

HINDSIGHT IN 2020

A FILM BY MIGUEL SILVEIRA

A MICHEL STOLNICKI PRODUCTION

XISKO MAXIMO MONROE

KHADIM DIOP

JOSEFINA SCARO

BEN BECHER

# AMERICAN THIEF

ONLY HACKERS CAN BRING YOU JUSTICE

NO PORT FILMS PRESENTS AMERICAN THIEF IN ASSOCIATION WITH GIGANTIC STUDIOS, PEACEABLY ASSEMBLY PRODUCTIONS, YOUR MAMA  
DIRECTED BY MIGUEL SILVEIRA, PRODUCED BY MICHEL STOLNICKI, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS AARON KOEN, CHARLES MARTINEZ, JONATHAN GRAY, BRIAN DEVINE, MAYRA AHAD, MARIO PEIXOTO, WRITTEN BY MIGUEL SILVEIRA, MICHEL STOLNICKI, MISSY HERNANDEZ  
CO-PRODUCED BY MISSY HERNANDEZ, JOSEFINA SCARO, BEN BECHER, ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS FELIPE BRETAS, SCOTT RIEHS, ILDA SANTIAGO, BRUNO BEAUCHAMPS, OLGA BOISTER, STARRING XISKO MAXIMO MONROE, KHADIM DIOP, BEN BECHER, JOSEFINA SCARO  
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY JOHN WAKAYAMA CAREY, EDITED BY AVRAHAM DOBSON, ORIGINAL MUSIC BY FRANCIS RODRIGUEZ, LOCATION SOUND BY CARLOS MARTINEZ, ANIMATION & VISUAL EFFECTS BY STIAN HAFSTAD



TRT 78:01 | Red Color | USA | 2020



FILM  
MOVEMENT

PRESS KIT, TRAILER AND PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD  
FOR PREVIEW SCREENERS & BOOKING REQUESTS CONTACT:

Jimmy Weaver - Theatrical Bookings

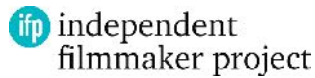
[jimmy@filmmovement.com](mailto:jimmy@filmmovement.com)

216-704-0748

Maxwell Wolkin - Festival & Non-theatrical Bookings

[maxwell@filmmovement.com](mailto:maxwell@filmmovement.com)

212.941.7744x211



## QUOTES

"The *Medium Cool* of our generation" - Susan Stover

"*American Thief* is a wildly original, truly thrilling film that has the immediacy, daring and perspective of only the best cinematic triumphs of recent years—yet it's a true American indie." - Ken Eisen

"It's the film that will define an era." - The Black Cape

## FESTIVALS

Centerpiece at Maine International Film Festival  
Festival Highlight at Oldenburg Film Festival  
Official Competition at Urbanworld  
Official Selection at Woodstock Film Festival  
Narrative Competition at Indie Memphis



## **LOGLINE**

A teen hacker seeking revenge for his father's murder, a young activist, an internet conspiracy vlogger, and an artificial intelligence programmer become pawns in a plot to derail the 2016 presidential elections.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Filmed and scripted around true events between 2015-2019, *AMERICAN THIEF* straddles fiction and documentary as its protagonists become pawns in a plot to derail the 2016 presidential election. Toncruz, a teenage hacker, wants to avenge his father's murder while fellow-hacker, Diop, wants to fight for justice. Paul, a disgruntled internet vlogger known as "Man in the Van" and Toncruz are contacted by an Unidentified User on the deep web who claims he can provide them with the truth. Meanwhile, an artificial intelligence programmer observes what unfolds as she fails to contain the monster she's created. A fast-paced action/thriller that integrates fictional characters with real events creating an intense tale of dystopian conspiracy that will keep you transfixed.

## MAIN CAST

<b>Toncruz</b>	<b>Xisko Maximo Monroe</b>
<b>Diop Mason</b>	<b>Khadim Diop</b>
<b>Paul Hunter</b>	<b>Ben Becher</b>
<b>Josephine Aronovich</b>	<b>Josefina Scaro</b>

## MAIN CREW

<b>Directed by</b>	<b>Miguel Silveira</b>
<b>Written by</b>	<b>Miguel Silveira Michel Stolnicki Missy Hernandez</b>
<b>Produced by</b>	<b>Michel Stolnicki</b>
<b>Director of Photography</b>	<b>John Wakayama Carey</b>
<b>Edited by</b>	<b>Avram Dodson</b>
<b>Original Music by</b>	<b>Francis Rodriguez</b>
<b>Animation &amp; Visual Effects by</b>	<b>Stian Hafstad</b>
<b>Co-Producers</b>	<b>Missy Hernandez Ben Becher Josefina Scaro</b>
<b>Executive Producers</b>	<b>Aaron Koen Charles Martinez Mayra Auad Mario Peixoto Jonathan Gray Brian Devine</b>



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

What originally started as a seemingly simple story about a teenager searching for the man who killed his father - to be filmed with a skeletal script and minimal crew over the course of several weekends - quickly turned into a far more complex and exciting journey. Working with an extremely limited budget, we shot what we could until we were forced to break to find additional funds. This forced us to produce the film in five segments over the course of three years, which allowed me to rework and deepen the story we were telling by connecting our fictional narrative to the troubling reality of what was unfolding before us. The public became more aware of government surveillance of ordinary Americans and increasingly wary of information they willingly shared on social media. Cybersecurity became a hot-button issue in the debates. The DNC was hacked. Russia accused of meddling in the election. Fake News. FaceBook. The fictional world of our story collided with the real world and the directing needed to complement this.

Drawing from the influence of Haskell Wexler's "Medium Cool", I brought our actors to witness and participate in real events as their fictional characters. They attended protest rallies and marches, weaved their way through costumed strangers during the Halloween parade, searched for someone amidst the anxious crowd outside Rockefeller Center on election night, and watched from the crowd at the National Mall as the Trumps walked the Obamas to their helicopter and assumed their positions as President and First Lady. Throughout the film, the narrative is interrupted by street interviews of New Yorkers offering their distinct points of view on race, class, and the election. The resulting film is an electrifying thriller and a true hybrid that offers a visceral look at a polarizing moment in American history and asks the quintessential question of our time, "What the fuck is going on?"

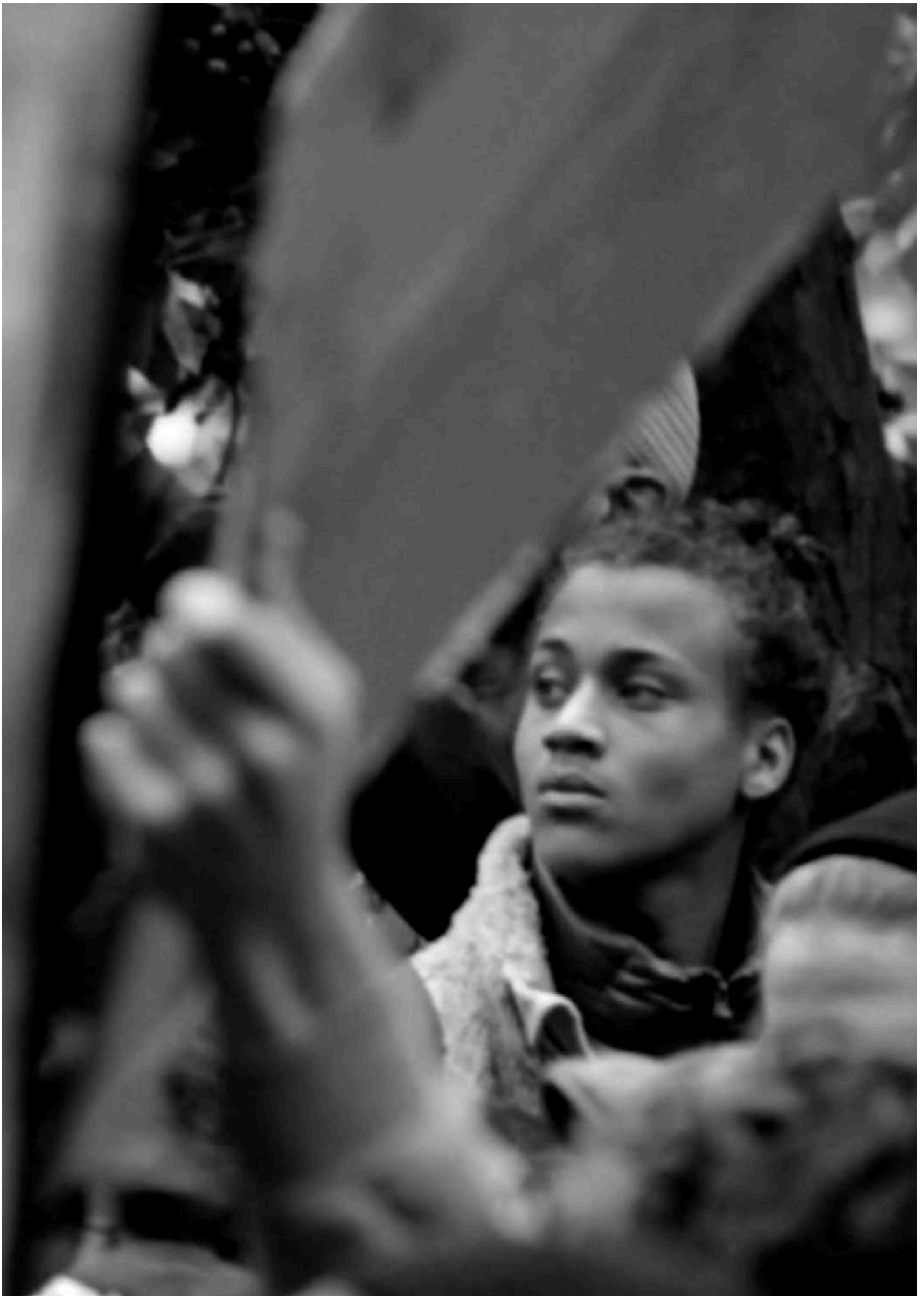


## Q/A WITH KEY CREATIVE TEAM

Four years in the making but fresher than today, MIFF23's World Premiere Centerpiece Film, *AMERICAN THIEF*, is a wildly original, truly thrilling film has the immediacy, daring and perspective of only the best cinematic triumphs of recent years—yet it's a true American indie, shot because it had to be, and introduces us to several great talents, including director and co-writer Miguel Silveira, producer and co-writer Michel Stolnicki, co-writer and co-producer Missy Hernandez and leading actors Xisko Maximo Monroe, Khadim Diop, Ben Becher, and Josefina Scaro.

Recently, Stolnicki, Silveira, Hernandez, and MIFF23 Midlife Achievement Award Honoree Hilary Brougner reconnected via Zoom to talk about the film.

**Hilary:** I want to just say I had the pleasure of first meeting these three through Columbia University's MFA program, and they were renegades and upstarts from the start and also full of tremendous heart. Cinematically and politically, these three filmmakers were very alive in our hallways. So, I'm excited to be doing this Q&A with them here and now. It is really moving to see this film, especially now. We're all sheltering in place right now. New York's streets are very, very quiet. This is shot against the protests around Black Lives Matter and the election unfolding in 2016. The heightened surrealism of it comes across so potently. When did the sci-fi/thriller genre merge with this heightened, intense sense of "This is real, this is now," the verité quality of the filmmaking? When did you know those two things were going to come together and surprisingly go hand in hand?



**Michel:** We always wanted to make a genre piece. I think we always had this aspect of making a thriller or making something exciting and intertwining that in fiction and documentary. We always had in our mind that we wanted to make a genre piece, a thriller, because it would have a larger appeal to the audiences.

**Miguel:** When we started we had a different objective. As we began to observe what was happening in the world, it was very clear. We have to expand and let the story invite us to shoot whatever it is that the story really is. This whole thing about the hacking of the election, the technology involved, Cambridge Analytica-- it was happening way before it became broadly known. And the investigation is still ongoing right now, after the film has finished. Maybe it was July, June, September. I can't point the finger exactly, but that's when the sci-fi elements became clear. We knew there was going to be sci-fi elements to it.

**Missy:** We knew we had to take a break, because our [director of photography] had to go on another shoot. During that break, as we were waiting for new funds to come in from other grants and our investors, I remember Miguel saying, "I know what the film's really about. It's about the election. And we're not going to be finished until after November, after the elections take place. It has to be written in such a way that it works regardless of whoever wins, we never know exactly who was working for whom."

**Miguel:** There's a very strong documentary aspect which traditionally is kind of like a hybrid film. I always refer, even though the film is different, to Medium Cool. Our interest is really an inquiry, right? The film had those ideas but was shot, the way I see it, as an inquiry to what was taking place and what did that mean in the timeline of politics, timeline of the United States. We went in with this desire, and we had no answers, or we didn't have anything predetermined that we wanted to say.

**Hilary:** So, what was the story germ that you began with?

**Miguel:** Right before Cannes 2015, Michel said, "Let's make a movie." Then we decided to call it American Thief. The title came first. And we had no idea what that was, but just the name popped up. There was no Trump. I mean, he existed, but he hadn't announced his intention to run. It was before all of this stuff. But the thing, the element, the ethereal essence of this film was in the zeitgeist long before. At that specific moment, to me the most important event was of course the Black Lives Matter movement. Of course, I don't suffer what folks who are directly affected by police violence suffer the same way. As a human being, I understand that I have to be on that side. There was a kernel of a story about a kid who witnesses his father be killed, like so many others in so many other movies as well, in an act of police violence that is not explainable. It's tricky to make a film about that from where we're coming from. So, we were hoping to see where the journey was going to take us, always thinking, "Where do we belong here? Do we belong here?"





**Michel:** So, we had the actor, and we had the idea, and we wrote 15 pages, going from festivals to festivals with our shorts just trying to figure out what story we wanted to tell about. When we got back after that experience, we put together a small team, and we started shooting every weekend. That's how the story came about.

**Michel:** I would say the relationship between technology and the main character, Toncruz, was something that was always there in the core. When we were doing the first test cameras, the first look around the city, before the Black Lives Matter, there was like this element of hacking. He was always on the computer. We were testing how we could shoot that and make that entertaining.

**Hilary:** Xisco Maximo Monroe, who played Toncruz -- you can feel the film breathing with him throughout. I'd love to hear more about how that relationship grew and changed as a filmmaking team working with this young person who's discovering himself as an actor, who's also living as a young man through this time as you've indicated, having experiences that are both fictional and very real as he's working with you.

**Miguel:** First time I saw Xisco, he was in a film directed by Talibah Newman, I think, produced by Hugo Kenzo, and I was like, "This kid is fantastic," because he played a very engaged, this incredible genderless figure in her film that I really like. It's called Sweet Honey Chile. I really like so much. I wanted to meet that actor. His eyes are so beautiful. But I didn't know if he was acting. I had no idea if that was a real person being themselves or if that was just somebody playing a part. When I met him, he was very different than the character. I was like, "Okay, this kid is an actor. He's a performer and can completely commit at a very young age to these people that are not him." He would always get it right in the first take. I would shoot four or five takes, and as I edited I always used the first or second. That taught me a lesson.

**Hilary:** If you had to describe your cast and your approach to casting, how could you sum it up?

**Missy:** It was multifaceted. Also, because of the stop-and-go production, it was like, "Hey, Missy, can you write a scene that takes place in a police office?" "Okay. Do we have any actors for that?" "I don't know. Can you find actors too?" "Yes." And other times it was just like, "Do we know if an actor's going to be available five months from now if it's pilot season now and they might go to LA?" Then a lot of the last-minute casting or recasting in some cases came down to who's available and trusts us enough to show up. So, it's a combination of just asking film friends what actors they trust or would be willing to come out, who is geographically available, and oftentimes it would be just pulling in our friends who are also other filmmakers.



**Michel:** There was a lot of trust. There was no relationship about being mentor or mentee with Toncruz or Diop; we really became peers. So, we were able to tell these stories together and find what was bringing the motivation behind it.

**Hilary:** It's not a movie you watch; it's a movie you feel and you're immersed in. I wanted to know, are there scenes that stand out that you shot that were extraordinary experiences in and of themselves more than others? What are some of the moments that surprised you most when you were working with this extraordinary cast in these pseudo-real life, some real life, some fictional situations?

**Miguel:** I won't give it away entirely, but there's an intervention scene where these characters are talking about police oppression. They're all African-Americans. And I cast the grandma because she is that person in real life. It was important to not write her words, because I wouldn't know how to start. I knew that I wanted to hit a couple of dramatic points; they're important to the storyline. But besides that, I wanted them to really use this opportunity to talk as they do. They all had cues in order to hit notes, but then we began to shoot, and it was kind of like freestyle. Besides Toncruz and Diop, everyone is the person they are in real life. So, everything they say is actually true. It's non-scripted. It's directed, but definitely not scripted. That scene is a true hybrid piece in this film, because it's definitely set, but what transpires in the sequence is the kind of truth that you can only find in documentaries. Yeah, that's the perfect example.

**Missy:** I think after filming that, it was kind of the benchmark of "Okay, we're making something that is more than what we thought it was." Throughout the film, there's these kind of documentary interludes where there are actual New Yorkers that we came across while filming to see if they wanted to say anything to camera-- about society, about the election-- whatever they're feeling, what they believe. Then a lot of our work as writers on the fiction side was crafting pieces that spoke to and supported that in our narrative and helped us make sense of what was going on.

**Michel:** For me, what was the most impressive, and which I can't stop thinking about, is the election night, because we spent 24 hours working together as a group, as a collective. We were in the streets experiencing it all. We didn't sleep. We took a couple breaks, but we were together. And we would get in the van and drive around and shoot and find people. Like Missy was saying, a lot of these interviews came on election night. A lot of them didn't want to talk. You'd have to really show them what we're trying to do as artists, and then they would be more open to it. A lot of people were still skeptical about what's going on. You could see that divide clearly everywhere you walked around New York City that night, and we wanted to hear everyone's opinions. We wanted to understand, and that's what we were doing that night.



**Missy:** I think that also carried through the rest of the film in terms of not just the documentary aesthetic but actually listening to people, whether it's people in the streets, whether it's our actors who are actual community activists who work to welcome back and ingratiate former felons into the community, or just our own actors and their experiences as young black men in New York City, how they feel when a police officer is looking at them or when they're alone on a subway at night. I don't think that that's a perspective that we often get in mainstream media. A little bit more so now, but it's still not the mainstream experience of the content that is out there, for especially young people of color. It's a different perspective that we can't speak to but we can hear and give voice to.

**Hilary:** I think the intersection of art-making and activism as creative, generative processes is really clear in this film. It asks new questions. It creates new answers. It speaks to the soul so beautifully. I'm wondering if each of you could speak about lessons learned or something affirmed about either of those roles, or the way those two roles connect for each of you personally.

**Miguel:** As a filmmaker, I do believe there's power in what we do artistically, because it generates more subject matter for investigation, and that propels folks to engage in conversations that they perhaps didn't before. Folks who I hope will see this film perhaps have not asked the questions the film asks, have not exposed themselves as we have with risking making a bad movie and shooting a bad scene, or getting something right, without worrying about either. We went through that, and perhaps that will be a tool for folks to ask some questions that they haven't and see the situation that I think is objectively very complex from the standpoint of the film. So, I'm very proud that we took those risks.

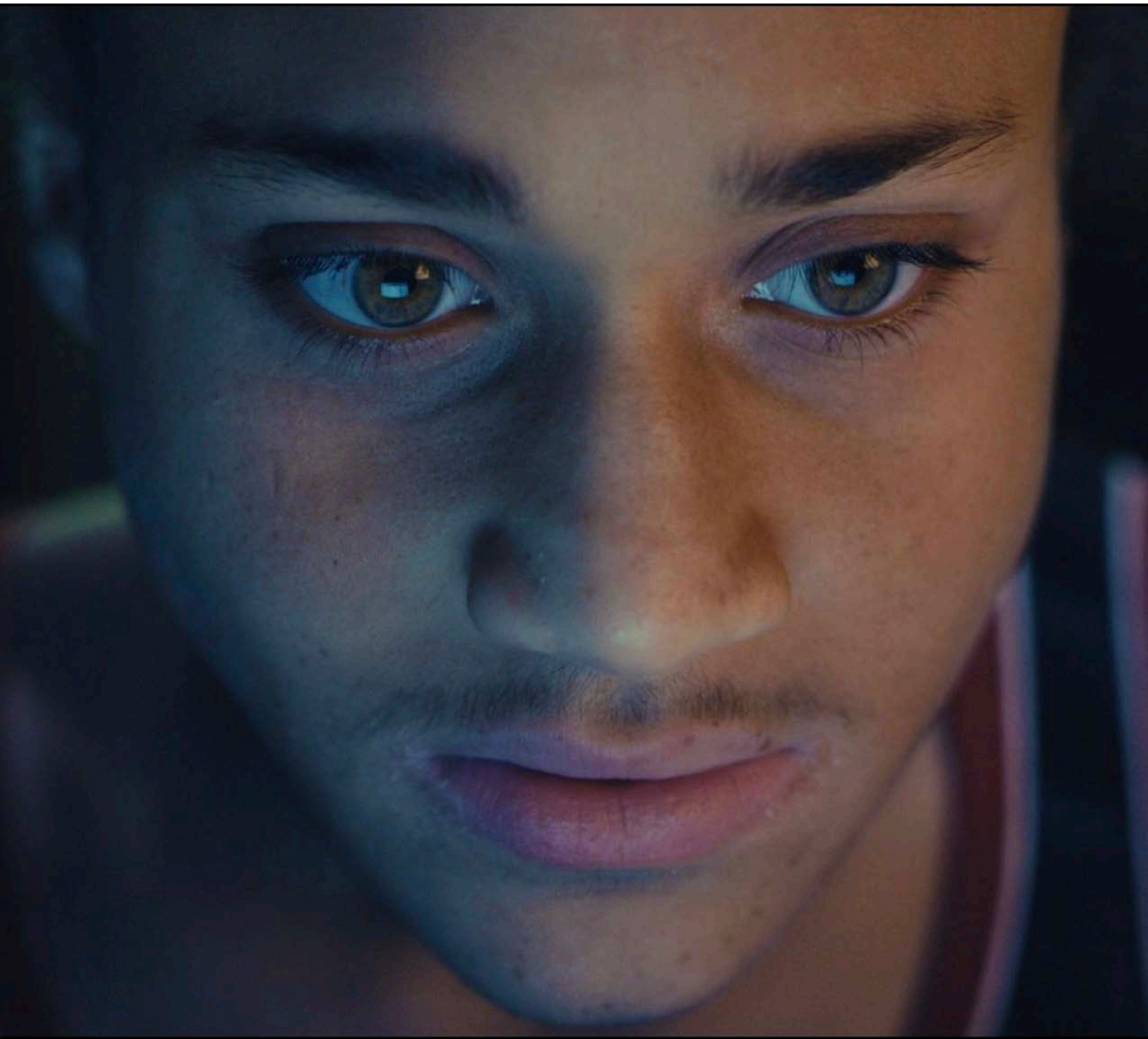
**Missy:** For me, it really impacted the kind of work that I am passionate about putting out there. After making this film, I still write comedy and like comedy and like things that are more genre-driven, but actually engaging in different social issues I think is important to have in any work that I am creating, so that people aren't just entertained but actually questioning and looking at things more closely. I think the documentary aspects of the film and the way we went about opening up the conversation to our actors, to people in the community, was super impactful. So, it's inspired me to take a step back from my narrative work and do a documentary to really hear from the people in the community for the stories I'm telling, even though the main characters and storyline is my imagination or personal experience.

**Michel:** I would say that whatever we're feeling, the other person is feeling. Ideology can't come before reality. That was my biggest lesson in this film is that we really need to create a dialogue and bring people together and talk about this, instead of pushing different opinions. So, that was my biggest lesson.

**TRAILER**

**<https://vimeo.com/465869712>**

**Available for download**



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