

A FILM BY TAYLOR D. MASON

grist



a film by TAYLOR DOMINIQUE MASON starring ANEISA HICKS, BRIANNA BUCKLEY, & ANGEL PAIGE SMIGIELSKI edited by RICARDO BOUYETT & TAYLOR DOMINIQUE MASON production design by CAITLIN MCCARTHY director of photography MELISSA PRATT written & directed by TAYLOR DOMINIQUE MASON



GRIST

CONTACT

Taylor D. Mason

Director/Producer/Writer

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TECHNICAL INFO

2023

Running Time: 17:24

Aspect Ratio: 2:39:1

Shooting Format: 4K UHD

Color, English



THE STORY

LOGLINE

A genderqueer musician finds home in an underground community of healers in the aftermath of assault.

SYNOPSIS

A wildly successful musician, Ryan seems to have it all. But when the cousin who harmed them years ago returns to the city for the holidays, Ryan spirals into a dangerous bout of depression. After months, their best friend Mel convinces them to seek support from The Tulsi House — a collective of queer, trans, and non-binary Black healers. When Ryan opens up about their assault to Jian, the house leader, Jian pulls Ryan through a healing journey that allows them to communicate with their younger self. Ryan wakes up from their session, Jian provides them a powerful stone charged to protect them from their cousin, but that yields powerful, and dangerous results if used incorrectly. Ryan is finally ready to move forward, but when confronted by their cousin for the first time in years, they must decide what justice and healing truly mean to them.



TEAM



TAYLOR D. MASON

Writer, Director, Producer, Editor

Taylor (they/them) is a writer, filmmaker, and healing arts practitioner based in Chicago. A graduate of Columbia College Chicago, Taylor's first film 'Sante' premiered at the 28th Annual Black Harvest Film Festival in 2022, and was recognized by The Caucus Foundation and the Albert P. Weisman Award at Columbia College Chicago. Taylor is driven to tell stories that center femmes and families of color, and the ways in which marginalized communities strive for bodily autonomy and intergenerational healing through nature, ritual, and ancestral connection.



MELISSA PRATT

Cinematographer

With one foot in the narrative world and one foot in the documentary world, **Melissa (she/her)** is a versatile Director of Photography. She graduated from DePaul University with concentrations in Cinematography and a minor in Documentary Production. She has shot numerous short films, music videos and documentaries as well as a feature film and two documentary series. When not shooting, Melissa works as a Local 600 Union 2nd Assistant Camera on shows such as Paper Girls, The Big Leap, Chicago Med and The Chi.



CAST



ANEISA HICKS

Ryan

Aneisa (she/her) is a Chicago-based, New Jersey born actress known for *The Exorcist* (2016), *Chicago Med* (2015) and *Empire* (2015). Some of her credits from theater include: *Her Portmanteau* (A.C.T), *Graveyard Shift* (Goodman Theatre), *Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (Eclipse Theatre), *Nowhere* (Lifeline Theatre), *Anna Karenina* (Lifeline Theatre), *End of TV* (Manual Cinema), *The House that will not Stand* (Victory Gardens Theatre). She is represented by DDO talent and is a member of the Screen Actors Guild.



BRIANNA BUCKLEY

Jian

Brianna (she/they) is a Chicago-based actress. Theater credits include *the ripple*, *the wave that carried me home* (Goodman Theatre) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater), among others. Brianna is also an educator and director, working with organizations like Lifeline Theatre, Silk Road Rising-EPIC. In 2018 she received the non-Equity Jeff Award for Best Supporting Actor and accolades in the Chicago Tribune for the "Hot New Faces of Chicago Theatre". She is represented by Gray Talent Group and is a member of the Screen Actors Guild.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

'Grist' is inspired by the resilience and creativity of Black, Brown, queer, and trans communities and the ways that they have historically taken healing and survival into their own hands in the midst of violence and the absence of institutional support. As our society grapples with rampant violence against women, femmes, and queer and trans people, 'Grist' leverages magical realism to re-imagine what it looks like for survivors to take matters of healing and safety in their own hands.

Filmed in my home in Chicago with the support of local artists and vendors, 'Grist' is my second film to date. Our cast and crew reflects the ethos of the project. The film's team is largely led by women, femme, and gender non-forming people of color, with 20 out of 28 of the cast and crew identifying as women and femmes across the gender spectrum. Sixty percent of our team members identify as femmes of color, and 44% openly identify as Black queer and trans people.



FILM FAQ

What lead you to choose to incorporate magical realism in the story?

I wanted to create a project that touched on themes of transformative justice — a means of accountability and safety for survivors that do not seek involvement from police or other state entities — while also centering the range of emotions and thought processes that some survivors experience, particularly when the person who harmed them is not open to being accountable. Doing all of this without being didactic felt like a tall order, but leveraging fantasy felt like a way to open up the story to more possibilities.

Magical realism is a huge inspiration for me in my work and my learning, and its roots in political transformation in Latin American and West African cultures; housing magic in the every day as a means of imagining what possibilities lie beyond our current reality.

What was your favorite part about making the film?

My favorite part was working with a team that was so dedicated to the story. On set, there was such a culture of camaraderie and care that folks had toward one another, and that was huge for me, particularly given the subject matter. We set community agreements and safety protocols on set, but there was also such a respect that people had for one another that brought much more ease.

What was your biggest challenge in making the film?

Definitely wearing multiple hats, particularly in the early stages of production. This is my second film, so I'm learning by doing.



FILM FAQ CONT'D

Why did you choose to film the healing scene?

This story originated from a photography project that I did in 2020, that captured Black femmes, friends of mine and the ways that they incorporate healing modalities and practices into their everyday life. I'm a yoga teacher, reiki practitioner, and facilitate restorative justice circles with young people, and I've always been interested in telling stories that explore topics that are important to me but that also center the characters' journeys toward healing themselves and healing with others. Some of my biggest film inspirations — *Eve's Bayou*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *The Tree of Life* — do such a beautiful job of creating images and stories that do this work, whether it's explicit or not.

The forest scene was an opportunity to explore merging some healing elements — particularly sound, meditation, and natural landscape — with media to create an immersive experience for audiences. Over time, I hope to deepen my incorporation spirituality and healing through fantasy, folk, and experimental narratives that center Black healing traditions.

What is your goal for the film?

I really hope that it encourages reflection and conversation, while also helping to increase the ways that we talk about sex and sexual safety with young people across the gender spectrum. Young people between the ages of 11 and 24 experience the highest rates of sexual violence and intimate partner violence, and these experiences can be so invisibilized and shrouded in shame. I'm looking forward to screenings of the film — at festivals and in community — to generate questions among young people and the adults in their lives, and to have conversations around survivor justice, accountability, and creating safety.



CREDITS

CAST

RYAN **ANEISA HICKS**

JIAN **BRIANNA BUCKLEY**

MEL **ANGEL PAIGE SMIGIELSKI**

MOODY **DAVIAN THOMAS**

JAZZ **SYDNEY MONET SWANSON**

YOUNG RYAN **NIA WRIGHT**

TREY **GILBERT DOMALLY**

MOM **CARLA UTER**

CREW

PRODUCTION DESIGNER **CAITLIN MCCARTHY**

EDITOR **RICARDO BOUYETT
& TAYLOR MASON**

COMPOSER **BRYAN EVANS**

FIRST ASST. DIRECTOR **HANNAH RUSSELL**

SECOND ASST. DIRECTOR **EESHA PATKAR**

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR **ADIA IVEY
& JAEDA MASON**



CREDITS

CREW, CONT'D

FIRST ASST. CAMERA	RICHARD COLMAN
FIRST ASST. CAMERA, FOREST	JEANNA MAE JAURIGUE
SECOND ASST. CAMERA	HEIDY CRUZ
SECOND ASST. CAMERA, FOREST	OLIVIA LUNA
GAFFER	MADDIE DODGE
KEY GRIP	HALEY FREUND
LOCATION SOUND MIXER	REYNALDO DUMAS
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR	JENNIFER MCMURTRY
PRODUCTION ASST.	ALLIE MORGAN
SET PHOTOGRAPHER	HENRI TRINH
COLOR BY	QUICKSILVER COLOR
COLORIST	C. RYAN STEMPLE, CSI
SOUND DESIGNER	BATSIRAYI ZESAGULI
MUSIC PROVIDED BY	SUPERCOOLWICKED & DMITRI
CAMERA EQUIP. PROVIDED BY	CAMERA AMBASSADOR CHICAGO
GRIP EQUIP. PROVIDED BY	ELEVEN04
PRODUCED WITH SUPPORT FROM	SHIFT CONSULTING CO.



MEDIA

full-size images available at gristfilm.com



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WEBSITE

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