



POINT AND LINE TO PLANE

Running Time • 18 minutes

Aspect Ratio • 1.78:1

Language • English

Format • Super 16mm

WITH

Deragh Campbell

+

Chingiz Osmanov

Melanie Scheiner

Liza Glazunova

CREW

A Film by Sofia Bohdanowicz • Produced by Calvin Thomas •
Camera by Sofia Bohdanowicz • Additional Photography Sarah
Friedland, Helena Klintsevich, Calvin Thomas • Gaffer Angela
Saviñon • Production Assistant Zainab Fatima • Edited by
Sofia Bohdanowicz • Original Score Stefana Fratila •
Re-Recording Mixer Lucas Prokaziuk • Sound Edit Jacquelyn
Mills • Hand Processing by Rachael Watson





SYNOPSIS

Just as an explorer penetrates deeply into new and unknown lands, one makes discoveries in the everyday life, and the erstwhile mute surroundings begin to speak a language which becomes increasingly clear. In this way, the lifeless signs turn into living symbols and the dead is revived.

–Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*

Devastated after the death of a friend, a young woman (Deragh Campbell) attempts to extract meaning from this intense loss as she discovers signs in her daily life and through encounters with the art of Wassily Kandinsky and Hilma af Klint. Amidst travels that are at once internal and external, she searches for traces of her friend as connections uncannily accumulate. Shapes and colours from across time and space seem to rhyme with one another and coincidences offer her precious moments of solace.

Borrowing its title from Kandinsky's 1926 book, *Point and Line to Plane* portrays the phenomenon of magical thinking endured during an individual's journey to process, heal and document a period of mourning. Just as af Klint and Kandinsky sought to depict the invisible, here the potentially resurrecting properties of perception help to illuminate the power of how we choose to look and, moreover, how we see.

SOFIA BOHDANOWICZ

Sofia Bohdanowicz is an award-winning filmmaker from Toronto. She has had retrospectives of her work screened at BAFICI, Seattle's Northwest Film Forum, Cinemateca de Bogotá, DocLisboa and Festival du nouveau cinéma. In 2017, the Toronto Film Critics Association awarded her the Jay Scott Prize and in 2018 she was nominated for the Rogers Prize for Best Canadian Film for her documentary *Maison du bonheur*. Her third feature film, *MS Slavic 7*, graced the cover of *Cinema Scope* (and the Argentinian newspaper *Página/12*), premiered at the Berlinale and was featured at the Harvard Film Archive. Bohdanowicz is an MFA graduate of York University's Film Production program, an alumni of Berlinale Talents as well as the TIFF Talent Accelerator. She is currently in development on her fourth feature film titled *A Portrait* which won the Kodak Silverway award at the 2020 FIDLab.





DERAGH CAMPBELL

Deragh Campbell is an award-winning Toronto-based filmmaker and actor. Her debut mid-length film, *MS Slavic 7*, that she co-directed with Sofia Bohdanowicz, premiered at the 2019 Berlinale Forum. Her performance credits include lead roles in *I Used to be Darker* (Matthew Porterfield, 2013), *Stinking Heaven* (Nathan Silver, 2016), *Fail to Appear* (Antoine Bourges, 2018) and, most recently, *Anne at 13,000 ft* (Kazik Radwanski, 2019), for which she received a Canadian Screen Award nomination for Best Lead Actress. Deragh Campbell was selected for the Rising Star program at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival and for the Artist Academy at the 2018 New York Film Festival. She is the recipient of a MacDowell Fellowship for screenwriting and, in 2020, was awarded the Jay Scott Prize for emerging film talent by the Toronto Film Critics Association.



INTERVIEW

Your film captures and re-stages a movement through grieving that you were going through as you made it. How did it initially take shape?

I was in New York and wanted to go to the Guggenheim to see their Hilma af Klint exhibition. It was her first retrospective in North America. I made my way to the museum and it turned out I mixed up the dates and they were still installing the exhibition. I had come all the way to New York and I thought it would be a shame if I didn't go inside. I used to work for an art documentation company and actually love watching people install art, so I bought a ticket anyways. I didn't know af Klint well but I could tell something important was happening and started filming on my phone. My story of being locked out of the show reminded me of when the character of Audrey in my film *Veslemøy's Song* tries to go to the New York Public Library and gets kicked out of the listening room because the record she sought out is too fragile. It felt like there was a narrative coming together, so I started documenting what happened. I remember calling my MFA supervisor afterwards and saying "I don't know what this is but I think it's important to pursue it," and she told me to keep shooting, you don't know what will happen.

Then I noticed the show was going to go up the next day and I decided to go back and see it and filmed that too because I had a feeling that it was urgent to capture. The exhibition ended up being the most successful they had ever had. A few weeks later, my friend Giacomo passed away.

*The film's title comes from Kandinsky's book, **Point and Line to Plane**. How did these things intersect?*

It was through the process of discovery, research, detective work and yearning to piece together my friend's passing that I came upon this text. Our mutual admiration for Kandinsky was one of the first things Giacomo and I discovered that we had in common. I thought about something Giac's sister said in her eulogy to him, "people won't remember what you said or what you did, but they will remember how you made them feel." I was thinking about that quote in conjunction with Kandinsky's paintings we loved like *Composition VI* and *Several Circles* and I realized that whenever I looked at one of these paintings, I remember how he made me feel. I started to dig around and learn more about Kandinsky. I came upon *Point and Line to Plane* midway through the shooting process. It hypnotized me and scared me in a way because experiences I already had while shooting were mirrored in the book. Kandinsky describes his journey to understanding non-objective art and connecting to the spiritual, his process of outputting the inner to the outer. It became this magic guide to the process of making the film.

I started to see the connection between Kandinsky and af Klint and their theories. Then I realized Giac had passed away on af Klint's birthday and that he was in New York at the same time I had seen her exhibition. It was the last trip he went on before he died. There were already these points of coincidence when I started making the film. It just started happening. I couldn't reckon with the fact that he passed away, so I started to time travel in my mind. I wondered what it would have been like if we saw af Klint's show together, and, because he was colour-blind, I wondered, how would he see those paintings?

Wassily Kandinsky
POINT AND LINE
TO PLANE



The film documents a series of these coincidences. How was it formed by drawing these kinds of connections?

I found out that Giac died when I was in Vienna and I realized he had the same birthday as Mozart. That was a jumping off point for the film. Six months later, I ended up going on a research trip to Russia for another project and of course Kandinsky is Russian. I started shooting on my Bolex in St Petersburg. I was nervous and anxious at the time, grieving alone in a foreign country. I needed to start from my apartment window first as a way to work myself up to shooting outside and feeling comfortable. Eventually I did go out to do a full day of shooting. I had to change each 100 ft. roll in a makeshift tent. I ended up in the music conservatory where I filmed a lesson with a Russian violin prodigy. At the end of the day, when I was unloading everything, I noticed the pressure plate was unlocked. Having already shot three films on a Bolex, I was so upset and embarrassed that I had made this mistake. I started listening to recordings of when I shot outside throughout that day and compared them with audio recordings of loose pressure plates on Youtube in order to know if the clicking noise matched. My obsessive demeanour came from a place of needing to know if the footage was going to work or not but at the same time I didn't have any more film so it was potentially this huge disaster for me. But the footage became this gift instead. Throughout the film there are shots and passages that vibrate. I was able to look at it and say: how can I use this blemish as something unique that will serve a purpose?

In Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane*, he writes about how whenever you see a piece of art where an artist successfully and honestly expresses what is inside of them it then becomes a true expression of their soul and when you see a work of art that resonates like that then you start to feel this inner vibration—

when your pressure plate is unlocked in your Bolex, the strip of film starts to vibrate. I started to feel this connection with this accident that had happened with me in Russia through Kandinsky's text.

His book, even its title, mirrors mechanically what you find inside a Bolex camera, which is what keeps everything together, a pressure plate which is literally a point and line on a plane.

Can you describe how the concept of magical thinking influenced you?

When I read Joan Didion's *A Year of Magical Thinking*, where she writes about how her daughter was dying at the same time that she was grieving her husband's passing, I started to understand the concepts of time travelling in the mind. You're not able to understand that someone's presence is no longer there so you move between memories almost like they're in front of you and you start looking for signs and coincidences and meaning. In order for someone's death to be rationalized, your brain is looking for reasons so that you can let it go. It becomes this very spiritual conversation that happens in your every day. I felt very validated when I read this book.

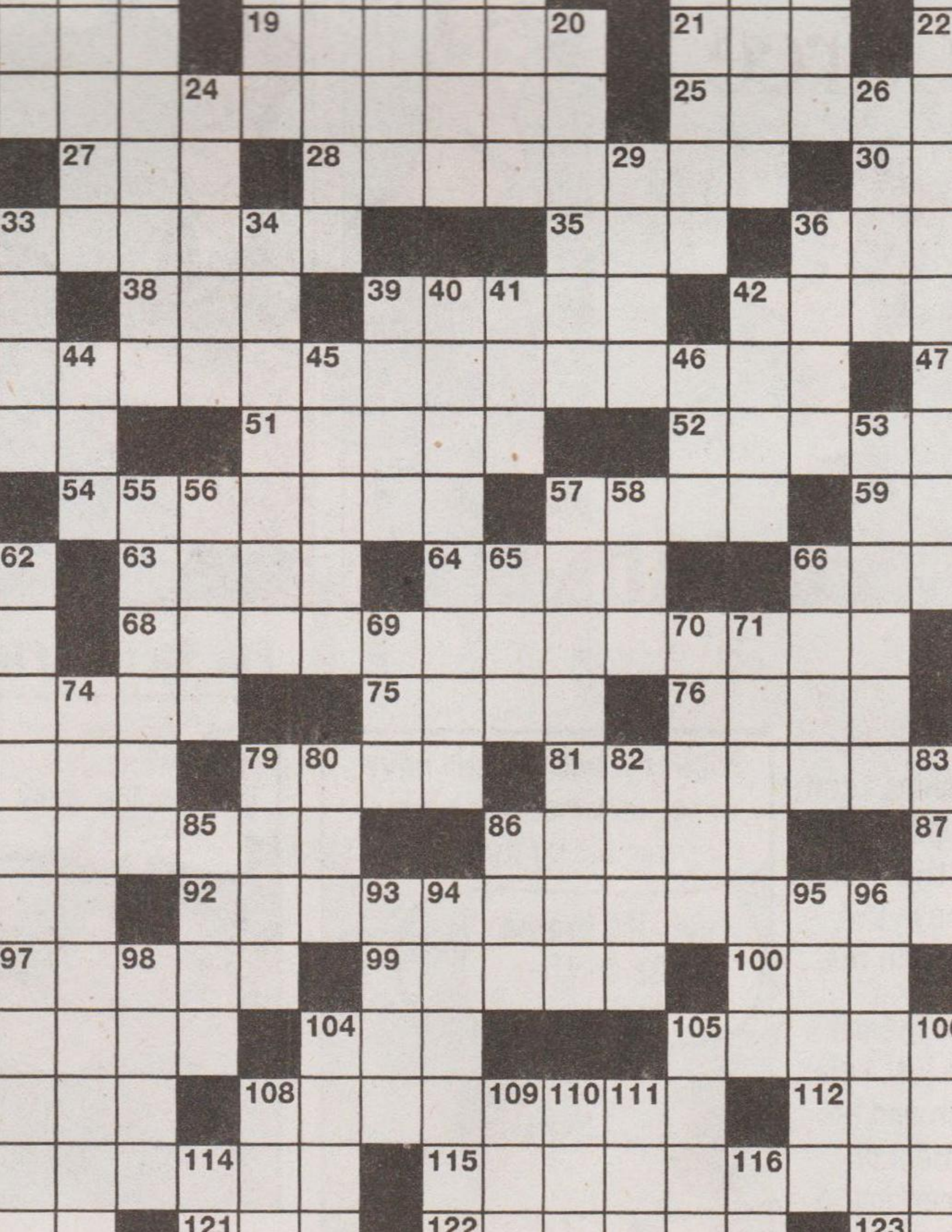
How do you view this process now, from the other side of it?

Even through the process of re-staging, there were still coincidences happening. For example, when I got a newspaper for our shoot with a crossword puzzle—and crosswords were a thing that Giac loved to do—the theme of the puzzle that day happened to be "It's a Sign," which was so strange. Bizarre things kept happening. It's not something I could clearly explain to someone in one conversation, there's no way of making sense of all of these points. Some people might call it a film that came from a mind that was jumbled but I don't think I was ever so clear in my life.

My thinking was very cogent and intentional but I was being guided by another force, something that I couldn't control, some people might call that mania some might call it the supernatural. I know that it wasn't a film that came from me it was a film that happened to me and I was only its conduit.

The film is dedicated to the memory of Giacomo and also to an artist named Jaan Poldas. Can you tell us about Jaan and his work?

He was my neighbour and we shared a studio in our building's basement. We didn't really get along at first but we came to build a friendship through mutual respect that we had for one another and that respect came from the fact that we were both very stubborn people. At the beginning of our friendship we argued quite a bit but came to an understanding. Much like of Klint and Kandinsky, Jaan was a non-objective artist but he worked more in the realm of geometric abstraction. His work was inspired by Malevich and Mondrian. His paintings are essentially combinations of blocks of colour. I would describe the work as angular, precise and detailed. He was a colour theorist and I had the privilege of watching him put together his last show that would go up posthumously. He was keen to build a community in the studio and always welcomed other artists to use his supplies and tools. Once, I used his table, which I would describe as your typical, messy artist table which had a lot of paint splatters on it, and I was like, "oh I'm gonna do my own project," and left behind traces of paint on the table, just as he did. But the next day when I went into the studio, he had actually washed up the traces of paint I left on the surface and he said to me it wasn't the kind of mess that he liked. Needless to say, he was generous but was also a very particular person.



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Everything in his studio was thoughtfully placed, his tools were an extension of his artistic practice; if something went missing he would notice right away. He had these blotting strips of canvas that he would hang by his paintings. I felt like he hung them there because he wanted me to notice them. And one day I did. I remember going into his studio and feeling the urge to take a closer look, and when I did I fell in love with them. The contrast between the improvisatory nature of these strips and the work he typically made was fascinating. The strips appeared to be some kind of outlet to express his intuitive ability versus the very practical and regimented structure of his body of work. I eventually gathered the courage to ask if I could film them. He agreed and I organized a small shoot in his studio with myself and a friend of mine. I remember he came to join us and was delighted, he watched over us like a proud father. Intuitively, I knew that I had to do something with those strips and I was so lucky that I did because he passed away about six months later and his studio was dismantled quite swiftly after that.

*The woman played by Deragh Campbell is never named in the film but are we safe to presume she is Audrey Benac, the same character from **Never Eat Alone**, **Veslemøy's Song**, and **MS Slavic 7**? She always seems to be hunting ghosts...*

I think that's what Audrey does...in every film, she's chasing old ghosts but here she is after new ones. They're people who have just passed away so I think time and ghosts are catching up to this character in a more immediate way. She is very much in the past in the film but I think through the passing of these friends, she is forced to be more in her present. I didn't write this film with Audrey in mind. It was a stream of consciousness.

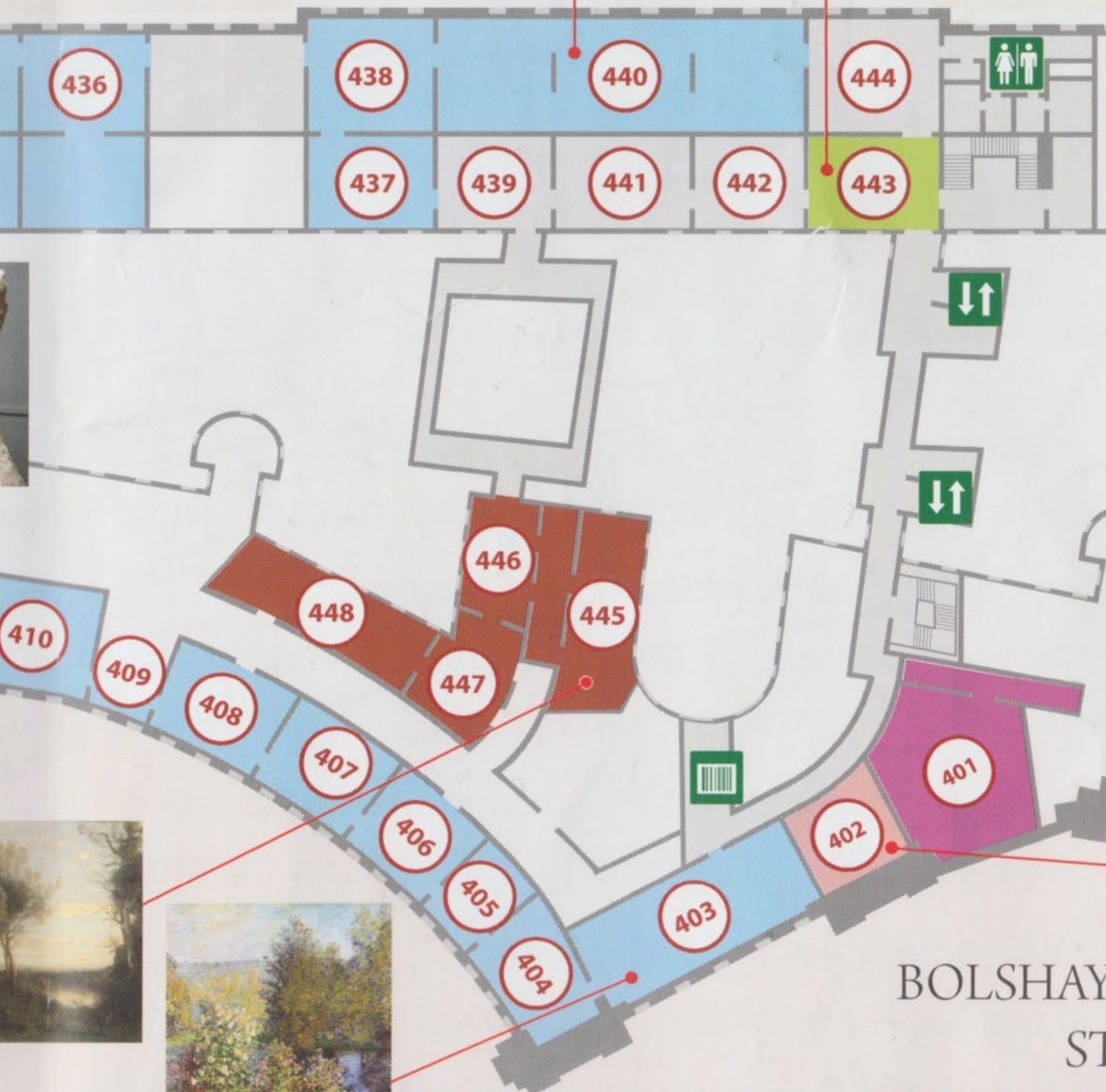
I decided to have her play out these experiences because it was too painful. It needed to be remounted and processed and filtered through someone else. I'm really fortunate in my collaboration with Deragh Campbell in that she is also a close friend so she witnessed a lot of what I went through with my friend's passing and was able to channel a lot of that energy and those experiences through those re-stagings. I wasn't just working with someone who was a professional actor but also a confidant who is able to clearly reach into herself and into our relationship to re-animate these intimate moments.

The film concerns itself with the very act of looking. Can you talk about the role that perception plays in the film?

Sometimes we need other people who are thinking on a different plane to connect us to what we know is there but cannot quite reach. Kandinsky and af Klint's work became necessary guides for me to understand and to believe that energy can only be created, it cannot be destroyed. The essence of my friend still exists. That energy is still there and it can be found and celebrated and felt and remembered.

Kandinsky experienced synesthesia so whenever he saw colour, he heard sound. He writes a lot about this in his book concerning the spiritual in art. Many of his works were intended to be physical manifestations of pieces of music or sound. Sound is invisible but his work, and af Klint's too, show that just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there. He was seeking to change our perception by trying to show the invisible had a shape and a form. He was a medium between these two worlds. He looked at his paintings as expressions of what we cannot see with our eyes but can sense and feel.

MOIKA BANKMENT



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Can you talk about the film's particular approach to the use of sound and music?

When I was grieving I felt like I was cocooned. Your body's immediate response to an emergency is to protect you from what's happening around you. I wanted to duplicate this sensation, and what the sonic experience of that is because you move through the world in a different way. For example, there's a moment where Audrey is dancing to an overture by Mozart from *The Magic Flute*. It's usually a very joyful piece but we slowed it down about 40% for the film. You're experiencing things in a kind-of slow motion when you're grieving. You want to move forward but you can't. Some sounds are acute and sharp. You become really aware of your breath and other sensations. It felt like I had this physical ringing inside of me all of the time so I worked with a sound designer named Stefana Fratila and it was so incredible because—another coincidence—I was on the York University campus and there was this ringing I would hear everyday when I was walking through the hall. One day I decided I wanted to record this and discovered it was actually an installation from the university's art gallery. It was a track of these singing bowls which are circles, crystal bowls that are different colours and depending on the shape or size of these circles they make different sounds and tones. That's how I found Stefana. I had her develop this sound and tone to envelop people in the experience of mourning.

That's interesting about the bowls being circles because Kandinsky described circles as the most peaceful shape—

—And that they represented the human soul. The mystical and open parts of me want to believe there weren't coincidences and the logical side of me is like well you were a more porous person when this was happening and you were open to what the world was offering

therefore you were able to pick up on it, your senses were heightened. Maybe those signs are all around you all the time but at some points you are more open to them than not.

It also should be said that my relationship to Giac was connected to filmmaking. He was my first producer, we made films together, so throughout the process of making this film I felt like in a way he was bringing me to all of these things. I think the circles really started with Jaan's blotting strips which have these different coloured intersecting circles. I saw Hilma af Klint's show about a year later and noticed she also had these circles that intersected. Later, when I did research on af Klint I found out she was trying to represent scientific discoveries that were happening at the time, atoms and quantum physics...the invisible.

If you want to take it even further there's the shape in between these circles which is called the vesica piscis which is this vaginal shape which can be found in many renaissance paintings. This shape which typically holds an image of a Christ-like figure represents a centre point of creation. Furthermore, when an atom duplicates itself, in diagrams this is demonstrated with one circle literally coming out of another one. This is called the process of mitosis, the centre point where the vesica piscis appears is the centre point of creation. Also these two circles again mirror the inside of a Bolex and what happens in the centre is creation: images forming themselves as the film moves from one spool to the next.

