

POEM OF E.L.

**Maya Gurantz, 2022 | Los Angeles, CA | Leon
Speakers Award for Best Sound Design**



Maya Gurantz's *Poem of E.L.* is a haunting and immersive film that attempts to make sense of surveillance footage capturing Elisa Lam's last moments before her unsolved death in 2013—footage that ignited a frenzy of conspiracy theories and true crime sensationalism. Gurantz cleverly deconstructs the harmful narratives surrounding Elissa's tragic end, challenging the tired tropes of mystery and horror. Instead, she tackles a daring journey of somatic investigation, meticulously studying and reenacting Elissa's movements captured in the chilling elevator footage. This process, spanning eight years, serves as an homage to Elissa's humanity, aiming to depict the possibilities of her mental state, rather than reducing her death to a BuzzFeed Unsolved ghost story. Gurantz's approach is innovative and moving, interpreting the footage in three ways: as a physical reenactment, as a hypothetical POV journey blending memory and hallucination, and as an immersive fugue state. *Poem of E.L.* transcends the confines of traditional filmmaking, creating a deeply immersive and thought-provoking exploration of one woman's tragic fate, and serves as a testament to art's enduring power to challenge, provoke, and ultimately, shed light on the darkest parts of the human experience.

CHASING BIRDS

**Una Lorenzen, 2022 | Montreal, QC, Canada
| Chris Frayne Award for Best Animated Film**



In a world that's constantly shifting beneath our feet, Una Lorenzen's *Chasing Birds* emerges as a moving reflection of the essence of change and the power of perspective. Set in a world turned upside down, the story unfolds through the innocent eyes of a little girl, inspired by Lorenzen's own daughter. Her simple act of chasing a bird becomes a profound metaphor for human connection, disconnection, and the transformative power of change. Lorenzen masterfully plays with perspective, both visually and thematically, inviting viewers to tilt their heads and see the world from a new perspective. This elevates the story into a captivating exploration of how our viewpoints shape how we experience change while navigating the dichotomy of fear and exhilaration that accompany it. Through the protagonist's journey, Lorenzen articulates a universal truth: change can either be a source of fear or a gateway to new possibilities, depending on one's perspective. The animation itself becomes a character, fluid and ever-changing, mirroring the evolving world it depicts which it quite literally draws the audience into. *Chasing Birds* stands out for its simplicity and depth, reminding us that at the heart of every story lies the potential to see the world differently—to find beauty in chaos and hope in change.