



OFFICIAL SELECTION - 2016 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL  
OFFICIAL SELECTION - 2016 MIAMI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

102 MIN / U.S.A. / Color / 2016 / English, Bosnian, Arabic, Dari, Hausa, Fur

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# synopsis

**SHORT SYNOPSIS:** Exposing her role behind the camera, Johnson reaches into the vast trove of footage she has shot over decades around the world. What emerges is a visually bold memoir and a revelatory interrogation of the power of the camera.

**FULL SYNOPSIS:** *What does it mean to film another person? How does it affect that person - and what does it do to the one who films?* Kirsten Johnson is one of the most notable cinematographers working in documentary cinema today, having shot *CITIZENFOUR*, *HAPPY VALLEY*, *FAHRENHEIT 9/11*, *THE OATH*, *THE INVISIBLE WAR*, and dozens of other essential documentaries. With her visually radical memoir *CAMERAPERSON*, Johnson presents an extraordinary and deeply poetic film of her own, drawing on the remarkable and varied footage that she has shot and reframing it in ways that illuminate moments and situations that have personally affected her. What emerges is an elegant meditation on the relationship between story-telling and the camera frame, as Johnson transforms scenes that have been presented in so many other directors' films as one reflection of truth into another kind of story - one about personal journey, craft, and direct human connection.



# director's statement

The joys of being a documentary cameraperson are endless and obvious: I get to share profound intimacy with the people I film, pursue remarkable stories, be at the center of events as they unfold, travel, collaborate, and see my work engage with the world. I experience physical freedom, the chance at artistic expression and discovery in each moment I hold a camera. No wonder I've been doing it for 25 years and love my life.

And yet, the dilemmas I face while holding my camera are formidable. There are the concrete challenges I must face in the moment - how to frame, find focus, choose the direction to follow. The other troubles are implicit and often also unseen by the audiences of films I shoot:



The people I film are in immediate and often desperate material need, but I offer little to nothing material.

I can and will leave a place I film (a war, a refugee camp, etc.) when the people I film cannot.

I traffic in hope without the ability to know what will happen in the future.

I ask for trust, cooperation and permission without knowing where the filming experience will lead the subject.

I alter the balance of power by my presence and act on behalf of one side or another in a conflict.

My work requires trust, demands intimacy and entails total attention. To both me and the people I film, it often feels like a friendship or family, but it is something different.

I know little about how the images I shoot will be used in the future and can not control their distribution or use.

My work can change the way my subject is perceived by the people who surround him/her and can impact reputation or safety for years into the future.

I follow stories the director I work for does not need and/or want me to follow.

I fail to see or follow stories the director I work for hopes I will follow.

I've been aware of these dimensions for most of my career, as are most documentarians, and have longed discussed them with colleagues. What I didn't know is how the accumulation of these dilemmas over time would begin to impact me. And what I didn't anticipate even as recently as 5 years ago when this film began, is how many more people in the world would be filming on their cell phones as well as seeing images from every part of the globe, communicating visually and instantaneously. Surveillance, political repression, censorship, and the possibility of global distribution of images filmed by any individual on the planet impact all of us and our relation to filming in shifting and unprecedented ways.

In making CAMERAPERSON, we decided to rely as much as possible on the evidence of my experience in the footage I shot in the moment. We know that this fragmentary portrait is incomplete and are interested in the way it points to how stories are constructed. Our hope is to convey the immediacy of finding oneself in new territory with a camera as well as giving the audience a sense of how the accumulation of joys and dilemmas a cameraperson must juggle builds over time. Like in the film, this is an invitation to you and an acknowledgement of how complex it is to film and be filmed.

With thanks,

Kirsten Johnson

# film chronology

**1989-Present:** KJ works as a freelance, for-hire cameraperson, working with over 60 directors to date, and visiting over 86 countries in the process.

**1990:** While still in film school at La Femis in Paris, KJ shoots Jacques Derrida with director Amy Ziering.

**1997:** KJ moves to New York and begins work with The Shoah Foundation, shooting over 200 long-form interviews with Holocaust survivors.

**2009:** KJ films in Afghanistan, finding two teenagers to follow for a feature-length documentary which she shoots and directs. One of these is Najeeb Afghan (featured in CAMERAPERSON), another is a young woman.

**2012:** After shooting over the course of 3 years in Afghanistan and cutting with CAMERAPERSON's Co-editor Amanda Laws, KJ presents edited film (at the time titled A BLIND EYE) to Najeeb and the young woman, who retracts her permission to be in the film for fear of safety concerns. KJ accepts her position and removes footage and reconsiders the scope of her film.

**2013:** KJ begins collaboration with Producer Marilyn Ness and continues process of reaching out to dozens of directors and producers to gain access to revisit footage she's shot.

**2015:** KJ begins collaboration with Editor Nels Bangerter.

**2016:** KJ completes CAMERAPERSON, using footage (with generous access from the original directors shot for) from over 30 projects she's filmed.



# an incomplete list of what the camera enables

## For the cameraperson:

- Access and a reason to stay in worlds not of one's own
- Permission to behave, ask, do in ways that are transgressive/outside social norms
- Complete distraction from one's own life
- The creation of evidence of experience
- The chance to be closer or farther (through the lens) than is physically possible
- Emotional connection
- Trauma - vicarious, secondary, and direct
- Enhanced influence and power
- Sense of invisibility
- Sense of invincibility
- Magical thinking
- Suspension of time

## For the person filmed:

- A chance to speak of things that have never been spoken and hence say things they never expected to say
- An invitation to think of a future when they will no longer be alive but what they say and do will be preserved in another form
- The camera allows subject to see him/herself as a subject (worthy of time, attention)
- The camera gives subject the chance to imagine different outcomes
- A change of status in the community (family, village, profession)
- Increased risk to one's own safety and/or reputation
- The creation of an image of self, the distribution of which one cannot control on a global scale into perpetuity
- The opportunity to see oneself from a different perspective.
- A shift in perspective on what transgressions are possible
- Emotional connection with film crew
- Hope that being filmed can change one's fate or might impact a situation in the future

# full list of films

## **I CAME TO TESTIFY (2011)**

*Bosnia & Herzegovina*

Writer/Producer: Pamela Hogan

## **AUDRIE AND DAISY (2016)**

*Nodaway County, Missouri*

Directors: Bonni Cohen & Jon Shenk

## **CRADLE OF CHAMPIONS (2016)**

*Brooklyn, New York*

Director: Bartle Bull

## **THE EDGE OF JOY (2010)**

*Kano, Nigeria*

Director: Dawn Sinclair Shapiro

## **DERRIDA (2002)**

*Manhattan, New York*

Directors: Amy Ziering, Kirby Dick

## **THE WAY WE ARE LIVING (2011)**

*Colombia*

Writers/Producers: Pamela Hogan, Oriana Zill de Granados

## **THIS VERY LIFE (2016)**

*Myanmar*

Director: Kim Shelton

## **PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL (2008)**

*Liberia*

Director: Gini Reticker

## **CITIZENFOUR (2014)**

*[location withheld]*

Director: Laura Poitras

**VERY SEMI-SERIOUS (2015)**

*Manhattan, New York*

Director: Leah Wolchok

**THROW DOWN YOUR HEART (2008)**

*Nakisenyi, Uganda*

Director: Sascha Paladino

**TWO TOWNS OF JASPER (2002)**

*Jasper, Texas*

Directors: Whitney Dow, Marco Williams

**THE OATH (2010)**

*Sana'a, Yemen*

Director: Laura Poitras

**TRAPPED (2016)**

*Huntsville, Alabama*

Director: Dawn Porter

**HAPPY VALLEY (2014)**

*State College, Pennsylvania*

Director: Amir Bar-Lev

**FAHRENHEIT 9/11 (2004)**

*Washington, D.C.*

Director: Michael Moore

**THE JOY OF EXTREME POSSIBILITY**

(forthcoming)

*Austin, Texas*

Director: Meg McLagan

**BUFFALO RETURNS (2015)**

*Pine Ridge, South Dakota*



Director: Gini Reticker

**LADIES FIRST (2004)**

*Rwanda*

Director: Gini Reticker

**BORN TO FLY: ELIZABETH STREB VS. GRAVITY (2014)**

*Brooklyn, New York*

Director: Catherine Gund

**DARFUR NOW (2007)**

*Zalingei, Darfur*

Director: Ted Braun

**VIRGIN TALES (2012)**

*Colorado Springs, Colorado*

Director: Mirjam von Arx

**HERE ONE DAY (2012)**

*Westport, New York*

Director: Kathy Leichter

**1971 (2014)**

*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Director: Johanna Hamilton

**ORIGINAL FOOTAGE (VARIOUS)**

*- footage w/ Kirsten's mom, dad, children, various Afghanistan, return to Bosnia, lecture w/ Charif Kiwan (Syrian dissent)*

# bios

## **KIRSTEN JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER & CINEMATOGRAPHER**

Kirsten Johnson has worked as an independent documentary cinematographer and director committed to human rights questions and visual creativity since 1989.

She is the principal cinematographer on over 40 feature-length documentaries and has been credited on countless others as "Additional Camera." She directed "The Above" which premiered at the New York Film Festival as a part of The Intercept's Field of Vision launch, spearheaded by Laura Poitras. Her collaboration with Poitras is longstanding, credited as cinematographer on the Oscar-winning "Citizenfour," the upcoming series "Asylum" on Julien Assange, has shot footage that will appear in Poitras' new visual work for her Spring 2016 solo show at the Whitney Museum, and shared the 2012 Sundance Cinematography Award with Poitras for "The Oath." She is also a long-time collaborator with Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick, shooting the Oscar-nominated "The Invisible War," "Outrage," "This Film is Not Yet Rated" and "Derrida." In 2004, "Deadline," which she co-directed with Katy Chevigny, premiered at Sundance, was broadcast on primetime NBC, and won the Thurgood Marshall Award. Her first documentary feature, "Innocent Until Proven Guilty" premiered at the Berlin Film Festival, which later appeared on HBO. Her cinematography is featured in "Fahrenheit 9/11," the Oscar-nominated short by Sandy McLeod "Asylum," the Emmy winners "Ladies First" and "We Came to Testify," Tribeca Winner "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" and Sundance premiere documentaries, including "A Place at the Table" and "American Standoff," among others. "Cameraperson" is her third feature-length documentary as a director.

Her early experiences filmmaking were shaped by an invitation to work with Djibril Diop Mambety and Ousmane Sembene in West Africa, inspiring her to apply to the French National Film School (La Femis), where she studied cinematography. Throughout her career, the films she has shot have won and been nominated for Academy Awards, won major festival audience awards and been seen by tens of millions of people.

She teaches a class in "Visual Thinking" at the NYU Graduate Journalism Department, a course in cinematography at SVA, and often leads workshops for young camerapeople and documentarians under the auspices of the Arab Art and Culture Fund in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

## **MARILYN NESS, PRODUCER**

Marilyn Ness is a two-time Emmy Award-winning documentary producer. Most recently Ness produced Dawn Porter's TRAPPED and Kirsten Johnson's CAMERAPERSON, both of which are premiering at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. She also produced Katy

Chevigny and Ross Kauffman's feature documentary E-TEAM, which premiered at Sundance Film Festival in 2014 and was bought by Netflix Original, as well as Johanna Hamilton's feature documentary 1971 which premiered at Tribeca Film Festival 2014 and was broadcast on Independent Lens in May 2015. Ness directed and produced the documentary feature film BAD BLOOD: A CAUTIONARY TALE that broadcast nationally on PBS in 2011 and was the centerpiece of a major campaign to reform blood donation policies in the U.S.

#### **ABIGAIL DISNEY, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Abigail E. Disney is a filmmaker, philanthropist and the CEO and president of Fork Films. Disney's longtime passion for women's issues and peace building culminated in producing her first film, PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL (winner, Best Documentary Feature, Tribeca Film Festival 2008). She then executive produced the five-part PBS series, WOMEN, WAR & PEACE. Her executive producing and producing credits include Fork Films supported films 1971, CITIZEN KOCH, FAMILY AFFAIR, HOT GIRLS WANTED, THE INVISIBLE WAR (2012 Academy Award Nominee, Best Documentary Feature), RETURN and SUN COME UP (2011 Academy Award Nominee, Best Documentary Short). Her most recent projects include Fork Films original productions THE TRIALS OF SPRING, which she executive produced, and THE ARMOR OF LIGHT, her directorial debut. Disney is also the founder and president of Peace is Loud, a nonprofit organization that uses media and live events to highlight the stories of women who are stepping up for peace and resisting violence in their communities.

#### **GINI RETICKER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Chief Creative Officer of Fork Films, Gini Reticker is an Academy Award-nominated and Emmy Award-winning director and producer with a distinguished career that spans more than 20 years. In 2014, she directed THE TRIALS OF SPRING, which chronicles a young woman's journey from an Egyptian village to becoming an international human rights activist. Premiering at the Human Rights Watch Festival in June 2015, the documentary was part of a multi-media project which includes six short films appearing online on *The New York Times*. Concurrently, Reticker executive produced Abigail Disney's 2015 directorial debut THE ARMOR OF LIGHT, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Reticker directed PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL, the inspiring story of Liberian women whose actions helped bring an end to a brutal civil war. She received an Academy Award nomination for the short film, ASYLUM, recounting one woman's journey to political asylum in the U.S. The same year she was nominated for an Emmy for producing A DECADE UNDER THE INFLUENCE, a look at the heyday of 1970s filmmakers, which garnered the National Review Board's Award for Best Documentary. Her first film THE HEART OF THE MATTER, a groundbreaking film about women and AIDS, won the Sundance Film Festival's Freedom of Expression Award. Reticker also garnered an Emmy for LADIES FIRST, the story of women rebuilding post-genocide Rwanda. She was a creator and executive producer of the PBS series WOMEN, WAR &

PEACE, recipient of the Overseas Press Club's Edward R. Murrow Award as well as The Academy of Television Honors Award. Reticker has also co-produced or executive produced such notable films as: THE BETRAYAL (NERAKHOON) -nominated for both an Academy Award and an Independent Spirit Award - and Fork Films supported 1971, ALIAS RUBY BLADE, CITIZEN KOCH, HOT GIRLS WANTED, and SHE'S BEAUTIFUL WHEN SHE'S ANGRY.

#### **NELS BANGERTER, EDITOR**

Nels Bangerter's feature documentary editing credits include LET THE FIRE BURN, winner of Best Editing awards from the IDA, Cinema Eye Honors, and Tribeca Film Festival; HBO's VERY SEMI-SERIOUS; KUMU HINA, winner of the Independent Lens Audience Award; and WAR CHILD, which premiered at the Berlinale and won Tribeca's Audience Award. He was also editor of BUZKASHI BOYS, an Oscar-nominated fiction short produced and edited in Kabul, Afghanistan, and he was nominated for a News & Documentary Emmy for his work at *Dan Rather Reports*. Nels holds an MFA in film production from USC and is based in Oakland, California. Before becoming an editor, he worked in a gold mine, lived in a redwood tree, and earned degrees in English and electrical engineering.

#### **AMANDA LAWS, CO-EDITOR**

Amanda Laws is a Brooklyn based independent filmmaker, working both in documentary and narrative. Her editing work includes most recently the romantic comedy IT HAD TO BE YOU, directed by Sasha Gordon and executive produced by Chris Columbus. In documentary her work has included editing (among others) THE IMPOSTER: HOW TO WRITE BANJO CONCERTO directed by Bela Fleck and SaschaPaladino, SHOOTING SCRIPT by Frank Hall-Green, and IT WAS RAPE by Jennifer Baumgardner. In 2011 she acted as a mentor to the documentary fellows at the DoxBox film festival in Syria, and in 2013 she attended the Sundance Doc Edit lab with an earlier version of CAMERAPERSON, then titled A BLIND EYE.

#### **DANIELLE VARGA, CO-PRODUCER**

Danielle Varga has been working in documentary film and television for the past eight years. She was associate producer on Johanna Hamilton's 1971, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2014 and won IDA's award for its archival footage. She was the archival producer on Matt Wolf's TEENAGE, which also premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, and she was the researcher on the features documentaries E-TEAM and PARTICLE FEVER. For television, Danielle was associate producer on the PBS series MAKERS and has worked on a number of films for PBS's *American Experience* and *Frontline* series. Danielle is a native of Queens, New York and currently resides in Brooklyn.

# credits

Filmed, Produced, and Directed by  
KIRSTEN JOHNSON

Produced by  
MARILYN NESS

Executive Produced by  
ABIGAIL DISNEY  
GINI RETICKER

Edited by  
NELS BANGERTER

Co-Editor  
AMANDA LAWS

Co-Producer  
DANIELLE VARGA

Re-Recording Mixers  
PETE HORNER  
ERIC MILANO

Music

BLOODLINES CHANT  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY KATHRYN BOSTIC  
RECORDED BY MICHAEL WELLS

CONCURRENCE  
CONCEIVED & SOUND DESIGNED BY WELLINGTON BOWLER & CARLA KIHLESTEDT

CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA, III MOVEMENT  
COMPOSED BY DINO REŠIDBEGOVIĆ

PIANO SOLOIST OMER BLENTIC  
PERFORMED BY SARAJEVO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

BETWEEN B&C  
BY SYZYGYS  
COMPOSED BY HITOMI SHIMIZU & HIROMI NISHIDA

Assistant Editors  
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MATT COWAN  
NICK THOMPSON  
CLIFF WILSON

Translators  
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NAHEED BAHRAM  
ISHAK JALIMAM  
AMY KASI  
HUMA PIR MOHAMMAD  
AMIN PALANGI  
AIDA ŠEHOVIĆ  
IVAN VUKSANOVIC  
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GABRIELLA GALLUS

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DAVE TECSON

Sound Edit and Design  
ERIC MILANO

Additional Post Production Sound  
DAVID MATORIN

Post Production Sound Studios  
THE LOVE LOFT

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CAITLIN TARTARO

Edit System provided by  
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AVID TECHNOLOGY, INC.

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KATY CHEVIGNY  
BRENDA COUGHLIN

Consulting Editors  
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JONATHAN OPPENHEIM  
POLA RAPAPORT  
DAVID TEAGUE

Consulting Writers  
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LISA FREEDMAN

Post Production Consultant  
SU KIM

Distribution Advisors  
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FORK FILMS  
JANE DOE FILMS  
KATHY LEICHTER  
JOHANNA HAMILTON  
MARCO WILLIAMS & WHITNEY DOW  
MEG MCLAGAN  
LAURA POITRAS / PRAXIS FILMS  
REDORA FILMS  
SASCHA PALADINO  
STREB EXTREME ACTION  
TWO SHOES PRODUCTIONS  
WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC.  
WNET

Additional footage from:  
BUFFALO RETURNS  
FAHRENHEIT 9/11  
VIRGIN TALES

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