



CANADA | 2025 | ENGLISH | 75 MINUTES | DIGITAL, COLOR, STEREO

## PRESS KIT

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pUNK FILMS PRESENTS

# crocodile eyes

what makes a moment real?

## INTRODUCTION: Director Statement by Ingrid Veninger

I don't think I've ever made anything as personal as this film. I shot over 18-months, and every single day I wanted to stop, but the film wouldn't let me. Many of my projects have been shaped and informed by real life circumstances, mixed with fictional elements, but this one is fully soaked in real-life, involving my real family. My interest lies in the mechanics and the mysteries of human intimacy, and my method draws inspiration from the pioneering spirit of many filmmakers.

The humanity of Agnes Varda

The humor and passion of John Cassavetes

The movement of Bob Fosse and Miranda July

The authenticity of home movies

The provocation of DOGME95

The experimentation of Jean-Luc Godard

The exploration of Marie Menkin and Jonas Mekas

"We need less perfect but more free films." Jonas Mekas

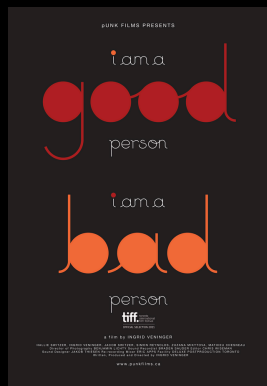
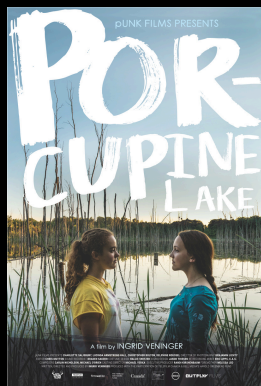


# In 2023, TIFF programmer, STEVE GRAVESTOCK curated a series, SEE THE NORTH. He included Ingrid Veninger's first feature, ONLY (co-directed with Simon Reynolds). This was the introduction.

To my mind, Ingrid Veninger is one of the finest poets exploring the period of adolescence and young adulthood, as well as family dynamics. All of her feature films address these issues most notably MODRA (a Canada's Top Ten selection) and PORCUPINE LAKE, but she touches on them tangentially in I AM A GOOD PERSON/I AM BAD PERSON and THE ANIMAL PROJECT. Like her other films, ONLY and THE BUNNY PROJECT boast moving, genuine and disarmingly direct performances. (Many of the films prominently feature her son Jacob Switzer and daughter Hallie Switzer in lead or pivotal roles.)

All of Ingrid's films have basically been micro-budget efforts. Indeed, it wouldn't be overstating the case to call her the godmother of the current Toronto micro-budget indie scene. Her DIY aesthetic and philosophy has impacted filmmakers like Kazik Radwanski, Yonah Lewis and Calvin Thomas, Igor Drljca, whose work has been screened around the world.

A few years ago, I was on a panel in Winnipeg hosted by the Film Group and I was asked which filmmaker I had been proudest of programming at TIFF. It was the same when I was asked to do this retro where I had to winnow down decades of programming into a handful of films. In both cases, the answer was immediate: Ingrid Veninger.



# SYNOPSIS

With this 8th feature film, Ingrid Veninger, presents a collection of raw, unfiltered vignettes that delve into the heart of human intimacy and weaves an intricate tapestry of a family spanning four generations. This profoundly personal and immersive work serves a dual purpose: it offers a contemplative journey through the rhythms of life, and simultaneously explores the process of making a film, guided by intuition.

**Content Note: There is real death and real birth in this film.**



## DETAILED SYNOPSIS

**crocodile eyes** is a poignant and unflinching portrait of a close-knit four-generation family as they navigate the death of their eldest father, Dedo, engaging us in an ultra-meta experience, which is both innocent and self-aware.

Captured in a series of chronologically unhinged vignettes, told through the impulsive lens of its maker, Ingrid Veninger, the film gradually unfolds a dual purpose: as a meditation on the cycles of life through death and birth - and as a deconstruction of the art and artifice of filmmaking.

In the opening scenes, we are introduced to the family's youngest member, four-year-old Freya (played by Laska Sauder, Veninger's grand-daughter). As she freestyles a song in the car, cares for a plastic rabbit, and builds a sandcastle at the beach, Freya confides to us her fear of being "alone", a resonant reminder of the pandemic years of (almost) her entire life. What she really wants, however, is to be a "mom" and "have babies", perhaps intuiting her place in the cycle of things, of birth, life and death, beginnings, and endings.

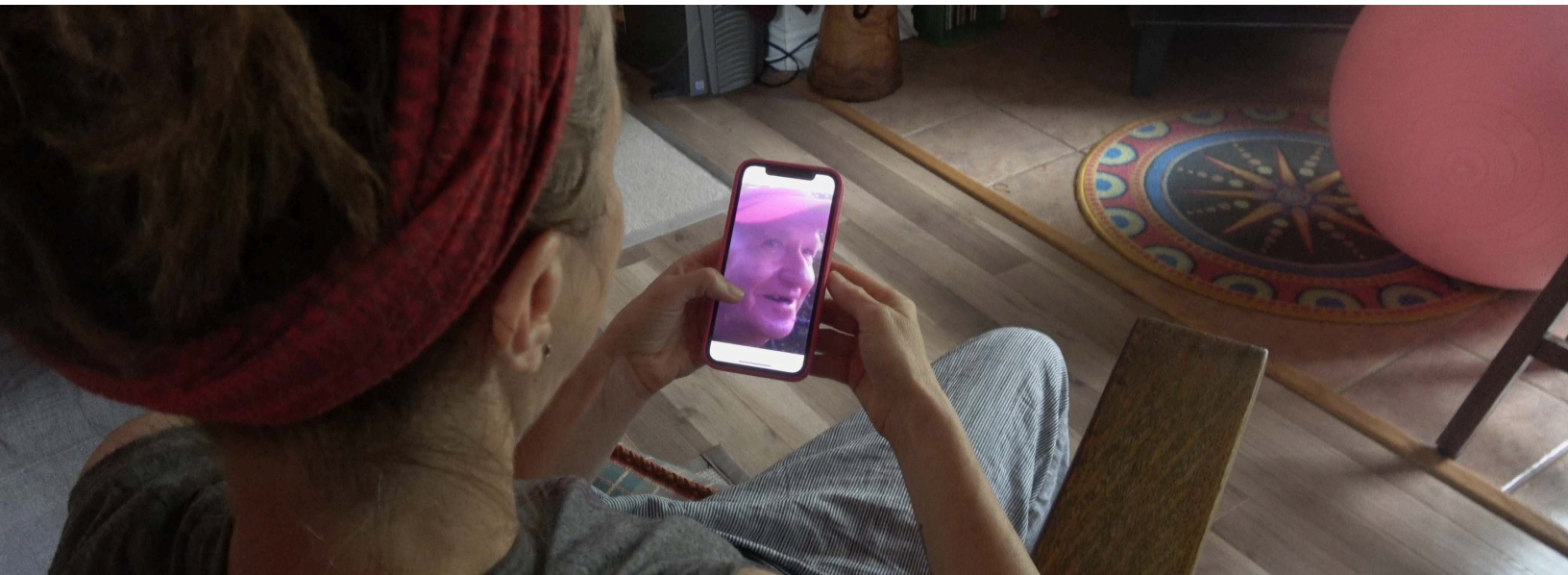
The fresh-eyed clarity of Freya's mind is soon contrasted with the struggles of adulthood, as Sara (Hallie Switzer, Veninger's real-life daughter) expresses the intensity of motherhood, "I haven't done something without feeling pulled in... Four years", and Freya's Uncle Jake (Jacob Switzer, Veninger's real-life son) is unenthusiastic about watching his own birth. Ever deadpan, Jake describes his newborn self as a "little fucking bloody nugget." But even Jake's cynical exterior is ultimately chinked with the emotion of raw experience. In his own words, "It's pretty crazy to see your own birth."

Veninger visits a palm reader and asks "what part of my father is in me?" and how she can balance teaching, filmmaking, and helping her daughter? The palm reader says "you're overthinking everything, focusing on making a movie, focusing on writing a movie, focusing on helping your daughter...pick one thing...you're all over the place." Veninger responds, "But isn't that kind of a life?"



At the mid-point, a dead mink lies in the middle of a road, day-old blood blooming around its corpse like a halo. Veninger struggles with the dubious task of lifting it, raising the question: How do we deal with the dead? Very carefully, as it turns out, especially if we don't want to touch it. And we better throw our whole body into it, for death isn't something easily lifted. And even if we succeed, where then do we put death?

Back at the beach, we witness how Freya is convinced that "crocodiles" are lurking beneath the water. The sequence is a potent revelation of the relativity of perception, belief, and the power of imagination, and a reminder that this subject is nowhere more appropriately examined than under the magnifying lens of a camera.



Then, we are thrust into the heart of the film, the sickness and death of Veninger's father, Dedo (Frank Veninger), the eldest member of this four-generation family. (Note: These scenes may be difficult to watch). As Dedo lies semi-conscious, his pillow lovingly wreathed in cedar and pine, we witness human dying and death in its starkest poignancies, punctuated with rattled breaths. Finally, an unflinching moment of a last gasp and the death mask itself, a visage filled with more meaning than a thousand words could evoke.

While the impact of Dedo's death touches every member of the family; no one is more poignantly affected than his wife, Baba (Helen Veninger). After 60 years together, her grief spills out like an open wound, and we're left with the nagging suspicion that there'll be no easy way out. How do we lift the dead, and where do we put them?

From the ashes of death, we find ourselves in the throes of Sara giving birth to her second child. While Veninger teaches a screenwriting class over Zoom, her daughter labors in the next room. And, while labor is happening, Veninger pulls our attention once again to her adult son, Jake, and his egg sandwich. It seems we're now talking about gripping moments, instead of being inside of one.

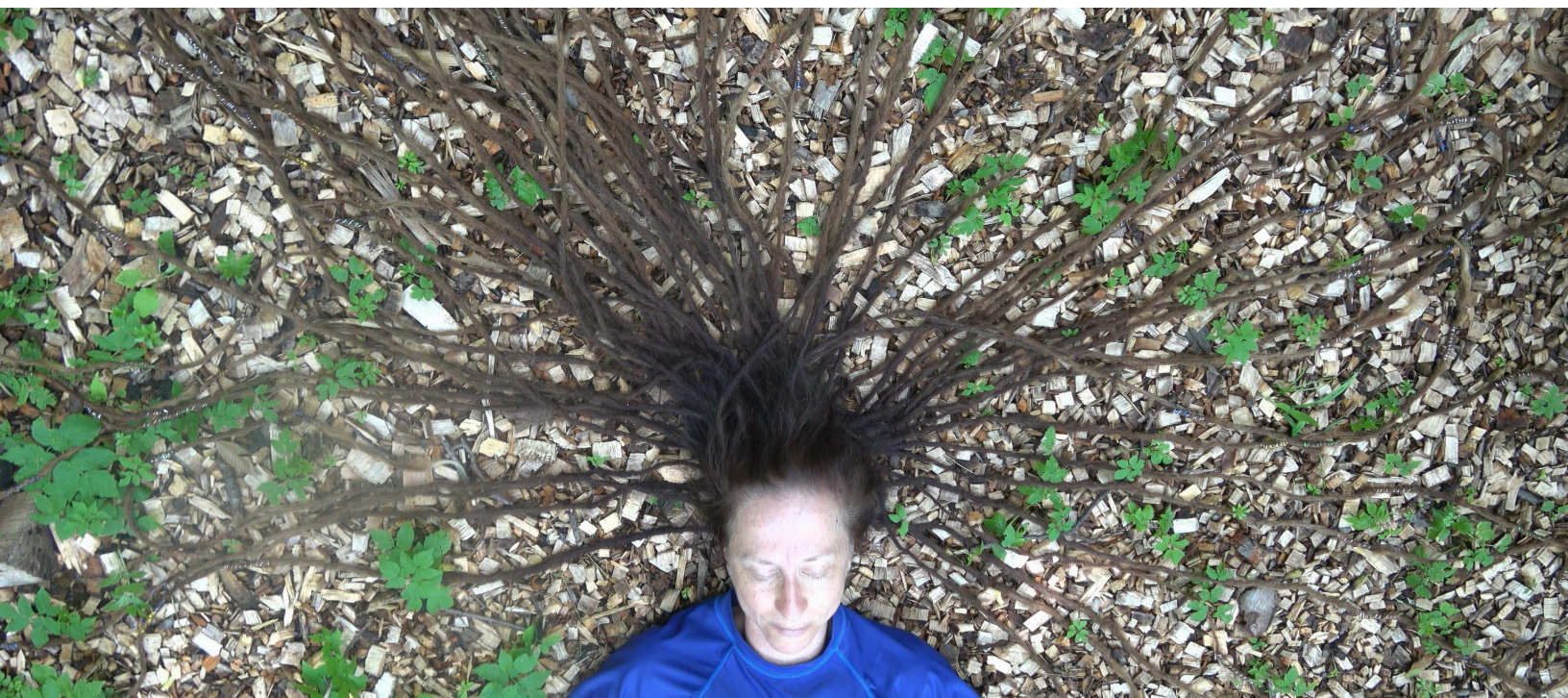
The cracked egg sizzles in a pan like a birth already dying and our awareness is steered to an army of ants devouring a snail. What are gripping moments? We are watching cycles of life and death feeding on each other - and Jake reflects, "People may only get a couple of those big moments in their entire lifetime". Indeed, most of life may be all the messy, mundane stuff in between the slices we call birth and death. And this film is full of messy, mundane stuff. Then, as the contractions intensify, Veninger moves to her daughter's side - in a single hand-held shot - just in time to capture the birth of her grandson, Charlie. With new birth and new life, death's finalities are dissolved and renewed. The ultimate termination is re-framed as a station along a circle, rather than the end of a line.

In prologue to conclusion, we make one final stop to birth and burial, as Freya prepares to bury her own placenta along with her brother's. Unbeknownst to her, it's been replaced with frozen beets. Freya's belief is what's important here. "It's a big red dot". Yes, and it will be buried to grow a sunflower for Freya, and a cedar tree for her new little brother, Charlie.

In the final resolution, the story shifts its gaze to Veninger's mother, and new beginnings... We follow Veninger, Baba, and Jake - as they embark on a road trip to a retreat in upstate New York, and lastly to Niagara Falls, to lay Dedo's ashes.

And as we are ushered into the film's ultra-meta moment, we witness the "players" watching the finished film for the first time. As we watch them, watch themselves, we feel the weight of this meta deepening, its subtle labyrinth evolving beyond the screen. And Dedo, the founder of these lives and fulcrum of this film - he's watching, too. He watches from a hallway filled with his prodigious collection of posters featuring cinema, art, theatre, dance, music... just as the artistic treasure of his legacy echoes through the frames of this film.

Finally, it's little Freya - the new future - who owns the final image, casting all our big ideas about life and birth and death aside, in the simple joy of a runaway beach ball.



## BIOGRAPHIES



### INGRID VENINGER

Director/Producer/Player

Born in Bratislava, raised in Canada. This is Ingrid's 8th feature film as director (15th as producer). A participant in the inaugural TIFF Studio, Berlinale Talents, and Rotterdam Producer's Lab, Ingrid has been a mentor at the Canadian Film Centre and Screenwriter-in-Residence at the University of Toronto. Currently, she is a tenured Associate Professor at York University, in the department of Cinema and Media Arts. Passions include: travelling, vegan feasts, and dancing.



### HALLIE SWITZER – SARA

Born in Toronto, Hallie has played lead roles in many pUNK Films projects, MODRA (TIFF 2010, Canada's Top Ten), i am a good person/i am a bad person (TIFF 2011), Porcupine Lake (TIFF, 2017), WISH (CFF, 2021). Hallie supports families as an early childhood educator and postpartum doula. Passions include: writing and roller skating.



### LASKA SWITZER SAUDER – FREYA

This is not Laska's first pUNK Film. On her 1st birthday, she starred in WISH (CFF Premiere, 2021). Passions include: school, drawing, dancing, and dragons.





## JACOB SWITZER – JAKE

Born in Toronto, Jacob has played lead roles in previous pUNK Films projects including, ONLY (TIFF 2008), THE ANIMAL PROJECT (TIFF 2013), IF YOU WERE ME (Whistler FF, 2022). As a musician, Jacob performs as JAY FEELBENDER. Through collaborations with GOODBYE HONOLULU and CREEP CREEP BEACH, Jacob has shared the stage with global acts – Spanish indie-rockers, HINDS, Canadian pop-rock stars THE BEACHES. His new album is set to release in 2025 with Victory Pool Music. Passions include: recording, touring, and cinema.



## SIMON REYNOLDS – DOUG

Simon reprises his role as Doug from the pUNK Films project, i am a good person/i am a bad person. Simon and Ingrid first met on the set of Friday the 13 (the series) and have been friends ever since. Currently, Simon divides his time between Canada and India. He is a filmmaker and adventurer.



## BABA and DEDO aka HELEN and FRANK VENINGER

Helen and Frank have been involved (behind-the-scenes) on every pUNK Films project ever made (sets, props, costumes, craft service), this is the first time they appear on-camera. Dedo passed away on January 23, 2023. He loved movies.



## **JOHN SWITZER - CO-CAMERA**

John was volunteered to shoot this film with Ingrid by virtue of them living together (35 years and counting). John is a musician and teaches music production at Seneca Polytechnic. He loves to cook, which is brilliant, because Ingrid doesn't.



## **MIKE LOBEL – CO-EDITOR**

Mike has worked in many facets of the film and TV industry. He responded to an online post from Ingrid in May 2023 – seeking an editor for a “new experimental project”. They discovered they shared a scene (as actors) on *DEGRASSI: THE NEXT GENERATION*. In addition to editing, Mike is a musician and composer. Current passions include: folklore and meditation.



# CREDIT & KEY CREW

## PLAYERS

Ingrid Veninger  
Hallie Switzer (SARA)  
Simon Reynolds (DOUG)  
Jacob Switzer (JAKE)  
Frank Veninger (DEDO)  
Helen Veninger (BABA)  
Leon Switzer Sauder (CHARLIE)  
&  
Laska Switzer Sauder (FREYA)

## DIRECTOR/POST-WRITER/PRODUCER

Ingrid Veninger

## MAIN CAMERA

Ingrid Veninger  
John Switzer

## EDITOR

Mike Lobel  
Ingrid Veninger

## ADDITIONAL CAMERA

Jacob Switzer & Hallie Switzer  
Laska Switzer Sauder & Helen Veninger  
Jane Siberry & Braden Sauder  
Simon Reynolds & Mike Lobel

## SHOT ON LOCATION

Toronto, Canada  
Big Bay Point  
Manitoulin Island  
Psychic Clinic  
Burdock Brewery  
Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema  
Tanglewood Forest  
Niagara Falls  
Kripalu Center  
York University Motion Media Studio

## MUSIC

MODRA RUZA  
Written by Gejza Dusik  
Performed by Gejza Dusik  
DEDINKA V UDOLI  
Written by Gejza Dusik  
Performed by Gejza Dusik  
BIG LEAGUE CHEW  
Written by Jacob Switzer  
Performed live by Jay Feelbender  
MAKE YOU MINE  
Written by Goodbye Honolulu  
Performed live by Jay Feelbender  
NIAGARA FALLS IMPROVISATION  
Performed live by Braden Sauder

