



PRETEND NOT TO SEE ME

the art of **Colette Urban** • a film by **Katherine Knight**

director **Katherine Knight** produced by **Site Media Inc.**

cinematographer **Marcia Connolly** editor **Anthony Seck** original score **Sam Shalabi**

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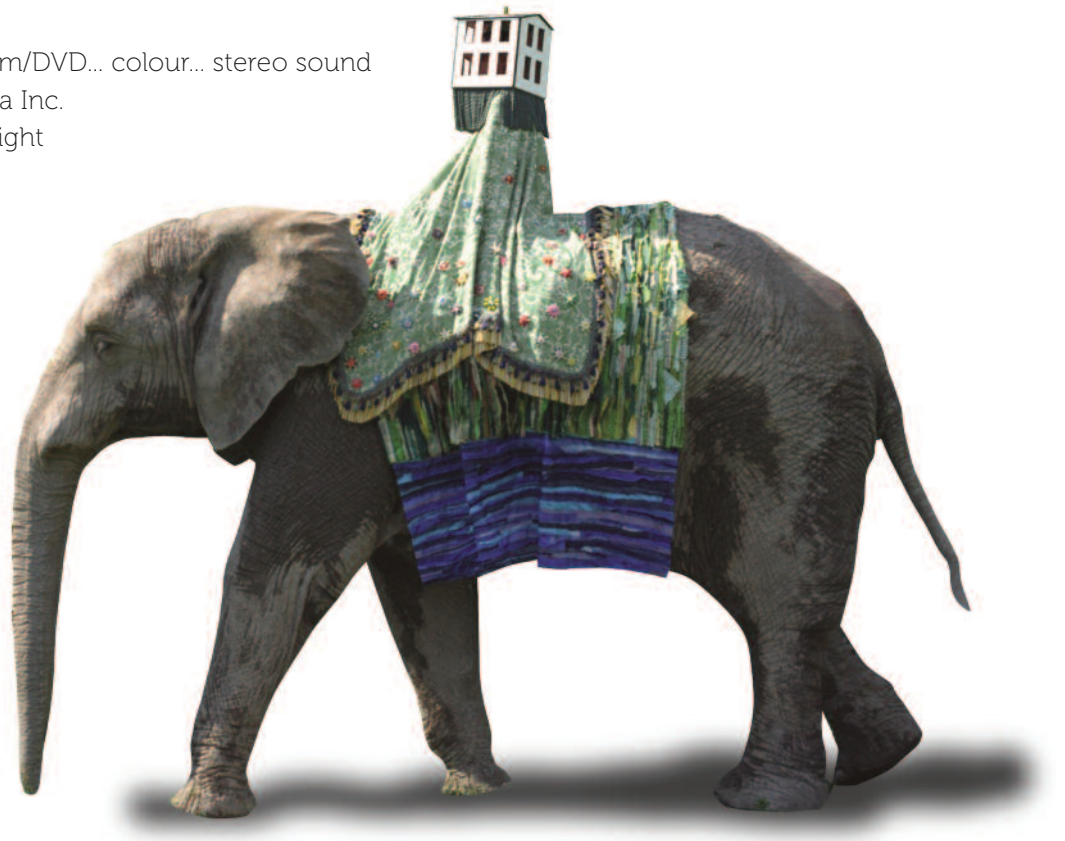
Pretend Not To See Me: The Art of Colette Urban

2009

48:40 minutes... HDCam/DVD... colour... stereo sound

Produced by Site Media Inc.

A film by Katherine Knight



Life and art intersect on a remote Newfoundland farm, when visual artist Colette Urban stages thirteen performance artworks in her fields and barns.

Synopsis

Newfoundland's spectacular, coastal landscape and an isolated farm become the living gallery for thirteen avant-garde performances by renowned visual artist Colette Urban. In her barns and fields. Colette becomes a half-woman half-bear, dances a tango while strapped into bungee cords, wheels nonsensical record contraptions and turns herself into a parody of consumer goods.

I am timid in the real world. Performance and this idea of disguise are a real comfort to me. I'm not me. I'm someone else once I am in that role of the performer.

Resilient, determined, self aware and funny, Colette embraces the transformative power of art. She emerges as an empathetic, courageous and visionary character who has achieved artistic excellence through a focused and solitary journey.

This is a film about following a dream, having courage and believing in oneself. It's about embracing risk and sustaining courage through acts of the imagination. It's an astonishing representation of Colette Urban's enigmatic art performances set against the rugged beauty of rural Newfoundland

Expanded Synopsis

Pretend Not To See Me, documents thirteen art performances by Colette Urban, staged at her unique artist retreat in rural Newfoundland. The film is an astonishing representation of Urban's enigmatic art performances set against the rugged beauty of the Newfoundland. She emerges as an empathetic, courageous and visionary character who has achieved artistic excellence through a focused and solitary journey. This is a film about an artist carving out their own distinctive place in the world.

Pretend Not To See Me, is about following a dream, having courage and believing in oneself. It's about sustaining courage through acts of the imagination. This is a story about the lure of remote locations and the magic of Newfoundland. It's about longing for home and having the courage to invent your own sense of place. It's about embracing risk and taking action. It's a story about how a lifetime of artworks are reinterpreted and renewed in the landscape of western Newfoundland.

In this film, Colette Urban takes her art out of the gallery and into the natural environment of her Newfoundland property, an abandoned chicken farm. She restages thirteen pivotal performances and in the process rediscovers her art, her commitment and her passion. In the process she reminds all of us to believe in ourselves.

Colette shares her process of invention, of recycling everyday castoffs into surprising and original objects. She talks about needing an audience and how her work is incomplete without a public forum. She explores the paradox of living apart yet wanting to belong. Throughout the highs of creative achievement are visible alongside the lows. As the performances unfold, we come to understand that loneliness, struggle and doubt are part of the artistic journey.

This film is poetic, immersive and attempts to place the viewer within the artistic mindset. Throughout the musical score provides a strong narrative thread. Traditional Newfoundland songs are reinterpreted and act as a chorus for Colette's intimate bond with Newfoundland. Halifax singer songwriter, Tanya Davis's song *Art* makes an evocative statement about the price of artistic excellence. Sam Shalabi's contemporary score echoes Colette's humour, melancholy and inventiveness.

The film begins with an overview of visuals from Colette's art performances. We then see her life as a farmer, first bringing in the hay and later tending to her chickens. Visual passages in the film develop the poetic power of the Newfoundland landscape. Colette's actual performances are interspersed with these visuals of the landscape, interviews and archival footage.

In the surprising performance titled *Recalling Belvedere*, Colette personifies her house and draws attention to its glorious vista out to the ocean. Blinkered by a replica house headress and blanketed by a richly beaded landscape-like green and blue cape, Colette rides an elephant slowly across a backdrop of trees and sky. The performance metaphorically describes how Newfoundland, *The Rock*, is an exotic place, full of the potential for personal transformation and self-knowledge. Through performance, Colette reminds us that life doesn't stand still and only through will and effort do dreams become fact.

In *Bare*, Colette enters a dark thicket of alder trees costumed as a half-woman, half-bear. This is a cycle of transition. Upright, watchful and cautious, a bear enters the thicket, retreats and disappears into the woods. Moments later, a woman emerges wielding a thick silver birch divining tool thrust weapon-like ahead. The tool separates the alders. The woman follows the path from darkness to open territory, emerging victorious in the light.

Pretend Not To See Me invites audiences into the magical world of the imagination. It's a crash course in performance art for everyone who loves landscape and ideas of the heart and mind.

Creative Team



Katherine Knight Director and Producer

Artist and filmmaker Katherine Knight teaches photography at York University. She is the founder on Site Media Inc, a Toronto film company producing portraits of creative artists in extraordinary places. Knight's photographs are held in many private and public collections, including: the CMCP (Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography); Museum London; and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. In 2000, she was awarded the prestigious Duke and Duchess of York Prize in Photography in recognition of excellence in her work. Knight's films include: *Almost a Photograph* (2009); *Pretend Not To See Me* (2009); and *Marguerite* (2003). In 2006, Knight produced *Annie Pootoogook*, a television half-hour for Bravo and APTN.

David Craig Producer

David Craig entered the Canadian film and television industry working on the feature film *Life Classes* (1986). He was Film, Photography and Video Officer for the Ontario Arts Council from 1988 to 1996. Prior to joining Site Media Inc. in 2008, Craig worked as an analyst with Telefilm Canada.

Marcia Connolly Cinematographer

Cinematographer Marcia Connolly strives to create a sense of intimacy between her documentary subjects and the audience. She is also an accomplished director who has contributed over 50 segments for programs at the CBC. These programs have received multiple Gemini's, an International Emmy, and the Japan Prize. Her recent portrait of Inuit artist Annie Pootoogook continues to play nationally and internally including an upcoming installation at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institute in New York City.

Anthony Seck Editor

Anthony Seck is a musician, producer, director, director of photography and editor. He is the co-founder of the group Shalabi Effect (Alien8Recordings) which has released four albums and tours extensively. He has produced numerous music and narrative videos for artists such as Feist, Basia Bulat, Broken Social Scene, The Be Good Tanyas, Tom Noonan and Ewan McGregor. He directed and produced the independent narrative short film *Mercy Seed*, starring Tom Noonan (*Manhunter*), and Deirdre Smith.

Sam Shalabi Composer

Sam Shalabi is a longtime fixture on the Montreal free improv and experimental post-rock scenes, both as a solo artist and as the leader of the Shalabi Effect. Shalabi's middle eastern heritage is a major part of his work. In 1996, he and guitarist Anthony Seck formed the free improv duo the Shalabi Effect, which grew into a quartet in 2008 with the addition of bassist Alexandre St. Onge and percussionist Will Eizlini. Shalabi's solo recordings include: *Luteness* (2000); *On Hashish* (2001); *Osama* (2003); and *Eid* (2007.) Along with his solo career and the Shalabi Effect, Sam Shalabi is a member of several other Montreal based bands, from the avant-garde Po and 'Gypt Gore to the more accessible post-rock of Detention and the Godspeed You! Black Emperor spinoff Molasses.

Colette Urban Biography

Performance artist Colette Urban uses her own body as an almost kinetic sculpture to explore themes of identity and social convention. Born in Denver, Colorado, she immigrated to Canada in 1973 where Urban studied and established her career. She began spending summers in Newfoundland in 1993. In 2007, she moved full time to Newfoundland in 2007 and established the Full Tilt Creative Centre in an abandoned chicken farm.

Colette Urban has performed her works across Canada, in galleries such as: the Vancouver Art Gallery; Art Gallery of Windsor; Blackwood Gallery; Presentation House; Mackenzie Art Gallery; Mendel Art Gallery; The Banff Centre; and Eastern Edge. She has performed and exhibited at: Duende, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; Norwich School of Art and Design, Norwich, England; and Sala Uno, Rome, Italy. Urban's work has been featured in numerous catalogues and in art journals including *Fuse*, *Art in America*, *Vie des arts*, and *Backflash*.



Credits

Director

Katherine Knight

Producer

David Craig

Katherine Knight

Performer

Colette Urban

Cinematographer

Marcia Connolly

Additional Camera

Katherine Knight

Almerinda Travassos

Editor

Anthony Seck

Additional Editing

Roz Power

Jared Raab

Original Music

Sam Shalabi

Musicians

Xarah Dion

Sam Shalabi

Jason Sharp

Molly Sweeny

Josh Zubot

Recorded by

Radwan Ghazi Moumneh at HOTEL 2 TANGO

Graphic Designer

Barr Gilmore

Sound Edit

Alan Geldart

Sound Mix

Kitchen Sync

Post Supervisor

Roz Power

Online

Steve Cook, NIFCO

Props Manager

Baxter Brake

Transcription

Highscribe

Young Girls

Lucy Allen

Hannah Blanchard

Male Voice

Steven Hennigar



Music

Art, written and performed by **Tanya Davis** in 2006

Upside Down Story (traditional) performed and recorded by **Stephanie Stella Payne** and **Daniel Obediah Payne** in 2008. Original version recorded 1950, Port au Port, Newfoundland. MUNFLA 78-054

Ten Commandments (traditional) performed and recorded by **Stephanie Stella Payne** and **Daniel Obediah Payne** in 2008

Hard, Hard Times (traditional) performed and recorded by **Stephanie Stella Payne** and **Daniel Obediah Payne** in 2008

Ode to Newfoundland, written by **Sir Cavendish Boyle**, composed by **Hubert Parry** in 1902, performed and recorded by **Stephanie Stella Payne** and **Daniel Obediah Payne** in 2008

Blue Sunshine, written and performed by **Shalabi Effect** in 2004

Kinder Surprise, written and performed by **Shalabi Effect** in 2004

Orchestrina Songs, written and performed by **John Gzowski** in 2004

Tropical Thunder, written and performed by **John Gzowski** in 2004

Film/Video

Trash Stash Store, archival super 8 by **Pamela Johnston** and **Colette Urban**

Orchestrina archival video by **David Craig**

Recalling Belvedere, archival video by **Sonya Schönberger**

Photos/Props

Performance photographs by **Elisabeth Feryn**

Newfoundland Resettlement Photographs (PF-317.483, PF.317-482, PF-317.037) courtesy of the Maritime History Archives at Memorial University, St. John's and the United Church Archives, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference

Joey Smallwood's Ceremonial Scissors courtesy of Dave LeDrew at The Newfoundland Emporium, Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

Thank You...

Finn Allen, Lucy Allen, Art Gallery of Windsor, Robert Bean, Hannah Blanchard, Warren Blanchard, Boyd Bonitzke, Loretta Brake, Baxter Brake, Allison Cameron, Centre for Art Tapes, Wendy Coburn, Marcia Connolly, Tony Delaney, Caitlin Fisher, Full Tilt Creative Centre, Patricia Fulton, Steven Hennigar, Phillip Hoffman, Michael Gibbons, Monte Greensheilds, Iceberg Man Tours, Mildred Jarvis, Maureen Judge, William Knight, Caroline Langill, Dave LeDrew, Roger Lilak, Barbara Lounder, Robyn Love, Annette Manguard, Herbert Marche, Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive, Meadows Guest House, Jones Miller, Carol Mitchell, Alberto Munarriz, Sol Nagler, Rose Noel, Ken Noel, Christopher Palmer, Garfield Parsons, Lukas Pearse, Ingrid Mary Percy, Gary Popovich, Dale Power, Roz Power, Andrew Roth, Wayne Rowe, Heidi Schaefer, Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery, Cheryl Sourkes, Cecil Stockley, Gail Tuttle, Dorothy Urban, Julie Urban, Bill Urban, Olive Whiffen, Leanne Whiffen, Darrel Varga, Minnie Vallis.

Special Thank You...

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Filmed on location at Full Tilt Creative Centre, McIvers, Newfoundland; at the Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery and in the communities of Meadows, McIvers, Twillingate, Newfoundland.

All performances © Colette Urban: *Hey!* (2008); *Bare* (2008); *Mega Moose* (2008); *Spellbound* (2006); *Sphincter Moment* (2002); *Recalling Belvedere* (2004); *Big Guy* (1999); *Pretend Not To See Me* (1996); *Augur* (1996); *Two Heads Are Better Than One* (1996); *Round Peg in a Square Hole* (1995); *Consumer Cyclone* (1993); *Orchestrina* (1989); *A Song to Sing, A Tale to Tell, A Point to Make* (1989); *I Feel Faint* (1985); and *Blindspot* (1987).

