

THE OWLS

A film by Cheryl Dunye

66 minutes, color, English,
HD, Stereo, 2010



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Log Line:

A generational anthem for Older Wiser Lesbians, aging revolutionaries in a world they cannot control. A funny, humane look at the bonds that restrain, and the dreams that remains.

Introduction to *The OWLs*:

The OWLs is a generational anthem for Older Wiser Lesbians. Raised in the shadow of “the pathological lesbian” films like *The Fox*, *The Children’s Hour* and *The Killing Of Sister George*, these women embraced the utopian vision of Lesbian Nation and came out with great optimism in their relationships, work, and daily lives. Now, approaching middle age, the revolution has eluded their dreams. Caught between a culture that still has no place for them, and a younger generation of lesbians and queers who are indifferent to their contributions, OWLs are facing a unique set of circumstances that have yet to be compassionately or truthfully addressed.

Synopsis

Ten years ago, The Screech was the hottest lesbian band on the scene. IRIS and LILY fronted, MJ produced, and their one hit record bought two houses in the desert. When Lily's drug use got out of hand, she found CAROL and sought refuge in the privacy and isolation of that relationship. Iris and MJ, however, never fully retired from the rock star lifestyle. Even though they broke up two years before, they just can't get away from each other. Sexy, seductive Iris, hides behind the bottle while dreaming of a comeback that is never going to happen. MJ, still in love with her, spends her days having Internet sex and staring at the ever-empty shimmering pool. Carol and Lily are so bored in their relationship that they can't think of anything to do but plan to have a child.

Into this timber box stumbles CRICKET, a belligerent lost twenty-something who is looking for trouble, and finds it. A coke-filled drunken pool party at Iris and MJ's deteriorates into the usual scenario. Iris gets plastered, comes on to a convenient stranger and MJ suffers in silence in a corner. But this night MJ just had too much to drink, and lunges at Cricket, who is not the type to cower. When Cricket throws a punch, MJ finally has the excuse she's been longing for to let out her rage & the ensuing chaos results with Cricket ending up dead on the pool's deck.

Despite their conflicts, these four women still have a bond, somewhere between family and gang. They work together to hide the body, burying it in a ditch under the pool, and filling in the grave with cement. Now linked by more than the ties of time, they are conspirators in a dangerous game. This all comes to a head, one year later when Iris finds Cricket's face on Missing Persons signs taped up outside her favorite liquor store. Soon after, SKYE, a mysterious butch stranger appears at Lily and Carol's door. Revenge is her goal and seduction is her strategy. Lily, who still has a pull towards a more dynamic life, lets her fantasies run wild, and Skye manages to change these four lives forever.

Intercut with the scripted drama, are the actresses own experiences of the desires and disappointments at play in the film, as they too become part of the extended community of experience that has so influenced that generation.

About The Parliament Film Collective

In response to the limitations and frustrations of corporate filmmaking, filmmakers Cheryl Dunye, Alex Juhasz, Candi Guterres & Ernesto Foronda invited a diverse but inter-connected group of lesbian & queer artists to come together as The Parliament Film Collective. They attracted a large queer, multi-racial community, at all levels of professional & artistic development, interested in working together to engage in a group experience and create great art. Together they developed a tale of desires gone awry, the pain of hindsight, and the everpresent tension between acceptance and rebellion.

Building upon Cheryl Dunye's signature narrative/documentary hybrid style, the "Dunyementary," *The OWLs* flows from the scripted dramatic action, enhanced by the actresses own takes on how these same questions play out in their lives. In this way, the literal collective of lesbian/queer artists who made *The OWLs* also influence the meaning of the film, reflecting the community relationships that have been so defining in the growth of this generation.

Characters

CAROL (44) Black feminism saved her life, and now she wants love, peace and family. She is willing to go through all kinds of machinations to keep her relationship with Lisa, and has learned to not make waves. Contented with small things, she's slowing down and marveling at the garden, the sunset, the beauty of her partner.

LILY (40) British and Jewish, she's got a special combination of intensity and prissiness. A legitimate rock star for one minute, she still gestures towards her radical days in her clothing and hair, but recently has been following her more practical side. Lily's problem is that she still feels passion and may be capable of throwing it all away for one last ride of true feelings.

IRIS (42) probably the smartest and most talented of the bunch, Iris's alcoholism is killing her as her few remaining friends stand by and watch. She's lost her self, and just acts out from some illusion of someone she once wanted to be: the "wild girl." But now it's denial, not freedom that drives her actions.

MJ (43) was a great producer when things were going her way, but never learned to deal with obstacles and frustrations. MJ has no ability to recoup. She wants to have a better life, but is on the carousel of falling on and off the wagon as a substitute for real change. Considers getting back together with Iris, simply because it's may be the path of least resistance. No resilience.

SKYE (30-something) uses her charm first. Has a cut and dried sense of morality, and follows her own orders. Walks into a room, assesses who is vulnerable to her beauty, and then goes in for the kill. A user.

CRICKET (20-something but looks younger) one of the tribes of lost lesbian kids. Kicked out of her family, in her nowhere town, is accountable to nothing and no one is accountable to her. Destined to fall off the cliff.

Bios

Filmmaker

Cheryl Dunye, a native of Liberia, holds an MFA from Rutgers University. Her 3rd feature film, Miramax's *My Baby's Daddy*, was a box office success. Her 2nd feature, HBO Films *Stranger Inside*, garnered her an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Director. Cheryl Dunye's debut film, *The Watermelon Woman*, was awarded the Teddy Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. Her other works have premiered at film festivals & museums worldwide. Dunye served on the boards of Outfest, the DGA, and IFP. She has been honored with a Community Vision Award from National Center for Lesbian Rights, a Creative Excellence Award from Women in Film & Television, and a Fusion Award from Outfest. Cheryl was selected as one of the 2008 Power-Up Top 10 Women In Showbiz and one of the 2009 Go Magazine's 100 Women We Love. Cheryl has just completed work on *The OWLs*, a lesbian noir thriller about butch menopause, relationships & murder, which has been the first feature to come out of The Parliament Film Collective.

Producer / Production Designer

Candi Guterres' multi-cultural and diverse upbringing spanned 3 continents, from Portugal to Japan and Nicaragua. After attending boarding school in New England, Guterres moved to NYC to study Architecture at Columbia University. Soon after, Guterres went to work in Miami's award-winning architectural design firm, Arquitectonica Int'l. (AIA). After traveling extensively, Guterres finally landed in Los Angeles, and switched focus from Architecture to the Fashion Industry, as a prop stylist for Vogue, Elle and GQ. It was not long before Fashion, became an easy segue into Film. As Production Designer, Guterres' extensive design/construction experience ranged from studio films such as, *Chasing Papi* (20THC.Fox) to indie features like *Stranger Inside* (HBO Films) directed by Cheryl Dunye and *Between* (Opus Films) - both Sundance films; multiple award-winning TV series as *The Brothers Garcia* (Nickelodeon), *Noah's Arc*, *Exes & Oh's*, *Shirts & Skins* (Logo/MTV Networks); LA-Paris-Tokyo global webisode Internet series; commercials & music videos. Guterres' period-film experiences, span from 1890's Russia on *Anna Karenina* to present day Mexico on *Fast and Furious*. Guterres is now, once again, expanding the focus from Production Design, to Producing, so as to have more control over material and content. Candi has now produced & designed several short films and 2 features, *Perfectly Flawed*, which had its World Premiere at *Outfest 2008* and *in the Spotlight...* which played at *Outfest* and *Frameline 2007*, and a 1970's period, mock-documentary feature called *Finishing The Game (IFC)*, which premiered at *Sundance 2007*, about Bruce Lee stand-in wannabe's. *FTG* was written and directed by Justin Lin of the *Fast and Furious* franchise. And last, *The OWLs*, the latest docunarrative, hybrid feature, which Candi Produced / Production Designed through a filmmakers collective, and just got accepted into the Berlin International Film Festival 2010 - Panorama. Guterres has been written up in *Variety Magazine: 50 Creatives to Watch (75th Anniversary Issue)* and was a featured Production Designer in the (ADG) *Art Director's Guild: Perspective Magazine (2007 Launch Issue)*. Candi currently lives, works, and travels regularly between Mexico and Los Angeles.

<http://www.candivision.com>

Producer / Music Supervisor / Catering

Ernesto M. Foronda is a Los Angeles-based producer & filmmaker who received his Film B.A. & Screenwriting MFA from UCLA & Columbia University respectively. As a founding member Trailing Johnson Productions, Ernesto produced 2 features including *Better Luck Tomorrow* (MTV/Paramount) and *Finishing The Game* (IFC), both premiering at the Sundance Film Festival. Ernesto has worked as a freelance screenwriter for numerous studio features including *Prom Night* (Sony), *The Strangers* (Rogue/Universal) and *Fast and Furious* (Universal). Currently, Ernesto is writing & producing an adaptation of Scott Heim's (*Mysterious Skin*) latest novel, *We Disappear* (winner: Lambda Literary Award, 2009) for director Justin Lin. In addition, Ernesto has worked as a Music Consultant & Music Supervisor including the two recent installments of the *Fast and Furious* franchise.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0286557/>

Producer

Alexandra Juhasz has made over 15 documentaries, feminist and lesbian issues from AIDS, to women's films, to teen pregnancy, including the features *Scale!* (2008), *Video Remains* (2005), *Dear Gabe* (2002) and *Women of Vision* (1998), as well as producing the acclaimed narrative feature, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996). Her work has screened at the *Sundance Film Festival* and *Toronto Intl. Film Festival*, and women's, and gay & lesbian film festivals around the world. She is a Professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College and the author of critical writing about alternative media.

<http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/~ajuhasz/>

Producer / Editor

Agusta Einarsdottir is an award-winning editor and director. Her career spans over 15 years of filmmaking and her list of credentials includes various directorial and editorial work, on feature films, documentaries, commercials, DVD content and corporate videos. Her editorial work has screened at film festivals, including *Sundance 2009* - a documentary directed by Robert Townsend called *Why We Laugh: Black Comedians on Black Comedy*, at the North by Northwest Film Festival - a feature called *Dead Pet*, and most recently at the Berlin Film Festival 2010 - *The OWLs* a feature directed by Cheryl Dunye. Awards include a MOBIUS Award for a commercial she directed for NBC and The Olympic Games. She has also garnered awards for her editorial work at the Cannes Commercial Festival and the Telly Awards. Other directing credits include: *Kat Williams behind the scenes pimpadellie* DVD, *Good Samaritan Hospital* commercials, BCBG promos, IFTV.com episodes, Horizon Media and Urth Caffè corporate videos, as well as interviews and news footage for the Icelandic National TV. Her production company Elf Films, a production and post-production company, is currently in production on a documentary called *Southland* and is developing a feature based on a best seller.

<http://www.elffilms.com>

Producer

Molly Sturdevant, although new to the film industry, was already involved in producing a documentary feature called *Other Nature*, a film about gay/lesbian/trans rights, about a

female-to-male transgender and a male-to-female trans' journey to the sacred place of Muktinath in Nepal, *The OWLs* would mark Molly's first doc-narrative hybrid feature that she is producing. Molly has a few films in the lined up to produce in the future. She is currently, on a book tour, travelling and promoting a book called the *29 GIFTS*, about Cami Walker who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and how an African medicine woman named Mbali Creazzo changed her life.

<http://www.29giftsbook.vom/>

SARAH SCHULMAN - Writer

Sarah Schulman is the author of 14 books: *The Mere Future* (2009), *The Child* (2007), *Shimmer* (1998), *Rat Bohemia* (1995), *Empathy* (1992), *People in Trouble* (1990), *After Delores* (1988), *Girls Visions and Everything* (1986), *The Sophie Horowitz Story* (1984), *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (2010), *Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences* (2009), *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS and the Marketing of Gay America* (1998), *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years* (1994), *Carson McCullers* (2002), *Manic Flight Reaction* (2005) and *Enemies, A Love Story* (2007) adapted from IB Singer.

Her awards: Guggenheim Playwriting, Fulbright Judaic Studies, Revson Fellow for the Future of New York at Columbia University, American Library Association Book Awards Fiction/Nonfiction, NY Foundation for the Arts Fellowships Fiction/Playwriting, Prix de Rome, Kessler Prize for Sustained Contribution to LGBT Studies.

Sarah is active in foundational movements for social change: abortion rights, AIDS activism, gay & lesbian liberation movement, and co-founder with Jim Hubbard of MIX: NY LGBT Experimental Film & Video Festival, ACT-UP Oral History Project. Sarah is a Professor of English at City University of New York, College of Staten Island, a Fellow of the New York Institute for the Humanities at NYU, and on the Advisory Board of the Human Rights & Social Movements Program at Harvard Kennedy School.

<http://www.actuporalhistory.com>

ALISON KELLY - Director of Photography

Alison Kelly has been the Director of Photography on award-winning films including *We Are the Mods*, *The Twenty*, *Make A Wish*, *Freedom to Choose*. She has shot many narrative features, documentaries & television programs. Alison got her start in film working in NYC as a camera assistant on features such as *The Bone Collector*, *Oceans 11*, *Personal Velocity*, as well as on TV series including *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and *NY Undercover*. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Columbia University and a Master of Fine Arts in Cinematography from the American Film Institute.

alison@alisonkelly.net

Post-Production Producer / Supervisor

Birna Paulina Einarsdottir is an award-winning producer and owner of Elf Films - production and post-production company. As an MBA graduate, Paulina excels in strategic planning and understands the business approach to production challenges and developing customized solutions to fit the dynamics and economics of the project. Her

work includes feature films, documentaries, commercials, trailers, corporate videos, DVD and Internet content. Paulina has produced and hosted television segments for Icelandic TV and regularly works on European projects. Recent projects include *The OWLs* screening at The Berlin Film Festival 2010 - Panorama, in which she was the Post Producer; *Jitters* (2009) currently in post-production, where she was the Line Producer; Producer on *Snow Summit Showdown* (2009), UPM on *Reykjavik Whale Watching Massacre* (2008), which screened at the *Toronto Film Festival* and *Screamfest 2009*. Her production company is currently in production on a documentary called *Southland* and is developing a feature based on a best seller.

<http://www.elfilms.com>

Strings Arrangement & Music Composer

Violinist and composer **Ysanne Spevack** is best known for her string arrangements for rock music and for her lush, string-laden movie and TV scores. Her strings grace a wide musical terrain spanning film scores, rock, pop and electronic music. Clients include Smashing Pumpkins, Jane's Addiction, Elton John, Brett Anderson (Suede), Tiesto, Dub Gabriel ft. Michael Stipe, Sister Bliss (*Faithless*), Asian Dub Foundation, David J., Chocolate Genius, Alex Parks, T-Power, MJ Cole, HBO's *Big Love* and *The Sopranos* title track composers, Alabama 3. In addition to composing film scores, she collaborates with other film and television composers, arranging, contracting and recording strings for their soundtracks. She also contracts and arranges string ensembles of any size for recording and live shows. Ysanne studied violin, piano, composition and conducting at the Royal College of Music, London, and sitar in India. Further studies include computer sequencing, studio and midi technology. She has performed internationally. Ysanne is London-born and Los Angeles-based. Her new album – soundzero – is out now.

<http://www.ilovestrings.com>

Photographer!

Eve Fowler is a photographer based in Los Angeles. She received her BA from Temple University and her MFA from Yale University. Her pictures explore provocative subject matter, such as male hustlers, lesbians, or transgendered individuals, but she deliberately supplies no explanatory titles or captions. In her early work, she photographed men who were loners, disconnected sex workers in New York & Los Angeles. She then began photographing androgynous men, which then moved into photographs of long-haired, shirtless, androgynous men who resemble some of the transgender women she photographs today. Eve's work is represented in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The New Museum in New York City, and The Smithsonian Institute.

<http://www.evefowler.com>

Cast Bios

Carol – Cheryl Dunye is a native of Philadelphia, born in Liberia on May 13, 1966. She received a BA from Temple U. & an MFA from Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts. Cheryl began her acting career by starring in her own films. In 1991, she wrote, directed & starred in *She Don't Fade*, a short film that experiments with narrative and doc, and takes a self-reflective look at the sexuality of a young black lesbian. By 1996, Dunye again, set out to write, direct and star in her own film, this time a full-length feature called *The Watermelon Woman*. Her film became the first African-American lesbian feature film made. It went on to win a *Teddy for Best Feature* at the *Berlin International Film Festival* and an *Audience Award at L.A.* Cheryl Dunye is a film director, producer, screenwriter, editor & actress. She has made acting appearances in numerous films such as *The New Women* (2001), *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), *Strange Weather* (1993), and *She Don't Fade* (1991).

<http://www.cheryldunye.com>

Lily – Lisa Gornick is a filmmaker from London that writes, directs and stars in her own films such as *Do I Love You?* (2003) and *Tick Tock Lullaby* (2007). Both films went on to win multiple awards in the film festival circuits and have worldwide distribution. In 1999, she began to make short films including *The 12 Steps of Starting a Religion* and *My Primary Lover Never Hollywood Kissed Me*, which won the *Best Short Film Award at Philadelphia Int'l Gay & Lesbian Film Festival*. *Do I Love You?* (6 min. version) was runner-up for the *JVC Short Film Prize* at the *Portobello Film Festival*. In 2000, Lisa set up a digital film production company called Valiant Doll. Since *Tick Tock Lullaby*, she has written a third feature film, which is in pre-production at the moment, and is in early development stages on a fourth film.

<http://www.valiantdoll.com.uk>

Iris – Guinevere Turner's career began as writer, producer & star of the feature film *Go Fish*, which premiered at Sundance, 1994, in dramatic competition. She co-wrote the film with Rose Troche, for whom she leant her voice as a doll, in Troche's feature film *The Safety of Objects*. From then on, Guinevere started a career in writing, acting, directing & producing. Turner went on to collaborate with director Mary Harron on the screenplay adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, in which she co-starred. Her next effort with Harron *The Notorious Bettie Page* was an HBO film, directed by Harron & produced by Christine Vachon who also served as exec producer on *Go Fish*. Turner's additional film credits include roles in *Kiss Me, Guido*, *Latin Boys Go To Hell*, *Pipe Dream*, *The Watermelon Woman*, *The Fluffer*, *The Itty Bitty Titty Committee*, a dominatrix in *Preaching To The Perverted* for BAFTA-winning director Stuart Urban, as well as roles in filmmaker friend Kevin Smith's *Chasing Amy* and *Dogma*. Her feature script *Blood Rayne*, based on a video game was released in January 2006, and stars Ben Kingsley & Michelle Rodriguez. She worked for 2 seasons as executive story editor on the TV series *The L Word*, on which she also had a recurring role. Two of her directorial efforts, the short films, *Spare Me* and *Hummer*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festivals 2001 and 2004. The other three, writer/director efforts, such as *Hung*, *Late*, and *Quiet Please*, have screened at film festivals worldwide. GT is currently at work on several projects, including a TV pilot, a feature script to direct, and a cooking

show called *The Decadent Vegetarian*, which stars Guinevere and includes her sidekick Charlie, who is a talking chicken.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0877587/>

MJ – V.S. Brodie played the role of Ely in the 1994 film *Go Fish*, for which she earned the 1995 Independent Spirit Award nomination for “best supporting actress”, as well as served as associate producer for *Go Fish*. In 1996, Brodie had a brief cameo in Cheryl Dunye’s *The Watermelon Woman*. V.S. continued to work in indie films, most notably for Christine Vachon & assisted in the production of *Safe*, *Stonewall*, and *Postcards from America*. In 1998, V.S. Brodie moved to Paris, where she currently resides, and is the chef and co-owner of The Catering Company.

<http://www.the-catering-company.com/>

CRICKET – Dark, brooding new-comer Deak Evgenikos, made her feature film debut in *The Itty Bitty Titty Committee* as Meat. It was Deak's second experience working with director Jamie Babbit. The first was during the filming of *Hummer*, a short film Babbit collaborated on with Guinevere Turner. Award winning, *Hummer* premiered with rave reviews at Sundance 2003. Deak's second short film, *Hung* was also written & directed by Turner, and shot in 2005. *Hung* can currently be seen on The Sundance Channel. Deak went on to work with the critically acclaimed director, Silas Howard, in the short film, *Frozen Smile*. 2006 brought a rapid-fire series of commercial work for Deak such as a national *IPOD* commercial, an International Apple Computer ad and several commercials on the Logo TV Network. Most recently she was cast in Tony Scott's *The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3*. In addition to her growing film career, Deak has competed professionally as a figure skater, is a Muay-Thai national champion fighter, as well as an inter-continental and multi-lingual entrepreneur. She currently resides in New York City.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1983291/>

SKYE – Trained in classical & contemporary theatre, Skyler Cooper discovered early on, that “androgynous appeal” would be the nexus in her body of work at playing male & female roles. In theatre, Skyler played the roles of Athena-Argonautica (Berkeley Repertory Theater), Lattrell Spreewell (S.F. Playhouse), Queen Miss Prism (CA Shakespeare Company), and Othello-Othello (Impact Theater). In film, Skyler has been cast in both male & female roles. She’s played a female on a TV pilot, *Don't Go*, a male on *Cocktails*, a female in a film *The Insomniacs*, and a female named Fredericka, in the film *Fredericka*. Skyler is determined & committed to bring, not only her unique look, but also a fresh perspective to her work, experiencing life as a woman & yet being perceived, by many, as a male. Skyler Cooper is a unique actor & an artistic creation of nature. Her art is to mirror the world, honestly & truthfully. You can expect Skyler’s performances to be a shattering of the proverbial “glass ceiling” that limit the expression of many female & male roles in the industry today.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1728229/>

Selected Press

http://www.epgn.com/view/full_story/8559193/article-An-older--wiser-Philly-filmmaker



Former Philadelphian Cheryl Dunye is receiving the Artistic Achievement Award for Directing at this year's QFest on July 16, where she will also screen her new film, "The Owls." Her intriguing, astounding drama concerns a group of lesbians who shared success years ago and now shares relationship angst and a terrible secret. In a recent phone interview, Dunye spoke about "The Owls" and how she — and queer cinema — have changed over the years.

PGN: I love the term/title "Owl." Where did you hear it/come up with it?

CD: I was at [lesbian bar] The Lexington Room in San Francisco, and I started to chat up a cute 25-year-old bartender. She said, "Do you know what I hate the most? I hate it when a couple of owls come in and order Grey Goose martinis and leave me a dollar tip." And I said, "What is an owl?" And she said, "An older, wiser lesbian, like you." My eyes flipped!

PGN: Do you feel older and/or wiser?

CD: We all represent a certain generation of lesbian identity and a relationship to this new queer identity. And this film explores that. I think that the New Queer Cinema came out at a time when there were a lot of dykes and lesbians, and there was not a lot of representation. New Queer Cinema bridged the indie world. Now we are at another moment and I feel this film brings these people together to talk about this moment, and the changes that are happening.

PGN: "The Owls" contains a comment about negativity and angst as things "we rarely talk about in cinema or [in] our lives." Why did you want to address this?

CD: I think that there needs to be more images [of lesbians] at different ages in their lives. So much queer cinema is about young love or hooking up. I've done my coming-out story. We are dealing with generational stuff here.

PGN: I was thrilled that you reunited V.S. Brodie and Guinevere Turner from “Go Fish.” How did you manage that?

CD: The reunion happened by chance. I was originally trying to snag Silas Howard for the part, but Silas was unavailable. It was fortuitous that V.S. was visiting Guinevere and got tied in.

PGN: You talk in/about the film being made as/by a collective. Can you discuss the genesis of this?

CD: There were a whole bunch of us going through this stuff — maybe not the personal politics I wear on my sleeve; I’m an extrovert. But there are those who feel queer cinema has more to offer, and isn’t offering it. We got to talking and said, “Let’s do something.” We pulled together finances, equipment and wherewithal. We don’t have to wait for a studio, or be approved to make a film. We’re trying to make a different kind of cinema. I’m going back to where I came from. This is the next level of the Dunye-mentary, which I started so many years ago, with my shorts and “The Watermelon Woman.”

— *Gary Kramer*