

PROGRESSIVE TOUCH



OFFICIAL SELECTION
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM
2020



HONORABLE MENTION
BEST INTERNATIONAL SHORT
KORTFILMFESTIVALEN
GRIMSTAD
2020



SLAMDANCE
FILM FESTIVAL
2021

"HILARIOUS, SEXY AND JOYFUL"

The Guardian

"A BIZARRE "IMPROVED" VISION OF SEX...
INTENSELY FUNNY"

GARAGE Magazine | VICE

"SWERVING PENISES...UNCANNY
MOMENTS OF BEAUTY"

GLAMCULT

A FILM BY
MICHAEL PORTNOY



Can you fuck to an irregular beat?

PROGRESSIVE TOUCH depicts three futuristic, absurdist love scenes in which the goal is to "improve" sex by complicating its rhythm and choreography. Sex as dance as comedy. Enacted by three real life couples, the dancers' every explicit move is synchronized to the propulsive, unpredictable score which borrows elements from progressive rock, trap, and math metal.

FILM INFORMATION

Title: Progressive Touch
Countries of Production: Austria, Netherlands, USA
Duration: 12 min 49 sec

FESTIVAL SCREENINGS (to date)

Mecal Pro | 22° Festival Internacional de Cortometrajes y Animación de Barcelona 2021
Slamdance 2021
Fantastic Film Festival Australia 2021
Fantaspoa - International Fantastic Film Festival, Porto Alegre 2021
Florida Film Festival 2021
London Short Film Festival 2021
International Film Festival Rotterdam 2020, Ammodo Tiger Shorts Competition
Norwegian Short Film Festival 2020, Honorable Mention Best International Short
Pornfilmfestival Berlin 2020, Winner for Best International Short
Queer Lisboa - International Queer Film Festival 2020
Leiden Shorts Festival 2020
Luststreifen Film Festival Basel 2020
Lima Alterna Festival de Cine 2020
Oslo/Fusion International Film Festival 2020
Bucharest International Experimental Film Festival 2020 (in competition)
Uppsala Short Film Festival 2020 (in competition)

Three-Channel Video installation

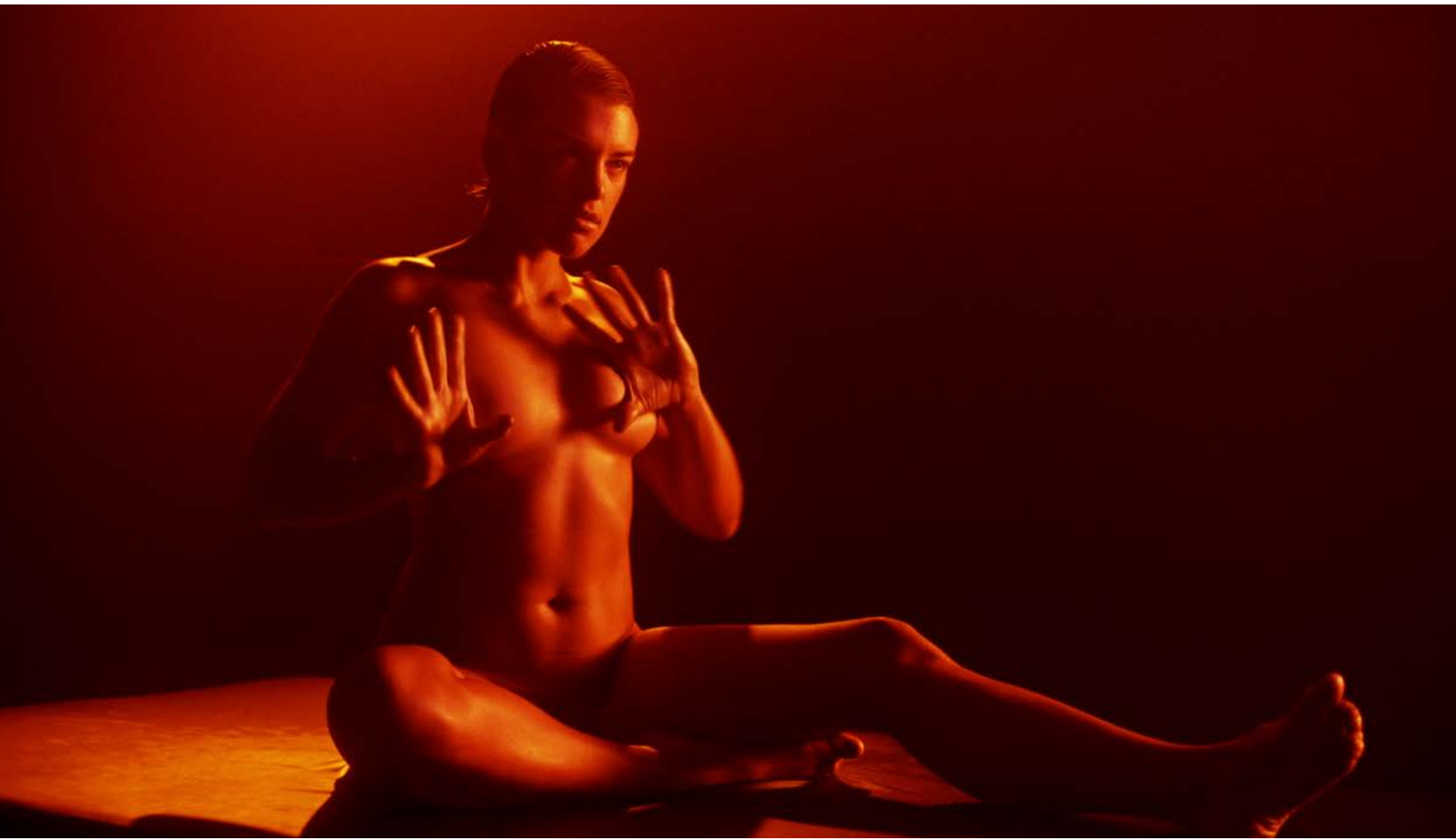
Exhibited at Steirischer Herbst 2019, Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art, 2020

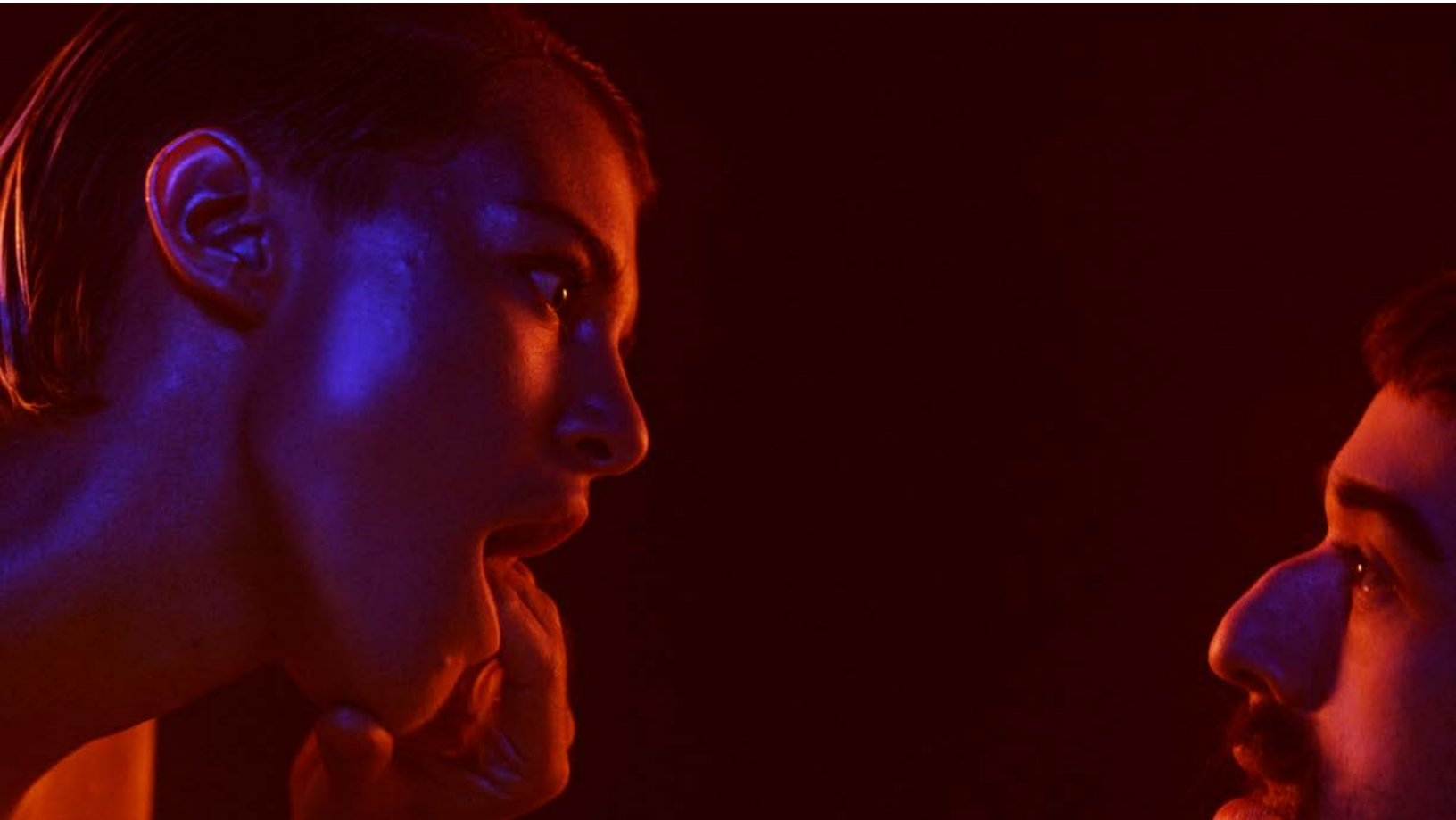
TECHNICAL DETAILS

Screening Material: DCP
Sound: Stereo
Screen Ratio: 16:9
Language: No speaking
Color

ONLINE TRAILER LINK

<https://vimeo.com/379329444>







Michael Portnoy - Director | Screenwriter

PROGRESSIVE TOUCH is Michael Portnoy's second short film. Michael Portnoy is a New York-based multimedia artist, considered by *Art in America* to be "one of the most interesting performance artists anywhere." Coming from a background in dance and stand-up comedy, his performance-based work employs a variety of media: from film and participatory installations to theater, sculpture, writing, painting, and curation. He has presented internationally in museums, art galleries and theaters, including recently Steirischer Herbst, Graz, Austria (2019 & 2018); Akademie der Künste der Welte, Cologne, Germany (2017); KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany (2017); Playground, STUK, Leuven, Belgium (2016, 2014); Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, UK (2016); Witte de With, Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2016); the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2015); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2014); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2013); The Kitchen, New York, USA (2013); dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); 11th Baltic Triennial (co-curator), Vilnius, Lithuania (2012); and the Taipei Biennial, Taipei, Taiwan (2010). He is a visiting professor at Malmö Art Academy.

Sex

Progressive Touch, by Michael Portnoy



Joyful ... Progressive Touch on show at Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art, Middelburg, Photograph: Gunnar Meier

Oiled up, iridescent and alive with shimmering blue highlights on a glowing altar, a woman eagerly semaphores her partner's entry. Her fluttering fingers mark the spot. Approaching the woman on her raised altar, her naked beau does a manly mince, all pelvic thrusts and menacing Māori grimaces to a booming beat, his gravity-defying erection cantilevering in the dark. And they're off! Accompanied by arcade video-game explosions, thuddy bangs and gabbling shivers, this is 21st-century sex - on multiple screens. American artist Michael Portnoy's *Progressive Touch* is a brilliant, banging new video performed by two real-life couples and two girls who are just good friends.

Currently on show at Vleeshal in Middelburg in the Netherlands, *Progressive Touch* spares us almost nothing in the genital and oral departments, the universal mime of body parts, extrusions and insertions. Brilliantly choreographed, stage-lit and soundtracked, Portnoy (could ever an artist have been better named for this work?) has the dream that young lovers might use these hilarious, sexy and joyful vignettes as instructional videos.

How about ripped-muscle anguish to a heavy prog beat, angular math-metal guitar rhythms and drumming discord, pompadour hair, boggle-eyed implorings, the gladiatorial torque of male torsos and the hydraulics and pneumatics of an oral encounter against shiny black curtains and a dangling cage. "I love physical comedy," says the artist. "And you could almost see these as cartoons, like if Mr Bean was ripped and hot, had a dick in his mouth and studied dance in Brussels."

The boy-on-boy action gives way to two pale young women, coming together with chirruping "Ooohs" and a cha-cha score, its exotica pace underscored by xylophones and primary-school percussion rhythms on a big pink grope-banquette. After a lot of tongue-twisting dabbling they sprawl amazed at the quantities of sci-fi goo dripping from their arms. They've been at it, up to their elbows.

"Why should a tongue go directly to a clitoris? Can't it travel through the room in complicated, swooping baroque patterns until it gets there?" Portnoy asks. Foreplay can be all free jazz, he told interviewer Haley Mellin, "but to get off we need a good ole 4/4. As a progressive rock fiend, and someone who works with choreography, music, and comedy the question is naturally going to arise: what is progressive sex? By that I mean, bodies connecting in all sorts of strange meters, tempo shifts, stops and starts, changes in dynamics, unpredictable flourishes and permutations."

What's love got to do with all this? Everyone needs to up their game now and again, to introduce the unexpected to the rumba, to remember humour and variety as well as duty. The girls collapse in laughter, the straight couple wind down, lit by a porno-blue strobe, while the boys, I'm sure, are at it again. Me? I'm off to the osteopath. **Adrian Searle**



PERFORMANCE

Michael Portnoy Wants to Know: Can You Fuck to An Irregular Beat?

In his new film series, "Progressive Touch," he tries to answer a most elusive question.

By [HALEY MELLIN](#) | Jan 12 2020, 5:30am

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TWEET



Michael Portnoy, *Progressive Touch*, 2019, video still

Michael Portnoy, a performance legend in European and New York circles, has released a new film series called *Progressive Touch*; four films which look at the future of sex through an absurdist lens. Portnoy dreams up a bizarre "improved" vision of sex, synced to an irregular metal and trap music score, requiring the physical skill of a trained dancer and the musical ingenuity of a composer. Filmed in Berlin and premiered at the festival [Steirischer Herbst](#) in Austria as a multiscreen installation, the dance-based films are intensely funny, and well, sexy. A new single screen version is headed for the [International Film Festival in Rotterdam](#). Portnoy began [his career](#) in the world of stand-up comedy, moved

verbal abstraction.

Portnoy's well-received engagement with comedic performance stretches back to his intervention at the 1998 Grammy's. Hired as a background dancer for Bob Dylan's live performance at the Grammy Awards, he broke out of his role and leapt onto the stage, beside Dylan, contorting with SOY BOMB written across his shirtless chest, becoming an iconic pre-meme meme of late-'90s pop culture. SOY BOMB showed how his imaginative work is both captivating and perplexing. In the past years he's presented work at major museums and exhibitions internationally, including [documenta](#) (Kassel, Germany), [Stedelijk Museum](#) (Amsterdam, the Netherlands), the [Centre Pompidou](#) (Paris, France), and the [Liverpool](#) and [Taipei Biennials](#), among others. "Progressive Touch" will be exhibited at [Vleeshal](#), Netherlands from January 18th, 2020 to March 29th, 2020. Currently in New York, Portnoy's sculpting an outlandish line of dad shoes in clay that give Balenciaga's Triple S a run for its money, Portnoy speaks with GARAGE.

Why did you make this film series, Progressive Touch?

As a comedian, I am always looking for humor-free zones to pervert. Why is there so little truly absurdist porn out there? This should be a whole niche industry! I'm not talking about parody or kink, which is still recognizable and codified in its non-conventionality. I'm talking something joyously imaginative and terrifyingly other, like the sex scene in the Swedish film *Border*, for instance. I want sex and sensuality to co-exist with manic nonsense and laughter. The hope is if you can reprogram human behavior at the root level of sex, by introducing formal invention and abstraction, then you can affect change similarly at higher levels of interpersonal exchange.

How did you come to this series?

It started with imagining people fucking to a highly irregular beat. The idea only became funnier and more inspiring to me over the years, and it was brewing for a long time. The human body is pretty uninventive musically. A healthy heart has a regular beat, we walk at a steady pace, and our genitals are wired to need a steady rhythm to orgasm. Foreplay can be all free jazz but to get off we need a good ole 4/4. As a progressive rock fiend, and someone who works with choreography, music, and comedy, the question is naturally going to arise: what is progressive sex? By that I mean, bodies connecting in all sorts of strange meters, tempo shifts, stops and starts, changes in dynamics, unpredictable flourishes and permutations.



MICHAEL PORTNOY, "PROGRESSIVE TOUCH," 2019, VIDEO STILL

Now that's just musicality. But what if we also "improve," or complicate our movements - complicate our touch and the approach of two bodies moving towards each other. Why should a tongue go directly to a clitoris? Can't it travel through the room in complicated, swooping baroque patterns until it gets there? I have been interested for a while in microchoreography to rhythmically unpredictable music. For example, *77 Blinks*, one of the pieces in my exhibition Relational Stalinism (2016, Witte de With Contemporary Art Center), was a dance just for the eyelids of five dancers blinking sporadically to a taiko drum score. *Progressive Touch* was trying to do this for sex.

"I want sex and sensuality to co-exist with manic nonsense and laughter."

How did you find the talent?

I put out casting calls in Berlin and New York. As I suspected the talent pool in Berlin was much better suited for this project, so we rehearsed and shot it there. I was looking for clever and technically skilled dancers with a great sense of rhythm. Most contemporary dance, as opposed to popular dance, has very little relation to the score, since synchronization is seen as passé, and so this requirement was hard to fill. The dancers needed to be comfortable with performing sexual acts on camera. And most importantly, I wanted to work with existing couples, as diverse as possible. As you can imagine, it wasn't easy to find people who checked off all the boxes. But in the end, I assembled an amazing cast with two couples and two women who were not romantically involved but who were good friends.

second chunks and then went through them one by one. It was a collaborative process with the assistant choreographer [Moss Beynon-Juckles](#) and I proposing some movements, the dancers improvising, then refining and selecting. We had very little rehearsal time, so it was demanding, but we had a lot of fun. As long as we are [laughing in the studio](#), I know we are on the right track.



MICHAEL PORTNOY, "PROGRESSIVE TOUCH," 2019, VIDEO STILL

The films seem to be set in some kind of alien world - the man and the woman in a deep orange-red outdoor landscape like a sunset on Mars, the two women on a floating padded couch-spaceship disc in a purple void, etc. And all the actors are naked but with iridescent makeup which gives their bodies an inhuman glow. What were you trying to evoke with the look of the films?

I see these films as a vision of a ridiculous possible future of sex, one all about rhythmic and choreographic complexity. I wanted the sets to be sparse, sublime, unplaceable environments and shot with luscious cinematography to stretch the humor. The budget was bare bones so we really concentrated on atmospherics—light, color and haze, and a few sculptural set pieces. Visually, I wanted to lean just lightly into the futuristic thing, and to keep the aesthetic quite classy and mysterious, so it wouldn't feel like most of the porn we're used to seeing. The team was exceptional, [Darja Pilz](#) was the cinematographer, [Ran Chai Bar-zvi](#) did set design, and hair and make-up was by [Servulo Mendez](#).

Music is such a huge part of this piece and mixes elements of metal, trap, prog rock, and sound design. What was the collaboration between you and composer and sound artist [Stefan Maier](#) like?

It was a real joy to work with Stefan. He is a pro composer and sound artist who

that hit you in the gut. Stefan started by creating and assembling a whole palette of percussion sounds. There was a real back and forth. I'd send him recordings of me singing in my bathroom at 3am in a bathing suit (not sure why I was in a bathing suit!) and he'd transcribe them, and this was later used as a partial rhythmic template for the two men's math-metal track. Or, I'd send him a melody scratch track like the Exotica-ish one for the two women, and he'd send it back fully orchestrated. I love when little movements of the dancers are coupled with massive sonic swells and impacts. I wanted the music to be onomatopoeic at times—to feel like the different moves—but to still be massive and catchy and not cartoony. Stefan really nailed it.

Often this is slapstick. Are these vignettes both wholly satirical and earnestly serious to you?



Sex Scenes: 'Valerie and Her Week of Wonders' Delves Into The Politics of Becoming

RACHEL RABBIT WHITE

I love physical comedy, and you could almost see these as cartoons, like if Mr. Bean was ripped and hot, had a dick in his mouth and studied dance in Brussels. The comedy that I'm after teeters between something beautiful, sexy, uncanny, abstract, WTF hilarious, masterful and stupid as hell.

"I see these films as a vision of a ridiculous possible future of sex, one all about rhythmic and choreographic complexity."

Any thoughts on presenting this work in the different contexts?

The films were initially presented at Steirischer Herbst in Graz, Austria in a huge empty, dark hall on four big screens. It was a formation in which viewers had to walk around to see each film playing. There was a nightclub style sound system which allowed the sub sounds to really take over your body. The films will also be presented as a multiscreen installation at Vleeshal, a museum in the Netherlands. I made these films to be seen by a large audience—as physical comedy they're much more accessible than some of the convoluted language performance I do. So Film festivals like IFFR and streaming services are ideal for this work.

I'm being tongue in cheek here, but this type of "improvement", which runs through a lot of my work, is less about making something better than making it more intricate and confusing. If it's pleasure alone that you're looking for, Progressive Touch is probably the wrong technique for you! My crazy dream is that young lovers out there would use these films as instructionals. I mean, for better or worse, we all have some sexual scores which we enact repeatedly—dances, you could say, that are especially pleasurable for us or our partners. Why not for a change try to sex each other up in 17/4 time?



THE ACTUALLY ICONIC "SOY BOMB" PERFORMANCE AT THE 1998 GRAMMY AWARDS. PHOTO BY KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

**Any comment on your 1998 Grammy's appearance of SOY BOMB, today?
What are you making next?**

Since the NDA just expired, I can finally reveal that the whole thing was an elaborate negative propaganda campaign orchestrated by the U.S. Oat Growers League to damage the reputation of the soy industry by associating it with terror. It failed, however, because it would take another 20 years until Americans were finally ready to adopt oat milk on a large scale. Next up, I want to make a second series of these. I have a bunch of ideas for the further mixing of sex, dance and experimental comedy. I am also developing a large scale performance piece for a museum in Moscow. And I just designed a new line of hideous and ridiculously expensive ceramic sneakers.

FILM CREDITS

Director: Michael Portnoy

Cast:

Tizo All

Ilona Bankiraj

Marc Philipp Gabriel

Juan Felipe Amaya González

Astrid Panaken

Deva Schubert

Music: Stefan Maier and Michael Portnoy

Producer, Berlin: Esther Niemeier

Producer, New York: Julia Simpson

Assistant Choreographer: Moss Beynon Jukes

Director of Photography: Darja Pilz

Editor: Camila Mercadal

Focus Puller: David Kizner

Gaffer: Jens Thurmann

Sound recordist: Camilo Garcia Castro

Hair & Make-up Design: Servulo Mendez

Production Design: Ran Chai Bar-zvi and Leonard Mandl

Coproduction by

steirischer herbst '19

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and supported by Chris Fitzpatrick

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