



Entertainment • Corporate Communications
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QUEENDOM

AN AGNIIA GALDANOVA FILM

Produced by Igor Myakotin and Agniia Galdanova

Starring Gena Marvin

Executive Produced by David France

WORLD PREMIERE - 2023 SXSW Film Festival

Documentary Feature Competition



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Mins 98 | Language Russian with English Subtitles | **Year 2023 |**

Country France, United States

<https://www.QUEENDOMdoc.com/>

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2023 SXSW Film Festival Schedule

World Premiere - Saturday, March 11, 2023 at 6:30 PM at Alamo Drafthouse (Lamar E)
Sunday, March 12, 2023 at 2:00 PM at Alamo Drafthouse (Lamar A)
Friday, March 17, 2023 at 3:00 PM at Alamo Drafthouse (Lamar B)

LOGLINE

Gena, a queer artist from a small town in Russia, stages radical performances in public that become a new form of art and activism - and put her life in danger.

SYNOPSIS

Gena, a queer artist from a small town in Russia, dresses in otherworldly costumes made from junk and tape, and protests the government on the streets of Moscow. Born and raised on the harsh streets of Magadan, a frigid outpost of the Soviet gulag, Gena is only 21. She stages radical performances in public that become a new form of art and activism. By doing that, she wants to change people's perception of beauty and queerness and bring attention to the harassment of the LGBTQ+ community. The performances - often dark, strange, evocative, and queer at their core - are a manifestation of Gena's subconscious. But they come at a price.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT - Agniia Galdanova

As a teenager, I had a hard time accepting myself and constantly endured humiliation and beatings because of my “unfeminine” look. From an early age, I often pretended to be a boy, and wore shapeless clothes and heavy shoes. This was my refuge from the stereotype that a girl should be feminine. Years later, I was beaten up by two men in the very center of Moscow just because they had mistaken me for a guy in a skirt. I decided to explore the themes of sexuality and gender identity further in my work. My initial idea was to follow several drag queens across Russia. One of the first potential characters I met was Gena. After spending time together, I was mesmerized by Gena’s artistry and courage. To me, she wasn’t one of many drag queens. She was an artist embarking on a journey of self-discovery.

I hope that when someone from Russia or any other country where being queer is illegal watches QUEENDOM, the film and Gena will give them the confidence to accept themselves and share their truth with the world, however dangerous it could be.

DIRECTOR'S Q&A - Agniia Galdanova

How did this film come about? How did the idea originate? What inspired you?

Drag culture and the LGBTQ+ community in Russia is important to me and is driven by my experiences growing up. I was bullied because of my looks when I was growing up. And as the Russian government was getting more hostile toward the LGBTQ+ community, I was fascinated by the resilience and beauty of the drag queen community, which was going deeper underground because of numerous threats. Many of the queens were my close friends.

My original idea was to create a documentary series following several drag queens across Russia. One of the potential protagonists was Gena. The series evolved into a feature documentary focusing solely on her life and art. It was a revelation to see Gena grow as a person and as an artist as we were filming with her. She was pushing the artistic boundaries and delivering a clear message - love yourself. We instantly connected and started collaborating. It’s an everlasting bond that will continue after the film is finished.

How long did it take to make the film? From concept to finish.

We started working on the film in 2019 and finished it in February 2023.

Why did you make this film?

I wish I could have seen someone like Gena when I was growing up in Russia. I made the film because I was mesmerized by Gena’s artistry and inspired by her courage to be her true self in such an oppressive environment as Russia. I could feel her fear, but I never saw her waver from her intention. There’s no one else like Gena. When I saw Gena struggling to fit in a small town built on top of the biggest gulag camp, I wondered how she could be two very

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different people. But then I saw how she blossomed and transformed while experimenting with makeup and making spectacular and otherworldly costumes from junk and tape - I knew I had to make a film just about her.

Gena was born and raised on the harsh streets of Magadan, a frigid outpost of the biggest gulag camp in the Russian Far East. Her parents passed away when she was a child. Brought up by her grandparents, she had the courage to come out to them early on. It was unbearably difficult. Gena says that when her grandfather realized their “grandson” was “not like everyone else,” he took her to the guardianship authorities and wanted to give her up, yelling: “We adopted a normal one! And we don't need THIS anymore!” But despite fear and misunderstanding, they still love her.

After witnessing Gena’s relationship with her grandparents who raised her, I kept thinking about how important unconditional love is. I was raised without a dad, and my mom was busy providing for the family. That’s why I connected so profoundly with Gena, who was also brought up without much-needed family support and care. In the LGBTQ+ community, people who are usually abandoned by their relatives find new families among queer peers. Gena is not an exception. But she never gave up on her grandparents. At the end of the day, they do love and care for her. Gena’s forced maturity and her lust for life motivated me to make this film.

I hope that if someone from Russia, or any other country where being queer is illegal, watches QUEENDOM, it will give them the confidence to accept themselves and share their truth with the world, however dangerous it could be.

Did the film change from your original idea for the film as you were filming or in post?

Gena was 20 years old when we started our collaboration, and over several years, she flourished into the incredible artist she is today. Starting with art performances in public, Gena gradually realized that she has the platform on social media to create positive change in society through her art. The catalyst for Gena’s political stance was the moment when she participated in the protest demanding the freedom of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny. It was an important moment for Gena’s evolution as an activist.

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched an aggressive full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Gena couldn’t stay silent, and she knew she had to oppose it through an art performance in public to draw attention to the horrific war that the Russian government had started. Gena wrapped her naked body with barbed wire and marched the streets of Moscow in the freezing cold. The protest-performance resulted in Gena’s arrest. From that point on, it was a whirlwind of events - from Gena’s release from detention to her daring escape from Russia. No one, even Gena herself, could have anticipated such an unexpected turn of events. She had to make choices about leaving the only home she has ever known, losing friends that love her, accepting that she might never see her grandparents again, and not knowing if she made the right decisions in an extremely short period.

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In the end, Gena's life became the story that represented so much about before and after, old and new, love and loss.

What were the challenges in making this film?

One of the challenges was keeping the crew and protagonists safe. Filming in Russia, especially with someone like Gena, who uses her art to protest in public, posed a considerable risk, and we had to evaluate each shoot and be careful everywhere we filmed. There were many close calls, and it was often a dangerous task. Still, we wanted to reveal the real story of what was happening inside contemporary Russia, especially around the often invisible LGBTQ+ community.

What were the successes that you had in making this film?

I developed a deep bond and a meaningful connection with Gena that I hope is felt while watching the film. The trust we felt for each other created a true collaboration that allowed the film crew - which was very small at all times to preserve the intimacy and for safety reasons - to capture candid moments between Gena and her grandparents as well as during moments of intense feelings and concern for her future. We created a safe space where Gena's truth is revealed through observational cinema.

We are proud of the film's visual language, including several performances featuring Gena that give a glimpse into her inner world and emotional state. The performances - often dark, strange, evocative and queer at their core - are a manifestation of Gena's subconscious.

What do you want audiences to take away from this film?

At the core of the film is Gena's relationship with her grandparents, who love her even though they disapprove of how she expresses herself or even who she loves. It is a clash of generations that many can relate to and understand. But it's also a film about the danger of being queer in Russia today. Gena has to make some painful decisions that make us all wonder - could we do that? Are we brave enough to stand up to the government? Could we leave friends, home, and family behind for something we believe in? Would we do what Gena did?

We hope audiences feel empowered and confident to live their most authentic selves despite the abusive environments they might live in, even if they must flee their home to live freely. We believe the film - and Gena herself - serves as a reminder that the most powerful way to fight prejudice against the queer community is by being true to yourself and not being afraid to show who you are - whether in public or a family setting. That is only the way to change people's minds. Gena did it. Could you?

Where do you find inspiration or who/what has influenced you as a filmmaker?

My inspiration for the kind of documentary films I make comes from reality itself. Marina Razbezhkina, my film mentor and teacher, influenced how I approach documentary films. Her method requires the student to be a one-person filmmaker. I had to direct, produce, film, and edit my films. This experience was invaluable and shaped my understanding of how to make a film on a deeper level because you deal with reality on your own. This type of approach

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requires your total dedication; you have to immerse yourself in the world of your protagonist and be ready to leave your comfort zone. It's not a job. It's a lifestyle. What's good about being inspired by reality is that you never know where it can come from. You have to be open to the world of possibilities and serendipity. While making QUEENDOM, I stayed true to the observational approach, but I also knew that I wanted to develop a new visual language that reflects my vision of Gena's world.

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DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Agniia Galdanova

Agniia Galdanova is a Sundance and IDFA-supported documentary film director. Her previous film, "One Step Forward, One Step Back," about a family's dream to live far from civilization in the Altai Mountains, premiered at the Message to Man International Film Festival. Her work focuses on complex human relationships told through immersive observational language. Her new film QUEENDOM about a young queer artist Gena Marvin is set to premiere at SXSW 2023 in Documentary Competition.

PRODUCER

Igor Myakotin

Igor Myakotin is an Emmy-nominated BAFTA-winning filmmaker who co-produced the feature-length documentary WELCOME TO CHECHNYA (Sundance '20, Berlinale '20). He is a 2022 Sundance Producing Fellow and was named by DOC NYC as one of the "40 Under 40" working in documentary film. Igor believes that cinema is not a way to escape reality but to embrace it with all its peculiarities and darkness. Currently, Igor is producing QUEENDOM (2022 Sundance Producers Lab and Summit, Gotham Market Week, CPH:FORUM, Big Sky Pitch), directed by Agniia Galdanova.

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FULL CREDIT LIST

Director

Agniia Galdanova

Producer

Igor Myakotin
Agniia Galdanova

Executive Producers

David France
Jess Search
Arnaud Borges

Co-Executive Producer

James Costa

Cinematographer

Ruslan Fedotov

Editor

Vlad Fischez

Principal Cast

Gena Marvin

Cinematography by

Ruslan Fedotov

Additional Cinematography by

Aliaksandr Tsymbaliuk
Nikolai Zheludovich
Aleksander Elkan

Edited by

Vlad Fischez

Music by

Damien Vandesande
Toke Bronson Odin

Sound design & Re-recording Mixer

Andrey Dergachev

Color by

Ruslan Fedotov

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Filmmakers would like to thank

Gena's grandparents

Ismail Luceat-Anima
Lex Blank
Oleg Makhnorylov
Deoxys Io
Pavel Kolomeytsev
Daria Savonina
Andrey Skatkov
Roman Valynkin
Quamaz
Anastasiya
Yulia
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Artists in Exile
Judith Depaule
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Tatiana Efrussi

Editorial Consultants

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Ricardo Acosta
Charlotte Munch Bengtsen
Alex O'Flinn
Peter Kerekes

Consulting Producers

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Melody Gilbert

Associate Producers

Arjun and Elena Joshi
Nikolai Kovtunencko

Additional Cinematography

Askold Kurov
Maxim Tomash
Sergei Borsuk
Sergey Stasrostin
Nikita Lychev
Voleemor
Yulia Morozova
Vera Vishnevaya
Shamil Hasanzanov

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Location Sound Mixers

Agniia Galdanova
Agatha Carioca Vandesande
Ilya Rodionov

Production Assistants

Yulia Smyshlyaeva
Tatiana Ochinskaya
development producers
Marfouga
Anna Gudkova
Liza Vorobyova

Development Cinematographers

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Anna Zalevskaya
Vitaly Shkotov
Masha Terentieva
Pete Minakov

Development Editors

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Pavel Volchek
Yuri Pivovarov

Development Translators

Ivan Nechepurenko
Loretta May

Development Copywriter

Valeria Tsyganova

Music Clearance

Dawn Sutter Madell

Additional Translators

Tomas Naglis
Jesse Mars

Titles and Credits Design

République Studio

Poster Photographer

Boris Camaca

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Poster Design
République Studio

Post-production Services
DumDum Films

Digital Intermediate Colorist
Ruslan Fedotov

Digital Intermediate Online Editor
Vlad Fishez

Digital Intermediate Conform Artist
Vlad Fishez

Visual Effects Artists
Vasiliy Raevskiy
Mic Sachkov

Post-production Sound Services by
Doli Media Studio
Sofia, Bulgaria

Supervising Sound Editor
Andrey Dergachev

Doli Media Studio Manager
Lyubomir Chochoy

Doli Media Studio Assistant
Iliyan Apostolov

Dialogue Editor
Ruslan Khusein

Foley Studio
Kyrgyzfilm
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Foley Artist
Ivan Savelev

Foley Recordist
Sergei Radzievskiy

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Foley Editor
Anna Zobova

Audio Sync Engineer
Konstantin Danilin

Transcription
Natalia Slavina

Closed Captions Services
Mistral Artist
Jerry Rudes

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DAVID HARRISON

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LUTZ & CARR
PATRICK SMITH

Production Counsel
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David F. Schwartz, Esq.
&

Kondas Law
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Grace Royer

PUBLICITY
David Magdael & Associates
David Magdael
Vince Johnson
Tommy Tang
Will Zang
Jennifer Hast

Festival Distribution by
The Film Collaborative

Song Credits

“Siboney”
Written by: Ernesto Lecuona
Performed by Connie Francis
Published by: EMI Feist Catalog Inc.
Courtesy of Polydor Records under license from Universal Music Enterprises

‘De La Cabeza’
performed by DJs Pareira
written by Mariano Caloso and Diego Irasusta
published by Música Cómeme
administered by Freibank Music Publishing
courtesy of Música Cómeme

“Human”
by Sevdaliza
Written By Sevdaliza
Composition: Sevdaliza, Mucky
Production: Mucky, Sevdaliza
Drum Programming: Mucky
Arrangement: Mucky, Sevdaliza
Recorded, Mixed and Mastered by Mucky and Sevdaliza at Soundkings
Reynard Bargmann / Rabies Publishing/Maktub Music Publishing administered by Cloud 9
Music B.V..

" Strichka "
written by Jonathan Illel / Alina Pash / Fabien Leseure /Damien Vandesande

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Performed by dOP & Alina Pash
Published by Circus Company / Because Editions
Courtesy of dOP Only

" Your Fellin' "
Written by Sammy Doylestien & Ryan Williams & Clement Alchelbaum
Performed by dOP & Pillow Talk
Published by Circus Company
Courtesy of dOP Only

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WORK
Fritt Ord Foundation
DOC SOCIETY
Current Time TV Award to the Best Pitch at Artdocpitch

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Benjamin Daussy
Coralie Manant
Arnaud Borges
Jess Search
Florent Vassault
Mike Lerner
Marina Razbezhkina
Alain Nagler
Alana Waksman
Alessandro Ubaldi
Alex Tomi
Alexey Platonov
Alyona Bocharova
Amanda Hillsberg Arya
Amanda Lebow
Andrea Alarcon
Andronik Khachiyani
Ania Trzebiatowska

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Boris Stefanov
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Chandra Jessee
Claudette Godfrey
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Dasha Slyusarenko
Denis Smagin
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Dmitriy Fesenko
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Dumitrita Pacicovschi
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Fenton Bailey
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Heather Haynes
Heidi Pullyard
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Iva Dimitrova
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Jesse Mars
John Burgan
Jonathan Bertin
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Jose Rodriguez
Karina Zrajevskaya
Kat Schulze
Katherine Hurley

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Langdon Page
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Maria Clement
Maria Eismont
Maria Santos
Marie-Genevieve Vandesande
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Mark Wollemann
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Maryana Drogoveyko
Masha Pavlova
Matias Aguayo
Max Tuula
Max Tuula
Maxim Gorbunov
Maxwell Anderson
Maya Daisy Hawke
Mika Altskan
Mike Lerner
Milton Tabbot
Monica Baptiste
Nadya Stepanova
Nastia Korkia
Nevo Shinaar
Nicolas Ouvrard
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Nikki Heyman
Niklas Engstrøm
Nina Guseva
Nino Maisaia
Olga Babych
Olga Privolnova
Olivier Tournaud

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Tomas Naglis
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Tue Steen Müller
Vasiliy Mirolubov
Vera Krichevskaya
Victor Nemeth
Weinshtein Alexander
Weinshtein Alexander Junior
Weinshtein Tatiana
William Krinsky
Yaroslav Golovkin
Yulia Vorobyova
Zaferhan Yumru
Zeynep Güzel

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This film was developed with artist support from Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program

Sundance Producers Fellowship Advisors

Andrea Meditch
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Maria Clement
Kristin Feeley
Paola Mottura

The Film was Pitched at

The Artdocfest Pitching/ Current Time TV
Big Sky Pitch at Big Sky Film Festival
CPH:FORUM at CPH:DOX
Gotham Market Week