

FILMS DE FORCE MAJEURE
& BLINKER FILM present



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Panorama



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Alina Skrzyszewska

GAME GIRLS

written and directed by Alina Skrzyszewska | with Teri Rogers & Tiahna Vince | producers Jean-Laurent Csinidis, Meike Martens, Kelly Parker
editing Emmanuelle Baude | story advisor William Shepherd | drama therapy workshop facilitator Dr. Mimi Savage RDT-BCT | production Films de Force Majeure
coproduction Blinker Filmproduktion, ZDF in cooperation with Arte, Studio Lemon | world sales Doc & Film International | supports Eurimages, PACA Region in
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Region with the participation of l'Agence Ecla, National Centre for Visual Arts, Cinéfeel Dotation, Jean Vallier, CNC, Nipkow Programm

synopsis

Game Girls follows Teri and her girlfriend Tiahna as they navigate their relationship through the chaotic world of Los Angeles' Skid Row, aka the "homeless capital of the U.S." A dilemma fuels the tension between the two women: while Tiahna seems comfortable being a player in the underground economy of Skid Row, Teri is driven by a powerful desire to get out. Together with other women from the neighborhood, they attend a weekly Expressive Arts workshop where they are looking to reflect, dream, and heal. Can their love survive the violence of their past and their current environment?

FILMS DE FORCE MAJEURE - BLINKER FILMPRODUKTION
FRANCE - GERMANY / 86' / 2018 / DOCUMENTARY

interview with Alina Skrzeszewska

You were born in Wroclaw, Poland. How come you moved to Los Angeles and got interested in the area of Skid Row?

I was 5 when my family left Poland. My parents, my sister and I fled to West Germany at the time, and I grew up in Munich. I later went to LA on my own, for the first time when I was 16. I spent a year there, I was going to high school. And I think I just fell in love with LA.

During that time, I was introduced to the writings of Charles Bukowski which as a teenager I found extremely fascinating. It was a description of life on Skid Row. Not only in Los Angeles but in different Skid Row-type areas throughout the US. It was a view of humanity that was very raw but also very beautiful at the same time. And I think in retrospect that sealed the deal that I was going to be interested in that part of LA.

I started to get to know Skid Row more intimately in 2006. While shooting my first documentary feature there (*Songs from the Nickel*, 2010), I had moved into one of these cash-based flophouse-style hotels which were still operating at the time, and I immediately felt a very strong connection.

How did the idea of GAME GIRLS come up? How did you meet Teri and Tiahna?

I wanted to make a film about women even while I was still working on my first feature, since that first film ended up being about men on Skid Row. But in order to do that, I felt I had to go back to the area as if I didn't know it. Just to go in there without any kind of preconceptions of my own.

I eventually decided to set up a free Expressive Art workshop for women that ran for almost a year and a half. We met twice a week first and then once a week because it became too much. I had met this really amazing woman, a drama therapist - Dr. Mimi Savage - who agreed to lead the workshops, which was great. The US producer, Kelly Parker, and I were canvassing the area with flyers, reaching out to all the social service providers in the area to get women to come.

The first day of the workshop was exciting. We had about 30 women there. And amongst them was Teri. And Teri kept coming. She was very enthusiastic about the whole process. Even though I liked her from



the beginning, I initially did not plan for the film to be focused on one protagonist only. The idea was more for it to be a collective portrait. I changed this direction after Teri began her relationship with Tiahna. At that point, I started having the sense that the story could lead that way.

It feels like the workshop has a real purpose of socially helping women in Skid Row. It also seems that it was necessary to be able to make those portraits in the film. Is the workshop still running today?

There was a time when we had this dream to continue the workshop beyond the film, but the resources were not there so we had to stop.



For me it was important to have the workshop as a sort of community space of feedback for the project itself. I wanted to avoid getting into some pitfalls of my own limited point of view. I wanted to have this community to run things by, and to feel like it was supported in that process. So that really did happen. The women who have made a strong commitment to be a part of the workshop have remained in touch. They meet up sometimes and always chat over social media. Many have moved on to better places in their lives. The workshop was an important experience for them. It was therapeutic and inspiring. And not just for the participants, but also for me and some other people behind the camera. It became this community, a sort of sisterhood actually.

Skid Row is almost seen a protagonist of the film, a living character. What's so special about it?

Skid Row is very complex. Depending on the day I might talk differently about it. A lot of things are compressed in a very small space on Skid Row. It is a very intense place, exhausting, dirty and smelly. It can be dangerous, it can be depressing. There is so much trauma present that anyone will be affected one way or another when spending some time there.

But at the same time, it is a kind of refuge. It's a home for people who had to leave their home or never really had one to begin with. People there recognize each other in their suffering. There are people on Skid Row who have overcome unimaginable things. They got a sort of second chance on life, and that perspective makes them incredibly insightful. Although the larger community of Skid Row is not the main focus of this film, I did want to show the community aspect as it plays out in Teri's and Tiahna's lives. People who are routinely marginalized in mainstream society are accepted here for who they are.

Very often, Skid Row is presented as "the worst place in America". But to me it's not Skid Row itself that's the problem. It's the conditions of society that make a place like Skid Row possible. Skid Row is just a mirror, where all our contradictions become visible.

What about the specific case of women, as the main focus in your film?

Women are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population. I have seen the change myself, in a quite radical way. Back in 2006 when I lived in Skid Row, I wouldn't see all these women camped out in tents along San Pedro Street. But they are there now.

It is a very tough place for women. Many of the women there come from abusive relationships, family histories, foster care... So, they do not have any real family support. They are very vulnerable.

It really is difficult to navigate that level of trauma in this kind of environment because the men there will try to victimize you. Not just men: other women as well. That is why the "game girls" - the young women who band together and hustle on the streets - are so tough.

They have to have this tough, rough exterior. They have to be able to switch to acting “crazy” within a second. It’s a survival mechanism.

You shot during strong political turmoil, and a lot of political issues were raised in the film: homelessness, Black Lives Matter... Was it a focus for you?

I would not say it that way. I make personal films. My goal is to just get very close to people, and show them for who they are. Whatever it is that they are expressing. I am not trying to make a specific political point. I try to go into the story. I try to take a look into Teri’s and Tiahna’s lives as much as possible from their perspective.

What I saw was that their lives were framed by violence. The systemic violence against black people, against poor people, the violence of the police. There definitely has been a growing militarization of the police in the United States. And the violence on the streets, perpetrated by those who have been hurt themselves. But police violence is not anything new, it has been going on for decades. It has just come into the mainstream consciousness over the past few years.



Can you tell me a bit about your filmic approach for Game Girls? Your crew?

Sometimes I had one person with me who was recording sound. Kelly Parker ran a second camera a couple times. But most of the time I was alone. I was trying not to interfere with any of the stories, and to focus on the authentic voice. That is why I set up the workshops and I shot alone. I waited to be led to or invited to stories that the women in the workshop wanted to share.

How long was that process of making Game Girls?

We started the workshop on January 29th 2014. We thought we were done in May 2016 with the shooting. However, a year later some new developments happened in the story and I shot some more... that was this past summer. We edited partly in Los Angeles, partly in Marseille and Paris. The editor, Emmanuelle Baude, was French. She traveled over here a couple of times. The editing was happening in essence alongside the shooting. We just finished the film on time for the Berlinale 2018.

Today, how is your relationship with the protagonists of the film? Did you show the film to them?

I've screened a previous edit to our Game Girls workshop "inner circle" last year to get everyone's feedback before finishing the film. It was a very touching event, and the women's responses were generally enthusiastic. Teri and Tiahna loved it. Some of the women wished I would have focused more on other aspects, such as more recovery and less smoking weed, ha! Now, with *Game Girls* completed, I just had another "inner circle" screening of the finished film. The edit had changed drastically since the last screening. A number of scenes from the workshop ended up on the editing floor. Yet, this time around all the women were swept up into the love story and really appreciated it as a movie. Everyone gave Teri lots of love afterwards. It was almost a mini group therapy session. It is funny, the women who attended the workshops are so different from one another, but we really have become this incredibly strong group, where there is so much mutual support. That was amazing for me to witness.

Interview by Stanislas Gazelle, 23 January 2018 - Los Angeles

Alina Skrzeszewska



Alina Skrzyszewska (1977) was born in Wrocław, Poland. During the politically charged years after the outbreak of the Solidarity movement her family emigrated to West Germany, and Alina grew up in Munich. She studied Stage Design and Art&Media at the University of the Arts in Berlin, and received an MFA in Film&Video from the California Institute of the Arts. In 2007/2008 she lived in an SRO hotel on Los Angeles' Skid Row. Since then, the

neighborhood has become something of a spiritual home for her, and Alina went on to make several films revolving around the area.

Her first documentary feature, *Songs from the Nickel* (2010) was shown at many film festivals around the world (Visions du Réel, DocLisboa, Gijon, among others) and has won several awards (see filmography below).

Alina is the recipient of multiple scholarships and grants among them a 12 month DAAD artist grant (2007/2008) and the Nipkow project development grant in Berlin 2012. She lives and works in Los Angeles and is the mother of a wonderful young boy.

filmography

2018 **Game Girls**

Documentary, France / Germany, 86'
Premiere: Berlinale 2018 (Panorama)

2013 **Traviesos** (German Title: **Wildfang**)

Documentary, Germany, ZDF / 3Sat, 28'

2010 **Songs from the Nickel**

Documentary, USA / Germany, 83'

Visions du Réel (Nyon, Switzerland), DocLisboa (Portugal), Gijon (Spain), FIFF Créteil (France), Document 9 (Glasgow, Scotland), Astra Film Festival (Sibiu, Romania), Athens International Film & Video Festival (USA)... Prizes: Prize for a Best Documentary at Athens International Film & Video Festival, Best Film at Document 9 of Glasgow, Sibiu Award at Astra Film festival Romania, Special Mention of the Jury at Festival Films de Femmes de Créteil 2011

2009 **Last One Left**

Documentary, USA, 21'

2006 **Stories of a Promised Land - part I**

Essay, USA / Germany, 11'

Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, Cambridge Film Festival, Stuttgarter Filmwinter

2002 **The Scent Of The Sky** (German Title: **Der Geruch des Himmels**)

Documentary, Germany, 15'

Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen

crew

Director **Alina Skrzyszewska**

Production **Films de Force Majeure (FR), Blinker Filmproduktion (DE)**

Script & Direction **Alina Skrzyszewska**

Director of photography **Alina Skrzyszewska**

Editor **Emmanuelle Baude**

Producers **Jean-Laurent Csinidis, Meike Martens, Kelly Parker**

Production management **Hélène Colombié**

Postproduction management **Jérôme Nunes**

Postproduction coordination **Nora Bertone**

Nationality **France, Germany**

Ratio **16/9**

Sound **Stéréo / 5.1**

Language **English**

In coproduction with **ZDF** in cooperation with **Arte and Studio Lemon**

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