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Queen of Earth

Alex Ross Perry

Producer Elisabeth Moss, Alex Ross Perry, Adam Piotrowicz, Joe Swanberg. **Production companies** Her Majesty September (New York, USA); Forager Film Company (Chicago, USA). **Director** Alex Ross Perry. **Director of photography** Sean Price Williams. **Production design** Anna Bak-Kvapil. **Costume** Amanda Ford. **Make-up** Amy Forsythe. **Sound** Clayton Castellanos. **Music** Keegan DeWitt. **Sound design** Ryan Price. **Editor** Robert Greene.

Cast Elisabeth Moss (Catherine), Katherine Waterston (Virginia), Patrick Fugit (Rich), Kentucker Audley (James), Keith Poulson (Keith), Kate Lyn Sheil (Michelle), Craig Butta (groundkeeper).

DCP, colour. 90 min. English.

Premiere 7 February 2015, Berlinale Forum

Catherine and Virginia are best friends. Last year, Virginia wasn't doing well, while it's Catherine who's struggling this year. Virginia's parents own a lakeside cabin, the perfect place for a week of mutual wound licking. Sun pours in through the windows, framing the cool green of the trees outside. But this isn't the refuge it seems and it's not just the music that awakens the menace in the images. The ripples across the lake and the wan sunlight offer little comfort, to say nothing of the picture of a skull lying forgotten in a cupboard.

Last year's events keep crashing in upon the present, things weren't good then and they aren't better now. When the two women confide in one another, it's like two separate monologues, the camera gliding between their strained faces as if they were one and the same. They otherwise stick to wry barbs, each criticizing the other's privilege as they still cling on to their bond. As salad leaves wilt, men come and go, and tension gives way to hostility, what even remains of this friendship? Dark-ringed eyes alight with rage, a stream of quiet bile, one face cut into another, two true Queens of Earth.

James Lattimer

Cruel intrusiveness

I wanted to challenge myself. I have made a few films in a row that are categorised as comedies, meaning some people laugh when watching them. With the support of a returning crew of close collaborators, it seemed only natural to create a film that took similar themes of misery and loneliness in a direction more adherent to the conventions of a psychological thriller than anything people find overtly amusing.

This film is about privacy. I have noticed that people are almost chemically resistant to giving others any space for themselves. *Queen of Earth* is about one woman's reaction to the world's refusal to leave her alone. Dishonesty, cruelty and curiosity are one and the same. The prying and the incessant joy that people get from knowing information about anybody other than themselves feels like a societal sickness, and this is about a character who finds her immunity to that sickness slowly deteriorating in the face of her own personal tragedy.

Alex Ross Perry

"That threat affects the characters in a way that the realisation of it is incidental"

Two long-time friends confront each other in a house in the countryside. Metaphorically, their roommates seem to be the ghosts of their past. What was inspiration for your film?

Alex Ross Perry: The film came out of a time where I wanted to be left alone more than anything, and more than I had been in a very long time. Various factors in my life all negatively converged and I felt as though I couldn't go out in public without my privacy being invaded by people who didn't know how to mind their own business. I wanted to do a film that looked at an extreme version of these feelings, of characters who felt like the outside world was conspiring to crush them.

Was the screenplay completely written out in detail – or did you also integrate improvisation while shooting, for instance in Catherine and Virginia's monologue scenes?

Contributions from actors have become more and more valuable to me. I learned on my last film that their instincts are worth pursuing, and generally very interesting to me, and a major improvement over whatever I had put on the page. So going into my second collaboration with Elisabeth Moss, and knowing what she is capable of, I intentionally left parts of the script and story vague so that she had room to bring her own ideas into as many scenes as possible. The monologue is an example of being pretty much exactly what was written. Sometimes it's just best to go with that.

Formally, the film reveals a complex work of montage in which the layers of past and present gradually merge into each other. To what extent does the editing process contribute to the final film?

The time-hopping structure was in the script, but the idea of sort of *Easy Rider*-ing the cutting into them was something that occurred to me during shooting and became very relevant and necessary. I have found that editing is extremely important in conjunction with giving the actors the space necessary to find moments or elaborate moments beyond what is written. So the edit is about conforming what we captured to the initial

intentions. It all becomes very liquid but the film finds its way back to whatever it was originally meant to be.

The soundtrack seems to be the third main protagonist in your film – somehow like an uncanny intruder.

This again, like leaving space for actors to bring in ideas and moments of their own, is endemic to working with film composer Keegan DeWitt for the second time. I was able to talk to him about ideas and send references along during production and he was even making music to the dailies for us to listen to on set. Often, the sound and music, and the atmosphere created as a result of them, really make the film what it is.

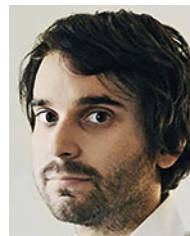
What is the meaning of nature in your film?

That's getting pretty close to interpretation for me but I will say that this and my last film both take as a defining moment characters escaping from 'the city' into a quieter, idyllic place, and I think moments like that do define people who live in hectic cities.

A leaf blower and a knife appear. Physical violence seems to be within reach, but it is not carried out. Could you please explain the concept of violence in your film?

Again, that's interpretative. But this is the sort of lesson you can learn from a master like Roman Polanski, where things sort of threaten to happen and that threat affects the characters in a way that the realisation of the threat is incidental, if it even arrives at all.

Interview: Ansgar Vogt, January 2015



Alex Ross Perry was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania in 1984. He attended the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and worked at Kim's Video in Manhattan. Perry lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Films

2009: *Impolex* (73 min.). 2011: *The Color Wheel* (83 min.). 2014: *Listen Up Philip* (108 min.). 2015: *Queen of Earth*.