

The Filmballad of Mamadada

Directed and produced by Lily Benson and Cassandra Guan

80 minutes | HD | Color | Stereo | USA | 2013



A vibrant cinematic collage crafted by over fifty artists uncovering the extraordinary life of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven: Dada pioneer, proto-feminist, and 20th century enigma.

www.mamadada.info

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SYNOPSIS

The Filmballad of Mamadada tells the story of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, unsung member of the New York Dada movement. A poet, artist, model, and public provocateur, the Baroness defied the social and artistic codes of her time. As with many of her female contemporaries, the Baroness' cultural legacy has been obscured, and in some instances appropriated into the oeuvres of better known male peers. Accounts of her personal life are scarce and often conjectural.

According to recent scholarship, the Baroness was born Else Hildegard Plötz in 1874. At age 18, she ran away from her middle-class Prussian home and survived as a vaudeville performer in Berlin. After a series of bohemian lovers and three failed marriages, she found herself penniless in New York City, a widow with the impressive title of Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven. The Baroness was notorious for wearing outlandish costumes and cross-dressing in public, and her overtly sexual poetry caused such scandal that she was blacklisted from the most avant-garde publications. She pioneered an assemblage aesthetic, making sculptures and clothing from everyday objects. Many believe she gave Marcel Duchamp the porcelain urinal that later became Fountain. An important figurehead for the fledgling Dada movement in America, the Baroness was a close friend of avant-garde luminaries such as Djuna Barnes, Berenice Abbot, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound.

The Baroness died under mysterious circumstances in 1927. In 2012, Lily Benson and Cassandra Guan recruited a group of over fifty artists and filmmakers to produce a collective biopic about her life. Participants were invited to interpret specific biographical fragments and create filmic adaptations on their own terms. The results varied wildly in style and content: from a re-contextualized Jane Fonda interview, to an animation depicting the effects of syphilis, to a reconstruction of a lost 16mm film by Duchamp and Man Ray. Benson and Guan then assembled the vignettes into a feature-length film. Unfolding like an exquisite corpse, the final narrative reveals a gloriously conflicted historical portrait. A myriad of contemporary feminist voices present the viewer with more questions than answers.

ABOUT THE DIRECTORS

Lily Benson is an interdisciplinary artist based in Malmö, Sweden and Brooklyn, USA. Working in mediums like animation, performance, illustration, and pop music composition, Benson investigates and challenges popular culture and entertainment through feminist play.

Cassandra Guan is a New York based artist working within and against the tradition of film. Through narrative experimentation, her work seeks to reclaim culturally repressed histories while engaging critically with the promise and problematic of such representations. Guan was born in Beijing and immigrated to the US during her early teens. She received a BFA from The Cooper Union and subsequently attended the Whitney Independent Study Program.

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Leslie Allison, Animals, Raoul Anchondo, Mauricio Arango, Doug Ashford, Harold Batista, Gregory Benson, Lily Benson, Caitlin Berrigan, Clara Carter, Lea Cetera, Joanne K. Cheung, Abigail Childs, Abigail Colins, Katy Cool, Cecilia Corrigan, Alex DeCarli, EASTER, Chitra Ganesh, Alex Golden, Cassandra Guan, Jorun Jonasson, Prudence Katze, Simone Krug, Joyce Lainé, William Lehman, Alexandra Lerman, Ming Lin, Thomas Love, Rob Lowe, Kirby Mages, Markues, Mores McWreath, Erin Jane Nelson, Anne Marte Overaa, Michala Paludan, Leah Pires, Sunita Prasad, Joanna Quigley, Will Rahilly, Amy Reid, Isaac Richard, Doron Sadja, Saki Sato, Frances Scholz, Dash Shaw, Sydney Shen, Beau Sievers, Shelly Silver, Ursula Sommer, Jim Strong, Aaron Vinton, and James N. Kienitz Wilkins.

PRODUCTION CREW

Producers

Lily Benson & Cassandra Guan

Associate Producers

Channing Benson & Keenan Patrick Pryor

Directors

Lily Benson & Cassandra Guan

Editor

Cassandra Guan

Assistant Editor

Harold Batista

Sound

Josh Allen

Music

Easter (Max Boss & Stine Omar), Doron Sadja, Cross (Leslie Allison & Lily Benson)

Drawings

Lily Benson

Animation

Lily Benson & Thomas Love

Voiceover

Ulrike Müller

Voiceover Script

Lily Benson, Cecilia Corrigan & Cassandra Guan

Voiceover Recording

Doron Sadjia & Ezra Tenenbaum

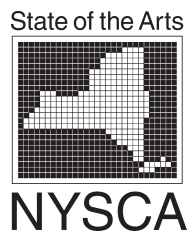
Copy Editing

Leslie Allison

Credits

Thomas Love

Supported by NYSCA Electronic Media & Film Finishing Funds and Media Arts Assistance Fund



FESTIVAL HISTORY

Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival (CPH:DOX)

Official Competition: New Visions

World Premiere

November 14, 2013

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art

January 18, 2014

International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR)

Signals: EU-29

Dutch Premiere

January 28, 2014

Lisbon International Independent Film Festival (IndieLisboa)
Emerging Cinema
Portuguese Premiere
May 2014

Asterisco Festival Internacional de Cine IGBTIQ
International Competition
Argentine Premiere
June 4, 2014

New Horizon International Film Festival
International Competition: Films on Art
Polish Premiere
July 24, 2014

Athens Avant-Garde Film Festival
Greek Premiere
November 2014