

Mollena Williams-Haas

Georg Friedrich Haas

THE ARTIST & THE PERVERT



RAINDANCE
FILM FESTIVAL
OLD WINDMILL DISTRICT

OFFICIAL SELECTION
hotdocs
2018

OFFICIAL SELECTION
THESSALONIKI
DOC FESTIVAL
2018

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2018
DURBAN
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

HOLLAND
FESTIVAL
INTERNATIONAL PERFORMING ARTS
AMSTERDAM 2018

PORNFILM
FESTIVAL BERLIN
ELOSIA NIGHT FILM 2018

DIRECTED BY BEATRICE BEHN & RENÉ GEBHARDT
PRODUCED BY BEATRICE BEHN & RENÉ GEBHARDT
CINEMATOGRAPHY LINUS NICKL >STUDIO AM FLUSS<
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER BETH POWELL
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY HENRIETTE RODENWALD, ANTJE WILMS
ADDITIONAL SOUND RECORDING ANTJE WILMS
EDITED BY BEATRICE BEHN & RENÉ GEBHARDT
ART DIRECTION RENÉ GEBHARDT
ANIMATION BY RENÉ GEBHARDT
POSTER NADINE TRAUTZSCH
ARTISTANDPERVERT.COM

PRESS KIT

THE ARTIST & THE PERVERT

A FILM BY BEATRICE BEHN AND RENÉ GEBHARDT

TECHNICAL DATA

1st feature film, documentary

running time: 96min

format: 2k, 24p, 1.85:1 (flat), 5.1. surround mix, color

screening formats: DCP, ProRes

language: German, English; subtitles: English

CONTACT / MATERIAL

press material available at: www.artistandpervert.com/press

contact: hi@artistandpervert.com

phone: +49 (0) 173 913 5927

website: www.artistandpervert.com

FB: www.facebook.com/theartistandtheperv

Vimeo: www.vimeo.com/dahlingproject

SALES

LIMONERO FILMS

phone: +44 (0) 793 9989 232

contact: pamela@limonerofilms.com



LOGLINE

Love and art come in many shapes and colors.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A famous Austrian composer & a renowned African-American kink educator fall in love and start on a controversial journey towards radical self-determination that touches on matters of race, sexuality, politics & power relations. Some call them perverted, others revolutionary.

SYNOPSIS

Georg Friedrich Haas is a famous Austrian composer & child of Nazi parents, his wife Mollena a renowned American kink educator and descendant of African slaves. Together they live in a public kinky relationship they have craved for 40 years: she is his ,slave' & muse, he is her master – a combination that pushes many people's buttons & touches on matters of race, sexuality, politics & power relations. This film documents their lives between perversion, art, love & radical self-determination.



FULL SUMMARY

Together, Georg Friedrich Haas and his wife Mollena Williams-Haas have been looking for the right partner for over 40 years before they finally found each other on the dating website *OKCupid*. Their first date was wild, passionate, and seemingly promising, so the renowned Austrian composer and the American sex educator, author and performer decided to go steady. Soon after they lived happily and in a BDSM relationship, which they made public in an article in the *New York Times*: Mollena is Georg's 24/7 "slave" and muse, Georg is her "master". But this is not the only reason they make a rather unusual couple. Mollena is a descendant of African slaves, Georg the child of Austrian Nazis. She grew up in poor conditions in New York, while he was raised on a mountain at 1.000 meters above sea level in Montafon. She is African-American. He is a white European - a tense racial combination, considering their relationship power dynamics.

After going public with their relationship, both received recognition and approval, but also a lot of criticism. Some believed it to be a marketing stunt, others insisted on a strict separation of work, art and private life, or even called them "perverts". Critics questioned their morals and decisions: How can Georg call himself a feminist if he wants to dominate his wife? How can an African-American woman voluntarily accept such a submissive role?

The story is told without narrator or expository commentary. Instead, friends and colleagues, but especially the protagonists themselves get their say. They talk about their different origins and child-

hoods, their difficulties in self-acceptance, their life struggles and shame, but also about their art, self-discovery and their journey towards radical self-expression.

THE ARTIST & THE PERVERT centers around the couple's lives and their radical self-definition over the course of a year. During this year, Georg Friedrich Haas's work *Release* premieres at the opening of the grand Elbphilharmonie. Together, the couple works on Mollena Williams-Haas's *Hyena*, a piece of storytelling and music dealing with her difficult journey towards sobriety. Furthermore, they make up for their lost honeymoon, and Donald Trump is elected president, which throws the two into a crisis of fear and bewilderment. Georg believes he has left behind the fascism and the Nazis of his childhood when he moved to the United States, while Mollena fears that this president will create more racial tensions and deaths. Other scenes include the couple's daily activities like composing, eating, kinky activities, and going on a walk.

THE ARTIST & THE PERVERT is a movie about the relationship of an African-American woman and a white European man, about BDSM and New Music, about racism and sexuality, politics and power structures, prejudices and the (sometimes) distorted awareness of others.

But **THE ARTIST & THE PERVERT** is also about self-acceptance and partnerships, dedication and passion, art and life, feminism and self-determination. And above all, it's a movie about love.

PRODUCTION NOTES

When filmmakers Beatrice Behn and René Gebhardt were looking for non-normative relationships for a documentary, they stumbled across the *New York Times* article about Georg Friedrich & Mollena Williams-Haas on Facebook. After meeting them by chance in Munich, Germany, Behn and Gebhardt realized that the Haas's had so much to tell that they wanted to make a movie about them. In order to be able to observe the reactions that followed the recently released article, they decided to start shooting immediately and therefore without any preparation, budget or funding. They accompanied Georg and Mollena to three different countries and were able to take part in very important personal moments such as the emergence and the premiere of the work *Hyena* created by Mollena Williams-Haas and Georg Friedrich and the couples second honeymoon. Furthermore, Behn and Gebhardt were able to interview Georg's mother. In this candid talk, she openly speaks about her Nazi family and how she still sympathizes with the ideologies while struggling with her son's choice to have an African-American wife.

Due to the minimal budget, a lot of cross-financing took place such as filming a documentary about the opening of the *Kleine Saal* in *Elbphilharmonie* in Hamburg, Germany. This movie was made with

almost no budget but lots of love and craft. All inserts are hand-drawn. The film also includes two hand-drawn, digitally edited and colored animation sequences, which visualize the protagonist's upbringing.

Also of very particular importance in this documentary is, of course, music. The opening credits of the movie were specially composed by Georg Friedrich Haas and include a performance developed by the filmmakers and the protagonists. The other musical interludes in the movie also belong to Georg Friedrich Haas, with exception of the final song *In My Mind* by Amanda Palmer. For Georg, music is his primary form of expression and a strong part of his life, and that's why his songs serve to reveal things about him on a level deeper than words. Moreover, there are thematic connections: After hearing the news of Donald Trump's election win, you can hear Georg's song *I can't breathe - In Memoriam Eric Garner* is being played, foreshadowing their worst fears.

After one year of filming, Behn and Gebhardt successfully crowdfunded their post-production, and took American producer Beth Powell on board. The sound editing was supported by Linus Nickl at *Studio am Fluss*, Berlin.

INTERVIEW WITH GEORG FRIEDRICH HAAS AND MOLLENA WILLIAMS-HAAS

Why did you agree to make a movie?

MWH: Because I feel strongly about being open with regard to our lifestyle, so that other people who cannot afford to be so open might have some small aspect of themselves shared with the wider world. So many people who don't adhere to heteronormative, monogamous intra-racial relationships experience prejudice. It is important to see yourself represented, to feel "seen" and we can do some small thing to help promote these ideals.

GFH: For four decades I poisoned my life by not accepting my sexuality. I made many people, especially the ones I loved, very unhappy. My life now is one of self-acceptance and it is a far better life. By coming out and going public with my relationship, I wanted to encourage others to embrace their fears and live their true lives in love, respect and responsibility with people they love. But apart from that, I felt like we could trust Beatrice & René.

How did it feel to be accompanied by people, who were complete strangers in the beginning?

GFH: After an initial period of adjustments, I stopped being consciously aware of them. They became like the sound of the air conditioning. This process went

quite far. Once, when they came over, and Mollena was still asleep, I opened the door for them and went right back to composing, not even offering them a glass of water. They had to wait patiently for 90 minutes ... In regards to my Nazi past it took me a couple of weeks to feel like I could open up to them. But when I did, it felt very precious to me because they were very empathetic and I was grateful to have the camera as a patient and silent witness documenting my long monologues about this subject matter.

MWH: Sometimes it has bothered me. Mostly because I am pretty introverted and don't like people in my personal space. They were profoundly respectful, and did an amazing job with keeping it low-key while at the same time being good human beings so it was not as awkward as I thought it might be.

How would you describe your way of dealing with sexuality – in general?

MWH: I want to be as open as possible. To shed the idea of shame. To give myself permission to be who I am, and extend that right to those around me and in the world. And laugh ... laughing is important for the sake of sanity: sexuality is no different.

GFH: Mollena said it all. I couldn't say it any better.

How would you define "kink"?

MWH: Any form of sexuality that deviates from standard heteronormative sexuality and incorporates fetishized aspects of desire.

Georg, how would you describe your relationship to music?

GFH: Listening to music and making music myself is just as essential to me as breathing, eating, sex and drinking. My musical language has not changed since the start of my relationship with Mollena. But I can now work much more intensively and more focused than before.

How would you define your roles in your relationship?

MWH: As a traditional 1950's-era American husband and wife style within a BDSM power-dynamic relationship, wherein I, as the submissive to and

property of Georg, align my focus with fulfilling his needs first and foremost.

GFH: As loved and being loved. I also try to give Mollena some space, so she is able to live and develop her artistic and human capacities in the best way possible.

What was your collaboration on "Hyena" like?

GFH: Painful. It deals with the darkest, most life-threatening time of my beloved's life. But I felt, just like Mollena, that it was necessary to make art out of Mollena's existential experience.

MWH: I wrote the text and handed it over to Georg, so that he could compose the music. With the exception of my insisting he should not use a lot of squeaky high pitches – something he loves – I didn't have input into the composing. ... well, except once we were in rehearsals for the premiere and I realized he had put something called a "drum glissando" in



there. This pretty much is a Warner Brother's cartoon sound and he had no idea, since he didn't grow up watching cartoons. But anyone who did would have been reminded of Wile E. Coyote and the Road-runner when they heard this "BOING-OING-OING!!!" sound, so he changed it.

What do you think about the title of the film?

GFH: It gets straight to the point: We both are an "artist" and a "pervert".

MWH: I am already tired of people doing the "WELL WHICH IS WHICH?!" HAHAHA!" thing, despite the fact that I think it is a lovely twist.

Mollena, there are quite a lot of people criticising you because you are a African-American woman living in this specific kind of relationship. How do you respond to this?

MWH: I no longer do, because I absolutely don't care.

To say someone can or cannot do something because of their race is an aspect of racism ... therefore to say I cannot be a submissive because I am African-American is also, in extension, racist. So, fuck racism here, too.

If you could wish for a certain reaction to this movie, which one would it be?

MWH: That people understand the humanity of kinky people, and that they see themselves, somehow, in us.

GFH: I wish that some people will be encouraged to carry their lives in their own hands as well, even if it contradicts the social norm. I wish that people understand that art and life form one single unit. And I hope that people will start to think a little more about the remnants of Nazism in our society which are still active.



INTERVIEW WITH BEATRICE BEHN AND RENÉ GEBHARDT

Why was the story of Georg Friedrich and Mollena Williams Haas so appealing to you?

BB: It's two things: First, because of their absolute intransigence in terms of self-actualizing themselves as a couple and as individuals, and secondly, because of the controversial nature of the relationship. There are so incredibly many complex topics involved in this relationship – a white, famous artist marries an African-American woman and lives with her as his "slave" and muse and is now able to be more artistic than ever, thanks to her. That made all the alarm bells ring in my head and I immediately had an imagination about how this relationship may look like.

RG: I agree! But those imaginations vanish as soon as you see that Mollena is anything but a quiet and humble woman. On the contrary, she is very clever, extremely ambitious, a consultant for alternative sexuality and an energetic Body Positivity activist. This makes you realize that the stereotypes in your head is not justified.

BB: She's also a very active Black Lives Matter activist. This means anything we imagine about what this relationship might be like is probably wrong. The whole thing is just way more complex than it seems

and raises so incredibly many questions: Can a white man call an African-American woman "his" without affecting a cruel and centuries-old history of slavery? Can a submissive woman be equal? Is a dominant man having a "slave girl" a feminist? What impact does her being his muse have on his art? And how does it affect her art and her life?

What is the meaning behind the title of the movie?

RG: The title deliberately doesn't tell who of the two is the artist and who is the pervert. You have to figure that out yourself.

BB: We take advantage of the fact that people are usually quick to judge. The idea for this title also emerged from all the comments the couple has received. People just want to have it all easy. But neither life, nor this film work like that.

Why did you decide not to use any commentary?

BB: Simply because it's not about our judgment or our assessment, but rather about the observation of a relationship involving two people, which appear very peculiar at first. And for many people, including us, this triggers an emotional reaction and a need for immediate judgment. You think you know right

away what this might be like, but in reality you know absolutely nothing about it. You can only learn about the truth upon closer inspection. That's what the movie is about.

RC: We want the people concerned to be able to express how they feel. And we want to give each one enough space to discuss and maybe even reflect on oneself and one's own prejudices.

How is your relationship with Georg and Mollena?

BB: We are the people behind the cameras, who were invited by these two very trusting people. From the very beginning, we were able to observe and capture this trust on camera. Even during their honeymoon. I am still amazed at how much the two were actually willing to show us.

RC: And only because of this we were able to make this movie. The two of them just let us do our thing. And they also accepted that this movie is going to be

about their lives, but that it's our artistic work.

How would you describe Georg and Mollena's relationship?

BB: The couple has a mutual relationship, which only differs by the fact that it involves a clear and intended shift of power. Mollena is submissive and can eroticize to do anything Georg asks of her, at any time. Georg, on the other hand, can eroticize dominating Mollena.

RC: If you then put this private relationship on a larger scale, it becomes a whole different story. Then you have all those arising questions arise about feminism, racism, patriarchy and politics, but also about self-determination and the right to live as you wish.

Mollena is an Afro-American woman and plays the submissive role in a relationship with a white Austrian man. There has been criticism about it already



– a criticism that might come back once the movie comes out ...

BB: The criticism is split into two directions. On the one hand, it's the fact that a woman submits to a man. And on the other hand, it's the fact that an African-American woman submits to a white man. But all of them forget that consent also plays a huge role in this. Equality means that any woman should be able to do anything she wants, just like a man. Then why should she not have the right to be submissive, if that's exactly what she wants?

RC: This also applies to the criticism of racism or the imitation of slavery. To reply in her own words: If she, as an African-American woman, is refused access to something or can't live the way she wants to just because she is African-American, then that's racism.

What is the core of their story about in your opinion?

BB: Quite simply, every human being has the right to

live and love the way he or she pleases, as long as no one will be harmed and everyone involved agrees.

RC: It is not just about the right, but also about the consequences in the long run when you do NOT live the way you want and you're suppressed by denial. This also involves overall social consequences that arise when a society is prejudging without knowing anything. This is exactly why people not being "normal" are afraid to talk about who they truly are.

If you could wish for a certain reaction to this movie, which one would it be?

RC: I want the movie to have an impact on people, so they will start to think about the way they live, and if they are happy the way they are living at that moment.

BB: Absolutely, and I want people living outside the norm to see that they are not alone and get the courage to open up and just do their thing.



PRESS COVERAGE

“In its light-hearted way, *The Artist & The Pervert* opens up a fascinating conversation about how people negotiate their individual wayward desires with the context of society’s power dynamics.”



“The film is surprisingly sweet and instructive (and occasionally naughty).”



“The latest images underline the point that the film already made in a moving way: Haas and Williams are lucky.”



“A charming film portrait about their extraordinary relationship.”



“Seeing the chemistry between the two can not be anything but humbling.”



“The film shows that there are many forms of love that do not meet the Hollywood standard.”



“This is a fascinating film. It’s gonna challenge you. It’s gonna push you.”



“An honest argument for how monumental self-acceptance and openness can be towards building a solid relationship.”



PRESS COVERAGE

“The Artist & the Pervert makes an essential contribution to the current neo-liberal discourse on identification, emancipation and diversity.”



“There is a play on voyeurism here that fits very well with people’s curiosity about lifestyles they do not fully understand.”



“It really pushed my boundaries.”



“Come into the movie theater with all your questions [...] Leave the theater with tears in your eyes and one thought in your head; are you really living the life you actually want to live?”



“Just fascinating where this film goes.”



“This is frank and bold.”



“The film is very raw, very real. And it dispels a lot of the misconceptions that we have about dominant/submissive relationships.”



PRESS COVERAGE

“The film is important, especially in these times of fear and populism, because it shows you have no need to judge others if you live your own truth.”



“Of the many films that will raise eyebrows and questions the film *The Artist & The Pervert* is sure to be one.”

SCREENANARCHY

“A liberating watch, and an eye opener for conservatives, textbook theorists and radical thinkers alike.”



“Art and sex go together like the body and soul; together they create something fervent, alluring, and often political in nature. *The Artist and the Pervert* is one of these art pieces.”



“Billed as a frank look at a range of topics including race, sexuality, politics and power dynamics, *The Artist & the Pervert* is a provocative exploration of how the pair navigate the particular challenges of their alternative lives.”

LIMELIGHT

“*The Artist & the Pervert* is an idiosyncratic introduction to Haas’ floating constellations of overtones and microtonal experimentation.”



DIRECTORS

Beatrice Behn is a freelance film critic with 10+ years of experience and senior film critic and editor-in-chief of Kino-Zeit, the largest German language film magazine for arthouse and independent film. She is also about to graduate from Freie Universität Berlin with a Master's degree in film studies. Her fields of expertise are genre cinema, bodies & genders and feminist film studies. 'THE ARTIST & THE PERVERT' is her first feature length documentary. Beatrice is based in Berlin, Germany.

René Gebhardt is an art director, designer and filmmaker. He won numerous national and international creative awards for his works, 10 Lions at the 'Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity' among them. 'THE ARTIST & THE PERVERT' is his first feature length documentary film. He is based in Berlin, Germany.



CREDIT LIST

director

Beatrice Behn, René Gebhardt

producer

Beatrice Behn, René Gebhardt

associate producer

Beth Powell

cast

Georg Friedrich Haas, Mollena Williams-Haas,
George E. Lewis, Susan Boynton, Mike Ford, Sir Simon Rattle,
Keith Rockhold, Julie Baum, Patti Beadles, Dixie De la Tour,
Marion Carter Williams, Roland Haas, Moritz Eggert, Händl Klaus,
Rolanda Haas

editing

Beatrice Behn, René Gebhardt

cinematography

Beatrice Behn, René Gebhardt, Antje Wilms, Henriette Rodenwald

art direction & animation

René Gebhardt

sound mix & sound design

Linus Nickl – Studio am Fluss

assistant sound recording

Antje Wilms