which the installation was to be inserted. For example, the maximum length and width of the installation were determined by the Design Brief. However, the size of the largest element was elaborated with respect to the heights of the buildings along both sides of the site, and that it was in the midst of a pedestrian mall. While developing the Cup element I saw it would be interesting to position it so that its two openings would frame the memorial, providing a new visual link. While the installation's iconic nature distinguishes it from the existing urban streetscape and adjacent structures the shape and materials chosen offer a welcoming, harmonious integration.

**KP**: The relationship between Linda's public art installation and the historical significance of its

location was always important to portray in the film. The monument is located in heart of Ottawa's historic parliamentary district, steps away from Parliament Hill, the War Memorial, the Chateau Laurier Hotel and the site where Lord Stanley, the Governor General at the time, gifted the cup to the game of hockey over 150 yrs ago. From a cinematic standpoint, I wanted to create a sense of context, using quick establishing shots of familiar landmarks to Canadians and then introducing Linda's work within that space. Original score, with no dialogue. I didn't want to reveal the monument in it's entirety at the start; just offer a glimpse of its form, juxtaposing textures and shapes to allow viewer to settle in to place. It was a freezing mid-winter shoot when we shot the opening sequence (-25C); there is something about the cold blue morning sky, wisps of vapour coming from rooftops, Canadian flags whipping in the wind, and pedestrians bundled up walking past and even through the



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monument to start our interaction with it.

Context plays a central role in the film and the artwork. Lord Stanley's Cup has become almost mythological in hockey culture. How did you each work to balance its sporting legacy with its cultural significance?

LC: The Stanley Cup symbolizes hockey's achievements. The sculptural installation commemorates the original gift and honours the winners. Thirty-nine black granite discs - the size of a hockey puck - are scattered across the Rink, embedded flush in the ground. Each is engraved with the name of a hockey team that made it to the Finals: 14 are polished matte, representing the Challenge Cup era (1893 -1915); 25 are mirror finished, representing the NHL from 1915 to 2017, the year the monument was inaugurated. The Stanley Cup has become a ritual for celebration. We wanted to incorporate this feeling into the installation, inviting the visitor into the Cup itself, to









sit on the puck/bench, to walk on the rink amongst the engraved pucks. I think this aspect is successful, the installation has become a place where people line up to take selfies in front of the Cup or inside it.

**KP**: When starting this collaboration with Linda, it became clear how the game of hockey and

the Stanley Cup trophy were both revered by Canadians of all ages and backgrounds. I wanted the film to add a layer to our understanding to and appreciation for the nation's love of hockey but from a different angle. Linda's installation invites visitors to walk through it and consider the design elements and how they relate to Lord Stanley's





cup and it's cultural impact. I wanted the film to invite the same curiosity for the audience.

The design team includes multiple creatives. How did collaboration within the team shape the final vision? And Koa, how did you ensure the film captured this collaborative spirit?

collaborating with Joe Moro from NORR and Bao Nguyen, a landscape architect. I discussed my ideas with them as they developed, appreciated having their feedback and took into account their comments in refining the final proposition. NORR was determined to win this competition, the firm was led by hockey





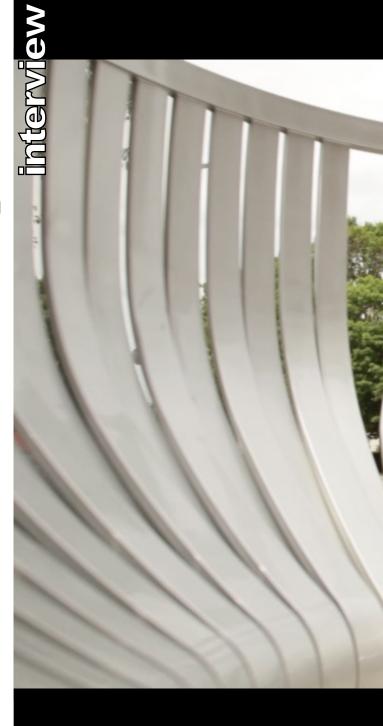


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aficionados. When we started working together, it was admitted that I was not their first choice for the artist on their team - they had initially asked Frank Gehry who declined. This gave me a chuckle, thought it was pretty good being second to him, and this set the tone for our amicable collaboration. As a self-identified "hockey dad" Joe was able to council me on the finer points of the sport in relation to my artistic vision and steer me away from some aesthetic ideas that would not be appropriate in this context. I loved the idea of using stainless steel lines to evoke traces of skate marks on the rink. Bao developed the graphic design for this. Jonathan Hughes (NORR) helped smooth out any technical issues associated with the monument's development and assured we were on track with our goals.

**KP**: Having spent several months with Linda and her team capturing the artistic process on film, I wanted to show a glimpse into the precision, care and craftsmanship that goes into her installations. Her work was a pleasure to film and we took our time to









INEMAKERS



find the best way to bring it to life. I owe thanks to the my immensely creative film collaborators:

Cinematographer, Philippe Lavalette, Gaffer/Grip,

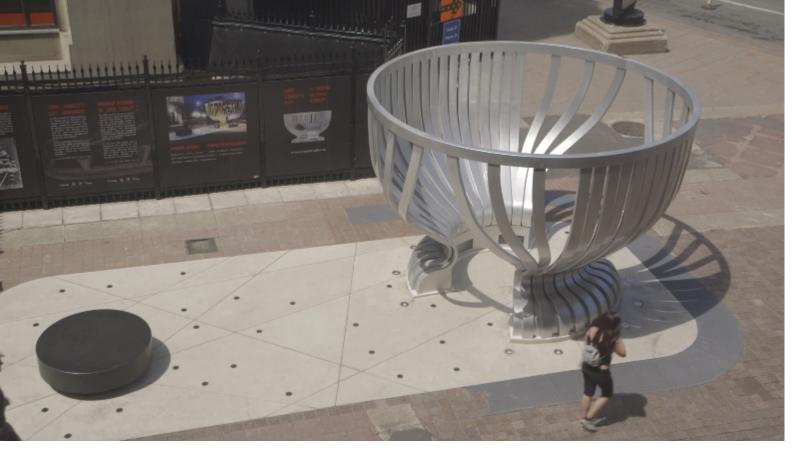
Olivier Leger, Additional camera operator, Jeff Lively and music composer, Nico Willems.

We definitely love the way light and shadow interact with the monument in the film, creating a sense of movement and emotion. Linda, was this dynamic interplay an intentional aspect of the monument's design? Did you envision how natural light would shift across the artwork throughout the day and seasons? Koa, how did you use cinematography—such as timing, angles, or lighting techniques—to highlight these features and bring the monument to life on screen?

LC: Yes, absolutely! A play of light and shadow is an important element in the sculptural composition.

During the day sunlight streams through the Cup casting changing patterns of light and shadow across





and through the site while the soft polished lustre of the various materials reflects and refracts it. I often design permeable structures to filter the natural light, drawing continually changing shadows on the ground as ephemeral traces of each hour, day and season. This was also one of the reasons I approached Philippe Lavalette, a cinematographer known for filming "intimate documentaries". I had seen his

camerawork in À tout hasard (Suzanne Guy), a series of films on various artists. His camera entered and surrounded each artwork and played with light, composing memorable poetic images.

**KP**: I love that we had the opportunity to shoot the art installation in different seasons and at different times of the day. Linda's exploration





of the original symbol of hockey excellence in her work invited me to play with how the form is presented cinematically. In the summer light, we played with camera moves gliding through the cup, catching reflections on passing cars and shadow time lapse. In the winter, we were able to showcase the beauty of the lighting design; we racked focus from the Christmas lights to the graceful lines of the cup, lit from the ground and shot low angle the puck bench lit by a deep ice blue at the base.

I didn't include any footage or stills of the Stanley Cup - as if it needs no introduction.

There is a nice moment in the film where Linda refers to how people think of the Stanley Cup







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now and traces the shape in the air with her hands, reminding the audience that the cup in the installation is about the original Lord Stanley's Gift.

# The public square setting presents unique challenges for both art installation and filming. What were the major obstacles each of you faced?

LC: The location is in the 17.5 m wide Sparks Street Mall. The dimensions of the artwork site took into consideration the required access route for the fire, emergency and service vehicles, snow removal, and adjacent restaurant patios. While I immediately saw the allotted narrow and long art site as rink-shaped, it did constrain the dimensions of the sculptural elements. The other factor we needed to negotiate was the maze of below-ground utilities. However, I welcome the challenges that come with a public art project as this can lead to unexpected and interesting design solutions.







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**KP**: As with all challenges presented in creative endeavours, the art is overcoming them with ingenuity. We carefully planned but also left room for inspiration on the day. We were a small, nimble crew with experience and ingenuity. For example, while our budget couldn't afford dollies and camera stabilizers, the team rigged a mono pod for the shot travelling through the installation. We took advantage of every corner of the site, sought permission to film from office windows, and allowed for moments of inspiration. One of my favourite shots occurred when we were taking a break. We had shot in the AM light and were waiting for the sun to lower in sky for afternoon beauty shots. The cinematographer was watching the shadows on the cup and had an idea to capture timelapse. That memorable timelapse shot ended up in the film.

We really appreciate how the film explores the monument's relationship with passersby. Linda, how did public interaction factor into your









# design, and Koa, what drew you to capture these moments?

LC: Transforming a site into a personal experience and acknowledging the presence of the viewer is typical in my art practice. Here, the Cup has two openings, offering access within;

the Bench invites the passerby to sit in the installation, look at the Cup and through to the War Memorial and beyond; the pucks embedded in the Rink encourage people to walk in the installation reading the engraved names.

**KP**: The public has a really interesting





relationship with the monument and I wanted to show this interaction in the film. The cup invites the passerby to walk through it along their journey, deep in their thoughts. School outings came to the monument to learn and appreciate. Others would sit on the puck bench to eat their lunches or read the details on the

pucks embedded the ice. I used a mixture of angles to observe the observer but also to be immersed with first person POV so that the viewer could appreciate the experience.

Could you both address the significance of scale, Linda in the monument's physical



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presence, and Koa in how you chose to frame it? Linda, the monument creates an interesting tension between human scale and monumental presence – it feels both approachable and awe-inspiring. How did you arrive at these specific dimensions, and what role did the surrounding architecture play in your decisions? And Koa, your camera work seems to constantly shift between details and sweeping architectural shots. Could you walk us through your thought process in choosing these varying perspectives, and how you worked to convey the true sense of the monument's physical presence through the lens? We're particularly interested in how you dealt with the challenge of translating a threedimensional spatial experience into the twodimensional medium of film.

LC: The sculptural installation is scaled to the







SINEMAKERS



designated art site, its environment and the public. Being in a pedestrian mall I didn't want any part of the installation to be overpowering. The monumentality of the Cup focuses on and celebrates Lord Stanley's gift, affirms its place, and makes it visible from passing cars, pedestrians and cyclists. But it also has a more intimate presence, welcoming the visitor inside. The Bench acts as a counterpoint and offers seating, each providing a view onto the other. The rink unites the whole, creating an experiential public space.

**KP**: To balance the cultural symbolism of the monument with an appreciation for the excellence in its design, it was important to play with scale and perspective. We shot the opening sequence in the winter, choosing long shots and wide angles to establish a sense of place by day. I wanted the audience to get their bearings in relation to key landmarks in

the nation's capital. Once the film establishes context, I played with different cinematic techniques to allow the viewer to experience the monument from first person immersive but also included different angles to bring attention to the relationship with the surrounding architecture. The strong narrative provided by Linda Covit, Jean-Yves Bastarache and Mona Hakim led the way. Our cinematographer, Philippe Lavalette, has a remarkable eye and with his team used creative techniques to achieve the look we were after.

We're particularly impressed with the monument's ability to evoke both a sense of the past and a forward-looking optimism.

Linda, can you elaborate on the design choices — such as materials and shapes — that helped achieve this balance? Koa, how did you ensure that the film's narrative and visual storytelling captured this duality in a





## way that resonated with viewers, both emotionally and intellectually?

LC: The materials and colours used evoke the essential icons of hockey - poured in place white cement for the rink, black Cambrian granite for the pucks and puck-shaped bench, silver painted metal for the Stanley Cup. The engraved pucks recount the history since the original cup was gifted.

KP The very mention of the Stanley Cup to most Canadian audiences evokes a sense of reverence and delight - of childhood dreams, fond family memories and the pursuit of excellence; Linda's design leans into its magical qualities and I worked with that - showcasing her intentions through cinematic techniques.

We worked closely with composer Nico Willems to produce an original score that felt contemporary, complex, energetic and optimistic.









We really appreciate the commentary provided by the experts in the film — Mona Hakim, art historian, critic and independent curator — and Jean-Yves Bastarache, public art consultant.

How did you, Koa, decide on their contributions, and Linda, how did their

insights align with or expand your vision as an artist?

LC: Mona has extensive knowledge of my work having previously written articles for several brochures, magazines and the monograph *Linda Covit*, les éditions Plein sud (2014). I



Women Cine<mark>makers</mark>

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public art, and worked in Quebec's 1% programme (Integration of Art and Architecture) for many years. He has often given me insightful comments on works in progress. In the interview he frames the installation within an international context and identifies why Lord Stanley's Gift Monument has successfully achieved a balance of contemporary aesthetics, modern technology and this immense cultural icon. (The installation was accompanied by a dedicated website with in depth information on the history of the Stanley Cup and the teams that vied for this prize, photos of the players and events, and spoken anecdotes, in both French and English. Unfortunately this is no longer being hosted online).

They both elaborate on aspects of my practice that are important to me. For example, Mona talks about how I was able to meet the challenge of commemorating a sports icon while retaining my own signature, my way of working, my approach. She discusses how there is always an interaction

always find her particularly discerning. In the film she discusses the Ottawa project within the context of my art practice, whether gallery installations or site responsive public art.

Jean-Yves is well versed in the currents of



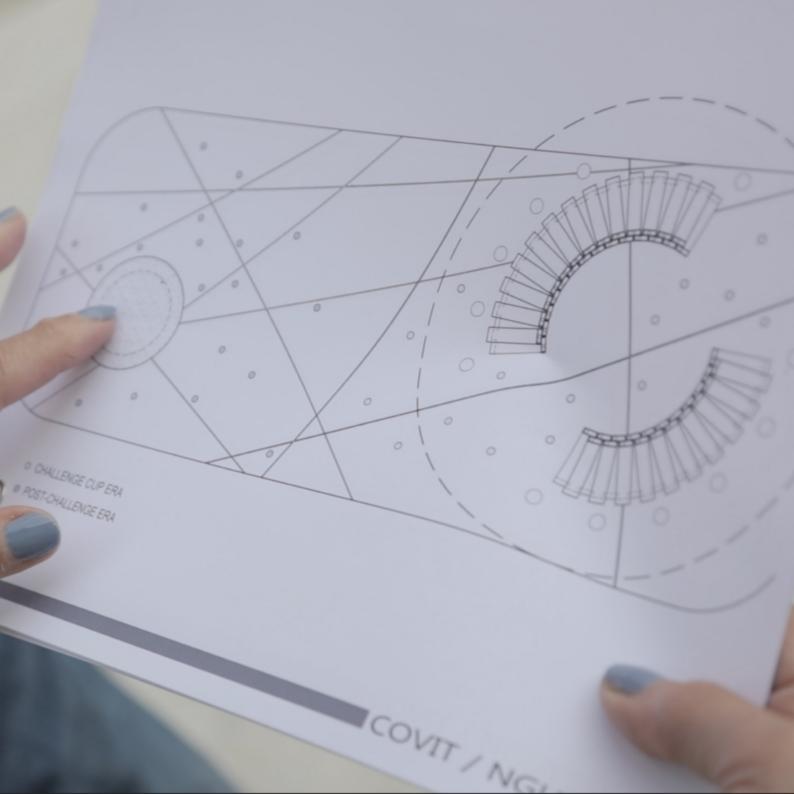
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between outside and inside, always an open perspective. Jean-Yves talks about how the installation can be contemplated from afar and appreciated up close, how it is well integrated into the urban landscape, framed by old stone and brick buildings - a harmonious contrast of contemporary and built heritage. I find these comments validating. As well, some of their observations help me see aspects I may not have verbalized, and show the links common to all my artworks.

KP Linda and I considered many ways to narrate the film but wanted to keep the film short and succinct so we identified key points we wanted to cover in the film. Linda would speak to her design and process and we loved the idea of including an expert or two to speak about her as an artist and why the installation works as public art. Linda suggested Jean-Yves and Mona as contributors and we scheduled the shoot day for all three interviews in one location in Montreal. It also gave us a wonderful











opportunity to make the film bilingual, Mona and Jean-Yves were most comfortable doing their interviews in French. Linda is bilingual but we thought the balance lay in having her narrate in English. We prepared questions for everyone in advance; their answers were eloquent and succinct; they really helped shape the narrative. We had already shot at least half of footage (construction, installation and opening sequence). Following the interviews we had planned to shoot the monument again in the winter - giving us another opportunity to capture coverage to best support the narrative.

Finally, with The Legacy, you've both contributed to an ongoing dialogue about history, memory, and identity. What do you see as the lasting impact of this film and the monument it celebrates?

LC: The large chaliced form, monumental in size,

evokes the original Dominion Hockey Challenge Cup gifted by Lord Stanley in Ottawa on March 18, 1892 and the current Stanley Cup as it came to be known. It is the very essence of this cup - a trophy that speaks of hockey and of the passion it incites in its scores of fans, a repository of names and dates documenting each series' win - that informs the sculptural installation.

The creation of a monument to commemorate
Lord Stanley's historic gift and the excitement of
the game of hockey began with a small group of
citizens who formed LSMMI. Their vision and
work to raise funds, obtain a prominent site and
the necessary permissions, etc. etc., together with
Barry Padolsky, Professional Advisor and Project
Manager, who oversaw all aspects of the artwork
competition needs to be acknowledged. The
resulting sculptural installation, donated to the
City of Ottawa, celebrates this, by inviting the
visitor into the artwork to share an important part



of our collective history and taking its place among the many symbols in Ottawa significant to our Canadian identity and culture.

KP The Legacy, I hope, stands as a celebration of Linda's beautiful and evocative tribute to Lord Stanley's original gift. For those who have the opportunity to visit the site, the film adds another layer of contemplation. For some, it's a film about honouring hockey history, for others, it's about the power of public art. Having made the film, I better understand now how revered the Cup is to Canadians, what it symbolizes for so many. But I also have an appreciation for public art, the work that goes into and the dialogue it sparks.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com







# Marcia Peschke

Seek Body Contour is a movement and poetry short film, exploring trauma, healing, and reconnection through the body. The film is told through the composition of vignettes and is inspired by somatic dance practice. It is deeply concerned with how woman of color navigate social and cultural surveillance, male validation, and a myriad of other standards and demands. The contours referenced in the title refer to the lines that map the experiences and emotions for how woman live in their bodies. All of the woman who participated in the creation of the film (currently living in South Korea as foreigners) have contributed by sharing how they disturb, complicate, excite, and add weight to gendered spaces.



An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemaker@berlin.com

Hello Marcia and welcome to WomenCinemakers. For this special edition we have selected Seek Body Contour, an extremely movement and poetry short film. We are thoroughly impressed by how you've woven the vignettes into a cohesive narrative landscape, wherein somatic dance practices take centre stage while preserving each performer's intrinsic authenticity. When walking our readers through the genesis Seek Body Contour, could you share your motivations for choosing somatic dance as the primary medium for conveying trauma and healing?

Marcia Peschke: Seek Body Contour is a short film about how women of colour can explore healing and reconnection with the body through a movement practice that is explored in community with each other. It is my





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directorial debut in film and I'm very excited to explore the language of filmmaking. My concern for the themes in the film is very personal and are also informed by my creative background. My experience in theatre has given me access to texts and performances from a variety of theatre makers and genres. In the context of South Africa, I have always felt that there is an activist sensibility embedded in a lot of the work produced during Apartheid and now into our young democracy. I was born before South Africa's entry into democracy, and I grew up experiencing complicated feelings towards what restorative justice should look like. This idea of advocacy and experiencing injustice has always been present in my life and as a woman of colour, it is something I can never remove myself from. South Africa also has high rates of genderbased violence and femicide so these are also conditions that heighten and inform my experiences as a woman. After years of producing work that explores the idea of women as sites of violence, I also wanted to pay tribute to the joy and healing we pursue. It felt natural to explore this through the medium of film. A lot of my own healing was experienced through movement and dance forms like physical theatre







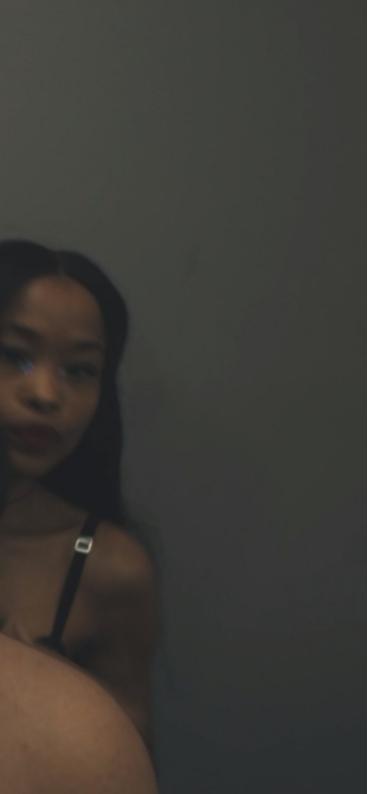




and contact improvisation. Both forms really give me permission to freely explore myself and to be in touch with others. I have so much more awareness of my body and it made me consider very carefully how I communicate my needs. I have an interest in pursuing Dance Movement therapy and that comes from my experience with contact improvisation. I believe that the body and mind are connected and that an injury to the mind can also manifest in the physical body. Somatic dance practices focus on selfawareness and connection with the body. There are different movement therapies or methods that emerge from somatic dance but they all focus on creating an environment that is free of the hierarchies that exist in traditional dance spaces, and instead allow the participant to sense and discover what their body is capable of.

This is interesting for me because I focus on how people are socialized and this type of somatic practice makes us aware of our physical movements and how we are conditioned to move. In my movement practice I imagine the history of a person (their memories, movements and thoughts) to be like the contour lines on a topographic map. Contour lines define the shape of an object, or the terrain on a map. Somatic dance practices give us the wonderful opportunity to 'map' our experiences, to





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find joy in moving differently, and to share movements that have meaning. Prior to shooting, I held workshops with the cast and it felt natural to develop the story in this way.

We are particularly impressed by the collaboration with womxn of colour *living* as foreigners in South Korea. In the creation of Seek Body Contour, the sense of community among the womxn involved seems integral to the film's narrative and spirit. How did your own experiences as a traveler and expatriate influence the way you built and nurtured this collaborative space? Was this process reflective of your broader journey in seeking and sustaining community across cultures?

Marcia Peschke: I've always had an adventurous spirit and I'm always led by my curiosity and desire to experience myself in interesting ways. I equally have a need to feel safety and security, especially in my personal and creative connections. As a child, both magazines and newspapers helped me to access people, places, and stories I longed to see. I'd cut these out and keep them as references of things I wanted to learn about. I later pursued Drama studies at university level and relied

heavily on collaborating with different departments and people. In theatre (especially where you have to be resourceful with funding) you are always in conversation with others whether it be workshopping a script, sourcing materials, or even getting family to help make costumes. By my late twenties, I completed my Master's Degree in Drama and Performance Studies and was set to advance further in my career as a lecturer. I however made the big jump, moving from everything that was familiar to living in South Korea and Thailand. I was challenged in every way, having to reevaluate the perspectives I had of myself and others. It meant walking into creative spaces (sometimes being the only black/brown woman of colour) and really being open to showing others that I am a complex human being capable of expressing myself in interesting ways. In Bangkok, Thailand, I had the privilege of encountering Spine Party Movement (a dance based collective), and Rebel Art Space (artists focused on social activism). These spaces emphasised the building of community, safety in encountering each other, and allowing for diversity in voices. Dance communities, particularly those that focus on internal awareness and connection between the mind





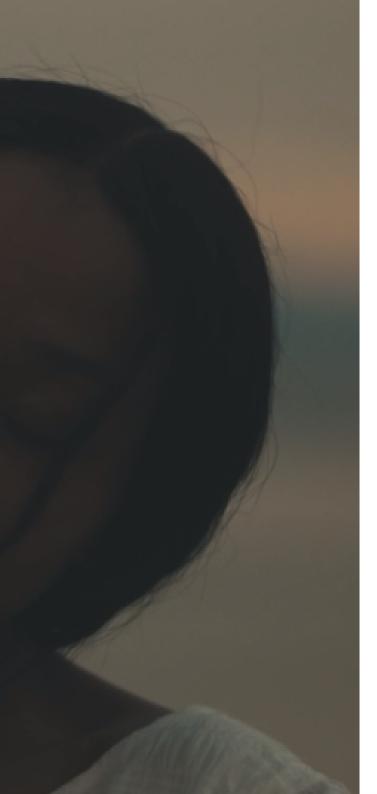




and body, have informed my practice as a director and overall, as a creator. I am at times endlessly aware of my foreignness, and frustrated with that, but I also practice being open and perceiving. I could say that these two states may come into play when I direct or collaborate with others. I believe wholeheartedly in advocating for my needs and the needs of others. The process for filming Seek Body Contour involved weeks (prior to shooting) of workshopping and choreographing with the cast. This meant creating an environment that would allow them to share their personal experiences, and to also have debriefing moments to safely withdraw from the heaviness of the themes explored. Though each experience is unique in its own way, we found connection through our experiences as women on foreign soil. What is important is to honour the experiences of people who are different from you, and to honour and give space to the social and cultural experiences that exist in the telling of their stories. I am eternally grateful to Simone Govender, Boipelo Seswane and Hannah Esther Janko-Barrios, my cast, for being on this journey with me. Our paths have crossed because we are all united in allowing ourselves to thrive.

Community often plays a vital role in both personal growth and creative expression. Do you find that living abroad has deepened your connection to

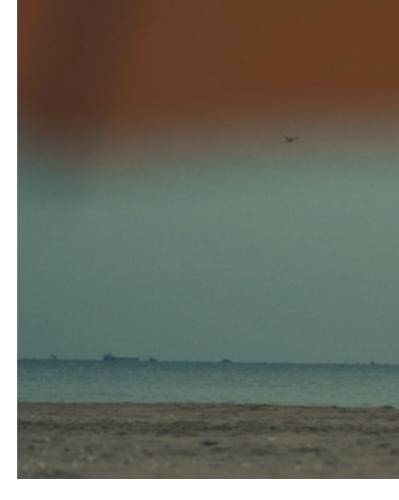




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## others in similar circumstances, or has it reshaped your sense of belonging altogether?

Marcia Peschke: Living abroad has helped me reconsider what I imagine home to mean. Home has had to become something that is inside of me. Of course, I long for things that are familiar but the adventure of new encounters has also been rewarding. Being comfortable with this comes after years of moving through connections that last and moving past those that don't align with my values. I've been with different communities and I'm more flexible as a result. I've come across other travelling performers/ expats who are hungry to share their talents. There exists this understanding that you need to put yourself out there and collaborative projects will find you. The creative world also feels tricky to navigate. I recently had surgery after struggling with an injury and the experience has been profound. I've had to focus on recovery and rebuilding my relationship with my body and I've also had to experience insecurity in creative connections as a result of less productivity. I will accept that this experience has asked me to be more graceful with myself when doing creative work. Each medium I work with has a space in my life. I may



spend a few weeks writing a script and, in the months, to follow I may be working on concepts for dance or film. The concern I've had with constantly participating in and producing performances has lessened and I feel I have connections that respect that the act of thriving as an artist also involves having to attend to major life commitments. Living abroad demands that you grow and I think you naturally connect with





people that feel like a community.

Trauma and healing are central themes in your work. How did you navigate the potential risks of representation when dealing with such sensitive personal experiences?

**Marcia Peschke**: I constantly ask myself why I am doing a project or why I am exploring these themes (trauma and healing). I draw from my own

thoughts on representation, and how I have responded to my suffering by creating boundaries for myself and others. In the production of Seek Body Contour, I did this in very concrete ways, protecting participants by providing them with detailed conceptual documents, and conversations about how we would use words and the body as text for the film. We dealt with difficult themes, sometimes talking about



idealized femininity and our bodies as sites of violence and surveillance. Using the body as text asks for a lot of vulnerability. During the rehearsal process I also used a form of dance called Contact Improvisation as a method for developing and exploring the body in healing. Contact Improvisation works with points of contact and uses shared weight and non-verbal communication between two (or more) bodies. Each person can explore their own internal feelings within what they are capable of. Women of colour are often positioned in relation to something else and in very generalised ways. On film, Seek Body Contour explores and challenges this by allowing its characters to experience their feelings (sometimes with doubt or joy), and finding community through (safe) touch. It celebrates each woman and positions each woman as worthy of receiving love and abundance. It works with beautiful images but is also sobering, giving time for all of the feelings to be expressed. I gave this project the time it needed so that I could safely work with the cast and avoid being lazy with their stories. The process mattered as much as the final product. It goes a long way to actively listen to people and to allow the project to be beneficial to them.

Your film is rich in metaphor and symbolism. Were there *specific images or movements* that emerged as central motifs, and how did they evolve during the process?

Marcia Peschke: In addition to having a background in theatre, I am also a poet with a research interest in autoethnography (a research method using self-narrative) so I actively enjoy creating images and inspiring feelings. There are a number of visual motifs in the film. These include the use of the colour red and the use of water. A few years ago, I came across a research article that included the experience of nurses working in hospitals (for non-white patients) under the South African Apartheid government. The article mentioned how (in one under-resourced hospital) blood-stained blankets were used to cover new mothers or how their newborns were washed in the same bathwater. I feel like these conditions speak to the idea of inheriting and sharing traumatic experiences. In post-apartheid South Africa there are still racial constructs that have very real consequences.. In the film the characters wash red cloth in water filled basins, signalling the physical and emotional labour experienced by women. In another shot, the act of moving in water becomes meditative and slowed down. And



Art & Independent Cinema

the repetitive scrubbing motion is the battle against being subjected to racialized and gendered forms of violence. In the film water is both healing and destructive. I'd also like to mention that the umbrella in the film was given to me by one of the voice over artists. It was completely by chance that it is the colour of turmeric because turmeric is referenced in one of the cast member's poems. The dance she does in the beach scene feels more significant because of this. We initially rehearsed with a small blue umbrella (picked because it was what I had and was more convenient to carry) so that was a happy accident.

Another motif that emerges in the film is the idea of surveillance. I currently live in South Korea and there is both heavy surveillance in public and (with the rise of deep fake crimes) online. I immediately turned to the idea of using a photo booth as a location. They are mostly easily accessible in urban areas, and while they are fun to visit, they also remind me of how we internalize being looked at. It involves a lot of performance, prepping yourself before the shoot and gazing into the mirror before deciding on poses. I am also



interested in the performance of femininity (as a component of desirability) and this particular scene is influenced by DV8's *Enter Achilles* and its commentary on power dynamics. So, I think this part of the film addresses the objectification of women and the act of facing that. And finally, there are a number of times the cast make physical contact with

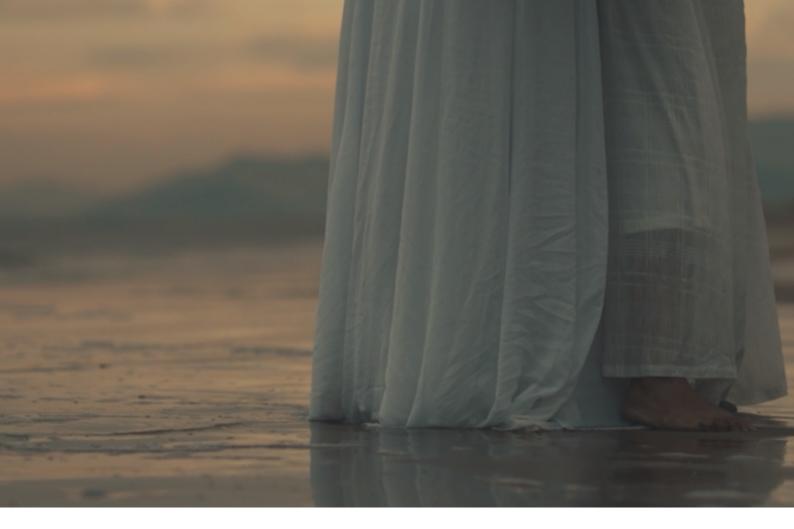




each other. During the rehearsal process we engaged in a number of game exercises such as moving with a football and passing it to one another in playful ways. Encountering each other in interesting ways made the movements together feel more authentic as it was supported by the

idea of being in community while exploring the themes in that moment.

We found the *interplay between movement* and poetry in the film particularly compelling. What was your process for integrating these two elements seamlessly?



Marcia Peschke: I've performed (live) with poets, and when they speak, I focus on observing and responding to the voice of the poem. To avoid superficial movements, I focus on what the lines say and how what I do complements the theme/s in the poem. I used the same process in selecting music for the film and chose pieces that were supportive of what I was trying to say. The texts

used in the film (some already in existence and some written for the film) are rich in imagery and are written as personal reflections so they support the movement pieces in the film. The ideas explored in the texts also served as prompts for movement games or were created after expressing internal emotions through dance. I spent years writing poetry before deciding to perform my



work on stage. Live performance makes me more conscious of how I deliver the text and the effect it has on the audience receiving it. In the film, I was intentional about how much text would be used, when to give space between stanzas and how certain words or phrases

might be used to draw attention to certain

moments, feelings or images.



Creative journeys are often marked by pivotal experiences that leave a lasting impact. Are there any specific moments, encounters, or artistic experiences from your past that have fundamentally influenced how you create and conceptualise your work today? How have these moments manifested in your filmmaking style or vision?

Marcia Peschke: The most important experience for me was reading film magazines! As a teenager, I'd go into a local stationery and bookstore called CNA and I would read through magazines like Total Film and Empire. Reading through reviews, interviews and film lists made me realise there was so much more than what I had access to. When I had enough money saved up, I bought a few issues and I still have magazines from the early 2000s. This part of my life simply gave me the opportunity to learn about film. I've also attended film festivals for a number of years and this allows me to see stylistic choices that are different from those made in commercial films. In terms of my viewing experience, I have been deeply affected by a number of films. The sense of longing and intimacy in Roma (2018) gave me a sense of capturing how a character sees the world. The restraint and

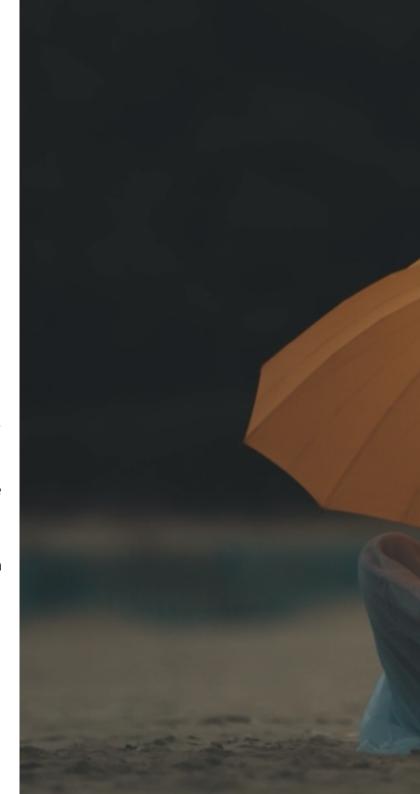


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quietness expressed by Yalitza Aparicio's Cleodegaria reminds me of what it means to observe. It also helps me connect to how the characters fill in and give meaning to space. I have a similar connection to Beasts of the Southern Wild (2012) and cinematographer Ben Richardson depicting the world of the film through the character Hushpuppy's eyes. Observation is something I practice as a dancer. I observe other dancers. I read their bodies in that space and I think this is a practice I want to continue in film. I am also very interested in soundscapes and for that reason, I'm drawn to the use of music in film. The music in films like 28 Days Later (2002) and Under the Skin (2013) are outstanding for me because they so deeply affect the storytelling and make the experience of both films more captivating. These are just some of the few experiences that have shaped my vision as a director.

Empowerment and social transformation seem to be at the heart of your creative philosophy. In particular, *performance as a form of disobedience* is a compelling concept, especially in contexts where norms and expectations are deeply entrenched. Could











you elaborate on how you use performance to disrupt or challenge societal and cultural norms, particularly in relation to identity, desirability politics, and gender-based violence?

Marcia Peschke: Performance as a form of disobedience is a concept I've been exploring mainly in the realm of performance art (live art) and it's possibly made its way into my writing as well. As a drama student I was exposed to the likes of Bertolt Brecht, and performance artists such as Orlan, Marina Abramovic, and Tracey Rose. Performance artists in particular use their bodies in exploratory ways, engaging in encounters that are ritualistic, political in nature and even confrontational. The same concerns are explored in feminist perspectives, using performance art which subverts audience expectations (in terms of what the experience of performance should be). This is probably why I'm so drawn to the form. Coming across Tracey Rose's Span II was significant for me because it confronted the racialized and objectified body, even making reference to the reclining female nude in classical artwork. In this particular piece, Rose, who is seated upright, knots pieces of her own shaved hair. I was attracted to how this was in defiance to the pliant nature of the reclining nude, and in turn, an engagement with the





Art & Independent Cinema

interaction of gender and racism. Performance art in its very nature challenges societal and cultural norms. It's also brought me to desirability politics and its impact on my personhood. I am a biracial black and white woman with light skin privilege and I also visibly have proximity to Africanness and this makes for complicated experiences. I'm very aware of how I am perceived and in performance I can experiment with audience perception, and have power over my identity and representation even when my body is vulnerable. In terms of tackling gender-based violence, this is difficult and so pervasive. I'm reminded of Lee Chang Dong's Poetry (2010), an observation of violence within a community more interested in maintaining the status quo. The treatment of the elderly character Mija within this community shows how we enable the condition of women as sites of violence. In my work, I've always tried to address this by looking at victim and perpetrator narratives, and how the way we are socialised plays into these narratives. The stories and people become more intimate when I look at them in this way. The very idea of situating the body as a source of knowledge or knowing is a powerful act. To engage in the act of dance,



sometimes lifting one's arm, moving quickly and then slowly, when we are expected to occupy very small spaces is also in defiance of systems that rely on submission to patriarchal norms.

The notion of 'disturbing' gendered spaces is provocative. In particular, your reference to male validation suggests a critical engagement





with patriarchal frameworks. What specific artistic strategies did you employ to deconstruct and challenge these systemic pressures?

**Marcia Peschke**: Patriarchal systems affect all people. Men are framed within gaining worthiness and social capital by dominating spaces and

bodies (especially those that need to be disciplined). As a director, there are obviously power dynamics that favour the decisions I make and for the sake of managing the project, that is important. I however tried to make creative and even logistical decisions that would allow us to work as a community. All of the cast, including myself, are either full time graduate students or



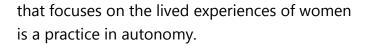


employed. This is a reality I face in working full time as a teacher while also having a creative life that will sometimes demand hours of travel. I was very interested in exploring everyday aspects of life, conversations with family and also the very act of perceiving your body while being in public spaces. The characters are allowed to engage with difficult issues, to have uncomfortable

moments of fear, and to enjoy the intimacy of dancing with other people. The women in this film are positioned as subjects, observing and responding to their gendered experiences. The very act of moving or dancing to express feelings is a privilege in a world where marginalized people have other concerns to attend to. Making the film in this way and conceptualizing a story







Given the deeply personal and culturally specific nature of *Seek Body Contour*, how do you anticipate diverse audiences might interpret the film's choreographic language, particularly those who may not share the



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#### immediate lived experiences of the performers?

Marcia Peschke: Contact Improvisation is emancipatory in nature. It's an exchange and at the same time it is a way of honouring the self. Months of workshopping allowed the cast to get comfortable feeling vulnerable in their bodies and sharing their feelings in an expressive way. Each person moves differently and not for the sake of moving. Everything comes from the world of the person dancing it. By viewing women like this, we become more aware of them as individuals. I would hope that even if audiences can't immediately identify with some of the experiences, that they would at least be curious about the profound act of witnessing people communicating their needs and listening with empathy. Even without having the same lived experience, I hope the audience can witness the joy and safety that comes from being with each other in community. I would hope that the viewer can feel challenged in some way. And if they can't identify what that is, they pursue why it is that they've been moved. I love the experience of sitting in a cinema knowing you've been profoundly affected by a film because you, together with everyone else, sit in silence even beyond the credits. At that moment, I may not be able to find the words



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to express what I feel, but I can acknowledge that something in me has been stirred.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Marcia. We really appreciate the thought-provoking nature of you work. Looking ahead, how do you envision your work evolving? Are there any new themes or experimental techniques you're eager to explore in future projects, perhaps building on what you've learned from this experience?

Marcia Peschke: Thank you for inviting me to share my practice. I'm proud to add that Seek Body Contour featured as part of the online screenings for the 2024 Contact Dance International Film Festival. We were awarded with laurels for art direction and the audience choice award. I'm grateful not only for that feature but also for being able to learn more about preparing promotional materials and film festival submissions. In terms of film, I hope to have many varied and exciting experiences and I'm open to exploring different filmmaking roles. I've recently been thinking about my desire to write and direct a horror film. I'm drawn to stories like The Wailing (2016), The











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Babadook (2014), Hereditary (2018), The Substance (2024), Midnight Mass (2021), and Kairo (2001) because they explore concerns like anxiety, the fear of being perceived and feeling isolated or disconnected from your body. In terms of live performance, I've spent a lot of time collaborating with many artists in support of their vision. And as I've generally lived outside of major cities, travel means I've had to be resourceful with the nature of the performance and the number of items I take with me. I would however like to expand by exploring multimedia in the work that I create, and because I am so interested in sound. I'd love to work more closely with musicians (for my own film or live performance projects). After completing Seek Body Contour, I now have more ambitious ideas for how to visually express myself. I feel more authentic being an artist who works in different mediums and I believe each informs the other in a meaningful way. I also made a promise to myself to take on more leadership roles and I'd like to do this by curating for an exhibition or film event. Part of my vision for community is organizing and bringing people together to discuss the works of art that inspire them. I mostly always want to be led by my curiosity and to always be that young person who looked forward to reading and collecting film magazines.







# **Talitha Bella Sewell**

Lives and works in the United Kingdom

After finding a lost diary on her walk home, a young girl uncovers the life and death of a maid from decades before. But what will happen when she gets too curious? Set in rural Lancashire, The Valley is the first short film by writer and director Talitha Bella. It's beautiful cinematography and scenic locations set the scene for this whimsical fantasy short.

Talitha Bella is a director and designer based in the UK. She finds inspiration for her work from the natural world - drawing from the sky, flora and fauna, and her travels. Her specific work and style is then formed by combining this with the grotesque, the fantastical, and the far from natural.

Her main focus is making ART that MOVES - in both a literal and metaphorical sense. She aims to have strong roots in social movements, whilst maintaining a level of beauty and art value.



An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Talitha and welcome to WomenCinemakers. Before starting to elaborate about your film we would invite our readers to visit

http://talithabella.com in order to get a wider idea about your artistic production.You have solid formal training: after completing your studies in Drama &





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Theatre, Sociology and Film, you continued to nurture your education with a BA in Design for Performance, which you're currently pursuing at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. How does your educational background shape your development and approach as a multidisciplinary visual artist? Moreover, does your cultural background inform the way you relate to filmmaking?

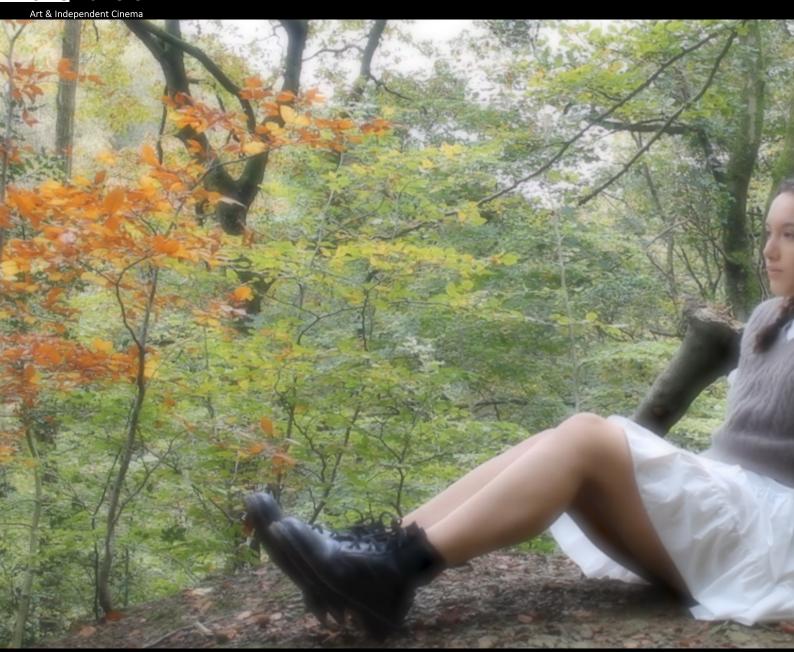
Talitha Bella Sewell: Hiya! Firstly, thank you for all of your kind words regarding my film. I think my educational background formed the foundations of my work as a film and theatre maker. I tend to use the tagline "art that moves", because after studying sociology for quite some time, it became very important for me to truly embed social movements in as much of my work as possible. The tagline also indicates my passion for visually pleasing aesthetics and design - something that I have been able to truly develop whilst studying performance design for my BA.





# Women Cinemakers Art & Independent Cinema





W O M E N = SINEMAKERS



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For this special edition of WomenCinemakers we have selected The Valley, your debut short film that can be viewed at <a href="https://youtu.be/rFra7TOyt3o?si=8W8CBOaOX2wHtoOR">https://youtu.be/rFra7TOyt3o?si=8W8CBOaOX2wHtoOR</a>. The Valley features a young protagonist and a historical narrative entwined. What inspired you to explore these themes, and why did you choose to structure the story around a found diary?

Talitha Bella Sewell: I've always been a big fan of historical storytelling, and I knew I wanted to find a way to do this through the film. However, with such a limited budget, I spent a long time deliberating the best way forward. I ended up finding the idea of her being an 'almost ghost' that haunted the protagonist. Then I was met with the question of, okay but why? Why did the ghost choose to haunt this girl in particular? So I looked towards the fairytales that I grew up with, and ended up with the young girl taking something that wasn't hers, similarly to Hansel and Gretel, the original rapunzel, and Jack in the Beanstalk. This also allowed me to develop the ghost's character and give her a personality through the reading of the diary.









We really appreciate how the rural Lancashire setting feels like a character in its own right. As you have previously mentioned, you find inspiration for your work from the natural world - drawing from the sky, flora and fauna, and your travels. What drew you to this specific location, and how did the rural Lancashire landscape influence the narrative?

Talitha Bella Sewell: It's the area that I grew up in, as well as the actress who plays the ghost. This felt so important, as *The Valley* is firstmost a fairy tale to me, so setting it in a place that felt like childhood to us, hopefully allowed us to help it feel like childhood to the viewers. But you are right, the location ended up writing some of the script for me. I struggled for a while





trying to work out how the ghost died, what the 'monster' would look like, and how I would create it without it looking gimmicky or cheap. We had planned to film during summer and therefore use a nearby stream, and have the monster live in the creek. But as time went on, and British weather failed us, it didn't seem possible. The water was too fast, and too cold. It wasn't until we did our first shoot day in the

forest that I decided that the camera itself should be the monster, and everything fell into place. From perfectly timed gusts of wind, to trees in just the right location for me to hide around, the setting led the shoots just as much as I did.

We really appreciate the film's careful pacing, which allows the audience to absorb



Art & Independent Cinema

its atmosphere. Was this rhythm *intuitive* to you as a director, or did it evolve during editing?

Talitha Bella Sewell: I think it's a combination. I knew that I wanted each frame to be visually beautiful, and realised while shooting that that wouldn't be possible until I came to editing it. So each take was long, and done from many angles. This meant that when I came to the edit, I could choose the most visually pleasing angle, where the wind was right, or the sun was perfectly positioned. Honestly in hindsight, I wish I could have gone even further with this notion, but my actresses were getting cold, and energy was thinning.

Your film seems to highlight curiosity as both a virtue and a danger. The central mystery in *The Valley* revolves around a maid's life from decades ago. The diary device suggests fascinating themes of legacy and memory - *a sort of literary bridge between two worlds*. How do you view the relationship between past and present in your storytelling? We're particularly interested in how you've used this physical object - this diary - as more than





# Women Cine<mark>makers</mark>











just a plot device, but rather as a sort of temporal anchor between these two Lancashire girls, separated by decades yet connected through words on paper.

Talitha Bella Sewell: I think that was important to me because I appreciate things that don't quite make sense, but are able to make you believe it. And this is why I wanted The Valley to have the essence of a fairytale. I have autism, and growing up these things would annoy me in stories. Why is the Rainbow Fish able to remove his scales in the first place? What happens when the witch's candy house gets rained on? How does Rapunzel manage to brush all of her hair every single day? But now, I see that that is what is so beautiful about the stories. It doesn't matter. And in the same way, part of me thinks, well how on earth is that diary still in a readable condition after such a long time? But I think that is what gives it its strength as a plot device, and helps with the overall atmosphere a lot.

We genuinely appreciate the whimsical elements you've incorporated into what could have been a rather straightforward



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mystery. The Valley creates a sense of mystery without resorting to overexplanation. What inspired this particular stylistic choice? How did you decide how much to reveal to the audience and what to leave ambiguous?

**Talitha Bella Sewell**: I think that whimsy is just very me. I don't really know how to explain it, but if you look at my other works, or even just films I like, everything has an element of whimsy, eeriness, and intentional confusion.

We were particularly impressed with *the* naturalistic performances in the film. How did you approach casting, and what direction did you provide to elicit such authentic portrayals?

**Talitha Bella Sewell**: I think the majority of that credit goes to Beatrice and Evelyn. Sometimes I'd ask them to portray a feeling, a colour, or a sound, and my direction would make little sense to another actor. But they just got it. I think they're passion, excitement, and





# Women Cine<mark>makers</mark>













dedication is what set the film alive.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Talitha. We really appreciate the thought-provoking nature of your film. Looking ahead, how do you envision your work evolving? Are there any new themes or experimental techniques you're eager to explore in future projects, perhaps building on what you've learned from this experience?

**Talitha Bella Sewell**: Currently my studies revolve mostly around theatre, but I am exploring the intersection of that with filmmaking a lot. Recently I collaborated with a dancer and choreographer to make a film, and I found that mutual understanding of both artforms made something magical, and I can't wait for people to see it next year.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com





# Isabella Walton

Lives and works in London, United Kingdom

'Izzy Aman: The Joy of Drag' explores the rich expressive world of drag kinging through the experience of one individual: Isabel Adomakoh Young, known as Izzy Aman in the drag world. We get the privilege of witnessing Isabel become Izzy, but more specifically on this occasion, Bob Ross. Through the art of thrusting, painting and mimicry we witness a gender bending revolutionary performance alongside a candid and powerful conversation about how we can create social change with drag. Whether that be deconstructing the patriarchy or redefining our identity. Izzy Aman makes us feel a lot of things: whether that be gender euphoria, arousal, empowerment or just simply joy.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Isabella and welcome to WomenCinemakers. For this special edition we have selected Izzy Aman: The Joy of Drag, an extremely interesting film that can be viewed at <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d</a> koHSgzHqGs. Drag kinging is often overshadowed by the more visible world of drag queens. Your film makes several bold artistic choices in terms of





DIRECTED BY ISABELLA WALTON STARRING ISABEL ADONAKOH YOUNG



# cinematography and editing. What steps did you take to ensure the documentary provided an authentic representation of this underrepresented facet of drag culture?

With a profile documentary like this, you are led by the subject. Though I had a set of questions going into the shoot, there was no shot list and no expectations for Isabel's answers. We shot what felt right in the moment and had the freedom of having the camera handheld which allowed fluidity for movement and space for spontaneity. I wanted to show the whole process of getting into drag before shooting the performance. Though drag kinging is less about the aesthetic than drag queens, I thought it was important to show Isabel's process of stepping into masculinity. The white flecks in her beard or the contouring on her neck creating a fake Adam's apple are details you might miss if you were to see her on stage. I wanted it to feel like we were on the journey with her from the very first

steps of becoming Izzy Aman. Then, for shooting the performance I really trusted my DOP Ola to do what he felt was right in the moment – whether that be stepping back, a quick zoom, a tilt etc. The story really came together in the edit. I edited it mostly myself before getting my co-editor Eileen to smooth out the details and help discuss the final puzzle pieces. The interview was initially an hour long. I cut and kept clips intuitively. Certain moments gave me goosebumps or a shiver down my spine and that's when I knew I'd found a gem of a sentence or conversation. I was lucky that Isabel was so expressive and phrased things beautifully. There are moments where to some people, it might feel like we're going off on a tangent, but as an adhder I love an outpour of opinions on a topic someone is passionate about. Overall, I made sure it was authentic by being led by Isabel and trusting my instincts on what felt most important. Isabel got to see the cut before we finalised it. It was important to me that they felt it



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was an accurate portrayal of their relationship with drag.

For those unfamiliar with drag kinging, how would you explain its significance and what makes it unique in the world of drag? In particular, what inspired you to create a documentary about drag kinging, and why did you choose Izzy Aman as your central focus?

Isabel could probably give a much better answer to this, but from what I've learnt from her and watching the art form, Drag Kings put masculinity under a microscope - exploring all its facets and multitudes. Usually performed by women or AFAB people, it gives an opportunity to those who have experienced misogyny to comment on patriarchy. A lot of drag kinging has political undercurrents and the performances can bring up taboo conversations, spark activism and/or female rage. On the other hand, it's a great chance to be silly and playful and experiment with what gender means and looks like. It's important to emphasise that every drag king is different and has a different relationship to their persona! I saw Izzy Aman perform with their drag collective PECS at Soho











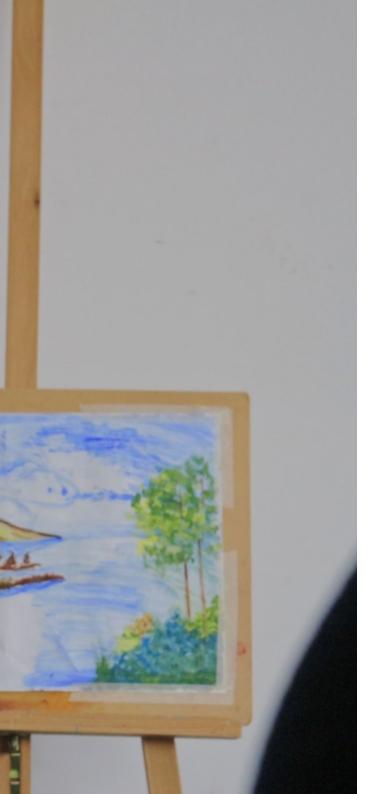
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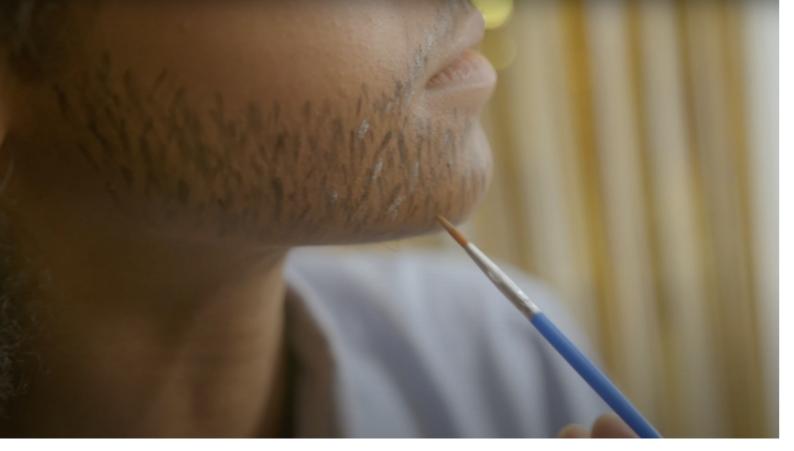
Theatre. There was something so radical about a black AFAB person dressing up as Bob Ross. In addition, Isabel looked like she was having so much fun. The queer joy radiated through the room and stuck with me. I thought other people NEED to see this. Especially as drag kings are not as known about in mainstream media. This led me to message them on Instagram afterwards and ask if they wanted to do this project which they responded to with an enthusiastic yes.

We particularly admire the way your film handles themes of mimicry and transformation. What, in your view, is the significance of mimicry in drag, and how did you capture its nuances on screen?

Mimicry is a big part of drag kinging. Whether that be generally mimicking stereotypical masculine traits, or mimicking an individual like Bob Ross! Firstly, mimicry has a great positive impact for the person performing it. Isabel explains stepping into masculinity really allowed them to assess their own relationship to gender and let go of the aspects of femininity that were



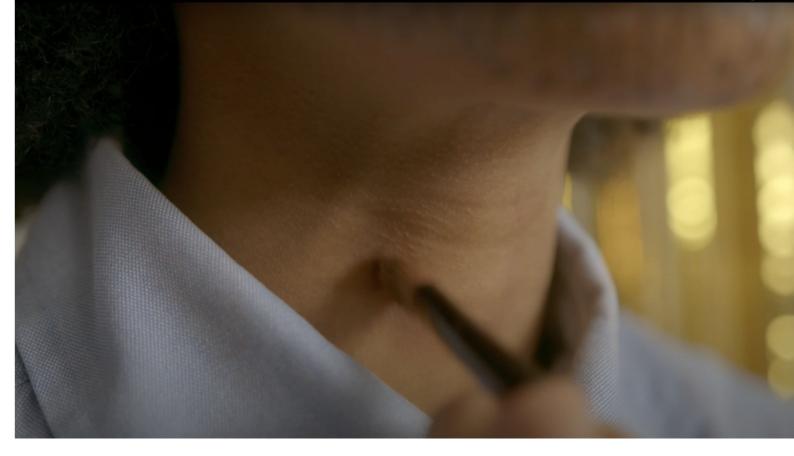




not serving them. Drag kinging has helped them take up more space in their day-to-day life and self-reflect on the whys behind their actions. For the audience this experience of mimicry is often funny and entertaining but also makes people think. Some people leave shows questioning their sexuality, gender or relationship to both those sectors of identity. Isabel's skill to create a masculine persona with a blend of

subtle and bold physical and facial gestures is mesmerising to watch. More specifically, her ability to capture the idiosyncrasies of Bob Ross really adds to the humour and surreal believability of the performance. I tried to play with these moments in the edit by timing them with verbs used in our conversation. For example, when Isabel says 'shake people up a little bit' I selected the clip of Izzy ferociously shaking his





phallic paintbrush. Matching verbal and body language added an element of fun and whimsy.

Throughout the film, you portray drag quite passionately as a tool for social change. Beyond entertainment, what specific changes do you hope to see in society through the art of drag kinging? We're thinking about everything from

how we view gender roles to the way we express ourselves in public spaces.

I would LOVE for some people to be inspired to try drag kinging themselves. I think it takes a lot of confidence to do something like this, but if anyone is gonna convince you it's worth a try, it's Isabel. I'd also love for the film to provide gender



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queer audiences with gender euphoria and make them feel safer in expressing the different sides of themselves. Perhaps it could be a sexual awakening for some people?! I definitely think it has the power for people to ask themselves – am I attracted to men or masculinity?

I hope it makes everyone assess their relationship to gender and consider what is worth maintaining and what is worth sacrificing. There is a chance some men may come away offended by the masculine mimicry but that's definitely not the purpose. The purpose is to laugh about the societal pressures that are put on men, and what those societal pressure make them do and say. These political elements are often explored through humour which I think is a cushion for potential offence and a lighter way of approaching spikey topics.

We were particularly impressed by the film's ability to evoke such a spectrum of emotions, from joy to arousal to

### empowerment. Was this emotional range a deliberate focus during the filmmaking process, or did it emerge organically as you documented Izzy's journey?

I guess the spectrum of emotions was encouraged by my set of questions. I didn't want to shy away from the deeper or more provocative topics surrounding drag kinging. I also wanted Isabel to feel safe discussing the highs and lows of their experiences. But again, it was then mostly led by Isabel's answers. Emotional range is something I want to shine through in all my films. Life is neither good nor bad but both. And our emotions can shift through months, days, hours, as well as existing at the same time no matter how conflicting. Showing this spectrum of emotions, especially in a documentary, feels like the most organic choice if you want to portray reality and humanity. Some may argue that the shifts in tone are disorientating and may desire something more consistent. But my intention was to leave the audience in a







spin of feelings and fresh information.
Something they can sit with and absorb afterwards. I definitely think the way I have conversations as a neurodivergent person influenced how I edited the interview, and how topics flowed into each other. I often can go through at least 5 very different topics and feelings within the space of 5 minutes when talking to a friend. Put simply, the emotional range was definitely natural as well as intentional.

The idea of using drag to deconstruct societal norms is powerful and timely. What role do you think documentaries like yours play in amplifying such revolutionary ideas?

I think film is a really great way to spoon feed big ideas and get people to passively absorb new ways of thinking. Whether you watched this documentary for entertainment, education or empowerment I hope people are left having experienced all three. The tone of this film is very much

welcoming discussion and including all parties in the conversation. I hope it sparks debate, curiosity and self-reflection.

Your film feels fun and celebratory, even though it tackles serious topics. How did you manage that balance, and what's the main message you want audiences to remember?

Again, it goes back to highlighting the reality of the human experience – the full spectrum of emotions. Different feelings can co-exist at the same time. Balance was considered, but importance was more of a priority. It was easy to make the film fun and celebratory because that's what drag is! I would question anyone who watches a performance of Izzy's and doesn't have a good time. On the other hand, being a black queer AFAB person is not easy. And performance art such as this can unlock those internal struggles, traumas and societal truths. It was important to express that drag kinging can be silly and possess







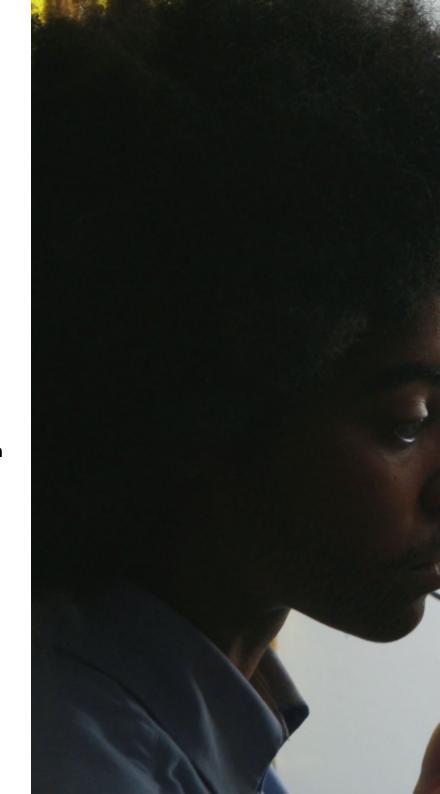


great depth simultaneously. There are so many messages jam packed into these 12 minutes. It is not my job to choose what viewers remember. I like that people can have different takeaways. I remember my mum saying that the film made her feel like she should be taking up more space as a woman in public. That was lovely to hear!

We really appreciate your insights and the time you've generously given us, Isabella. As we wrap up, we're especially keen to hear about your artistic trajectory. Could you share with our readers some tantalising details about your upcoming projects? We're particularly interested in how you envision your work evolving in the future.

I have various projects in the mix. My main focus at the moment is finishing my 1st feature doc- another film that happened organically with a very go-











with-the-flow approach. I expected it to be a short, but we ended up with so much great footage that we realised it had to be longer! It's on the intersections of the Sapphic community – so another queer activist piece that I hope will also express the highs and lows of various people's lived experiences.

I am much less focused on genre and more on theme. So, the other project I'm focusing on is a comedy short on a shopaholics anonymous group. Like all my work, it will explore a blend of tragedy and comedy with a more surreal tone in comparison to my non-fiction pieces.

I hope in future, I get to work on more longform projects and series that still have activism at their core and have the ability to make people laugh and cry. My goal as a director is to make people feel! Especially the emotions we avoid or that typically create discomfort.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com





# Ewa Abana

I hope audiences will be moved, or inspired by the stories and characters portrayed in my short films. Whether it's through tears, or moments of reflection, I aim to evoke a strong emotional response that lingers long after the credits roll.

Ewa Abana

Born in Poland in 1969, Ewa Abana is currently based in London. She pursued her undergraduate studies at the University of East London, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Photography. She recently earned her Master of Arts in Filmmaking at the same university.

Ewa's journey in photography and filmmaking began as a documentarian photographer. She engaged fully in documenting XR London protests in 2019 and currently in Pro Palestine protests, focussing on children involvement.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Ewa and welcome to WomenCinemakers. For this special edition we have selected MIESZKO, a moving documentary film that can be viewed at

http://www.vimeo.com/913502146. We truly

appreciate how your film brings attention to a topic largely absent from mainstream media. What initially inspired you to tell this particular story, and how did you discover Mieszko's case?

**Ewa Abana**: In 2020, I was tutoring photography workshops for children from disadvantaged Eastern European families in Coventry. Kasia and







Michal, Mieszko's parents, volunteered to support me during the workshops and even attended a few themselves. We spent a couple of sessions together, and after a while, we exchanged phone numbers, hoping to meet for tea in London one day. Somehow, this never happened, and our relationship was limited to sporadic interactions, such as liking or commenting on Facebook posts, until October 2023. That was when I noticed increased activity on Michal's Facebook account and came across one of his posts. In it, he shared a video from Poland showing parents of children affected by achondroplasia protesting in Warsaw against the government's decision to cut funding for the only available medication that alleviates the symptoms of achondroplasia.

At the same time, I was working on a documentary module as part of my MA in Filmmaking and actively looking for a story to tell, unaware of how deeply this one would affect me. At this point, I didn't know that Kasia and Michal had a child, nor that he was affected by this condition. However, as I read one post after another, I realized that these young parents face the challenges of achondroplasia every day with their only son, Mieszko. I began to research the condition and the medication, discovering that there was virtually no media coverage about the lack of funding for

achondroplasia treatment or the struggles of affected families, aside from a few local newspaper articles. I also found out that the parents had formed a small online community on Facebook to support each other and that they were backed by the Polish Association for Children with Achondroplasia, led by Marta Skierkowska. It became clear to me that these families, a relatively small group of parents, were fighting against the Polish government almost entirely on their own. I saw the need to highlight this issue and bring it to the public's attention through whatever channels were available. I contacted Michal and asked if his family would be interested in making a film about their personal circumstances and what was happening in Poland. He responded positively right away, and within three weeks of my initial proposal, I was on a plane to Poland.

We greatly admire the emotional weight carried by your documentary. Were there any moments during filming that were particularly difficult for you, either as a filmmaker or on a personal level?

**Ewa Abana**: I remember posting a short introduction on social media a while ago, where I wrote: a mother, producer/director, and photographer (in that order). Nothing has changed



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since. I am a mother of four, and along with all the excitement of making this documentary came the inevitable 'mummy worries.' Mieszko was just 1.5 years old, and we were about to meet for the very first time in his home. I had no idea if he would accept me or be comfortable with me around for many hours of filming. I knew only the basics about achondroplasia, but I had never met anyone living with this condition. I was clueless about his routine and daily challenges.

There was a big question mark: would I be able to film whenever I wanted, or would I have to work around Mieszko's routine? How would his parents cope with having a stranger in their house for hours?

I was equally uncertain about the house itself. How big was it? How much space was there inside? What type of lighting did it have, and how much natural light came through the windows? I didn't know what to expect. I was stressed, especially since the only camera I had at the time was a simple Canon 250D and a small, handheld A6-size LED light.

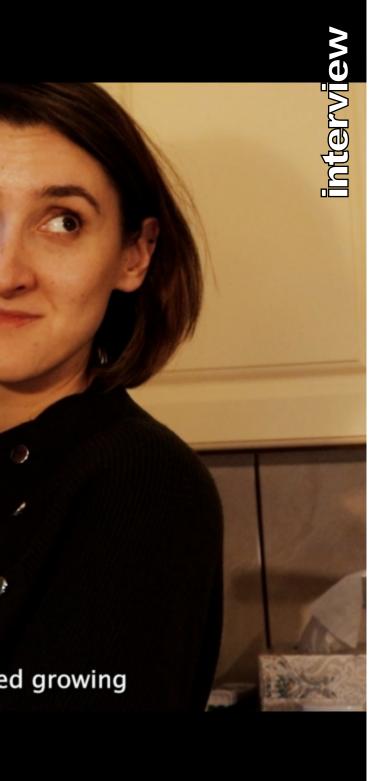
When I entered the house, a wave of worry washed over me. It was the most beautiful house you could imagine—with wooden panels on the walls, multiple large plants, cozy furniture, all in warm colors. But it turned out to be very challenging for filming. The overcast weather only added to my anxiety. From the











very first minutes of filming, Mieszko's dad, Michal, had no choice but to become a gaffer. And he was absolutely fabulous. He followed Mieszko's steps and Kasia's movements around the house, holding a tall standing lamp (the only available one), dragging cables behind him, and plugging in extensions wherever needed.

Mieszko didn't make it easy for us—he was his usual self, constantly changing locations and keeping us on our toes.

The goal was to show Mieszko as a happy, cheeky boy, emphasizing his individuality and humanity beyond his condition. I wanted to avoid portraying him as some famous "poverty porn" fundraising ads often do, where children are dehumanized to elicit pity from viewers.

There is a moment in the film where Mieszko cries. It is so raw and real—my heart was with him, but at the same time, I had the camera in my hand. I had to remind myself that I was there to film, to capture a heart-moving and authentic moment, even though all I wanted to do was give him a hug. His parents had full control of the situation, but in that moment, Mieszko's father politely asked me to step back and give them a few minutes without filming. I felt terrible—I should have known instinctively that





it was time for me to disappear. Mieszko was simply tired, and the last thing he needed was me filming. I wasn't sure, even through post-production, if I should use that footage.

The scene of him crying transitions into the next one, where he is peacefully asleep in his father's arms. In my opinion, it's the most beautiful moment in the film. But it was a moment that forced me to question the boundaries of being a filmmaker—when do you stop being a filmmaker and switch to being a human being?

When Mieszko was asleep, we had lunch with Kasia and Michal—lovely homemade food prepared by Kasia and her mother. We had a chance to sit and talk for a while. There were emotions and tears—not to be recorded. Those were moments that will stay in my memory alone, moments that changed me from a filmmaker to





something more: a campaign supporter.

Achondroplasia is a condition many people may not fully understand. Did you feel a responsibility to balance emotional storytelling with educating your audience? If so, how did you achieve that balance?

**Ewa Abana**: Absolutely, yes. I realized how little I knew about this condition and how overlooked it

had been in Polish media for years. Most importantly, I wanted to learn from parents how to talk about children affected by this condition with the respect they deserve.

I began by observing and listening to how parents addressed their son, learning never to use the term 'dwarfism' but instead to say 'short stature.' While achondroplasia is a medical term, not everyone knows what it means. If you say



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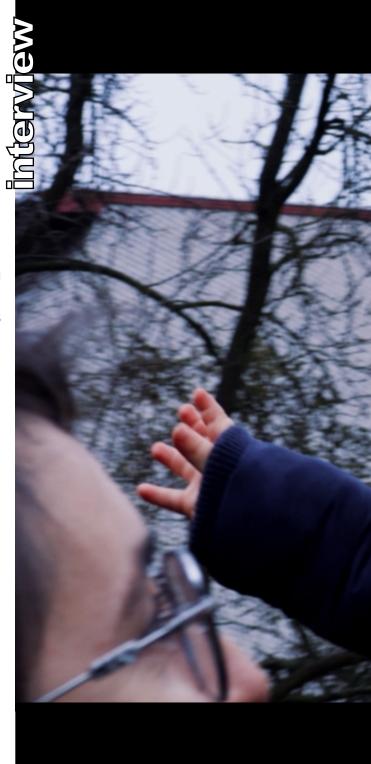
'dwarfism,' people immediately associate it with a short person, often without understanding the many complications it entails. Calling people with achondroplasia 'dwarfs' can be a sensitive issue, depending on the context. Many individuals prefer terms like 'person with dwarfism,' 'person with achondroplasia,' or simply 'short-statured person.'

It's important to prioritize person-first language, focusing on the individual rather than their condition (e.g., 'a person with achondroplasia'). Some individuals or groups reclaim the term 'dwarf' with pride, as seen in organizations like Little People of America (LPA). However, this is a personal choice and not universal.

To balance the emotional storytelling from parents with the educational perspective, involving Marta Skierkowska, the CEO of the Polish Association for Children with Achondroplasia, was essential. While parents shared their day-to-day care for their son with heart and love, Marta provided detailed explanations from a medical standpoint about what Mieszko faces daily. Marta herself has a child with achondroplasia, which fostered a mutual willingness to collaborate on this production and educate others.

In the film, Marta explained the majority of the complications that come with achondroplasia. After each screening of Mieszko, I found that viewers had learned













new things about this condition, thanks to her insights.

We're particularly struck by how "MIESZKO" highlights the impact of policy decisions on individual lives. Could you tell us more about the situation surrounding the Polish Ministry of Health's decision to halt reimbursement for Voxzogo?

**Ewa Abana**: Until today, the medicine Voxzogo had never been reimbursed by the Polish healthcare system. According to Polish law, patients are granted access to the only available treatment alternative if it is not already funded, based on the provision of emergency access to drug technologies. However, this provision seems to serve merely as a 'window' for all patients. In practice, a medicine is removed from this access option if its cost exceeds 5% of the RDTL's annual budget. This happens quite quickly in the case of expensive medications, as was the case with Voxzogo.

Only about 10% of the 270 children in need received the medicine through this emergency access program. The rest were denied access to this therapy option. This situation was highly unequal and unfair. Children with the same condition, living in close



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proximity and of similar age and health status, did not have equal access to treatment. Everything depended on the efficiency and expertise of the healthcare center managing the patient's case.

This issue was finally resolved when the medicine was fully reimbursed in January 2025. Now, all children in Poland with achondroplasia will be able to benefit from the drug program and receive Voxzogo, which is currently the only pharmacological treatment available for achondroplasia.

It's often said that trust is the cornerstone of powerful documentary filmmaking, and you mentioned the remarkable courage of Mieszko's parents, who allowed you into their lives despite having only met you once before. How did you manage to build such trust and create a comfortable environment within such a short time frame?

**Ewa Abana**: What I believe was key to building trust was maintaining clear and transparent communication. I provided Mieszko's parents and Marta with detailed information about the documentary's goals and context, as well as information on legality, liability insurance, logistics, and content usage. I gave them control over the

footage, allowing them to review it and provide feedback before finalizing the edit. I assured them that I would work respectfully within their home environment and routines to minimize intrusion.

I also shared the challenges I faced on my side, such as obtaining approval from the UEL Ethics Committee, which is involved when filming vulnerable individuals. I was open and happy to address any questions they had. To reassure them of my commitment, I even sent them copies of my tickets to show that I was serious about the film and my plans to visit. (Kasia and Michal had to postpone a major family event due to the filming.) Additionally, the consent forms made it explicitly clear that all participants could withdraw their consent at any time without any repercussions.

Recently, I realized just how much my reassurances were needed. Kasia shared some of her concerns about the filming process, and her list of worries seemed endless. Would Mieszko cooperate with long hours in front of the camera and lighting? Would he allow it, or would he rebel? Was everything at home ready? How would she come across? Would she appear as a very young, first-time parent upset about having a disabled child? Or would she be seen as a loving parent who







cherishes her gorgeous son and is determined to do everything to make his life better? And how could she possibly convey information about Mieszko, achondroplasia, and the government's decision to cut funding—all in just a few minutes of a short film?

Given the essential equipment and limited time you had with Mieszko's family, how did you ensure their authentic story was captured without overstepping personal boundaries?

**Ewa Abana**: I had a detailed conversation with the parents before filming to understand which spaces or routines they preferred not to include in the footage. I shared a clear plan of what I intended to capture and allowed them to suggest adjustments. I avoided entering private spaces, such as bedrooms, and always asked for permission before setting up equipment. I made an effort to avoid cluttering their space with gear and followed the parents' lead, stopping filming whenever they requested. I refrained from overdirecting and focused on capturing authentic moments—there are no staged scenes in the film. I worked discreetly, limiting unnecessary chatter or movement, to ensure a comfortable environment. Filming alone and keeping the crew to a minimum

was important to me, as it reduced intrusion and helped maintain a more natural atmosphere. I prioritized capturing positive moments while respecting the family's boundaries.

By focusing on the resilience of the human spirit, you've created a film that not only informs but deeply resonates emotionally with its audience. How did you strike a balance between presenting the harsh realities of Mieszko's situation and highlighting the strength and hope within his family's story?

**Ewa Abana**: I focused on capturing moments that reflected the duality of their experience. In one scene, the father talks about leaving Poland, while in another, the mother continues her daily routine of reading. The father is shown carrying a crying child, while the mother looks out the window with hope. In the night, the father searches for work, while the mother looks through family pictures, keeping an eye on the monitor as Mieszko sleeps in another room. Other scenes include the father (unseen) pushing a swing in the opening sequence and later holding the sleeping toddler in his arms. All these moments are juxtaposed with negative, informative text about the actions of the Polish Ministry of Health and heartbreaking, evocative



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text questioning Mieszko's future. This balance was crucial to ensure the story felt both authentic and emotionally resonant.

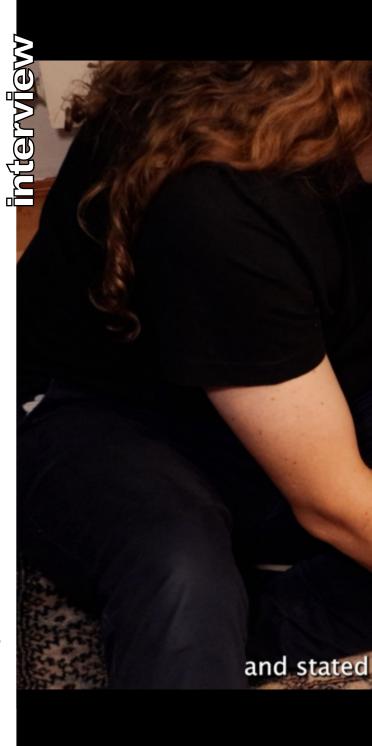
Documentary filmmaking often involves complex ethical considerations. What were the primary ethical challenges you encountered while capturing such a sensitive personal story?

**Ewa Abana**: A primary challenge was ensuring that the portrayal of the boy was respectful and dignified, avoiding any framing that might exploit his condition or reduce him to a medical narrative. To address this, I worked closely with his parents to include their voices and perspectives throughout the process.

Since Mieszko was only 1.5 years old, obtaining informed consent required extensive discussions with his parents about the documentary's purpose, scope, and potential impact. Transparency was a priority.

It was essential to portray the boy's life authentically while avoiding sensationalism. This meant highlighting not only the challenges he faces but also moments of joy. I was mindful of how the film might be received by audiences and took steps to mitigate potential harm by excluding footage that could be misunderstood. During post-production, I shared drafts with the family to ensure the film remained true to their story.





Women Cine<mark>makers</mark>



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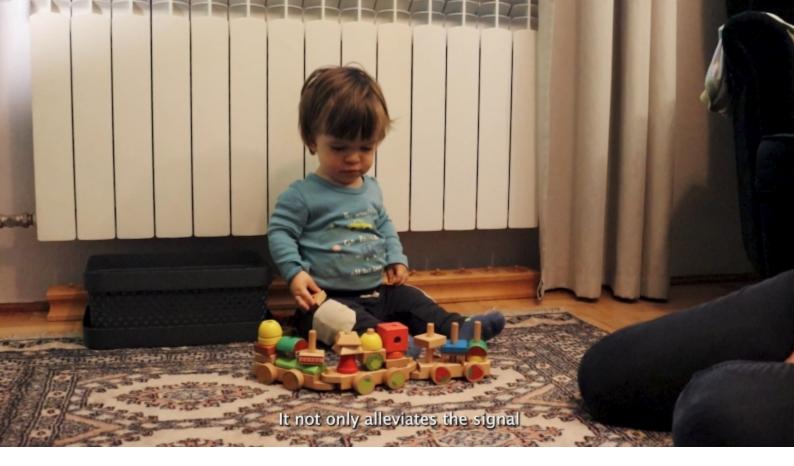
Another ethical challenge was considering the longterm impact of the film and how it might affect Mieszko as he grows older. I was cautious about the language and imagery used, striving to create a documentary that he could later view as an empowering representation of his early life.

By addressing these challenges, I believe I approached the film with the care and responsibility it deserves.

Your film addresses a specific issue in Poland, but it undoubtedly resonates on a global scale. Have you seen any international reactions to this story, and how do you think audiences beyond Poland might relate to it?

**Ewa Abana**: Yes! The Polish organization, the Association for Children with Achondroplasia, maintains communication with organizations supporting individuals of small stature worldwide. We follow each other's activities and draw inspiration from one another. The Polish push for proper treatment was directly influenced by observing that treatment is available in other countries—such as Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Italy, and Georgia—and is fully funded by their local healthcare systems. Interestingly, this Polish effort has, in turn, inspired initiatives in other countries, including the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. Patients in the





United States have also shown interest in the drug program. However, due to differences in healthcare systems, the reimbursement model is less applicable to North America.

There is also another dimension to this story: it's about what determined individuals can achieve and how they can influence systemic change. It's a story of perseverance—being the proverbial 'squeaky wheel,' keeping the issue alive, and driving change.

Parents of children with disabilities are often stereotyped as burdened and consumed by their struggles. However, the story of Voxzogo offers a different narrative: parents as efficient, persistent, motivated, and quick to learn. They know that the impossible does not exist.

Since filming "MIESZKO" in November 2023, have there been any developments regarding access to achondroplasia medication in Poland,





particularly Voxzogo? Have you observed any shifts in public awareness, policy discussions, or government action as a result of your documentary or related advocacy efforts?

**Ewa Abana**: Since November 2023, much has changed, primarily due to advocacy efforts targeting the Polish government. In October 2023, parents of children with achondroplasia organized a march through the streets of Warsaw, starting at

the Prime Minister's Office and ending at the Ministry of Health. Although this event was highly visible, it did not yield immediate results. The then-Minister of Health was unwilling to engage or provide assistance.

Shortly after the march, Poland held parliamentary elections, leading to a change in administration. Centrist political groups, which had already acknowledged the issue of unequal access to









therapy, came to power. However, this shift in government did not signify the end of the parents' efforts. Achieving success required motivation and collaboration from both parties: the drug manufacturer to seek reimbursement in Poland, and the Minister of Health to implement a reimbursable drug program.

The new government brought renewed hope. The Association for Children with Achondroplasia

launched extensive efforts to engage both the pharmaceutical company and the government. Monika Horna-Cieślak, the Ombudsman for Children, provided crucial support for introducing the drug shortly after assuming office. Together with the Ombudsman and the Patient Ombudsman, she urged the drug manufacturer to apply for reimbursement. The Parliamentary





Group on Achondroplasia also played a pivotal role by monitoring government efforts to implement treatment options. Members of Parliament and health journalists lent their support by asking questions and keeping the issue in the public eye. The Association for Children with Achondroplasia, founded and operated by dedicated volunteers—primarily mothers—coordinated these efforts. They

invested time in learning about pharmaceutical law, legislation, and reimbursement systems.

Parents and children themselves were instrumental in the campaign. Children wrote heartfelt letters to legislators, appealing for assistance and creating a powerful emotional impact. During this fight for access to the drug, an advocacy movement for achondroplasia patients



Art & Independent Cinema

emerged and grew. This movement has left a lasting mark on Polish society, with its first major victory being the push for reimbursement of the medicine Voxzogo. As the campaigners from the Association for Children with Achondroplasia emphasize, this achievement is only the beginning.

Thanks so much for your time and for sharing your insights with us, Ewa. Before we finish, could you tell our readers a bit about any upcoming projects you're working on? How do you envision the evolution of your work in the future, and what new themes or ideas are you exploring?

**Ewa Abana**: I have two upcoming short documentary projects that may evolve into longer films or series. Filming for the first project starts in February 2025. This idea has its roots in one of the regular TVCarib shows, Tasha Talks (which I filmed for over a year in the UK). My documentary will expand on this topic and showcase the stories of five migrant women (including Tasha herself) who now reside in the UK. They came to the country at different stages of their lives and have made it their home. Each has succeeded in unique ways and areas, but the sacrifices they made are





Women Cine<mark>makers</mark>

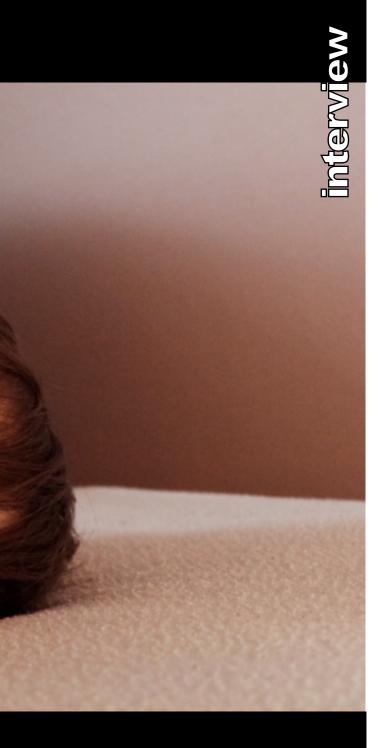
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# Women Cinemakers









similar. They will share their personal definitions of success and how this has changed over the years in relation to immigration. Has their understanding of success shifted since leaving their country of origin?

As a migrant myself, I believe that if I can relate to the stories of the people in the film, there's a chance it will feel authentic, and many people, especially in the diverse UK, will relate to it.

The second project, which I have already begun researching, focuses on the Indo-Dutch people who remained in Indonesia after the country gained independence from Dutch colonial rule. I came up with this idea after traveling to Indonesia in 2019 with my friend, a photographer, to document the aftermath of an earthquake. During the trip, we made many valuable contacts and friendships. Karin, a translator and project researcher with Indo heritage herself, is currently on a mission to find participants for this project.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

A special thank to editor KADIR ARICI





# Shiry Lee Price

In Tel Aviv of the 1950s, Elisheva and Ruthi were a local brand. Within two years, the lively "red headed twins" lost both of their parents, leaving them orphans at the age of 15. From that moment they had to survive alone. 60 years later, Shiry, Elisheva's daughter, accompanies them on their journey to the past. The struggles, the pain, and the amazing bond that helped them overcome it all.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Shiry and welcome to WomenCinemakers: before starting to elaborate about your film we would invite our readers to visit https://shirylee.wixsite.com/shiry-price in order to get a wider idea about your artistic production and we would start this interview with a question about your background. You have a solid formal training: you hold a BA with honors from the Open University, you graduated from the Minshar Art School and you also hold a certificate in video-therapy studies from Tel-Aviv University. How does your educational background shape your development and approach as a videomaker? Moreover, how does your cultural substratum



#### Women Cinemakers

Art & Independent Cinema

### address the direction of your current artistic research?

**Shiry Price**: What drew me in initially to the world of cinema was the writing aspect, and through that gateway, I discovered entire worlds of creative possibility. The medium's demand for diverse skills resonated with me deeply.

As I progressed through my studies and worked on various projects, I found myself increasingly drawn to exploring the subtle intersections between different genres. My focus gradually shifted away from traditional scriptwriting as I became more interested in breaking down conventional boundaries. It led me to explore how various artistic elements – movement, text, and visual language – can be woven together to create narratives that transcend traditional storytelling conventions. This process opened up exciting opportunities to collaborate with artists from various disciplines.

A significant milestone in my artistic journey was working on the documentary movie "Elisheva and Ruthi." This project introduced me to unexpected creative territories I hadn't previously explored. The experience of managing unpredictable dialogues and situations challenged me to grow significantly as a director. It taught me valuable lessons about







## Women Cinemakers





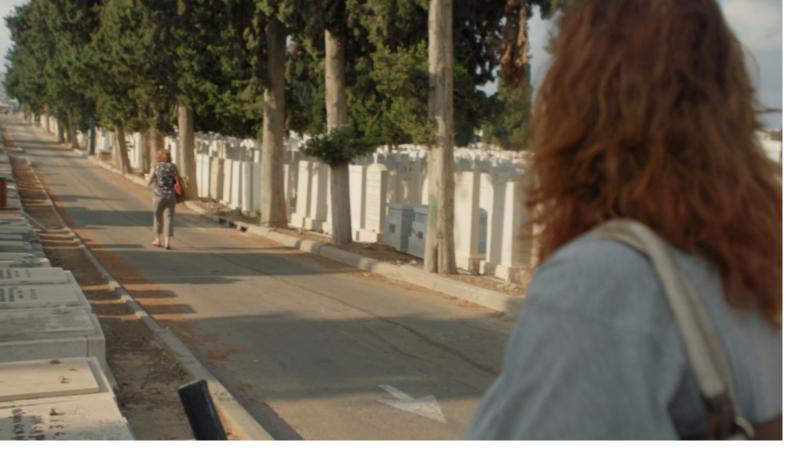


the importance of adaptability and authenticity in filmmaking. This project also prompted me to deeply reflect on different filmmaking techniques, and the interesting dialog between narrative and documentary film. That has now become an important theme in the new film "Agnon in Jerusalem" that I am in the process of filming.

For this special edition of WomenCinemakers we have selected Elisheva and Ruthi, an extremely interesting documentary film that weaves together a story of youthful loss, mature reflection, and sibling love. Such an approach, blending personal and historical storytelling, highlights the delicate balance between memory and reality. When walking our readers through the genesis of Elisheva and Ruthi, would you tell us how did you navigate the tension between subjective recollections and the need for historical accuracy, especially in a story so close to your own family?

**Shiry Price**: In creating Elisheva and Ruthi, my primary focus was on capturing the personal memories of my mother and aunt as they recalled their childhood. Their perspectives formed the emotional core of the film that was based on their memories, rich with detail and emotion, guided the narrative, making them the true protagonists of the story. During this process, I began researching



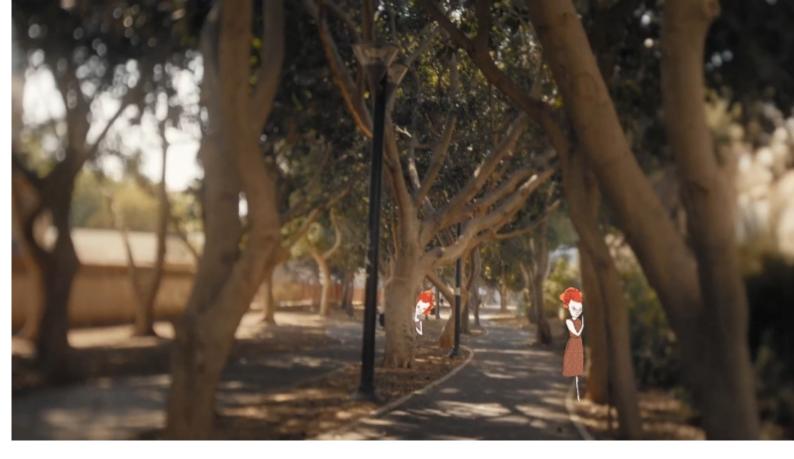


historical records to complement and contextualize their recollections. This included accessing archival materials from the Tel Aviv Municipality archive, the Jerusalem Cinematheque archive, and other historical documents I found in my mother's and aunt's collections—hidden among countless photographs, documents and personal mementos.

With the help of Yael Perlov, a renowned editor

and filmmaker, we were able to craft sequences that seamlessly integrated these historical elements into the personal narrative. The archival footage didn't just serve as a backdrop but added depth to the story, blending past and present in a way that felt both authentic and resonant. The challenge was to balance the subjective nature of memory with historical accuracy, which was made easier by the fact that my mother and aunt





naturally interwoven their personal experiences with broader historical events—especially those surrounding Israel and Tel Aviv in the 1950s. Their memories were not isolated from the larger historical context; instead, they were deeply shaped by it.

We are particularly struck by the emotional depth in this story of resilience. What inspired you to delve into the lives of your own family

members for this documentary? And what made you decide to frame the narrative through this intergenerational perspective?

**Shiry Price**: From a young age, I knew I would eventually make a film about my mother and aunt's life story. I was always deeply moved by the unique bond they share. As a child, I could spend hours simply observing them—when they're together, it's like a force of nature. It took



#### Women Cinemakers

Art & Independent Cinema

me time to figure out how to tell their story, and it was one of the reasons I enrolled in Cinema Studies at the Minshar School of Art in Tel Aviv. As I began working on this project, I realized I had to find a way to include myself in the narrative in a very delicate way as the daughter of Elisheva that accompanies them in their journey toward the past. I needed to make room for my own relationship with the deep sisterly relations, as it was my perspective and connection to them.

Even today, I am continually inspired by their life perspectives and emotional strength—qualities that have not only shaped me but leave a lasting impact on everyone they encounter. While filming, I often found myself reflecting on the saying, "Life is what happens when you're busy making plans." As children, my mother and aunt were suddenly thrust into an unexpected, harsh reality that completely altered the course of their lives. This experience played a pivotal role in shaping who they are today—both as individuals and as mothers.

Ultimately, I believe their story reflects a universal human experience, one that anyone can relate to at some point in their life. The resilience they displayed in the face of adversity is not just a personal story; it is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the ways in which we adapt,













survive, and grow in response to life's most unexpected challenges. By framing the narrative through an intergenerational lens, I hoped to highlight how their experiences continue to resonate across time and influence future generations.

The backdrop of 1950s Tel Aviv serves as a crucial element in your film, and we greatly admire how the film captures historical Tel Aviv alongside the sisters' personal narrative. Could you tell us about your research process for recreating the atmosphere of that era? How the city's atmosphere during that period shaped the twins' experience?

Shiry Price: The 1950s Tel Aviv backdrop plays a vital role in the film, as it deeply influences the personal narrative of the protagonists. One significant part of the research process was revisiting the apartment where my mother and aunt lived as girls, which remained largely untouched over the years. When we filmed there, they were able to share vivid memories, and we could immerse ourselves in those recollections, as much of the environment had stayed the same.

The city, and particularly the "Yad Eliyahu" neighborhood, was central to their experience. The sense of community there was incredibly important,





allowing my mother and aunt to continue living independently in their family home despite personal challenges. The neighborhood was like an extended family, where neighbors were always available to help, offering a strong sense of support and solidarity. This environment of belonging and collective resilience was essential to how they coped with the difficulties in their lives. People who surrounded them in those times are with them until today and were an important part of the research of the movie as I interviewed many of them.

To bring this era to life I worked with the

animator Michal Rabinowich. I wanted to blend documentary elements with animation to express the deeper, often unspoken emotions of childhood. The animated sequences serve as a visual representation of these primal feelings, exploring the emotional landscape of the past in ways that traditional documentary footage couldn't. The character design plays with the fine line between childhood and adulthood, allowing for a more symbolic portrayal of my mother and aunt's experiences. The backgrounds, made from letters and newspaper clippings, reference the actual places where the documentary footage





was shot—the house, the neighborhood—creating a seamless connection between the two worlds. These animated characters sometimes appear within the documentary scenes, suggesting that the animated world is slowly merging with the real one, blurring the lines between past and present, memory and reality. The animation became an essential tool in bridging the personal and historical aspects, capturing both the twins' intimate experience and the unique atmosphere they lived in.

We appreciate the unflinching honesty of the film, more specifically the delicate way you've

captured the unique bond between twins. What discoveries about twin relationships emerged during your filmmaking process? Were there any moments that you found *particularly difficult* to document or share?

Shiry Price: The bond between my mother and aunt, as twins, is something truly fascinating—almost beyond words. At times, their connection feels telepathic. They share a unique understanding of each other, where they can unknowingly wear the same clothes, call one another at the exact same time, and most notably, think alike and always care for each other. Their



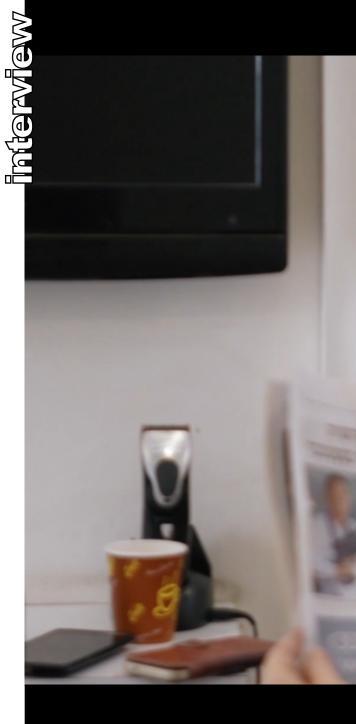
#### Women Cinemakers

Art & Independent Cinema

life story, marked by unique challenges and immense resilience, has only deepened this bond, providing them with a source of support and safety throughout the difficult times of their childhood.

While making the film, I discovered how deeply intertwined their lives are—not only in the present but in their shared past. I also began to understand the weight of their shared history. It became clear how much of their past they had kept buried or unspoken, and at times, it was difficult to ask them the tough, intimate questions that brought up sadness and painful memories. My mother and aunt had avoided discussing these aspects of their lives in such detail, so opening up to those stories was a vulnerable process for all of us.

Filming this process was emotionally intense. It was challenging to navigate the delicate balance between honoring their story and asking them to reflect on moments they'd rather leave behind. The strong emotional connection between the three of us made the process longer and more complex than I had anticipated. Sometimes, it would take days for me to process the footage, to reflect on what had been shared, and to gather the strength to move forward with editing. But it also made the film deeply personal, and in a way, it felt like we were all going through a meaningful process together through their act of sharing and reflecting.





#### Women Cine<mark>makers</mark>



#### Women Cinemakers







Throughout the journey, my mother was a constant source of encouragement. Even on the most difficult days, when I doubted the film's completion, she remained optimistic and urged me to keep going. Her unwavering belief in the project, as well as her strength and resilience, were a guiding force for me.

We truly appreciate the way the film conveys the complexities of family and legacy. What does this story mean to you personally, beyond its artistic impact?

**Shiry Price**: The process of making this film was incredibly personal for me, as it allowed my mother and aunt to revisit memories and emotions they had long suppressed. It gave them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of orphanhood from the perspective of grown women, which sparked many deep, meaningful conversations with my sister, cousins, and me about our family's past and how it continues to touch our lives today. Through these discussions, we explored the similarities and differences in our individual experiences, which brought us closer together as a family.

The premiere of the film at the Haifa Film Festival in October 2021 was a particularly emotional moment for all of us. Seeing the film come to life and sharing it with an audience was a profound experience, marking a significant chapter in our family's journey. It was more than just a film debut—it felt like a communal healing process, where the





past was honored and acknowledged in a very tangible way.

This support and connection with my mother go beyond the film. She has always been a great admirer of art, cinema, dance, and music—her passion for these things deeply inspired me. She is my partner in exploring new movies and performances, and that shared love for the arts is something I try to pass on to my own children. This legacy of creativity and appreciation for the world around us is something that continues to shape my life, and I hope it will continue to influence future generations in our family.

The decision to intertwine archival footage, personal interviews, and modern-day reflections is particularly effective, and the visual treatment of archival materials appears rather distinctive in your work. How did you decide on this narrative structure? What guided your *aesthetic choices* in presenting historical footage?

**Shiry Price**: The film was built from materials shot over several years, involving various cinematographers and multiple formats. This diversity of footage—each with its own contrasts, imperfections, and textures—became a key element of the film's aesthetic and visual language. I embraced these contrasts and rough edges because they reflect





#### Women Cine<mark>makers</mark>











the raw, emotional nature of the story. They capture the complexity of family, connection, relationships, and the passage of time—universal themes that resonate with everyone. I wanted the film's casual, almost unpolished feel to reflect the accessible sensibility of the main characters, and in doing so, make the narrative feel more intimate and grounded.

The film is also anchored by my own voiceover, which frames the story from my personal perspective. My voice provides continuity, guiding the audience through the narrative and helping to bridge the past with the present. The film begins and ends with my reflections, reinforcing the cyclical nature of memory and how the past continually shapes our understanding of the present. This structure, combining different styles and mediums, allowed me to express the emotional depth of the story in a more holistic and layered way.

Your documentary is both personal and universal in its themes. *Elisheva and Ruthi* portrays profound resilience in the face of adversity. Were there particular *themes or messages* you hoped audiences would take away, especially regarding the importance of family bonds and perseverance?

**Shiry Price**: As I immersed myself in the family photo albums, I began to realize how deeply the present is



#### Women Ginemakers

Art & Independent Cinema

intertwined with the past. One moment that stands out to me is when I discovered that the lullaby I sing to my son is the same one my grandmother would sing to my mother. It was a beautiful reminder of how family bonds transcend generations—how these small, seemingly insignificant gestures are passed down and kept alive, often without us even realizing it. This continuity is at the heart of family, and it's a powerful force that shapes us, even in ways we might not fully understand.

My hope is that audiences come away with a deeper appreciation for the importance of family, not just as a source of love and support, but as a powerful foundation that helps us weather life's most difficult challenges. The film speaks to the resilience that can emerge from the most trying circumstances, and the strength we draw from our connections to those we love, no matter what adversity we face.

We really appreciate your insights and the time you've generously given us, Shiry. As we wrap up, we're especially keen to hear about your artistic trajectory. Could you share with our readers some tantalising details about your upcoming projects? We're particularly interested in how you envision your work evolving in the future. Are there new themes you're eager to explore, or perhaps











#### innovative techniques you're looking to incorporate?

Shiry Price: I'm currently working on a new documentary film set in Jerusalem, which explores the unique connection between the city and the renowned Israeli author S.Y. Agnon, the only Israeli writer to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature. The film blends fiction and reality, combining documentary footage with scenes of local residents wandering through the alleys and streets featured in Agnon's stories. Through this, the film delves into his profound yearning for home, offering a reflection on life in Jerusalem amid the complex realities of Israel in 2024. I'm collaborating closely on this project with Dr. Michal Peles Almagor, an academic and expert on Agnon's work, which is enriching the project with her deep understanding of his literature.

In addition, I'm working on a new video art piece based on found footage material. This project is an exploration of intertextuality—how different forms of art and media can interact and resonate with each other. I'm particularly interested in the evolving world of video art and the ways in which found footage can be re-contextualized to create new narratives. It's an area I'm continuing to study and experiment with, constantly learning new techniques and methods.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com





# Marlen Puello

In a reduced space depoliticized of all visibility and legislation: she, the Fémina, lies. Stripped of all rights to exert her nature, in pursuit of her survival. Not included by him, the Homo, without visualization as a subject, hidden, omitted, overshadowed.

It occurs in every corner of the world, every day, at every hour, victim of invisibility and pedagogical exercise of Violence. A subtle Violence that also kills us.

This piece is an invitation to think ourselves as Women in all the aspects that our Femininity involves.

It is a piece to invite to perceive the first cell of Violence, which is not him, the HOMO, but the installed system that indoctrinates and annihilate us.

In memory of Ana Mendieta: Activist, feminist, exiled, and performer from Cuba. She died in 1985 at the age of 36, falling from the window of her 34th floor apartment after an argument with her husband, Carl Andre, the artist from the United States who was tried and acquitted. Mendieta's work was mainly recognized in the scope of feminist art criticism.

She didn't consider herself as feminist, but she was a woman who used her body and experiences as woman in her work. In fact, her early work is very related to her own examination of her identity as Latin, woman, and displaced person from her homeland.



An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Marlen and welcome to WomenCinemakers. For this special edition we have selected *HOMO FEMINA*, an extremely interesting performance vide that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article and that can be viewed at





## Women Ginemakers

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https://youtu.be/NaTeIoENybg. Your film has impressed us for the way it boldly confronts the often- overlooked complexities of femininity and the pervasive systems of violence that shape our lives. Rather than merely posing questions, it compels viewers to deeply examine their own perceptions and biases. When walking our readers through your usual setup and process, would you tell us something about the genesis of HOMO FEMINA?

**Marlen Puello**: Personally, I ask myself every day about the utility of art in the world we inhabit. I am absolutely convinced that, for me, art is a tool for social transformation. I believe in art that invites us to think, to question ourselves, and to be moved. I am interested in an active spectator, not one who is merely entertained.

Homo Femina is a piece that seeks to explore, to look through the peephole of a door that frames a reality intrinsically complex due to its invisibility. Subtle violence, exercised daily through the microaggressions of language, preestablished roles, and the objectification of the female body, highlights once again that the body of a woman has been and continues to be





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a battleground.

Homo Femina was born during the pandemic, a time when limitations became a powerful creative trigger for me. The sensation of the world coming to a standstill was both strange and contradictory. In the dance world, where our bodies are our primary tools, being confined at home was a significant challenge. Adapting to this new reality demanded great effort.

For me, however, having already spent years directing projects remotely from Stockholm while collaborating in Argentina, this situation reaffirmed that even more possibilities were within reach. It was then that audiovisual language emerged as a new creative opportunity.

Magalí Baratini, an Argentinian dancer and graduate of Teatro Colón, with whom I have worked for many years, offered to experiment with digital platforms and the audiovisual format. Thus, she from Buenos Aires and I from Stockholm began to explore the possibilities of creating and directing remotely. This process not only expanded our artistic tools but also demonstrated that physical barriers could be overcome with imagination and technology.

**HOMO FEMINA invites viewers to 'perceive'** 







rather than merely observe. What choreographic techniques did you employ to create this active spectatorship?

Marlen Puello: The audiovisual language is

SINEMAKERS

very different from theatrical dance language. The ability to work with varied shots and angles opens up new forms of perception, enriching the language of dance. With Magalí, we started by exploring the possibilities



offered by the camera—initially her phone—and later through tools like Zoom.

The narrative emerged later. I vividly remember a specific aerial shot we captured;

in that moment, the ghost of Ana Mendieta appeared. It was then that I fully understood the essence of this project.

I was interested in the idea of inviting the



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audience to spy, observe, and participate. To achieve this, we used different angles and possibilities offered by the camera. These elements unfold across the seven short films that comprise the audiovisual work. It's a very different approach from the techniques I usually employ in the theatrical format, but it represents another language with its own unique richness.

Your decision to honour Ana Mendieta through this work feels both poignant and layered. How did Mendieta's legacy influence the way you approached the choreography and narrative structure of this film?

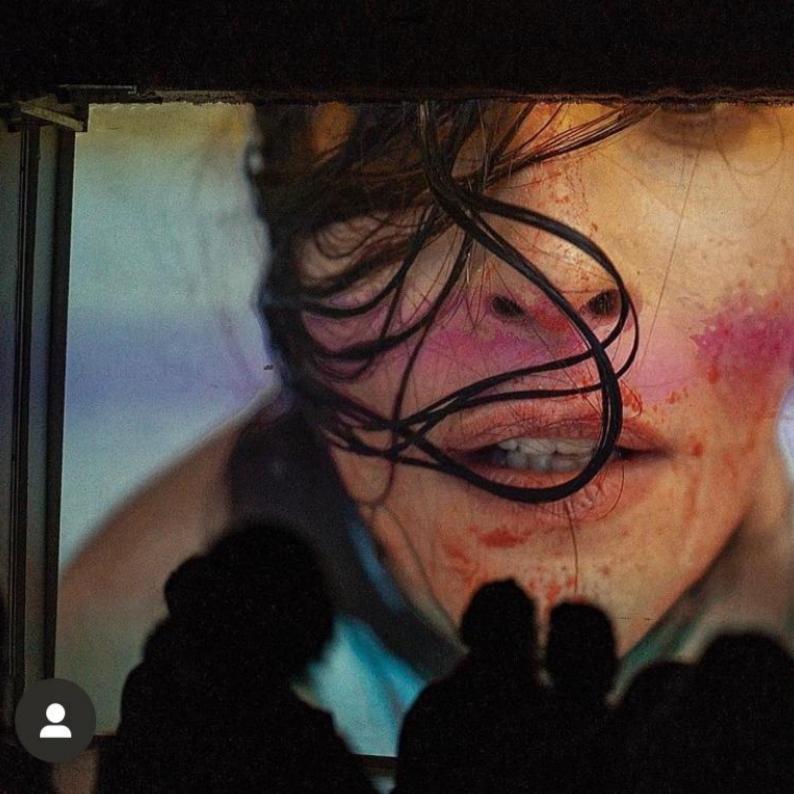
Marlen Puello: Ana Mendieta's work has always deeply moved me—not just her artistic production but also her personal story, her tragic end, the injustice and mystery surrounding her death, and the personal premonitions she sketched in her creations. Mendieta was a mystical artist, endowed with immense symbolic and spiritual power.

She was a performative artist who used her body to tell stories, to speak about us, as

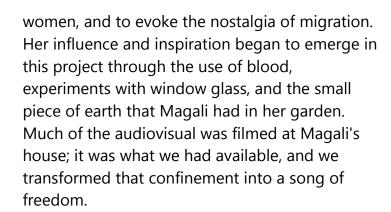












Your own biographical context - characterised by the intersection of identities you've highlighted: Latin, woman, displaced remarkably echoes some of Ana Mendieta's complex lived experiences. Could you unpack how your personal narrative of identity, migration, and cultural belonging infiltrates the choreographic language of *HOMO* **FEMINA?** More specifically, how do the nuances of being a woman who has potentially experienced displacement whether geographical, cultural, or psychological - translate into the corporeal and spatial dynamics of your dance film? Are there specific movements, gestures, or rhythmic structures that emerge from these intersectional experiences of identity?









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Marlen Puello: I deeply believe that my work is topographical. That is, I always need to first find the frame, the space, in order to create. The space, I feel, structures me and conditions me, allowing me to then liberate myself and reinvent. I sense that this is influenced by the trials of my migrations, especially by the initial forced displacement that leaving Cuba at the age of 21 meant for me.

Since then, finding a space has always been a challenge. Resignifying the sense of calling somewhere "home," wherever I may be, has been a journey made possible by art. Art is what always allows me to feel at home. With Ana Mendieta, I share that pain and longing for the lost land, a land that we have, through art, managed to resignify and reconnect with.

We are particularly impressed by your deliberate choice to create a choreographic work that deconstructs the systemic violence against women. Could you elaborate on how the concept of depoliticized space emerged as a central











## metaphor in your artistic conception of *HOMO FEMINA*?

Marlen Puello: As a woman, I have lived countless experiences that, throughout history, have felt unjust and have prompted me to question many things. Within me burns the need to challenge, to move, to think collectively, and to find new ways to approach reality. There are spaces that have historically been relegated to women, such as the home, which are utterly depoliticized due to their invisibility. It is here that the cell of patriarchal violence against women begins.

Domestic violence, symbolic violence through language, and violence in the roles we play are forms of invisible violence that persist in everyday life. Today, women step out of the home, work, achieve economic independence, and fight for the home to become a shared space of responsibilities and roles. Yet, we are still far from building a truly just society, where equity becomes more than an aspiration and a practice woven into the fabric of our daily lives.

We really appreciate how the piece invites viewers to confront the "first cell of







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Violence" as systemic rather than individual. Could you discuss the challenges of representing such an abstract and pervasive concept through dance?

Marlen Puello: Of course, the invisibilized violence is systemic, hidden, and deeply rooted in language, in the spaces and roles that are pre-assigned to us. To bring visibility to this reality, I also collaborated with the Argentine writer and poet Patricia Cuaranta, as the word had to be present. What is not named remains in silence, in darkness.

Throughout the process, we incorporated the work of musician and sound designer Andrés Soriano, who created a musical piece using micro-misogynistic phrases in various languages from collaborators invited from different parts of the world. And, of course, the filming and editing by Jeremías Vizcaíno, who, in addition to being a dancer, is an audiovisual producer and contributed with his masculine perspective to this construction of femininity.

The location where HOMO FEMINA takes place is central to the film's message. How











did you choose this space, and what emotions or reflections did you aim to evoke through it? Did you draw inspiration from real or social spaces to construct this environment?

Marlen Puello: The space of Homo Femina was born in the virtual world, but with Magali, we decided to move it to Argentina, a country marked by significant social struggles, such as the recent victory of the decriminalization of abortion, a crucial achievement in the last few years. In Latin America, the street violence that women endure, the objectification and tyranny of their bodies, the sexualization, domestic violence, and inequality are experienced in a much more intense way than in Europe, even in countries like Sweden, which are considered at the forefront of global feminism.

Although my environment and local geography have changed, I still feel deeply Latin American. My voice, my inner geography, responds to these ongoing issues, and my art is a reflection of that connection, of an identity that does not disappear, but transforms and continues to resist.





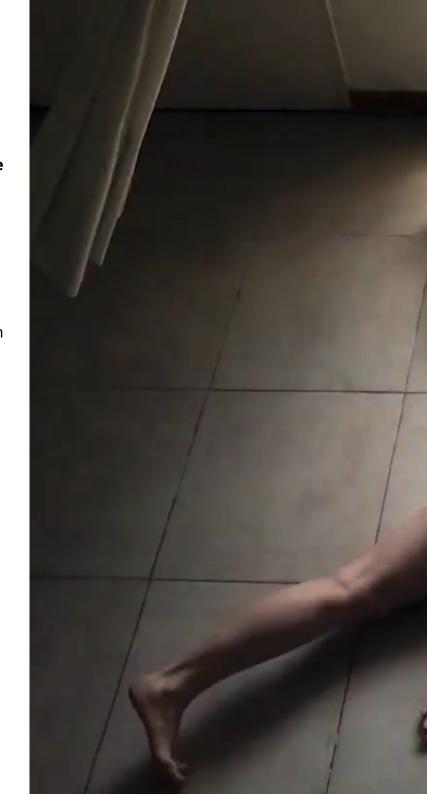


Thank you so much for your time and for sharing such profound insights with us, Marlen. Before we conclude, could you share a glimpse into any upcoming projects or creative ventures you're currently working on? Additionally, how do you envision your artistic practice evolving in the coming years, particularly in how you approach storytelling through dance and film?

Marlen Puello: Thank you for choosing us. I am currently immersed in the creative process of two projects that will come to light in 2025. Both address the need to reconnect with ritual, to revisit the myths that shape us, as we continue to be the stories we tell ourselves. They aim to return to the essence of our collective cultural construction and will be developed in interactive theatrical spaces. I have no doubt that, in the future, cinema will call me again, and I hope it won't be due to a pandemic that limits us. However, I fully trust my ability to transform whatever comes my way.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com









# Kalina Petrova

Lives and works in London and Sofia

On the endless road to meeting the me that is me but is not me. In search of the dark matter enveloping the known realm of light. I am all my demons, and all the demons are each other, are me. The journey occurs in the unfamiliar realm – the one beyond human understanding, the place where all the energy in our known universe originates. Once we find a way to wake up to the common thread that weaves together all our spirits – human and more-than human – we will have the power to create a pattern for harmonious being with ourselves, with the other, with the full multiplicities of the universe's being. Countless of indigenous cultures, philosophers, physicists, spiritual leaders, artists, seekers, and thinkers throughout history have reached the conclusion that despite being individual manifestations with our own internal multitude of being, we are essentially one bundle

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Kalina and welcome to WomenCinemakers: before starting to elaborate about your film we would start this interview with a couple of questions about your background. You have a solid formal training. After having earned your BA in Theatre Practice, you nurtured your education with an MFA
Dance and Embodied Practice. How does your
educational background shape your
development and approach as a
multidisciplinary artist? Moreover, does your
cultural background inform the way you
create your artworks?

**Kalina Petrova**: Hello! Thank you for inviting me to share my journey and artistic practice with WomenCinemakers. I appreciate your interest in

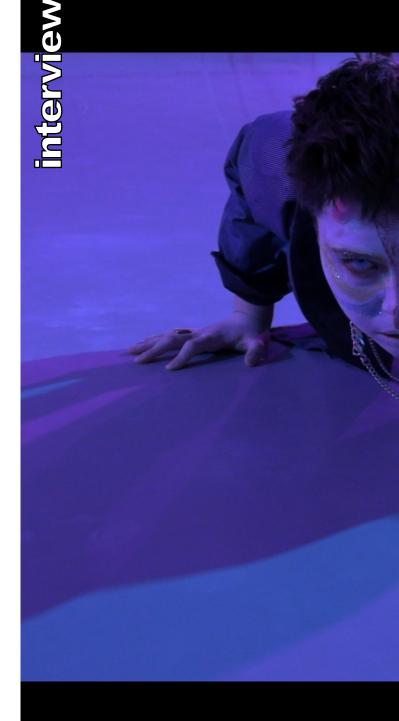


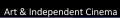


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my work. So, my educational journey has been truly integral to shaping my artistic voice and methodology, although most of what my aesthetic taste and inspirations have emerged more from living life in London, meeting people internationally and doing independent research. Starting with my BA at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, I was introduced to the foundational principles of creating performance art, blending visual aesthetics, narrative, and embodiment – which already really shifted what I was envisioning my arts practice would be like when I was graduating from highschool as a "theatre kid". Getting into university, I was genuinely still imagining more established forms of theatre and film, which would just incorporate the full shabazz of dance, singing, acting, etc. Little did I know how quickly my style and inspirations would transform and drift towards a lot more experimental, unpopular and niche forms of expression. Although most of my current practice was actually shaped outside of the uni studios, I think it definitely trained me to see the stage as a multidimensional space of experimentation where the boundaries between forms can blur, and to start thinking more boldly about which places can become a stage in the first place. Of course, a lot of what I gained was also a large number of resources and theoretical knowledge. Last, but not least, meeting all the cool creative people there was paramount to my development as an artist.

## SINEMAKERS















Afterwords, my MFA filled the gaps in my dance training by grounding my embodied knowledge of different movement styles and teaching approaches, and deepening my understanding of the body as an archive of lived experience and a vessel for storytelling. It also encouraged me to explore somatic practices and movement as tools for healing and transformation, which I now want to explore even further and pursue more education in the field. So, I guess it's clear that formal education influences me a lot – even if I follow the beat of my own drum with it and don't fully agree with how it is often delivered – if I want to go back for more, then there is something in there I find very meaningful. Reflecting on higher education in the arts, I recognize its role in providing structured learning, critical discourse, and exposure to diverse perspectives. However, it's essential to acknowledge that much artistic growth occurs outside academic institutions, through lived experiences, cultural immersion, and self-directed exploration. Balancing formal education with personal experience enriches an artist's practice, fostering a holistic approach to creativity.

As to my background – growing up in Sofia, Bulgaria, I was surrounded by the coexistence of ancient traditions and contemporary cultural shifts, which imbued my work with an inherent tension



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between the spiritual and the material. I can't even begin to explain all the tensions and existential crises that being from that region encompasses to be fair, but if you know anything about the Balkans, you know that it is a region characterised by a complex socio-political and historical landscape. Bulgaria's history, marked by periods of Ottoman rule, liberation, communist governance, and a transition to democracy, creates a unique cultural tension between ancient traditions and contemporary shifts. We are absolutely a land of the "in-betweens" – inbetween the past and the present, in-between the Global East and Global West, in-between pride and shame, and so many more. That on its own is a topic of a book, but one thing I can say now is that I discovered that this identity crisis that comes from being from the land of in-betweens fits perfectly into the butoh essence, which resides in the exact same liminal plane of existence, embracing the grotesque and exploring themes of darkness and existentialism. Butoh's focus on the body's natural movements and its intrinsic connection to nature align with the lived experiences of individuals in regions like the Balkans, where history and identity are in constant flux. So, as strangely as it may sound that an avant-garde Japanese dance practice created in the aftermath of WWII destruction would resonate so well with the lived experience of a Bulgarian living in the 21st century – here we are, and I promise you it makes

perfect sense if you start observing our society's ways of being.

So, to come back to your question – my cultural background informs much of my artistic process in the way that I find inherently appealing to draw on rituals, communal practices, and the history of resistance and complacency (yet another area of living in the in-between) in the Balkans. These intersections between my formal education and personal history enable me to explore themes of interconnectedness, healing, and transgression through the lens of my multidisciplinary approach in a way that feels both very personal and like a piece in my larger scale anthropologic and sociologic research.

For this special edition of WomenCinemakers we have selected Multiplicities of Oneness, an extremely interesting work that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article and that can be viewed at <a href="https://youtu.be/0d8pCteDXMA">https://youtu.be/0d8pCteDXMA</a>. We truly admire the poetic ambition of your film. When walking our readers through the genesis of Multiplicities of Oneness, would you tell us how did you conceptualise such an expansive exploration of identity and unity, and where did the journey of this project begin for you? Kalina Petrova: The journey of Multiplicities of







Oneness began with a desire to explore the liminal spaces of identity—those blurry, fluid realms where the self dissolves into something larger – as well as the myriads of selves that compose that one big self, which is manifesting itself as a singular unified entity. Inspired by my Butoh practice and its meditative engagement with transformation. I wanted to delve into the tensions and harmonies of multiplicity: how we contain many selves within us and are simultaneously part of a greater unity, which also applies to us as an individual being a part of a larger unity of many humans and non-humans. The genesis of Multiplicities of Oneness was deeply influenced by my desire to explore the fluidity of identity and the interconnectedness of all beings. This exploration was enriched by various philosophical and spiritual frameworks that perceive identity and existence as multifaceted and interconnected.

The concept came first from an observation of natural phenomena, such as water ripples or tree branches, where individuality exists in harmony with the whole. I found these metaphors compelling as a way to explore identity, particularly as a queer artist navigating intersecting personal, cultural, and political realities. One core inspirational theoretical framework that shaped my process came from studying the queerness of

nature through the lens of queer ecology. What I love about queer ecology is the way it challenges traditional binaries and heteronormative interpretations of nature, highlighting the diversity and fluidity present in natural ecosystems. Contrary to the narratives prominent in the mainstream media today, in the natural world, numerous species exhibit behaviours that defy strict gender and sexual classifications. For instance, certain fish species can change sex based on environmental conditions, and same-sex pairings have been observed in various animal groups. This inherent queerness in nature disrupts normative expectations and underscores the fluidity of life, which I find utterly inspiring and so interesting to approach through movement as a performer. Incorporating these concepts into my work allowed me to draw parallels between human identity and natural diversity, emphasising that fluidity and multiplicity are intrinsic to both. This perspective invites a more inclusive understanding of identity, free from rigid classifications. Native American cosmologies are another essential source of inspiration for me as they often perceive humans as integral components of a larger, interconnected ecosystem. These worldviews emphasise relationality, where humans, animals, plants, and the earth are part of a cohesive whole.



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Such perspectives challenge anthropocentric views, promoting a sense of unity and responsibility towards all forms of life. This holistic understanding of existence resonated with my exploration of unity and multiplicity, reinforcing the idea that individual identities are both distinct and part of a greater collective consciousness.

On an embodied level, the starting point for my creation was my meditation and yoga practices, which at that particular time were focused on Kundalini, which played a pivotal role in conceptualising the film. Kundalini yoga focuses on awakening dormant energy at the base of the spine, guiding it through the seven chakras to achieve spiritual enlightenment. Each chakra corresponds to specific physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the self. A very subtle layer of the film is that each of the six characters that I introduce my spectators to is based on and rooted in a chakra – it manifests the qualities od the chakra as a dancing body. If you wonder why six and not seven, the number of chakra centres – because the seventh one, the heart chakra, is the one holding the camera and takes you through the journey (in this case, me). Envisioning the characters as personifications of the chakras allowed for a symbolic representation of different facets of identity and consciousness. Guiding artists through meditations that engaged with their



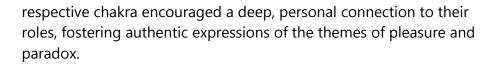








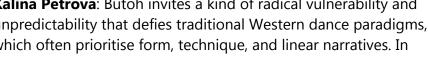
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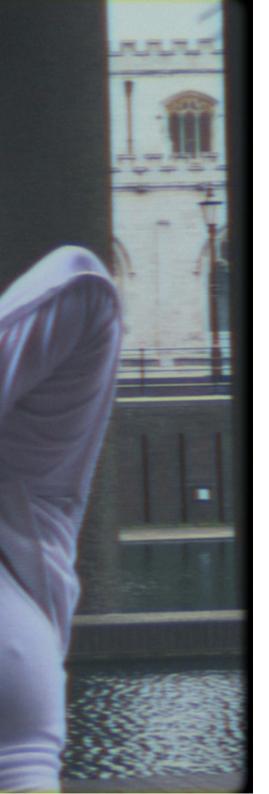


The film's genesis was rooted in improvisational movement research and a series of workshops I facilitated, where I encouraged participants to explore themes of fragmentation, connection, and transcendence. This iterative process led to a work that meditates on identity as both deeply personal and universally shared. Working both individually and collectively with the artists, I facilitated meditative sessions that encouraged them to embody their characters as extensions of themselves. By navigating the extremes of pleasure and paradox, the performers delved into the complexities of human experience, reflecting the multifaceted nature of identity and existence. This integrative approach, combining insights from queer ecology, indigenous cosmologies, and Kundalini meditation, allowed Multiplicities of Oneness to emerge as a contemplative exploration of the self's dissolution into the collective, and the collective's manifestation within the self.

The use of Butoh-inspired movements adds visceral and meditative qualities to your film. How does your interpretation of Butoh challenge traditional Western dance paradigms of movement and bodily expression? Additionally, what specific Butoh techniques have most significantly influenced your choreography?

Kalina Petrova: Butoh invites a kind of radical vulnerability and unpredictability that defies traditional Western dance paradigms, which often prioritise form, technique, and linear narratives. In





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contrast, Butoh embraces the grotesque, the invisible, and the unknown. It allows the body to become a site of transformation, tapping into what lies beneath the surface of consciousness. This philosophy aligns with my exploration of movement as a conversation between the internal and external worlds. For me, Butoh is not just a dance that you go into the studio to do – it transcends conventional dance paradigms, evolving into an alternate state of being that permeates daily life and fundamentally altered my approach to existence. It is basically a way of being, because engaging deeply with Butoh has fostered a heightened awareness of my body's relationship to the environment, time, and internal consciousness, which has led to a profound transformation in my perception and interaction with the world. My interpretation of Butoh is deeply influenced by ritualistic practices, particularly the pagan rituals inherent in my Bulgarian cultural heritage. Bulgaria's rich tapestry of traditional festivals, such as the Nestinari fire-dancing ritual, embodies a profound spirituality and connection between the earthly and the spiritual realms. These rituals, believed to bring prosperity and protection against evil, are a testament to the deep-seated communal practices that have been preserved over centuries. Integrating these ritualistic elements with Butoh allows for a unique fusion that honours both the various influences of my teachers and the distinctive direction of my personal practice. This synthesis creates a space where the spiritual and the corporeal intersect, enabling a transformative exploration of movement and expression.

Key techniques influencing my work include 'ma' (the space in-between), which encourages the play with stillness and invisible movements, inviting the audience into a shared, charged moment of presence. I also draw from fukushi, the internalising of emotion and letting it dictate











movement, allowing authenticity to emerge through visceral embodiment. The Hijikata walking exercise serves as a foundational method for generating material, emphasising a grounded, deliberate movement that connects the dancer to the earth. Additionally, the Kazuo Ohno flower exercise inspires dancers to embody the delicate and transient nature of a blooming flower, fostering a deep connection to organic forms and processes. These exercises, along with techniques that prompt dancers to move as if guided by an external force, cultivate a state where the body becomes a vessel for expression beyond conscious control. By engaging with these principles, I aim to create work that is raw, meditative, and deeply intuitive—challenging the codified language of Western dance. I embrace Butoh as a holistic state of being and intertwine it with all other elements of my identity and passions, by which process I believe I can create work that is challenging and even slightly unsettling – a prime example being that my dance film is 43 minutes long, while the average dance film is usually no more than 15, which on its own I find to be very much in the Butoh spirit of time play.

Multiplicities of Oneness traverses both the personal and the universal. How did your own experiences and identity shape the creative process?

**Kalina Petrova**: Of course, as with the work of any artist, my personal experiences and identity have greatly shaped the artwork I have created. Being a queer, non-binary, migrant, transdisciplinary artist directly informed *Multiplicities of Oneness* in all aspects of the work – from the meaning and conceptual framework to the aesthetics and embodied language. The work reflects my ongoing journey of self-discovery, where identity is not static but fluid and intersectional. This lens allowed me to explore multiplicity as a lived reality—being many things at once—and the deep yearning for unity that







comes with it. Navigating the complexities of non-binary identity, I perceive my gender as transcending the traditional binary classifications, which dominate the Western gender discourse. While I do not feel disconnected from my female body, I experience my identity as encompassing multiple facets that extend beyond conventional definitions of femininity, and even holding a lot of masculinity and qualities related to being manly. The experience of being in a fluid state in regard to my gender identity – an identity also shared by a couple of my dancers – deeply influenced the creative process in the way that realising that I am non-binary allowed me to approach identity as fluid, multifaceted, and constantly evolving. It shapes how I perceive and portray characters, movement, and narrative, emphasizing the coexistence of multiple truths and the interplay between opposites. Unlocking this embodied wisdom in my own self in turn gave me a lot of insights on how I can facilitate this transformative experience for others while generating material that comes from the person themselves rather than being an imposed choreography. This perspective also encourages me to create work that resists rigid definitions, instead embracing ambiguity and transformation as central themes, and it fosters a sensitivity to exploring liminal spaces—those in-between realms where new possibilities for expression emerge.

Growing up in Bulgaria, a society where women are often subjected to hypersexualisation or sexual repression, added layers of complexity to my self-exploration. In such environments, women may be viewed as sexual objects expected to conform to male desires, or any expression of sexuality may be deemed indecent. These societal attitudes can lead to internalised conflicts and challenges in embracing one's sexual





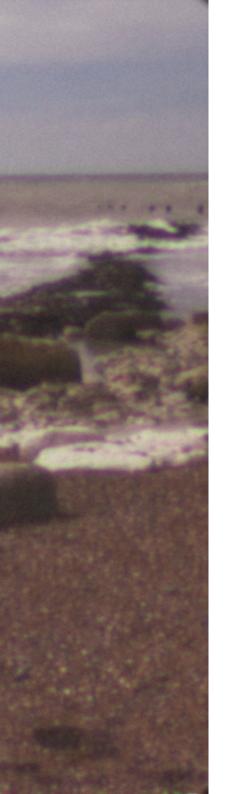




identity, particularly for queer individuals. Consequently, I became deeply aware of the complexities surrounding sexual liberation in a society marked by conflicting attitudes and made it a mission to provide a space where my collaborators can safely explore their sexuality and play with their pleasure while building the movement vocabulary of the piece. I generally thrive in paradox, so I naturally like to nitpick the nitty-gritty of it, which encouraged me to explore sensuality in my work as a way of reclaiming and reframing expressions of sexuality. By blending subtlety with moments of boldness, I aimed to challenge cultural taboos while creating a space where desire and intimacy can be both celebrated and reimagined. Themes of healing and transformation were central to my process. Personal experiences of navigating societal expectations and the vulnerabilities of queerness shaped the intimate and universal layers of the film. By weaving together personal memory, ritualistic gestures, and somatic exploration, I sought to create a piece that holds space for others to reflect on their own identities and shared humanity.

My spiritual journey further influenced the film's development. I was baptised when I was one year old, my father is Christian and generally, our society is considered to be Orthodox Christian. Now, if you dive deeper into it, you will see that Bulgaria is actually a lot more superstitious and in tune with its pagan roots than people would like to admit, but the current socio-political climate in Europe has made it so that Christianity has been placed at the centre of many arguments around traditional values and cultural identity. While as I child I was just moving in silent agreement to the prescribed Christian identity, as I matured, I found a deeper resonance with diverse spiritual practices, many originating from the Global South. This exploration required a mindful approach to avoid cultural appropriation, acknowledging





Art & Independent Cinema

the importance of respecting traditions that are not inherently mine. Butoh, although not a spiritual practice per se, is an example of one of those cultural 'transgressions' of mine, which I feel to be very in tune with the way I like dancing and the way I experience my spirituality. Additionally, engaging in shadow work – a practice involving the exploration of the unconscious aspects of the psyche – has been central to my self-discovery and to the making this film. This process entails confronting and integrating suppressed or hidden parts of oneself, leading to a more holistic understanding of identity. Incorporating shadow work into my creative process allowed for a deeper exploration of the multifaceted self, enriching the film's thematic depth. After we completed the project, a few of the dancers also shared that they had very profound transformational experiences in their personal lives because of the way I invited them to engage in shadow work, which was very special and meaningful for me as an artist who is not focused only on delivering a final product, but wants creation to be impactful for everyone involved, especially my collaborators.

Finally, my migration to the UK introduced me to a diverse cultural landscape, placing me in yet another "in-between" zone of influences. This experience broadened my perspective, allowing me to integrate various cultural elements into my Butoh practice and artistic expression. Migration as an experience can profoundly shape the movement vocabulary of a dancer and choreographer by exposing them to a rich tapestry of cultural influences and creating opportunities for blending diverse traditions, as well as by infusing their body with the experiential knowledge of crossing borders and expiring change by meeting the unknown. For me, the experience of moving from Bulgaria to London









introduced a dynamic clash between Eastern and Western aesthetics that was already present in my embodied experience in some ways via the cultural narratives that shape my own country but became even more prominent when I was introduced to a "properly Western" environment. In the East, there's often an emphasis on rootedness, spirituality, and communal practices, while the West prioritises innovation, individualism, and spectacle. This interplay creates fertile ground for developing a hybrid movement language that honours both the introspective, ritualistic qualities of Eastern traditions and the bold, experimental ethos of Western performance. Living in London further expanded this lens for me, immersing me in a constant flow of multicultural expressions. The city's vibrant artistic ecosystem continuously exposes me to an endless array of cultural spheres—from Afro-Caribbean dance forms to South Asian classical movements and contemporary European avant-garde practices. This diversity not only challenges me to break out of familiar patterns but also fosters a sense of interconnectedness, where movement becomes a dialogue between cultures rather than a single, fixed narrative. These influences converge in my choreography, reflecting the fluidity and complexity of identity in a multicultural world. By weaving together these personal experiences—gender identity exploration, societal challenges, spiritual journeys, shadow work, and migration—the creative process of Multiplicities of Oneness became a reflection of both personal and universal themes. The film serves as a space for others to contemplate their own identities and shared humanity, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and empathy.

The interplay of light and shadow, as well as the film's exploration of *unseen forces and hidden dimensions*, creates a rich visual language. How did you approach translating such





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abstract and intangible ideas into the film's aesthetic? Was there a particular symbolism that guided your creative decisions in this regard?

**Kalina Petrova**: Translating the abstract into the tangible was an intricate process of layering visual, sonic, and embodied elements. One of the foundations of the aesthetic came from my love of vintage cinema, which was picked up on by one of my university tutors, who described my film as: "80s horror erotica." I was immediately drawn to this description, even though I'm pretty sure he didn't mean it as a compliment, but since I am a huge fan of the genre, I was quite happy with his reading and accepted it to have been a guiding stylistic reference throughout the project. The VHS effect, for instance, was a deliberate choice in the editing process, intended to evoke a sense of personal archive. This aesthetic not only mirrors the nostalgic and tactile qualities of 80s horror but also creates a deeply private and intimate atmosphere, akin to the feeling of accessing secret memories or viewing one's life flash before their eyes in near-death experiences.

Symbolism is central to the film, with each character acting as a symbolic representation of a piece of the soul. Their painted faces and costuming were intentionally designed to dehumanize them slightly, turning them into transcendent entities that exist beyond the confines of human identity. These characters are not just humans—they are fragments of a whole, embodying the multiplicity of a singular being. The symbolic nature of their movements reinforces this idea, as each character's movement shifts midway through their chapter, transitioning between the two states of paradox and pleasure. This transformation is a physical manifestation of the tension and harmony that underpin human existence. The poetry integrated into the soundscape further reinforces











the symbolic dimension of the work. Each poem reflects the distinct voice of the chakra or character it represents, serving as a bridge between the visual and auditory elements. This layering of sensory details amplifies the film's meditative and transformative qualities, creating an immersive experience for the viewer.

Finally, the interplay of light and shadow—crafted using chiaroscuro techniques—became a metaphor for the seen and unseen forces that shape identity and existence. This manipulation of light not only highlighted the physicality of the performers but also suggested a deeper spiritual landscape, where the boundaries of the self blur and dissolve. Each element, from the textures of fabric and skin to the carefully choreographed transitions between states of being, was designed to resonate with the overarching themes of unity, fragmentation, and transcendence.

Multiplicities of Oneness invites viewers into realms that transcend ordinary human understanding, delving into concepts that are vast, abstract, and deeply philosophical. How did you navigate the challenge of making these ideas accessible to an audience while preserving their inherent mystery? Were there particular artistic strategies or storytelling techniques you relied on to maintain this delicate balance?

**Kalina Petrova**: This challenge lay in inviting the audience into an embodied experience without over-explaining. I approached this by creating layers of meaning, allowing viewers to engage with the work on their own terms. The choreography itself was intentionally organic and unpredictable, mirroring the psyche's hidden processes and leaving room for interpretation.

I relied on storytelling techniques rooted in sensation and imagery rather than linear narratives. By immersing viewers in sensory details—such as the rhythm



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of breath, the fluidity of movement, and the interplay of sound and silence—I aimed to evoke emotions that transcend intellectual understanding. This balance allowed the work to retain its mystery while remaining emotionally resonant.

Navigating the balance between accessibility and mystery in *Multiplicities of Oneness* required an intuitive approach to both the creation process and the way the work was presented. A significant part of this process involved guiding the dancers through a deeply personal and meditative exploration of their characters. I spent a considerable amount of time working individually and collectively with the performers, allowing them to internalise the material on a profound level. The principles of meditative practice were integrated into every stage of creation, enabling the dancers to embody their roles not just technically, but spiritually and emotionally. This process ensured that what emerged on screen resonated with a mystical authenticity, turning their performances into more than choreography—they became channels for their characters.

The intuitive method extended beyond the performers to the structure and merging of the film's elements. I approached the work holistically, allowing each layer—movement, sound, imagery, and text—to grow organically and inform the others. The use of meditative practices throughout the process helped create a sense of coherence, even when dealing with abstract and vast ideas. This intentional focus on intuition and fluidity allowed the work to remain esoteric yet accessible, inviting viewers to interpret and interact with it on their own terms.

One artistic strategy that grounded the experience was the division of the film into chapters, with each chapter introducing a specific character. This structural choice gave the audience touchpoints to engage with, offering











a sense of progression and clarity without diminishing the film's layered meanings. The characters' names and symbolic qualities acted as anchors, subtly guiding viewers through the abstract landscape.

The presentation of the film with an accompanying live performance further enhanced this balance. By curating the live experience as a meditative, trance-like event, I sought to create an immersive space where audiences could connect with the work on a personal level. This setup allowed viewers the agency to turn the experience into their own form of self-exploration. Sensory elements, from the rhythm of movement to the layered soundscape and the interplay of light and shadow, were designed to evoke an emotional resonance that transcends intellectual understanding.

Ultimately, the work's accessibility lies in its openness: it provides just enough grounding through structure and symbolism while leaving space for the audience's imagination and introspection. By immersing viewers in an environment that mirrors the hidden processes of the psyche, the work bridges the gap between the deeply personal and the universal, preserving its mystery while inviting profound connection.

The *interplay between sound and movement* seems central to the sensory experience of the film. Could you elaborate on how the sound design and music were developed to complement the choreography and visuals?

**Kalina Petrova**: The interplay between sound and movement was indeed central to the sensory experience of Multiplicities of Oneness. For this film, I collaborated with the immensely talented Nicole Marie Bettencourt Coelho, whose practice I deeply admire. While it is best to approach them directly for details and specifics of their experience of working with the movement and poetry, I feel that having already established a dynamic of collaboration on a previous project that was also rooted in spirituality and meditative processes, we were able to work fluidly



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on this film despite the time and space constraints I faced during production. This prior rapport helped us intuitively align on the aesthetic and emotional nuances required for the sound design.

To begin, I introduced Nicole to the concept and methodology behind the project in detail. This included explaining how the choreography and poetry were generated, drawing from meditations, automatic writing exercises after dance meditations, and movement scores designed to embody the paradox and pleasure inherent in each character. While financial constraints prevented them from joining us in the studio, I provided detailed references for each character, including movement qualities, and symbolic associations, to which they gave me instrumental textures that matched the essence of the performance.

Nicole received recordings of the poetry and footage of the dancers, which served as a foundation for crafting the soundtrack. The process mirrored the intuitive and meditative approach I used to guide the dancers—following their expressions and gestures to shape the sound. Despite working remotely, Nicole approached the task with a deeply sensitive understanding of the film's rhythm and emotional undercurrents. Their work seamlessly integrated breath, water, and heartbeats with ambient soundscapes and subtle field recordings, creating a sonic environment that amplified the body's textures and vulnerabilities.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this collaboration was the trust we shared. After our consultations and discussions about movement scores, instruments, and character references, I gave Nicole the freedom to explore and interpret the material in their own way. The result was a soundtrack that not only complemented the visuals but also elevated the











film's meditative and transcendent qualities.

Music in Multiplicities of Oneness became the connective tissue between disparate moments, creating continuity and resonance across the abstract visuals. The subtle shifts in tone and texture mirrored the transformations within the body, reinforcing the film's exploration of identity and unity. Nicole's intuitive artistry turned sound into a visceral extension of the movement, drawing the audience into an intimate and immersive experience that felt as fluid and organic as the creative process itself.

We particularly value the philosophical depth of your work, especially its exploration of unity and interconnectedness. In a world that often feels fragmented and divisive, how do you hope these ideas will *resonate with contemporary audiences*? Do you see your film as a call to action, a means of reflection, or perhaps *a bridge* between different ways of thinking and being?

**Kalina Petrova**: In a world that often feels fragmented and divisive, *Multiplicities of Oneness* serves as an invitation for self-reflection, much like a meditative practice, it seeks to remind audiences of the deep connections we share with each other and the environment. The film is both a means of reflection and a subtle call to action. It however does not aim to impose a specific mindset or compel viewers toward particular actions; rather, it seeks to introduce a visual representation of an experiential way of being that promotes embodied wisdom and bridges the in-between spaces within the self and among other beings. By sharing a piece of my own thought process, I hope to foster empathy and understanding among people.

Drawing inspiration from the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari,



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particularly their concept of the rhizome, the film embodies a nonhierarchical, interconnected approach to identity and existence. The rhizomatic model challenges traditional, linear narratives, emphasising multiplicity and the fluidity of connections. This perspective shines through the film's exploration of unity and interconnectedness, presenting identity as a complex, intertwined network rather than a singular, fixed entity. Additionally, the film draws from Japanese Zen Buddhist philosophy, which emphasises direct experience and the interconnectedness of all beings. Zen teachings encourage a dissolution of the ego and an embrace of the present moment, fostering a sense of unity with the surrounding world. This philosophical backdrop informs the film's meditative quality and its focus on the seamless integration of the self with the broader cosmos. In turn, the broader cosmology that is the backbone of my own spirituality, is rooted in my study of indigenous knowledge coming from communities that have been the target of colonial efforts of erasure. Indigenous knowledge systems and community-building practices significantly influence the work. Many Indigenous cultures perceive humans as intrinsically connected to the larger ecosystems, viewing all elements of nature as relatives rather than resources. This holistic worldview fosters a sense of responsibility and reciprocity, emphasising the importance of community and collective well-being. By integrating these perspectives, I aim to advocate for a reevaluation of our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the environment, promoting a more empathetic and interconnected way of being.

At its core, *Multiplicities of Oneness* encourages viewers to embrace vulnerability, joy, and care as radical acts. It serves as a quiet rebellion against alienation, inviting audiences to reflect on their own identities













and their connections to the collective. If the film sparks even a moment of introspection or connection, it achieves its purpose, fostering a bridge between different ways of thinking and being.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Kalina. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?

Kalina Petrova: Thank you so much for this wonderful opportunity to share my journey and thoughts! It has been a joy to reflect on the intersections of my practice and how I envision its evolution!

I've recently been focusing more on my work in social justice, communitybuilding, and activism, which has undoubtedly shaped my perspective as an artist, but has also kept me away from the studio. This shift has created some tension with my arts practice, as it sometimes feels like two distinct worlds competing for attention. However, I am determined to build a meaningful bridge between these walks of life. I want my art to be charged with everything that personally fires me up—whether that's social and political justice, trauma healing, or queer empowerment. I aim to transform my work into a tool for driving the changes I wish to see in the world.

A major part of this vision is my aspiration to pursue a practice as a Dance Movement Psychotherapist. I want to work specifically with trauma and abuse survivors, refugees, migrants, survivors of domestic violence, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. I see dance and movement as profound tools for release, transformation, and healing. Integrating this therapeutic focus with my creative practice feels like a natural next step in my journey.

In terms of future works, I don't have rigidly defined visions or shapes for



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them because I remain committed to an intuitive approach that responds to the dynamic flows of life. However, I know I am still deeply invested in film as a medium. I hope to create more projects blending dance and documentary, exploring experimental poetic cinema and slow cinema genres. These directions excite me as both a creator and a collaborator, particularly as I aim to streamline my roles and bring more voices into the filmmaking process.

As a performer, I am interested in pushing boundaries by exploring challenging, durational works that respond to contemporary socio-political events in transformative ways. I'm especially drawn to how these performances can be adapted to the energy and atmosphere of clubbing spaces, where shared euphoria and catharsis create fertile ground for communal engagement. This exploration also ties into my growing curiosity about fetish and kink within body arts practice. While this new direction is both intimidating and thrilling, it feels like a natural extension of my ongoing dive into the depths of sensuality, sexuality, and the layered complexities of embodiment. Ultimately, my work is evolving towards a more integrated space where art, activism, and healing coexist. I hope to continue creating pieces that embody resistance, joy, and transformation, while nurturing spaces that invite collective reflection and radical connection. Whether through film, performance, or community-based projects, I am excited to see where this path leads and how these practices can weave together to foster empathy, empowerment, and change.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant

womencinemakers.press@gmail.com







# Wilma Casal

Lives and works in New York City, USA

Even as a child, I was entranced by unspoken language. Watching people sit still and contemplate or watching them interact without a word opened a myriad of wordless expressions for me. The rawness and truthfulness, the pure beauty of body language, the subtle gestures, the minute nuances, the spaces in between spoken words became my treasure trove, and I became a dancer.

Dance is my cherished medium for sharing my experiences and wonderment. By translating non-verbal communication - mine as well as others' - into movement, I strive to preserve the spark of body language, carry it forward, turn it into a flame, or follow it to its embers. As a dancer, I want to bring the same grace, wonder, and joy I experience in my daily observations to my audience, inviting them to see and enjoy my world in all its facets through my art form.



An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

Hello Wilma and welcome to WomenCinemakers: before starting to

elaborate about your film we would invite our readers to visit

https://www.wolfandswan.company/wil macasal in order to get a wider idea about your artistic production. For this







special edition we have selected *An Ocean Away,* an extremely interesting short film that can be viewed at

https://www.wolfandswan.company/cinema. We really appreciate how the film encapsulates a story of freedom and restraint through the metaphor of a fisherman and her pursuit. Could you tell us about the genesis of An Ocean Away? What inspired you to explore these themes through dance?

**Wilma Casal**: Hello and thank you for inviting me!

An Ocean Away tells the story of a fisherman who, on his quest for the big catch, encounters a breathtakingly magnificent fish.

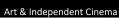
My big catch was an encounter with a piece of music by Jean Sibelius that I stumbled across and which captivated me instantly.

From the moment I heard it, I saw a fisherman, then a fish, and it felt like the music told me a story.

So I began to work on it, created the movements of the fisherman, built myself a











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fishing rod, and observed fish as they moved in the water.

My fisherman became more and more likable to me, and I read from his movements what drove him and how I was supposed to lead his way. That's how all the pieces slowly came together to form a choreography and a story, which then became a dance film.

Your film seems to wrestle with the paradox of possession versus freedom, and you've used the ocean and the fisherman's journey as central elements in your visual narrative. What drew you to these symbols, and how do they tie into your personal and artistic experiences?

**Wilma Casal**: After my fisherman discovers and cunningly catches his fish, which embodies everything he longs for, he quickly has to realize that the exhilarating feeling of lightness and joy can only survive in freedom.

He lets the fish free, and I hope that one morning he wakes up and finds his happiness in understanding himself as part of a glorious and





fascinating ecosystem that we are proud to protect, as well as one another.

To me, freedom means being free of fear. Striving for that in all walks of life would probably be the pursuit of a utopia. But I have always worked to find this freedom for myself in dance. My voice, in which I can express myself freely.

An Ocean Away melds environmental elements with human experience. How did you integrate the natural setting—the waves, water and shoreline—into your choreography and visual narrative, particularly during your location scouting?

Wilma Casal: The search for our location





could have well made a funny movie in itself.

I was searching for an atmosphere where dreary industry meets the vastness of the ocean.

And so I started by walking the shores of all five boroughs of New York, looking for places in which I hoped to find what I had envisioned.

I love to walk, but it was winter, bitterly cold, and I was pushed to my limits.

So, I switched from land to water, and on the Rockaway Ferry Line, I one day caught sight of a ruin, which sparked my attention. I then took a trip to Staten Island one weekend to inspect that area, which, according to a map, was located behind a navy base.



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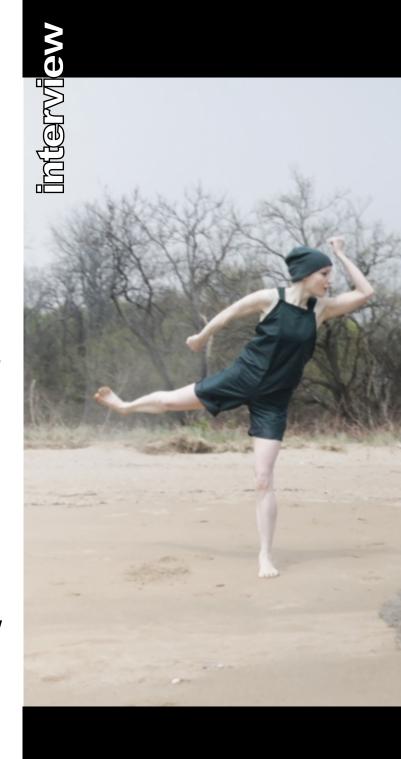
After a long march on which I bravely ignored several warning signs, I was rewarded with the scenery in which I could envision my fisherman starting his day.

Rocks and industrial waste that had been washed up over the years were piled up on the shore, between which a few people were scanning the ground for stranded valuables. It looked impossible to dance on such ground, but I just knew there had to be a way. For it was right here where the desolation and hope met, that accompanied my fisherman on his daily hunt.

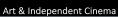
Here you had to be very persistent if you hoped for a sparkling miracle.

Your work aims to invite your audience to share in the grace, wonder, and joy you experience, and You speak of rawness and truthfulness as integral to your practice. How do you balance the raw, instinctive elements of movement with the technical precision that dance often demands?











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**Wilma Casal**: Technique is my tool to express myself precisely.

My love for dance began in classical ballet. Early on, I was also very fortunate to encounter the Martha Graham technique, in which I found my harmony and the possibility to initiate dance from impulses such as breathing. Fifteen years ago, I moved from East Berlin, where I was born, to New York to make this technique my language.

It is through meticulous crafting of movements and dynamics that I can create characters and bring them to life.

This is where I can express myself and draw a clear portrait. An exciting quest that reveals new treasures every day.

Through technical precision, I can find and share my interpretation and tell a story. Not losing sight of this goal in the daily pursuit of perfection is a long journey, much like that of the fisherman.

Your background in observing subtle human interactions seems central to your film, and we're particularly moved by your





translation of unspoken language into movement. Could you elaborate on how your early observations of human gestures influenced the characterization in this piece?

**Wilma Casal**: Our communication consists largely of body language.

We pass each other on the street, in the park, or on the subway and communicate so much, effortlessly and without saying a word.

I have always been fascinated by movements. The movements of humans and animals, such as those of ants, which carry their prey to the nest in efficiently choreographed teamwork.





Or the incredibly beautiful formation flights of birds, which remind of the lightness of being. But also the movement of elements, such as water or clouds, majestically changing their structures in the sky.

I love to watch all those small and big wonders and imagine stories inspired by the way they move. Everything and everyone has its very individual rhythm, and I find it fascinating to see what can cause this rhythm to get out of balance and how different people express their own feelings.

In *An Ocean Away*, the fish and fisherman watch each other, which fuels their curiosity and sympathy for one another.



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Their story unfolds through empathy, and I fervently believe that empathy is the strength that will help us bring many more stories to a peaceful ending.

An Ocean Away appears to blur the line between dance and everyday movement. What technical challenges did you face in filming these transitions?

**Wilma Casal**: The fisherman's gait embodies his daily routine and all the years of the same arduous grind-

day after day, one big catch after another. His irrepressible hunting instinct triumphs over his tired legs and weary mind.

Developing this choreographically has been enormous fun, but the stooped, hunched posture became a physically painful challenge during rehearsals and filming.

During our duet on the beach, the glorious, bright light not only made for beautiful shots, but also for copious tears every time we tried to look at the sky without blinking.

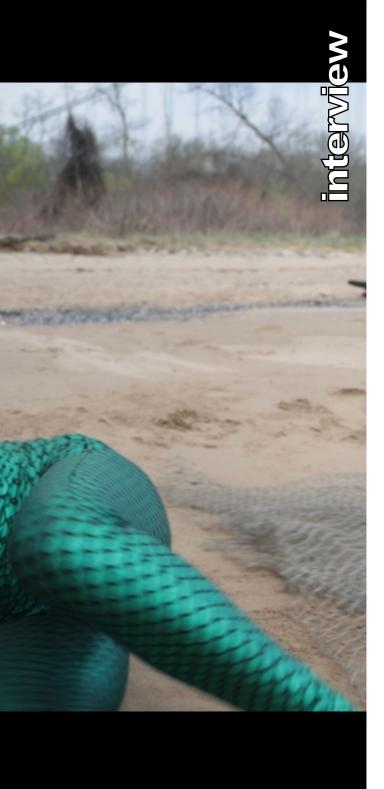














Fish unfold the elegance of their flowing movements in a game of resistance with the water and microgravity.

Only very special fish have the gift and ability to float in the undertow of the fine beach sand. It is precisely such a special miracle that my story washes ashore here.

Sparkling, it dances with the elements, endangered by the human urge for possession. But its radiance outshines everything that is not worth striving for.

The shot of our fish being released back into the vastness of the ocean was probably the most amusing anecdote of our shoot.

Back in April, the water was freezing cold.

Despite all the warnings, particularly about the strong currents, we made several attempts and trips to the location, with me taking on the role of the fish.

At first, I tried to swim against the cold of the water, dressed in a diving suit with a huge





glittering fin.

This was a hopeless undertaking without head protection, as the cold almost led to a state of shock.

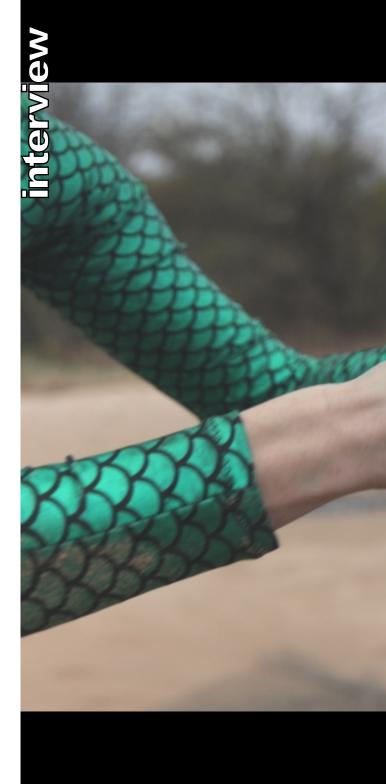
We then started a second attempt, in which I was fully prepared with a wetsuit, head protection, and neoprene gloves, ready and fully motivated to swim off into the open sea. Equipped with an underwater camera, our camerawoman also had rubber boots and waders. However, she was continually swept away by the strong waves.

As I tried to dive elegantly into the vastness with my glittering fin, the current dragged me along and I was repeatedly pushed upwards by the water.

I might have felt less like a novice swimmer if only I had known that when diving with neoprene gear, I would also have had to attach diving weights.

Dance often transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, offering a universal language of movement. Do you view *An Ocean Away* as a















story that can resonate universally, or do you feel it is deeply rooted in particular cultural narratives, personal experiences, or specific contexts? How do you balance crafting something that feels intimately personal while ensuring it remains accessible and meaningful to a broad and diverse audience?

**Wilma Casal**: I create pieces on topics that move me and send me on a quest.

I then try to present my story clearly and comprehensibly, in the hope of paving the way for viewers to accompany me on my journey and to also create their own story from my work.

We all see and feel individually, influenced by our socialization and physiology.

I want to create moments that bring people joy. Moments that can be experienced together and inspire an honest exchange.

Sharing our stories is a joint journey, an adventure in which we can discover ourselves and others.

We appreciate the poetic nature of your approach to storytelling, where movement and



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visuals intertwine to create layers of meaning. Do you hope that audiences will arrive at a shared understanding or emotional experience through the film, or are you more interested in leaving its interpretation open to individual perspectives? How do you navigate the balance between guiding the viewer toward specific themes and allowing them the freedom to find their own resonance in the piece?

**Wilma Casal**: Many years ago, we performed my piece "Dust In My Wings" at a program that presented the work of different choreographers.

Afterwards, there was a question and answer session, which was opened by the wonderful curator with the words: "Today we turn the tables and interview *the* audience: *What did you see, what touched you, and are there interpretations you would like to share?"* 

The audience was enthusiastic to share their impressions, and I was delighted to have inspired such a variety of ideas.



Getting to see my piece from the audience's point of view from so many different perspectives was one of my most fulfilling and revealing moments.

As a performer on stage, I can experience every performance anew. In film, after completion, I myself become part of the





audience and can see the film and its story with always new eyes.

In a world increasingly dominated by digital interactions—where so much communication is filtered through screens, emojis, and text—do you feel that our sensitivity to body language and

unspoken gestures is at risk of being lost?

Does this shift in communication styles influence your work, both in terms of what you choose to explore and the messages you hope to convey to your audience?

Additionally, do you see your work as a form of resistance to this trend, a way to remind





people of the richness and depth of physical presence and unspoken connection?

**Wilma Casal**: The euphoric use of emojis can perhaps be interpreted as a joy in facial expressions and the celebration of gestures. But the overflow of digital communication surely has no positive influence on our togetherness and well-being.

I am currently working on a piece entitled "Near Distance", which humorously takes a look at the grotesque images that have crept





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Dance is also such an encounter.

I believe in the magic of beauty and the power of dance to open hearts and build relationships in which we can support each other, move mountains and break new ground.

With my company, WOLF & SWAN I just shot a new dance film that tells about how consciousness and change of body language can pave new ways.

With film and dance, we can create bright sparks and images of our future — a world in which we want to live.

Thank you, Wilma, for sharing your thoughts and taking the time to speak with us. As we draw to a close, we're keen to learn more about the trajectory of your artistic journey. Could you give our readers a glimpse into your upcoming projects? We're especially curious about how you envision your work evolving—are there new themes you're excited to delve into?

into our daily and social lives with the advance of digital media.

But I think that our search for genuine encounters persists, and with that, our sense of one another and for the subtlety of nonverbal communication.







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**Wilma Casal**: I'm very much looking forward to the release of *Ancestral Shadows in a few weeks*, the dance movie I just mentioned.

It's about three women who meet their ancestors and break free from roles and movement patterns that have been passed down throughout generations.

Ancestral Shadows talks about breaking free from social structures in which women are still playing an inferior role.

I can't wait for the beautiful work of all the WOLF & SWAN artists to be seen soon.

In summer 2025, we will release *Dance Is In The Air*, a film collage with sculptures of air dancers in the streets of New York. Conducted by the rhythms of the city, they are met with joyful applause or simply overlooked.

Their play is accompanied by dancers of WOLF & SWAN Company and the question: What drives us. The film shows how the











world around us influences our perception and feelings and how these form a silhouette.

Furthermore, I am currently working on a solo dance film called *Bird Song In Silence*. It portrays a bird, which represents the innocence and vulnerability of all living creatures, which are dependent on us humans implementing a real and long-term change.

And very close to my heart is our next stage production, *Dragonblood*, an interpretation of the famous Nibelungenlied.

From a feminist perspective, my piece reflects on an unmarked and soft-washed crime that lingers on our stages and thus remains socially acceptable.

A parable about moral responsibility.

The premiere is planned for winter 2025 in New York.

An interview by Francis L. Quettier and Dora S. Tennant womencinemakers.press@gmail.com

