

Press Kit

INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING

A FILM BY AMY JENKINS

DOCUMENTARY / 95 min / ENGLISH / ©2018 / DIGITAL DCP / 5.1 AUDIO

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SCREENINGS

INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING had its World Premiere in New York at the Museum of Modern Art Doc Fortnight Festival in February and its International Premiere at the Sydney Film Festival, AU, in June. The film won BEST DOCUMENTARY at the Athens International Film and Video Festival, OH. INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING had its New England Premiere at the Independent Film Festival Boston in April, and was also screened at Montclair Film Festival, NJ and the Greenpoint Film Festival, Brooklyn, in April/May.

TWO-LINE

Over the course of one tumultuous year, Artist and Director Amy Jenkins confronts the cancer diagnoses of her mother, sister, and brother, and also welcomes her first child to life. Crafted in a unique visual style, the film weaves breathtaking vignettes of nature unfolding with cinéma vérité family footage to lead us to a bold and daring acceptance our own mortality.

SYNOPSIS

Weaving cinéma vérité family footage with breathtaking vignettes of nature unfolding, INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING tells an elegiac story about transformation, grief, and the essential nature of the collective human journey. As Director Amy Jenkins welcomes her first child into the world, she also must negotiate the cancer diagnoses of her mother, sister, and brother, all of whom fall ill within the same year. Crafted from Jenkins' video journals and narrated through archived answering machine messages, Jenkins, a visual artist, turns her camera to interrogate loss. Her vulnerability leads us to a bold and daring acceptance of our own mortality and a reverence for the fleeting beauty of life.

LONG SYNOPSIS

INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING is an observational portrait of an American family navigating the cycles of birth and death, echoing the natural world around them. Told in an unconventional visual style, the story evolves from the viewpoint of Director Amy Jenkins, whose first child is born while she negotiates the cancer diagnosis and transit toward death of three of her closest family members. Profound and visually stunning, the film offers a rare and intimate view of the human experience.

Filmed over a decade with the artist's keen attention to symbolism, visceral touch, and the passage of time, the film maintains a vintage aesthetic with 4:3 DV footage. A hand-held camera records intimate interaction between Amy as cameraperson and her family, while clips from the artist's obsessive act of recording with video, answering machine, and journaling, narrate the family story as it unfolds. The film favors visual metaphor over plot; in breathtaking splendor, the natural world transforms to reveal poignancy in the family story and to anchor the documentary footage in artistic gravitas.

The story begins as Amy leaves New York to marry John in New Hampshire and later becomes pregnant. This idyllic beginning takes a turn when it is revealed that Amy's sister, Linda, has been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and Amy's mother, Ellen, has advanced breast cancer. After Amy gives birth, she and infant Audrey fly back and forth across the country to tend to Linda and Ellen in Park City, Utah. As Linda slips closer to death, Amy's mother chooses to postpone her own cancer treatment to care for her daughter. Linda and Ellen pass in rapid succession. Shortly after, Amy's brother, Craig, places Amy's hand over a lump in his abdomen. "Maybe it's a tumor," he jokes.

The family—now just Amy, Craig, and their father—once again must grapple with the possibility of inevitable loss. As Craig strives to embody acceptance of his mortality, Amy resolves to be fully present with him in each moment, even as she clings to the tangibility of Craig by recording their experiences. In her attempt to mediate the family story through her camera, the filmmaker echoes the family's inability to adequately convey emotion in words. Searching for a way to let go, she turns her lens to the natural world and finds solace in the unrelenting pace of life and death as it unfolds in her yard.

The passage of time becomes a psychological focus of the film—it drags and flies. We witness baby Audrey's first steps, first words, and her blossoming personhood, as, in turn, we watch the slowness of illness morph into the quickness of death. Told with gorgeous sparsity and understated grace, the film distills life's counterpoints into a sequence of intimate moments in which nothing—but also everything—occurs. In doing so, it elucidates the most compelling and often challenging aspect of the human experience—unconditional love.

"Instructions on Parting" weaves magnificent artistic footage with cinéma vérité to tell an elegiac story about transformation, grief, and the essential nature of the collective human journey. By chronicling with her camera to interrogate loss, the filmmaker leads us to a bold and daring acceptance of our inevitable end.

PRESS QUOTES

“A vivid visual translation of psychological truth...Satisfyingly unconventional...[Jenkins] makes an eloquent case that experience and contemplation can...soften [our] unavoidable existential dilemma.”

— **JONATHAN STEVENSON**, *Two Coats of Paint*

“A film of moving specificity and profound universality... An unforgettable experience.”

— **JOSHUA BRUNSTING**, *Criterioncast*

“Expand[s] the limits of the personal essay.”

— **DANIEL EAGAN**, *Film Journal*

“A deeply moving, tautly poetic diary of multiple loss... Transcendent insight[s], folded into the film’s rich, rhythmic structure, stay with you long after the ending.”

— **DAVID BRODY**, *Artcritical*

“Jenkins rescues...essential glimpses of dignity and compassion from the grips of death.”

— **ELA BITTENCOURT**, *The Village Voice*

“Formally elegant and conceptually rigorous, *Instructions on Parting* is a work that bears witness.”

—**DAVID SHAPIRO**, *Bomb*

“The film itself is tragic and beautiful, a celebration of the life cycle and an intimate look into its final stages and the inevitability of death. It’s...powerful, necessary and relatable.”

— **BEN CONANT**, *Monadnock Ledger Transcript*

CREATIVE TEAM

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/EDITOR Amy Jenkins is an American artist whose installations, films, and photography have been exhibited, screened and collected internationally. Her works, which focus on themes such as familial relationships, desire, and gender identity, have been shown at museums including The Museum of Modern Art, NY; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; The Haifa Museum, Haifa, Israel; Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, Linz, Austria; the Akron Art Museum, Ohio; Sioux City Art Center, IA; and Palm Beach ICA, FL. Her recent documentary feature, "Instructions on Parting," won Best feature Documentary at Athens International Film and Video Festival, OH, and has screened at festivals including MoMA Doc Fortnight, Montclair, IFFBoston, and Sydney. Jenkins was chosen to be a LEF Foundation Robert Flaherty Film Seminar Fellow, and a two-time nominee for the CalArts Alpert Award in Film/Video. Her artwork has been reviewed in many publications, including *The New York Times*, *ARTnews*, *Bomb*, *Artcritical*, *Performing Arts Journal*, and *The Village Voice*. **Visit her website at:** www.amyjenkins.net

PRODUCER Mary Kerr is a seasoned film professional with over 20 years experience in programming, arts administration and documentary filmmaking. She is currently consulting on several documentaries in various stages of production and most recently produced *One Cut, One Life*, by Lucia Small and Ed Pincus. She has programmed for the Sundance, Los Angeles, and SilverDocs film festivals and worked for the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, Creative Capital, and Scandinavia House. She served on funding panels for the NEA, NYSCA, ITVS, POV and Tribeca Gucci Fund, and juries for the Ashland, Full Frame, Sarasota, and Nordisk Panorama film festivals, amongst others. She holds a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Maryland and currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

EDITOR Bara Jichova Tyson is a filmmaker and editor who often collaborates with artists including Hal Hartley, Michael Almereyda, and Narcissister. She is finishing her first feature documentary film *Consuming Others*. Her short documentary film, *The Hatch House*, won the best short experimental documentary at the 2016 FAFF in California, and was the official selection of the 2016 Architecture and Design Film Festival in NYC and 2016 AMDOCS. In 2015 she co-produced and edited *Built On Narrow Land*, a feature-length documentary directed by Malachi Connolly. She is a 2016 recipient of a MacDowell Colony fellowship. Originally from the Czech Republic, she now lives and works in New York City.

CONSULTING EDITOR Laure Sullivan is a Film Editor, Story Consultant and Filmmaker living and working in Brooklyn, NY. She has worked on feature docs, narrative features, television programs and series. Her debut film was *Listen Up! The Lives of Quincy Jones*. Since then she has worked with directors Michael Moore, Josh Fox, Mira Nair, Gaylen Ross and others. Her personal work has shown at various venues and has received support from Sundance, IDFA, ITVS, and NYSCA. Awards include: Cine Golden Eagle, Emmy, and Best Editing WIFF. Films

edited by her have premiered at Sundance Film Festival, TIFF, NYFF, Cork Film Festival, and Galway Film Fleadh.

COMPOSER Noah Hoffeld, a cellist, composer and producer, is equally at home across many genres, including solo cello performance, film scores and rock song vocals. A graduate of Juilliard, he's been featured with artists like Natalie Merchant, Philip Glass, and Renee Fleming, and his cello solos are heard in *A Walk in the Woods* with Robert Redford. His cello opens the recent album by Krishna Das, *Trust in the Heart*.

SOUND DESIGNER Jim Dawson has collaborated with The Wooster Group, Trisha Brown Dance Company, Jay Scheib, Cynthia Hopkins, The Collapsible Giraffe, Findlay/Sandsmark, Door 10 and Jim Findlay. He has made soundscapes for Jean Butler, Deganit Shemy, Rebecca Warner, Diane Madden and Jon Kinzel. His film credits include Brian Rogers' *Screamers*, Amy Jenkins' *Instructions on Parting*, Jacques Menasche's *Cathy at War*, *F8* and *Be There*, the PBS documentary *The Narcotic Farm*, Ian Olds' *Occupation: Dreamland*, and *The Fixer*.

FILMMAKER INTERVIEW

How do you describe INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING in your own words?

INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING tells an elegiac story about transformation, grief, and the essential nature of the collective human journey. As I grappled with new motherhood and the simultaneous transits toward death of several close family members, I used my camera to hold onto their memory. Ultimately, through the making of this film, I found an acceptance of my own mortality and a reverence for the fleeting beauty of life.

Why did you decide to turn your family's story into a documentary?

When my first child had just been born and my family members were ill, I was filming them because I wanted to hold onto them for my own memories. I was a visual artist who worked with multimedia and sculpture, so I wasn't thinking like a filmmaker, I was really just thinking as a daughter, a sister, a mother. At the same time I also filmed the nature in my yard, as a visual meditation or a coping mechanism for the difficulties I faced. All the tapes went in a box, unlabeled. That box of tapes sat in my studio for six years. I finally viewed the tapes while on an artist residency; it was then that I realized the recordings were rare, yet universal, and that they needed to become a film. I had never made a feature documentary before, so I had a huge learning curve (and much editing over five years) in order to create **INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING**.

What was the reaction of the various members of your family to being so intimately filmed during their illness and end stage of their lives?

My family was very accustomed to seeing me with a camera since I was very young, so they were very relaxed with me. The camera that I used for this film was a Sony PC1, a unique little camera that just fit in my hand—it was like an extension of my body; I never looked through the eye piece. I probably filmed so much at that time because I was so comfortable with that camera. And when my brother died I put it in a cabinet and have never used it since.

Please explain how you used nature as a metaphor and a means of showing the passage of time.

During my family's illnesses I frequently filmed in my yard, essentially as a visual meditation to stay present while difficulties were occurring around me. It wasn't until later that I realized that the nature footage I had recorded resonated with the family story, and in the juxtaposition of those two preoccupations lay the liminal focus of the film: the cyclical nature of birth and death that is echoed all around us.

Do you have one piece of advice for aspiring filmmakers?

Put the story first, worry about technology, money and technicalities later.

What do you hope audiences will take away from your film?

Death is a universal experience, yet rarely discussed. To truly be present with my family members in their passage, I had to let go of my own expectations and judgments. To do this was an opportunity to give and receive love, a true gift.

Interview by Montclair Film Festival Blogger Robin Naphtali