



Present

FLAMES



A LOVE STORY, A HATE STORY, A REAL ROMANCE

86 min / USA / English

Sales Contacts:

PARADIGM TALENT AGENCY/ Meghan Oliver
moliver@paradigmagency.com / 310.288.8000

PARADIGM TALENT AGENCY/ Benjamin Weiss
bweiss@paradigmagency.com / 310.288.8000

SELECTED PRESS

"Without a doubt unlike any other film released" - *The Playlist*

"Flames is an entirely fascinating project" - *Filmmaker*

"Deeply intimate and very original" - *Indiewire*

"Extremely raw, sexually and emotionally intimate" - *Observer*

"A funny and bracing documentary, sure to garner strong reactions from anyone who watches it." - *Vice*

"A film that is unlike any other" - *Deadline*

"It makes falling out of love seem like an enviable, knowledge-gaining - even beautiful - endeavor to go through." - *Village Voice*

"Transfixing images map the uncharted territory of visceral passion gone the way of meta awareness" - *Artnews*

AWARDS:

Best Feature Documentary - New Hampshire Film Festival 2017

Television Prize - Avanca Film Festival 2017

FESTIVALS:

Tribeca Film Festival 2017

Hot Docs Film Festival 2017

Galway Film Fleadh 2017

Traverse City Film Festival 2017

New Hampshire Film Festival 2017

Avanca Film Festival 2017

Houston Cinema Arts 2017

Torino Film Festival 2017

DocPoint Helsinki 2018

LOGLINE

A real romance filmed over five years. Josephine and Zefrey simmer in the white hot apocalypse of first love until the throw of a dart finds them on a spontaneous trip to the Maldives and cracks open the question - is their love true or just a performance?

SYNOPSIS

Filmed over five years, *FLAMES* follows real-life couple Josephine Decker (*BUTTER ON THE LATCH*, *THOU WAST MILD AND LOVELY*) and Zefrey Throwell from the white-hot passion of first love to the heartbreak of the bitter end. High on their intense connection, the pair of artists document their relationship's every beat, from their adventurous sex life, to their performance art collaborations, to a spur-of-the-moment getaway to the Maldives. But when the romantic vacation doesn't exactly go as planned, the now-former couple are left to decide what to do with their film-in-progress, and for these two filmmakers, the end of the relationship isn't the end of the story.

As they continue filming, reconstructing what happened and where it all went wrong, lines begin to blur between what was real and what was "the film"—if there's even a difference anymore. Equal parts performance piece and penetrating rumination on the way some relationships are never finished even after they end, *FLAMES* is an extraordinary docu-art hybrid- a raw nerve of a film that finds within its unique idiosyncrasies and eccentricities a universally affecting manifesto of heartbreak.

- Cara Cusumano

CONVERSATIONS WITH ZEFREY THROWELL AND JOSEPHINE DECKER

How did you meet one another?

Zefrey: We met on a rooftop in Brooklyn. I lifted her up and tried to throw her over the edge. After that it was love.

Josephine: I met Zefrey at my ex-boyfriend's going away party on a roof. Then, we were madly in love for about three months, and it was all downhill from there!

What were your initial thoughts going into this project? Were your initial goals different in the beginning than they were by the end?

Zefrey: FLAMES was first inspired by a solo show I had at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The curators said they were open to seeing anything that I had made recently. We had both been dealing with that complicated moment when your love for someone turns into hard reality -- and after a few fights, we decided we would deal with the complications arising in our relationship by making a short film. We re-enacted an incident that sparked a lot of discord between us, and when the film premiered, the audience responded pretty deeply to the work. "Madonna Mia Violenta" premiered at MoMA at the end of 2011. Shot and edited in two weeks, it was as rough and raw as the subject matter. Some loved it, some were grossed out, some cried, some referred to it as a "sex tape"! Perfect!

Still in love and inspired by the success of the short, we decided to keep filming. Deeper and more real were the watchwords. How to get there? How not to end up just another documentary? And so! With full hearts, we set about creating a film about a couple that was genuinely in love. The camera would not cut away. The tears would be real. The fights genuine. The kisses deep and the orgasms rippling. We decided to re-enact painful events in our lives immediately after they happened. In an aggressive and ill-advised form of art therapy, we were soon filming everything from abortion decisions to strip poker economics and emotional breakdowns. In the blush of first love, the critic is an unwelcome guest and we certainly learned this as our relationship crumbled. Whereas most films would end on this note, we continued to film for five long years and uncovered even deeper revelations about who we were as ex-lovers and more importantly, as people.

Josephine: Originally, this film was a way for me and Zefrey to work things out in our relationship. Our condom came off the very first time we had sex (and we were very, very in love by then), so I had to take the day after pill... That was an intense experience to have so early in our relationship. When Zefrey found out he would have a screening of his performance films at the MoMA, he noted that we could make our own film and KNOW that it would premiere at MoMA, which is pretty cool! Given that we had JUST gone through this intense dynamic of children/no-children, we decided to make that the subject matter of the short that we would show at MoMA. The film went over swimmingly, and we sold two copies of the film right away via Zefrey's art collectors.

It seemed a logical next step to... make a feature?

But as we went along, Zefrey and I were increasingly on different pages about how to tell a story (any story!) and definitely on different pages about how to tell our own story. Our trip to the Maldives was.... well, as bad as it looks in the film, and when we broke up a few months later, I was ready for the project to die.

I guess in finishing the film, Zefrey and I had to address some of the underlying issues of trust in our relationship. I think for me, finishing the film was less about finishing a film and more about finally coming back together to try to trust someone I felt I never wanted to see again. And, surprisingly, Zefrey worked hard to build our trust again. I'm grateful to him for his perseverance in finishing this film, even if the process was.... difficult... miserable... full of regret... luscious... exciting... deviant.... growth-filled more confusing than any creative project should be!

What was the most challenging scene to shoot, and why?

Zefrey: The hardest scene for me to film was the closing revelation in Times Square. I had been wrestling with whether or not to tell Josephine for years. I had chickened out at Washington Square and then again at therapy. It would have been much easier not to tell her and leave the secret buried. I'm not sure it was the best decision to make for our friendship, but I felt that in fairness to the spirit of the project, which was to give everything, be completely raw and transparent with each other, that I should finally tell her.

Josephine: The most challenging scene to shoot for me was maybe Times Square. I really was up to my ears in my own work and so, so furious that we were still making this film. I did not want to be there. And I really didn't care about the huge 'revelation' that Zefrey needed to share. I was like: WHEN CAN WE MOVE ON!??!

Was there any hesitation to continue the project once you broke up? Any concerns?

Zefrey: Absolutely. I questioned whether or not to continue on a daily basis. It caused massive problems in my relationship with my current girlfriend. We fought and continue to fight about it. She felt that I was obsessed with the past and doubted whether my love for her was true if I felt compelled to constantly dissect my previous relationship. On the other side, Josephine also fought me for years about the project. She tried to bury it and didn't want the movie to be made. She was concerned that it was too raw and personal and was uncomfortable with the amount of nudity and real sex in the picture. She felt that her career had moved on and didn't want to be associated with something so radical anymore. The upshot of all this conflict was it was a hell of a hard film to make. On top of that, there was no outside financing of FLAMES, I paid out of my pocket for almost the entire budget of the picture. The labor of many shitty jobs is why FLAMES exists today.

I was extremely worried that it was a massive waste of six years of my life and almost all of my money. I was having trouble sleeping and had developed large mouth ulcers from the stress. I remember about four years into the project, I reread an interview with John Cassavetes where he talked about mortgaging his house to make *A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE*. This is one of my favorite films of all time. With his story of true heroism/madness as the inspiration and the help of many many wonderful friends (including Michael Melamedoff, the intrepid producer, who fought for this film for years) we continued and finally finished FLAMES.

Josephine: Concerns! Is an understatement! I think I tried every way possible to kill this project, but Zefrey is a demon and lets nothing die. "I don't want to spend any more time with you because I don't like you," was maybe said a few times, by me... to him.

What was the filming schedule like? For example, was it every day and then a few days off? What dictated the schedule?

Zefrey: We would film whenever the spirit struck. We had cameras on us constantly. Most often we would wait until a traumatic event had occurred in our relationship and then film it in the next few days.

Josephine: We shot maybe once every eight months for the four years following our relationship. Zefrey would call and say, "The movie's almost done! We just need one more scene!" And then I would argue with him about film structure, and then we would shoot something which usually turned into us arguing, and then he would go away and eight months later call me and say, "The movie's almost done! We just need one more scene!"

Ashley Connor shot the film. Was it ever difficult to be genuine with one another while a third person watched closely? Did you find yourself adjusting your personalities or behaviors for the benefit of the camera?

Zefrey: Ashley Connor is a goddamn saint. And she is a hell of a talented cinematographer. The level of trust and compassion between us was akin to being in a relationship together. Josephine and I were essentially in an emotional threesome with Ashley for years. I tried to be myself as much as I could be. I don't think I am a particularly talented actor, so this essentially just me being me.

We still disagree upon whether this movie is narrative fiction or documentary. Is it actually possible while playing yourself in a film for it not to be you? Or is this just a different layer of the real you? Can someone be 90% themselves in a film? What the hell does *real* mean anyway?

Josephine: I definitely think I amped up fighting when the camera was rolling. I was aware that conflict is the butter in the cake of a film, so... I think yes, I probably argued with Zefrey more when we were in the Maldives than I would have if we had just been there on "performance vacation" with no cameras!

You captured five years worth of your relationship on-camera. How did you condense it all into 86m?

Zefrey: Six years of constant editing. Matthew Levy, Josephine, and myself. Cutting, cutting cutting. We had hundreds of hours of footage. It was a form of aggressive therapy to watch myself being a horrible person, being a mediocre human, being just another schmuck for so many years. Editing this film changed not only the way I view myself, but also how I act in the world. I hope that I am a better human being now.

Josephine: Long, brutal hours in the editing room. Many many arguments, and then, ultimately, Zefrey started to make a very personal film, and he took the final cut and ran with it. He invested a ton of time into the film, and made something very unique. I think he was really working through something in this movie. And

basically after putting myself 'in the way' of making this movie for so long, I saw what he was trying to do -- that he was trying to get at something very personal to himself and also very universal -- and I tried to get out of his way and let him make his film.

And finally, why FLAMES for the title?

Zefrey: We had countless titles. ME, YOU, AND ASHLEY, LASHED TO THE MAST, HORRIBLE PEOPLE DOING HORRIBLE THINGS, ART FUCK, 5 YEARS IN THE TRENCHES OF TRUE LOVE, COLOR OF INTIMACY, VIOLENTA, ONE OF THE LOVES OF MY LIFE, FLIRTING, FALLING, ANOTHER TRUE LOVE, YOU, AGAIN, WHITE PANTIES AND ROUGH PALMS ...and many many more.

FLAMES was the one that stuck. It has the double play of old lovers and everything going up in a house fire and that truly nailed the spirit of the movie.

Josephine: Well, I wanted to call it IN FLAMES because that felt more true to my experience. But at some point, for my own sanity (maybe his too), I had to hand creative control over to Zefrey.

CAST AND CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Zefrey Throwell (Director):

Zefrey Throwell is a NYC based artist who uses the mediums of film, performance, photography and painting to orchestrate his inquisitive perspective. 1000 car horn symphonies, a weeklong strip poker critique of modern economics, a massive food fight- Throwell's projects have been featured in The New York Times, CNN, NPR, NBC, Artforum, Art in America, Artinfo and Modern Painters. Throwell has work in The Museum of Modern Art and other major collections. His films have shown at the Cannes Film Festival and other festivals around the world. He is currently directing three feature films and organizing the longest choir in history- a 10,000 opera singer project that stretches over the alps from Italy to Germany, as well as a 10 cruise ship symphony surrounding Miami Beach. Throwell's latest feature film "Flames" will premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival in April 2017.

Josephine Decker (Co-Director):

Said to be ushering in a "new grammar of narrative" by [The New Yorker](#), Josephine Decker aims to spark curiosity and wonder in audiences while delving into the ways we classify ourselves and others. Part of Time Warner's 150 incubator, a recent Sundance Institute's New Frontier Lab Fellow and one of Filmmaker Magazine's 25 New Faces of Independent Film, Josephine Decker premiered her first two narrative features, BUTTER ON THE LATCH and THOU WAST MILD AND LOVELY, at the Berlinale Forum 2014. The films were listed #2 and #10 on The New Yorker's Top Ten List of 2014, played about a hundred festivals around the world (including Torino, London BFI, BAM Cinemafest), won Sarasota Film Festival's Independent Visions Award, Tangerine Entertainment's prize for a rising female director and many other awards. Her third [narrative feature](#), starring Molly Parker and Miranda July, is currently in post-production, and this fall, she incubated a dance-theater-film hybrid at Princeton University with butoh choreographer [Vangeline](#).

Interested in melding unconventional movement and dance into narrative film, Josephine spent a year in [Pig Iron Theater's](#) Advanced Performance Training to learn theater-based techniques of collaborative writing. She is using that training to create Virtual Reality narratives, including one currently with [Wolf Cinema](#) in Berlin and another developed by Kaleidoscope VR, [DevLab](#) and The Sundance Institute.

Ashley Connor (Cinematographer):

Ashley Connor is a New York based director of photography. Her work on Josephine Decker's BUTTER ON THE LATCH and THOU WAST MILD AND LOVELY, which both premiered at the 2014 Berlin Film Festival, prompted New Yorker critic to name her, alongside Darius Khonji and Fabrice Aragno, as one of the year's best cinematographers. Her breadth of style can be seen in work as diverse as Dustin Guy Defa's PERSON TO PERSON (Sundance '17) and Adam Leon's TRAMPS (TIFF '16), as well as in popular music videos for artists including Jenny Lewis, Angel Olsen and Mykki Blanco. Most recently Connor lensed Desiree Akhavan's second feature THE MISEDUCATION OF CAMERON POST starring Chloe Moretz.

Michael Melamedoff (Producer):

Michael Melamedoff is a partner in Brooklyn-based production company Cowboy Bear Ninja, where he heads up television development and sales, as well as producing, directing, and writing original content. In the past year, Mr. Melamedoff has co-created and executive produced pilots and original series for networks including

A&E, CNN, MTV, SuperDeluxe, TruTV and Viceland. Mr. Melamedoff is also an accomplished filmmaker with multiple feature credits as a writer, director, and producer including acclaimed midnight movie, THE EXHIBITIONISTS, starring Laverne Cox. He most recently produced and co-stars in FLAMES, an experimental love story starring and co-directed by renowned performance artists and filmmakers Josephine Decker and Zefrey Throwell. He is also currently directing the comic documentary THE PROBLEM WITH APU, starring comedian Hari Kondabolu, for TruTV.

CREDITS

DIRECTED BY	Zefrey Throwell
CO-DIRECTED FOR A LOOOONG TIME BY	Josephine Decker
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Ashley Connor
PRODUCER	Michael Melamedoff
EDITOR	Zefrey Throwell
ADDITIONAL EDITORS	Matthew Levy Josephine Decker Nathan Floody
MUSIC	Zefrey Throwell
LOCATION SOUND	Roxanne Unger M. Parker Kozak Allison Jackson John Rau Jomar Statkun
SOUND EDITOR	Klas Wikberg
SOUND MIXER	Roland Vajs Ryan Price
COLORIST	Jenny Montgomery
CAMERA	Jomar Statkun Adam Reign Steven Probert Joseph Bearese

Asa Gauen
Zefrey Throwell
Josephine Decker
Drea Bernardi
Dominika Michalowska
Nadja Marcin
Etienne Truchot
Cassandra Troyan

STARRING

Josephine Decker
Zefrey Throwell
Hollis Wotherspoon as Liz
Nora Ash
Nadja Frank
Jomar Statkun
AJ Aramian
Parker Leventer
Matthew Levy
Sophie Traub
Kaedon Gray
Courtney Finn
Daniel Kunitz
Seth Rothschild
Grayson Cox
Eric Clinton Anderson
Genevieve White

Chandra Bocci
Lia Woertendyke
Jonathon Fairhead
Birgit Larson
Sara Raggini
Cassandra Troyan
Charlotte Hornsby
Chloe Bass
Joe Swanberg
Jeremy Bold
Stephanie Sellars
Jacqueline Autrey
Drea Bernardi
Jason Eppink
Quinn Bauriedel
Evan Leed
Sarah Chipps

**JOSEPHINE'S
PERFORMANCES**

**COSTUMES &
PRODUCTION DESIGN**

Abby Walsh

Artemis Shaw
Anna Oliver
Danielle Brustman
CJ Dockery

THANK YOU

John Cage

Nathalie Scholten

Danelle Eliav

Oliver Huzly

Dirk Skreber

Klemens Gasser

Art in General

Jon Rider

Mary Lapidés

Rajendra Roy

Anna Morgan

Bowie Horowitz

Hal Horowitz

Grayson Cox

Luis Illades

Milo Jasper Frank Statkun

The Decker Family

Dan Schoenbrun

Lauren Wolkstein

Audrey Evans

Daniela Schult

Alice Rohrwacher

Elizabeth Rao

Cara Cusumano

SPECIAL THANK YOU

The Cast of Movie No. 1

Tara Deporte

Human Impacts Institute

Pig Iron Theater Company

Loren Halman

Dana Eskelson

Ages and Ages

Tim Perry

Janet Elliott

Sarah Chipps