

Push it Down, Push it Away

Curated by Sarah Dawson 2022



SARAH Dawson

Sarah Dawson is a programmer for the International Documentary Film Festival of Amsterdam (IDFA). Her previous roles have included Associate Programmer at Sheffield Doc/Fest and Festival Manager at the Durban International Film Festival in her home country of South Africa. Prior to this, she spent a number of years with the Centre for Creative Arts, presenting festivals such as Poetry Africa and Time of the Writer, as well as writing and lecturing on film on film for various African institutions and publications. She has an MA in Film Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Curatorial note for film selections

by SARAH DAWSON



Sometimes it's easier to not see the truth. Trauma can cause the mind to play tricks, preferring to show us an image of the world that is preferable to reality – a survival mechanism of mythmaking that allows us to continue in the face of adversity and protect ourselves from knowledge that hurts. But a refusal to see means shielding from truth in ways that can be limiting at best and damaging at worst, shadowboxing with ghosts of pain of trauma, shame, fear. The repression of difficult truths can be witnessed in both our most intimate realities and in conversations about some of the larger fears of our global society - climate change, postcolonial relations, consumer culture, to name a few. The camera is a tool of seeing, and in this selection of films, sometimes the eye of the camera can see more than those we meet on-screen about the realities they inhabit – the camera notices the blind spots, the artefacts and fragments that explain a reality that does not add up properly without these missing pieces. At other times, we remain in the dark along with them, allowing the mind to paper over truths to make smooth a world that is full of ruptures and complexity. In these films, we see that abandoning the safety of myth takes a strength that can't always be mustered, and that taking shelter in comforting explanations is a very human reflex.



MADONNA ADIB



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Let My Body Speak by Madonna Adib

This documentary is a personal and intimate journey exploring the repression experience by the filmmaker during her childhood when she faced sexual control in a Damascus also experiencing a growing socio-political repression in the late 80s early 90s. Through the creative use of family archive in Damascus mixed with current footage of her body she reconstructs the pain of the past absorbed by her body.





HALA EL KOUCH

Hala El Kouch is film director, editor, photographer, voice over artist and writer. She grew up in Nigeria, then moved to Lebanon for her studies in 2008. With a BA in audiovisual and MA in film directing from the Lebanese University of Fine Arts, she graduated in both with distinction. She has worked as a cinema teacher in Action for Hope, a creative director at The Actors Workshop Beirut and currently is a visual content director and manager at March. Directed more than 6 short films, one of which Fishing out of the sea won several first-place awards in national and international festivals such as The European film festival, NDU film festival, The Beirut Greek film festival, and her recent documentary that has been selected and took part of IDFA. Soon to publish her first poetry book, pursue her PhD and working on new projects such as her first feature film and hybrid web series.

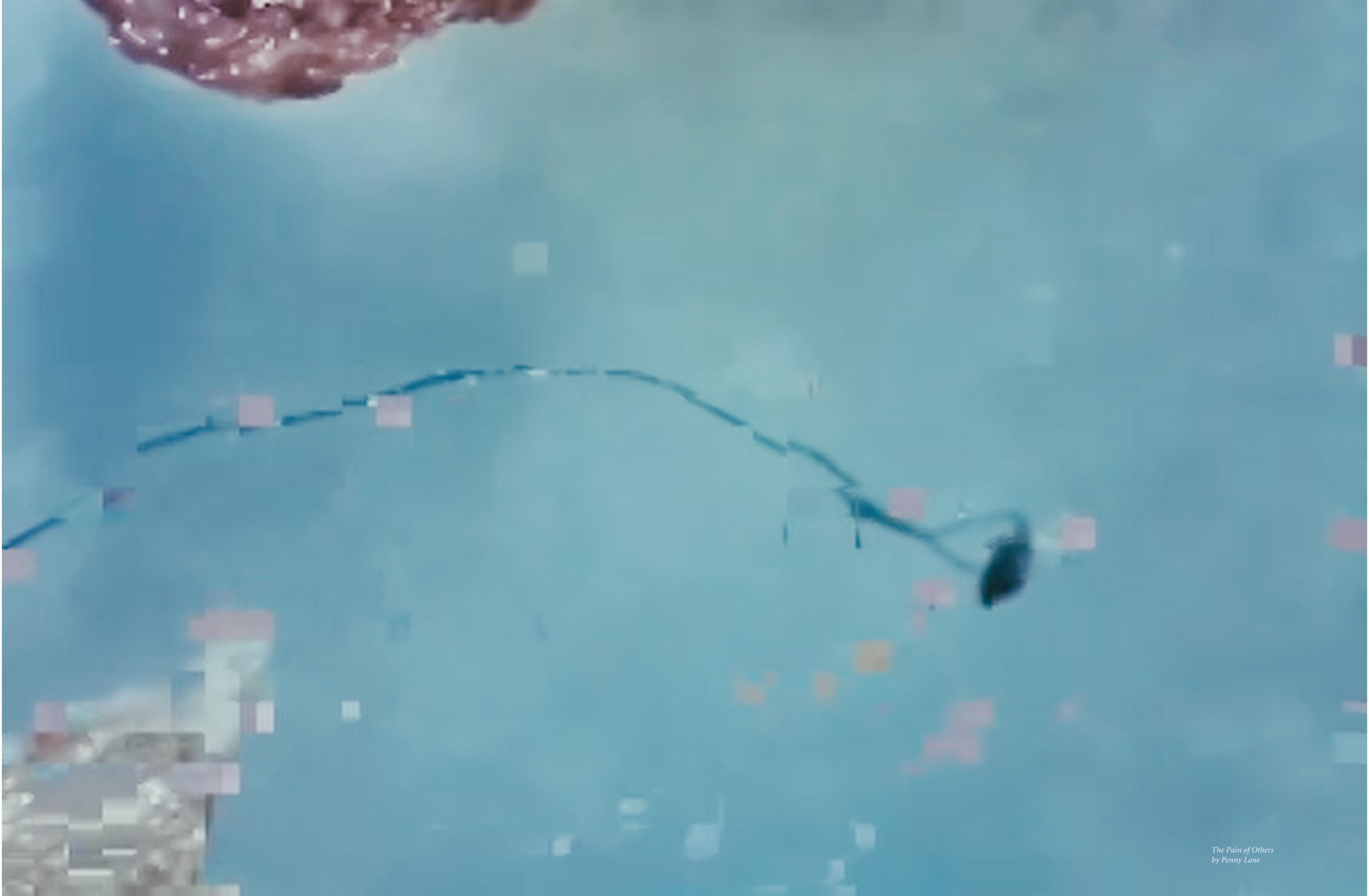


THE PERFECT PICTURE by Hala El Kouch

Can a single traumatic event be the fatal blow that disrupts the notion of an ideal family? Lebanese filmmaker Hala El Kouch creates a therapy session setting to confront her parents about a traumatic event, and interrogates them over the course of five days. But the moment that “changed everything” for her seems to have made far less impact on her parents. The conversation takes an unexpected turn. A stream of images, family videos, and photographs from the family album paint a picture of perfect domestic bliss. And during the reenactment, too, Hala’s parents behave in a loving and amiable way towards each other and their daughter. In an otherwise empty room that sometimes contains a sofa and sometimes chairs, the three of them amuse themselves by making faces at one another, combing each other’s hair, and sharing kisses.

Hala nonetheless maintains that this perfect picture has been tainted, and that she no longer trusts her parents. Every so often she bursts into tears. What is it precisely that makes that picture perfect? And has the happy family been irrevocably damaged by the incident, or is it Hala who caused the stir?





Penny Lane

Penny Lane's most recent feature documentary NUTS! premiered at Sundance 2016 where it won a Special Jury Prize for Editing. After a successful theatrical run beginning at New York City's legendary Film Forum, NUTS! was released by Amazon and is now in wide release. Her debut feature documentary, OUR NIXON, premiered at Rotterdam, went on to SXSW, won the Ken Burns Award for "Best of the Festival" at Ann Arbor, and was selected as the Closing Night Film at New Directors/New Films. OUR NIXON was picked up by CNN Films and is currently in wide distribution. Both films received numerous awards and critical acclaim.

Named one of Filmmaker Magazine's "25 New Faces of Independent Film" in 2012, Penny Lane has been making experimental nonfiction films since 2004. She has been awarded grants from Creative Capital, the Sundance Institute, Chicken & Egg, Cinereach, TFI Documentary Fund, Jerome Foundation, LEF Foundation, Rooftop Films, Catapult Film Fund, New York State Council on the Arts, Experimental Television Center, IFP and the Puffin Foundation.

Penny Lane is currently an Associate Professor of Art and Art History at Colgate University, where she lives in a very old house and shows movies in her barn.

And yes, Penny Lane is her real name.





The Pain of Others by Penny Lane

The Pain of Others is a found footage film about Morgellons, a mysterious illness whose sufferers say they have parasites under the skin, long colored fibers emerging from lesions, and a host of other bizarre symptoms which could be borrowed from a horror film. Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, say they have it. But the mainstream medical community says Morgellons is not a disease at all, but a delusion propagated and reinforced by social media. "It's all in your head," they say. Morgellons sufferers don't understand what is happening to them; but whatever it is, it is very real. The Pain of Others is composed entirely of videos shared by a small group of "Morgies" who have turned to YouTube to prove they're not crazy. These people document what's going on with their bodies. They share their terror, anger and confusion. They discover community and a sort of healing in one another – even as their questionable beliefs are reinforced in a frightening echo chamber of misinformation and quack cures. Unsettling, funny and intimate, The Pain of Others is at once a body-horror documentary and a radical act of empathy.



Carol Nguyen

Carol Nguyen is a Vietnamese Canadian filmmaker based in Toronto and Montreal. Her films often explore the subjects of cultural identity, family and memory. Her most recent film "No Crying at the Dinner Table" premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and had its international premiere at IDFA 2019, where she was also invited as the Opening Night speaker. It also received the Jury Prize for Short Documentary at SXSW. Carol is a 2018 Sundance Ignite fellow, Adobe Creativity Scholar and a TIFF Share Her Journey ambassador, where she strives to empower diverse voices and women through her own stories and personal experiences in the film industry. Today, Carol is working towards developing her first documentary feature as well as an animated short.





NO CRYING AT THE DINNER TABLE

Filmmaker Carol Nguyen interviews her own family to craft an emotionally complex and meticulously composed portrait of intergenerational trauma, grief, and secrets in this cathartic documentary about things left unsaid.

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