



Presents

MY ART

A film by Laurie Simmons

“Laugh out-loud funny” – Judith Hudson, *Bomb Magazine*



U.S.A./2016/Drama, Comedy/English
87 min/2.35:1/ 2.0 & 5.1 Surround Sounds



**Opens January 12th at Quad Cinema in New York City & January 19th
at Laemmle Ahyra Fine Arts in Los Angeles**

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Assets:

Official US Trailer: TBD

Downloadable hi-res images: filmmovement.com/theatrical/index.asp?MerchandiseID=573

SYNOPSIS

Ellie Shine (Laurie Simmons) is a single artist living in New York City. Ellie has a good life: a stable teaching job, successful friends, and a loyal, aging dog named Bing. As her decades-old dream of a respectable place in the art world becomes more elusive, her frustration with her lack of recognition feels alarmingly urgent. When she is offered the summer house and studio of a famous friend in Upstate New York she seizes the opportunity to hit the reset button on her life and work. She unwittingly finds inspiration in two out-of-work actors who maintain the gardens at her summer retreat: Frank (Robert Clohessy), a recent widower trying to reassemble his life by turning his back on a mediocre acting career, and Tom (Josh Safdie), a young, hungry actor whose wife (Parker Posey) has a less ambitious vision for their idyllic country life. Joining them is John (John Rothman), a thrice-divorced, disillusioned lawyer looking for a summer distraction. This unlikely trio helps Ellie reinvent her artistic identity by participating in her DIY art videos—improbable recreations of old Hollywood films. They accompany Ellie on an odd and unexpected journey toward finding her late-blooming artistic momentum.

LOGLINE

When Ellie Shine, a single artist living in New York City, is offered the summer home of a famous friend, she begins an odd and unexpected journey towards reinventing herself and fulfilling her decades-old dream of recognition in the art world.



SELECT PRESS FOR MY ART

“The newbie narrative filmmaker really impresses in an unexpected arena... her performance as artist Ellie stands out...” - *Kate Erbland, Indiewire*

“The focus on a female artist’s midlife crisis feels at least a little revolutionary.” - *Steve Dollar, Art News*

“The world [the characters] build is mystical — both to them and to the viewer: The films within the film are entirely winsome, as a viewer, it’s delightful to recognize the originals in the re-creations” - *Max Cea, Salon*

“Ranges from romance to comedy and fantasy, with threads of feminism woven in... it’s Simmons’ depiction of Shine’s art-making that is truly magnetic to watch.” - *Pei-ru Keh, Wallpaper*

SELECTED FESTIVALS & AWARDS

Official Selection - Venice Film Festival, 2016

Official Selection - Tribeca Film Festival, 2017

Official Selection – Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival, 2017

Official Selection – Virginia Film Festival, 2017



Credits

CAST

Ellie	Laurie Simmons
Meryl	Lena Dunham
Frank	Robert Clohessy
John	John Rothman
Tom	Josh Safdie
Angie	Parker Posey
Mickey	Blair Brown
Veronika	Barbara Sukowa

CREW

Written by	Laurie Simmons
Directed by	Laurie Simmons
Produced by	Andrew Fierberg
Executive Producers	Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn Richard Edwards
Cinematography	Tom Richmond
Music Composed by	Will Epstein
Music Supervisors	Annie Perlman Melissa Chapman
Editor	Betsy Kagen
Costume Design	Stacey Battat
Production Design	Kelly McGehee
Line Producer	Tina Piccari

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY – Laurie Simmons

Laurie Simmons is an internationally recognized artist. Her work is included in the collections of The Brooklyn Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, The Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum, among others. In 2006 she wrote and directed a short film, THE MUSIC OF REGRET, starring Meryl Streep and the Alvin Ailey Dancers with cinematography by Ed Lachman. She has had retrospectives at the Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden and Neus Museum, Nuremberg. Recent solo exhibitions include the Jewish Museum, New York and the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis. She will have a retrospective originating at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in 2018.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"I started writing MY ART in 2011 and began filming in 2013. Its central character is Ellie, an artist who shows an unwavering commitment to her work at a critical juncture in her life. After being cast as the artist-mother in TINY FURNITURE, a film by Lena Dunham, I became preoccupied with the depiction of artists, particularly women artists. Almost invariably, they are mythologized, romanticized, and made to seem tragic and crazy, which has no bearing on my own experience as an artist. Fearless about focusing her artistic voice and embracing a new medium, Ellie uses everything and everyone around her to push ahead." - Laurie Simmons

IN CONVERSATION WITH LAURIE SIMMONS

How did the project evolve and the film come to be made?

In 2009 I played the part of Siri in my daughter Lena Dunham's movie TINY FURNITURE. Siri was a single, working artist mother with two daughters living in downtown New York, loosely based on Lena's own experience. As much as Lena was unlike her character Aura – Siri was not me. I had some input into Siri's character but in the end she was very much Lena's creation. I spent a lot of time thinking about both artist portrayals and representations of women my age on screen and that's when Ellie started coming into focus. I would say that experience made me think long and hard about women's stories – particularly women over forty. Do the stories ever move beyond the subjects of love and aging? Are women's aspirations really addressed apart from finding romance? And lastly, what about the ageless aspects of a female character – those traits which might make her appeal to people of all ages.

When did you decide to set the film in upstate New York and not in the city?

Interestingly my first pass at the story took place in downtown New York where Ellie the artist was very distracted by family relationships – specifically negotiating the care of her elderly mother with her two sisters (completely autobiographical).

It eventually became obvious to me that Ellie needed to leave her friends and the comfort zone of New York in order to find a new artistic voice. I've always loved Bergman's SMILES OF A SUMMER NIGHT and all its incarnations - Sondheim's A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC and Woody Allen's A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SEX COMEDY. The summer farce with its implication of 'the moon made me do crazy things' has always appealed to me along with the romance movies of the French New Wave like JULES AND JIM. Thinking about these films helped me structure Ellie's relationships with her summer friends. Ultimately she needed to leave New York to find her own way back in.

Does MY ART represent how you feel about New York City?

I adore New York and I am the consummate New Yorker. I understand the filmmakers who make a claim that their film is a love letter to the city. I initially thought I would make that movie. What I truly know from experience is how challenging it is to live in New York and more specifically how difficult it is to find your destiny there. Every New Yorker readily admits they have a very passionate but fraught love affair with New York. I conceived MY ART as a film in three acts. Acts one and three take place in the city and are very short, I needed to pack as much of a New York feeling as possible into those scenes.

What do you think the film is expressing about artistic "success", both the lack of it and the achieving of it? Is it somehow always bittersweet?

I think for the characters in MY ART "bittersweet" is a way of life – the result of examining one's life honestly and realistically questioning when to change course. In some sense these characters are up for anything and quite open but they are also by turns world weary and cautious. Ellie, like many artists, has had to keep her work close and be her own best advocate, so ultimately there is some resistance to letting her new work out into the world. That said, I think Ellie may be the least conflicted character in MY ART in terms of seeking and finding some sort of artistic success.

Tell us a bit about working with Parker Posey, and how the rest of the noteworthy casting for the film came together.

The character of Tom's wife had to be a wildcard... An unexpected character, strong enough to keep him from pursuing his dreams as an actor and unpredictable enough to keep him off balance romantically. She had to be older, beautiful, and absolutely mesmerizing. It's a smaller role but needed to be impactful. I love Parker's work. She often seems like she's jumped in from another movie to wake people up and get them back on track. I can't imagine anyone but Parker who could capture the nuances of Angie's character. And how lucky we were that she showed up with that incredible blonde hair!

The actors in MY ART are all friends and acquaintances –people whose work I know well which allowed me to write with specific voices in mind. Robert Clohessey lives in the town where we shot MY ART. I'd seen his work on Broadway and TV before I met him. His character "Frank" tells stories and cracks jokes that are true to Robert's life and he often plays a cop or a detective in his work. John Rothman, Blair Brown and Barbara Sukowa are all friends and connected to the art scene in various ways. I knew they would understand the story and want to be part of it. Barbara and I are in a women's film group together and I, of course, already knew her work with Fassbinder and Margarethe von Trotta when we met years ten years ago. She had a crazy schedule during the making of MY ART and we were only able to get her for two days but I had my heart set on her singing the Kurt Weil song "It Never Was You." I met Josh Safdie during the filming of TINY FURNITURE. He is best known as a filmmaker and director but I'd heard he was a terrific actor. He helped me think about Tom in a new and more vulnerable way.

Did you always know you were going to cast yourself as Ellie?

Three months before shooting I was still uncertain as to whether I going to play Ellie or cast an actress. I'd written fairly spare dialogue for Ellie and always thought about her as a reticent character surrounded by much more talkative people. I wanted her inner life to be something of a mystery and in a sense we learn more about her when she's playacting than when she's interacting. I think the aspect of the script that tipped it towards my ultimately playing Ellie was her engagement in the art process. Holding a camera, carrying equipment, setting up lights, cutting, pasting, pinning, shooting are all actions that are second nature to me.

I think one of my favorite scenes was walking around the museum looking at art, an action that is so second nature to me and that has a very specific rhythm of its own.

As an artist yourself - how do you view the work you created, as Ellie's work - for the film?

Believe it or not the biggest challenge in conceptualizing Ellie was figuring out what her artwork would be. I agonized over this decision for months, realizing it could be any art discipline I chose. I needed to find a way for Ellie to make art that audiences could relate to. It's not always that interesting to see an artist paint or sculpt on screen. Every artist I know is something of a cinephile so it didn't seem like a stretch to have Ellie's obsession with old movies become the basis of her art.

Video and performance has become more familiar to the general public so I thought video art might provide a more transparent way to show Ellie's process. The technique of shooting in front of a rear screen projection is something I've done for many years. It's a visual language and style I've developed and feel comfortable with. My production team and DP were all really worried that it wouldn't work. I finally had to say: "Guys, I've got this one."

Can you see Ellie's art as an extension of your own work or do you have a necessary critical or ironic distance as the writer and director?

The subject of movie art is a tricky one. Often real artists are brought in to paint the paintings of fictional characters – Paul Jenkins for the Alan Bates character in AN UNMARRIED WOMAN, the artist Billy Sullivan made the paintings for AS GOOD AS IT GETS and John Bratby painted Gully Jimson's (Alec Guinness) paintings in THE HORSE'S MOUTH.

In the case of MY ART I am an artist inventing art that bears little resemblance to what I normally do and for a fictional artist who is nothing like me. It does raise the question as to whether or not it is "my art?" At this point I really feel the art vignettes belong to Ellie's character.

MY ART doesn't conform to the typical Hollywood narrative structure and its 'happy ending' isn't connected to any relationship with a man - did you set out to break this mold when you started writing?

I knew from the moment I started writing that Ellie's happy ending would not be a typical one... and I do believe MY ART has a happy ending. Ellie's story is based on the lives of many women friends who have little interest in upending their lives for a Hollywood style romance. While Ellie is not romance averse, her priorities are strikingly clear. It's no accident that she was attracted to a man who played an integral role in the creation of her new work.

She shaped Frank into many characters and that's ultimately what attracted her to him. Frank in a dress is ultimately Ellie's invention. Like many artists, Ellie is a kind of user, charming people along the way to help her realize her dreams.

Some people who watch MY ART will likely also have seen TINY FURNITURE - was there a thought process about role reversals or echoes in relation to that film, and having Lena playing a small role in your film versus you playing a role in hers? To what degree are both projects anchored in the mother-daughter relationship?

I would say the two phases of my film education were working with Ed Lachman on my first film – a musical short called THE MUSIC OF REGRET (2006), and then being intimately involved with the making of TINY FURNITURE (2009). The thing that attracts me to filmmaking is the infinite number of moving parts from writing the script to the final editing process. As an artist I'm used to being involved with all phases of my work so I do have a very open attitude about making things. I observed Lena wearing many hats while making TINY FURNITURE and it frankly seemed very doable if the subject matter is true to one's experience and literally close to home.

I was clear about making Ellie a single woman, unencumbered by family obligations. It made her more of a loner so we could see her emotional side emerge in her work.

As far as Lena's character in MY ART, I wanted Ellie to encounter a young woman who would be a harsh reminder of what Ellie hasn't yet achieved. The 21st century notion of the "humble brag" is the phenomenon of subtly letting others know about how great your life is while complaining about how difficult success can be. The character of Meryl is completely unaware of how explaining the downsides of success might affect her former teacher.

Lena's character is part cameo, part MacGuffin... Everyone in my family appears at some point in the movie – my husband in the form of one of his paintings, my daughter Grace attends the gallery opening and of course our family dog Dean has a role to play as well.

ADDITIONAL BIOS

Andrew Fierberg (Producer)

Andrew Fierberg has produced over 40 provocative, award-winning independent films. His latest film is Laurie Simmons' feature debut MY ART. He is in development on the second season of the STARZ production of THE GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE, to be directed by Lodge Kerrigan, which he is producing with Steven Soderbergh.

His feature films include SONGS MY BROTHER TAUGHT ME by Chloé Zhao (In competition at Sundance and Cannes), Steven Shainberg's SECRETARY and FUR: AN IMAGINARY PORTRAIT OF DIANE ARBUS, Lodge Kerrigan's KEANE, Sally Potter's YES and RAGE, Michael Almereyda's HAMLET, Jill Sprecher's 13 CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ONE THING, Jonathan Nossiter's SUNDAY, Gina Kim's NEVER FOREVER, and Zoe Cassavetes' BROKEN ENGLISH.

Mr. Fierberg has created pioneering work on the crossover between the cinema and the art gallery, having produced Isaac Julien's BALTIMORE, Sharon Lockhart's LUNCHBREAK, Mika Rottenberg's SQUEEZE, and Amie Siegel's THE ARCHITECTS and QUARRY. He was the Media Producer for the AMERICAN PAVILLION at 2014 ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE in Venice.

In 2013 he made his directorial debut with the film EL CIELO ES AZUL. The bilingual comedy stars Miguel Rodarte, Osvaldo Benavides, Stephanie Sigman, and Barbara Sukowa.

Andrew sits on the Finance Committee of the Film Forum and is on the Board of Advisors of Bomb Magazine and the Storefront for Art and Architecture. He is an Associate at Harvard University's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.

Jeanne Greenberg-Rohatyn (Executive Producer)

Jeanne is the owner of Salon 94, an art gallery with three locations in New York City. Greenberg-Rohatyn is the Board Chair of Performa, the non-profit responsible for the International Performance Art Biennial and sits on the selection committee for the Frieze New York Art Fair. She is married to investment banker Nicholas Rohatyn. In 2014, Greenberg-Rohatyn was named one of the top 25 most important women in the art world by Artnet.

ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT:

Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City, which recently celebrated its 15th Anniversary with a month-long film series at the Museum of the Moving Image. As a company, Film Movement has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide, and last year it had its first Academy-Award®-nominated film, Naji Abu Nowar's THEEB. Film Movement's theatrical distribution strategy has evolved to include promising American independent films, documentaries, and an even stronger slate of foreign art house titles. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano, Arturo Ripstein, and Ettore Scola. For more information, please visit www.filmmovement.com.