

Pinball London Production

*presents*

# UNCLE HOWARD



A film by Aaron Brookner

2016 / USA, UK / Color / Documentary / 96 minutes / English

Sundance Film Festival 2016 Screenings

Monday, January 25, 3:30pm at Holiday Village Cinema 3 (Press & Industry)

Tuesday, January 26, 3:00pm, at Temple Theatre (World Premiere)

Wednesday, January 27, 9:00am at Yarrow Hotel Theatre

Thursday, January 28, 9:45pm at Broadway Centre Cinema 3, Salt Lake City

Friday, January 29, 6:00pm at Redstone Cinema 7

Saturday, January 30, 2:30pm at Egyptian Theatre

For clips, images and press materials please visit our DropBox:

<http://bit.ly/1jKJYHN>

[www.UncleHowardFilm.com](http://www.UncleHowardFilm.com)

**Press Contacts**

RJ Millard  
917.693.2869

[rj@obscuredpictures.com](mailto:rj@obscuredpictures.com)

Kory Mello  
978.761.1145

[kory@obscuredpictures.com](mailto:kory@obscuredpictures.com)

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

*Uncle Howard* is an intertwining tale of past and present, the story of filmmaker Howard Brookner whose work captured the late 70's and early 80's cultural revolution – and his nephew's personal journey 25 years later to discover his uncle's films and the legacy of a life cut short by the plague of AIDS.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Howard Brookner was buried on his thirty-fifth birthday in 1989. He was gay; an Ivy League graduate; broke artist; rising Hollywood star; heroin user; jet-setter; bohemian; seedy nightlife lover; director of cult docs; an honest and devoted friend – he was many things to many people. To director Aaron Brookner, he was a loving and inspirational uncle who died of AIDS when Aaron was only seven, right when Howard was on the brink of a promising filmmaking career.

William S. Burroughs wrote: “Immortality is the only goal worth striving for,” evoking the Egyptian concept that death is not the end of human existence but a necessary transition to immortality, achieved when one's spirit could be freed from its tomb. Howard's relationship with the famed writer marked his gateway to artistic and personal freedom.

Twenty-three years after his death, Howard's work and memory are fading. But Aaron finds the clues to the many sides of his uncle's story in a modern day tomb, in Burroughs' New York City bunker. Inside, more than 300 cans offer a glimpse at Howard's life and career, including outtakes from his 1983 debut film *Burroughs: The Movie*, the first and most revealing film about the iconic writer. Howard's video diaries documenting his illness and personal feelings, photographs, rehearsal videos from his Hollywood feature with Madonna, buried letters, and extensive documentation from the mid-80s until his death all become Aaron's guides to piecing together a Rashomon-like existence to fulfill his uncle's dying wish not to be forgotten.

Through conversations with family and close friends – including Jim Jarmusch, Tom DiCillo, Sara Driver, Hisami Kuroiwa, Brad Gooch, James Grauerholz and Robert Wilson – comes an exploration into the cultural revolution of the late 70s and early 80s, a bankrupt and sordid and bankrupt New York City, the eruption of the AIDS plague, sex, drugs, politics, and the artistic determination of a filmmaker whose life was cut short.

Featuring long-lost footage and archival photos of William Burroughs, Patti Smith, John Giorno, Allen Ginsberg, Brion Gysin, Paula Court, Terry Southern, Andy Warhol, Spike Lee, John Waters, Francis Bacon, Matt Dillon, Madonna, and more, *Uncle Howard* reveals a portrait of the tumultuous and mysterious life, struggles, and untimely death of Howard Brookner.

## FILMMAKER STATEMENT

Growing up, I remember my Uncle Howard always carrying around a camera, asking anyone who would talk or perform to say something. I was entranced by the reactions he would get out of my grandparents, his parents, and my own family. Later on, he invited me to the set of *Bloodhounds of Broadway* and I knew I had to become a filmmaker.

As I watched St. Vincent's Hospital being torn down, for more sky-rise condominiums to go up, I remembered visiting my Uncle Howard there in its jam-packed AIDS ward when I was boy. The Chelsea Hotel, now being turned into a luxury hotel, is where Howard and so many generations of artists were once able to live cheaply, so they had time to make their art. The New York of today is a different city from the one that my uncle lived in, and I feared that his memory would soon be erased.

I set out to preserve Howard's legacy by finding his first film - the cult classic documentary *Burroughs: The Movie* - which had been out of print since his death. This act of searching set off a wave of other discoveries: his missing film on Robert Wilson; his home movies; his video diaries; the behind-the-scenes making of his debut Hollywood feature, *Bloodhounds of Broadway*, starring Madonna; and an astonishing archive of all the film he shot between 1978 and 1983 which had been stored in the back room of Burroughs' former home on Bowery for 30 years.

My mission evolved beyond bringing back Howard's lost first film. I wanted to use everything that Howard had left behind, including the vivid memories he left with his friends and family, to turn his life story into a movie. To keep his memory alive. To champion his risk-taking spirit of making films and living life to its fullest.

- Aaron Brookner

## CREW BIOGRAPHIES

### **Aaron Brookner - Director**

Aaron Brookner was born in New York City and studied film at Vassar College. He is a director and a screenwriter. He began his career working on Jim Jarmusch's *Coffee and Cigarettes* and Rebecca Miller's *Personal Velocity* before making the award-winning documentary short *The Black Cowboys* (2004), as well as numerous music videos.

He wrote an authorized screenplay based upon the life of legendary writer Budd Schulberg (*On the Waterfront, A Face in the Crowd, What Makes Sammy Run?*) and embarked on a feature documentary with Schulberg until his death in 2009, before the film's completion. His first feature film *The Silver Goat* (2012) was the first ever created exclusively for the iPad. Released as an app it was downloaded across 24 countries making it into the top 50 entertainment apps in the UK and Czech Republic.

In 2011 Brookner initiated a project to find and restore the films and archive material of his late uncle and earliest filmmaking influence, director Howard Brookner. The undertaking lead to the successful recovery and restoration of the cult classic *Burroughs: The Movie* (1983), about beat generation icon William S. Burroughs. Aaron Brookner and Paula Vaccaro produced the remastering.

In October 2014 the film received a special Revivals screening at the 52nd New York

Film Festival, in the company of Jim Jarmusch, Tom DiCillo and James Grauerholz. Janus Films distributed theatrically and the Criterion Collection released a special edition DVD/Blu-ray.

Brookner's second feature film is *Uncle Howard*: a documentary about the life and work of Howard Brookner - who died of AIDS in 1989 at the age of 34 - while making his Hollywood breakthrough film *Bloodhounds of Broadway* starring Madonna and Matt Dillon. The film is produced by Paula Vaccaro, co-produced by Sara Driver and Alex Garcia, and executive produced by Jim Jarmusch.

In 2014 Brookner created his first video installation work (*Double-Breasted Trench*) shown in the "Animals in the Wall" group show in Shoreditch, London as part of the William Burroughs centenary celebration. A solo immersive film and video installation show with collaborator Paula Vaccaro entitled *Non Nova Sed Nove* is due in 2016, as well as a remastered version of Howard Brookner's sophomore documentary film entitled *Robert Wilson and the Civil Wars* (1987) about avant-garde theatre director Robert Wilson.

### **Paula Vaccaro - Producer**

Paula has worked in radio, TV, newspapers, digital platforms and films for over two decades. Based in the UK, she is one of the founders of Pinball London, a production company creating content with an auteur zeal. She has worked alongside world renowned filmmakers such as Sally Potter, Emir Kusturica, Guillermo Arriaga, Lucia Puenzo and Edoardo de Angelis among others.

At Pinball London she also leads a team providing impact producing services, training, and consultancy via Pinball Audiences and ancillary content that links films to a wider art world via Pinball Arts. With experience in international productions in the US, LatAm and Europe, Paula has trained emerging producers for over a decade and has helped facilitate GoodPitch workshops in Latin America. She holds an MA in Media Arts specialised in Documentary from the University of London and is a Professor at Kingston University, where she is developing an MA in Impact Producing as well as short courses for emerging producers. She has participated as a Jury for various awards including Focal's Awards to the Excellency in the use of Archive in films since 2010 and was an Emmy Juror between 2009 and 2014.

### **Sara Driver - Co-Producer**

Sara Driver was born in 1955 in Westfield, New Jersey. Driver adapted, produced and directed the film version of Paul Bowles' short story, *You Are Not I* (1982). It premiered in the U.S. at Joseph Papp's Public Theatre in New York City and was featured at many international film festivals and museums. In their end-of-the-decade critic's survey, Cahiers du Cinéma declared it to be one of the best films of the '80s.

Her feature film, *Sleepwalk* (1986), won the prestigious Prix Georges Sadoul (1986) given by the French Cinémathèque. *Sleepwalk* also won the Special Prize at the 1986 Mannheim Film Festival, and was the opening night selection for the 25th Anniversary of the Semaine Internationale de la Critique at Cannes (1986). *Sleepwalk* was also featured at the Museum of Modern Art's 1987 New Directors New Films Series and the 1987 Sundance Film Festival. In 1993 she made the feature film, *When Pigs Fly* which premiered in competition at the Locarno Film Festival and was also shown at many international film festivals (Toronto, Rotterdam etc.). Before going on to worldwide

release, it won the "Best of Festival Feature" award at the 1994 Long Island Film Festival.

Driver's other film credits include Jim Jarmusch's *Permanent Vacation* (1979, producer, production manager) and *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984, producer). Her theatre work includes the play, *What the Hell - Zelda Sayre* (1977); the experimental musical, *Jazz Passengers in Egypt* (1990), performed at LA MAMA, NYC; as well as the play, *Stairway to Heaven* (1994), at the Cucaracha Theatre, NYC.

She taught directing at New York University's Graduate Film School (1996-98), where she received her Master of Fine Arts degree in 1982. For the past several years Sara has been writing and developing feature film projects, the original screenplays, *Deaf, Dumb and Blonde*, *Gone With the Mind* and *They Live Among Us*.

### **Alex Garcia - Co-Producer**

His films have screened at acclaimed festivals such as the Venice International Film Festival (*The Burning Plain*, *Words with Gods*), the Berlin International Film Festival (*Elite Squad*), and the Tribeca Film Festival (*Amor, Dolor y Viceversa*). In 2008, *Elite Squad* won the Golden Bear, Berlinale's prestigious top prize, one of over 30 accolades the film received that year.

### **Jim Jarmusch - Executive Producer**

Born in Akron, Ohio, Jim Jarmusch lives and works in New York.

Films include *Permanent Vacation* (1980), *Stranger than Paradise* (1984), *Down by Law* (1986), *Mystery Train* (1989), *Night on Earth* (1991), *Dead Man* (1995), *Year of the Horse* (1997), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999), *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003), *Broken Flowers* (2005), *The Limits of Control* (2009), *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) and the short film "*Int. Trailer. Night.*" (2002).

## ABOUT HOWARD BROOKNER

### **Biography**

Howard Brookner (April 30, 1954 – April 27, 1989) was an American film director who directed two documentaries and one fiction film in his lifetime. He died in 1989 after a battle with AIDS, fought while making his final film.

Brookner studied at Phillips Exeter Academy, earned his B.A. from Columbia University in political science, and his M.A. in art history and film at New York University, where for his senior thesis he began *Burroughs: The Movie* with his film school friends Tom DiCillo (camera) and Jim Jarmusch (sound).

He produced and directed *Burroughs: The Movie*, the first documentary ever made about William S. Burroughs with his full collaboration (1983), *Robert Wilson and the Civil Wars* on theatre director Robert Wilson (1986), and directed, co-produced and co-wrote *Bloodhounds of Broadway* (1989) starring Madonna and Matt Dillon.

### **Filmography**

*Burroughs: The Movie* (1983, Documentary)

Starring William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Patti Smith, Brion Gysin.

*Robert Wilson and the Civil Wars* (1987, Documentary)

Starring Robert Wilson, Philip Glass, Heiner Müller.

*Bloodhounds of Broadway* (1989, Drama)

Starring Madonna, Matt Dillon, Jennifer Gray and Rutger Hauer.

*Scary Kisses* (Unfinished)

### **Other Credits**

Gaffer: *Permanent Vacation* (directed by Jim Jarmusch, 1980)

Special Thanks to: *Mystery Train* (directed by Jim Jarmusch, 1989)

## FEATURING

(in order of appearance)

Aaron Brookner	Austin Brookner
John Giorno	Steve Brookner
William S. Burroughs	Hisami Kuroiwa
Howard Brookner	Sara Driver
Elaine Brookner	Spike Lee
Dusty	Cinqué Lee
El Perdido	John Waters
James Grauerholz	Juliane Zerbst
Terry Southern	Lena Sackmann
Steven Lowe	Klaus Maeck
Brion Gysin	Robert Wilson
Mortimer Burroughs	Lindsay Law
Otto Belue	John Silberman
Patti Smith	Sharon Delano
Frank Zappa	Paula Court
Andy Warhol	William Olander
Victor Bockris	Matt Dillon
Allen Ginsberg	Jennifer Grey
Lucien Carr	Madonna
Jim Jarmusch	Elliot Davis
Jeff Chan	Tony Longo
Tom DiCillo	Randy Quaid
Laurie Anderson	Rutger Hauer
Anne Waldman	Frédéric Mitterrand
Julia Heyward	Kim Massee
John Cage	Richard Shone
Merce Cunningham	Malcolm McLaren
Philip Glass	Darryl Pinckney
Peter Orlovsky	Michael Wincott
Stewart Meyer	Jean Brookner
Melody London	Andrew Brookner
Jackie Curtis	Alan Boyce
Rick Little	Sarah Lindemann-Komarova
Sarah Farber	Phyllis Adams
Max Farber	Lee Kline
Brad Gooch	Alex Berman
Lester Brookner	

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Directed by Aaron Brookner

Produced by Paula Vaccaro

Co-Produced by Sara Driver & Alex Garcia

Executive Produced by Jim Jarmusch

Associate Producers: Patricia Finneran & David Tongers

Director of Photography: André Döbert & Gregg de Domenico

Editor: Masahiro Hirakubo

Sound: Diana Sagrista & Alberto Muñoz

## **LINKS & RESOURCES**

Official Website

[www.unclehowardfilm.com](http://www.unclehowardfilm.com)

Social Media

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/smashthecontrolmachedoc](http://www.facebook.com/smashthecontrolmachedoc)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/unclehowardfilm](http://www.twitter.com/unclehowardfilm) (@UncleHowardFilm)

Instagram: [www.instagram.com/unclehowardfilm](http://www.instagram.com/unclehowardfilm) (@UncleHowardFilm)

Janus Films

[www.janusfilms.com](http://www.janusfilms.com)

Burroughs: The Movie

[www.burroughsmovie.com](http://www.burroughsmovie.com)

###