BLOWING UP

You have one new message.

An absurdist tragicomedy

Written & directed by
A.J. Fitzgerald

18:40 festival cut
20:00 director’s cut



She’s Grieving. She’s Hollow.

She's inflated! And on her birthday, everything finally bursts...



Janine is thirty and feeling nothing but grief. Her best friend plans a lowkey birthday, her boss gives the worst advice imaginable, and dinner goes sideways. Across one long, terrible day, a single message threatens to pop her carefully air-tight autopilot routine. ***Oh yeah! And she's an inflatable doll!*** An absurdist tragicomedy about grief, anhedonia, and that feeling you get when you can't feel anything at all.

The Wrestling Match That Inspired the Story

Kenny Omega vs. Yoshihiko · DDT Pro-Wrestling







One inflatable opponent. *Total commitment.*

Kenny made the absurd feel real by selling every move. That became the starting point for Janine: everyone around her treats the doll as a person, without breaking the reality of the scene.

Creative reference: DDT Dramatic Fantasia #275. Stills from the original match.

What the Doll Makes Visible

A visual language for anhedonia, disability, projection, and release



THE CONCEIT



THE CATHARSIS

THE CENTRAL TURN

Janine's inflatable body gives physical form to an invisible disabled experience: a person fully present, yet treated as vacant because her pain cannot be read in familiar ways. The absurd image is funny until the film makes us recognize the human being trapped inside it.

ANHEDONIA MADE PHYSICAL

Air takes the place of affect. Janine looks full while feeling hollow, turning the invisible distance between emotion and expression into something immediate. Her numbness is not an absence of inner life; it is the shape her pain has taken.

A BODY OTHERS CAN USE

Because she seems passive, everyone projects onto her. They move her, speak for her, advise her, unload on her, and mistake limited capacity for consent. The doll exposes the line where care becomes control and a disabled person becomes public property.

FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT

We begin by staring at a doll. At the emotional peak, Janine appears as a real person and stares directly back. The visual gag collapses, the gaze reverses, and catharsis arrives as recognition: she was never empty. We simply failed to see her.

The Cast



Maria Todero

Janine



Tenaya Cleveland

The Boss / Ms. Dolly Moore



Don-Dimitri Joseph

Scott



Danielle Rodd

Miranda



Melanie Miranda

Server



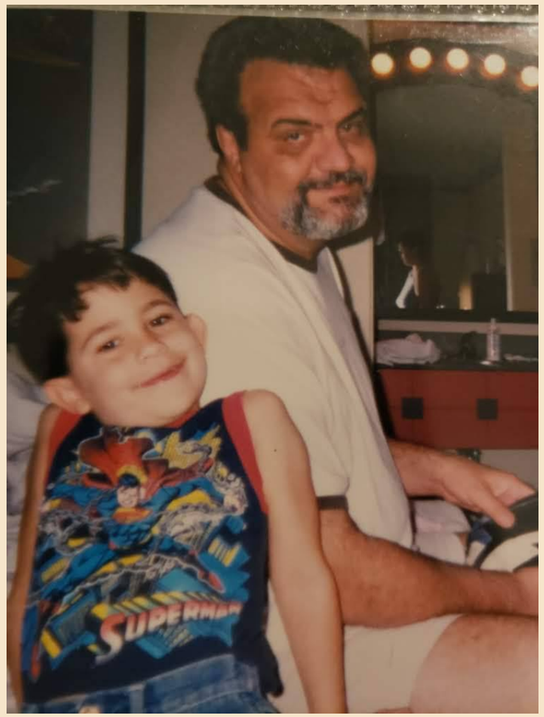
(Also Janine)



Aleesha Flow

Smart Speaker (voice)

For Dad.



Dad & me



Michael “The Bear” Fitzgerald

Before this was a film about grief,
it was a way to face losing my dad.

Blowing Up began as an absurd idea. When my dad became ill, it became personal. I poured what I was feeling into Janine: the numbness, the anger, and the need to feel something again.

His voice is part of this film. So is my love for him.

In Loving Memory of Michael Patrick “The Bear” Fitzgerald

A legendary voice of radio that filled rooms and hearts alike, Michael “The Bear” Fitzgerald spent over four decades bringing stories, laughter, and warmth to the airwaves. From Florida to West Virginia, his booming voice and generous spirit connected communities and inspired countless. This film honors his legacy: a celebration of empathy, storytelling, and the enduring power of a voice that never truly fades.

On the Festival Circuit

PREMIERE & SCREENINGS

Vero Beach Film Festival

World premiere · A hometown celebration

On Florida’s Treasure Coast, where A.J. Fitzgerald grew up in Fort Pierce.

Atlanta Films & Friends Showcase

Screened · Atlanta, Georgia

FLIFFShorts

Official selection · Savoir-faire Shorts

TREASURE COAST INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Official selection

Award Winner

Best Short Film

Best Short Film Director

WINNER - Best Short Film Screenplay

Florida Film Gem Award

Brenda Cooper Social Awareness Award

First-Time Filmmaker Award

A Little Absurd. A Lot to Feel.

“a stroke of genius”

“Todero is a consummate force of nature through this performance.”

OneFilmFan · 5/5

“presenting Janine as a blow-up doll was brilliant”

Film Threat · 8/10

“makes the weight of grief both absurd and heartrending”

Take 2 Indie Review · 5/5

“Each character was unique and felt like someone real.”

Incluvie · Movie score: 4/5

More reviews: IndyRed UK Film Review

Reviews of an earlier cut. Publication names link to full articles.

The Crew / Creative & Production

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY

A.J. Fitzgerald

PRODUCERS

Don-Dimitri Joseph, Tequisha “TQ” Hendrickson, Lovely Jones

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Danielle Zito, Don-Dimitri Joseph, Lovely Jones, Tequisha Hendrickson

CASTING DIRECTORS

Aleesha Flow, A.J. Fitzgerald, Don-Dimitri Joseph

DIRECTOR’S CONSULTANT

Rohan Cornwall

1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Tequisha Hendrickson

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Christopher Cerda

PRODUCTION DESIGNER / SET DECORATOR

Anaya Martin

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

Amani Jackson

STORYBOARD ARTIST

Via Roz

MAKEUP ARTIST

Stephanie Marshall

HAIR STYLIST

Dinesha Haynes

WARDROBE

Faith Johnson

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

Connor Gaffney, Rich Lewis, Jaysonna “Jay” Thomas

CATERING BY

Sarah Joseph

The Crew / Camera, Sound & Post

CAMERA OPERATOR

Luigi Comba

1ST ASSISTANT CAMERA

Julianna Diaz, Lucas Riahi

DIGITAL IMAGING TECHNICIAN

Jephry Milloy

GAFFER

Sidney Travis

KEY GRIP

A. King Solomon II

GRIPS

Jack Carson, Connor Gaffney, Parker Bridges

EDITOR

Adrian Profumo Pedrazas

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Michael Hall

COLORIST

Adrian Profumo Pedrazas / FX

POST PRODUCTION ART

Adrian Profumo Pedrazas, Samuel Lopez De Victoria III

POST SOUND SUPERVISOR, FOLEY ARTIST, RE-RECORDING MIXER & COMPOSER

Julien Monette

SOUND RECORDISTS

Henry Godwin, David Knight

ORIGINAL SONG

“March On, Little Dictator!” by Yoro Yoyo

FITZ OF RAGE FILM





Poster Design · Adrian Profumo Pedrazas

BLOWING UP

FITZ OF RAGE FILM

Screenings & Inquiries

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Confirmed for Crafty Short Films in 2027
Online premiere expected late February–early March
Exact release date to be announced