

"Transcendent. A smoky,
steamy miracle."

VARIETY

"Hypnotic, intimate and
blisteringly honest."

BAZAR

SMOKE SAUNA SISTERHOOD

EEN FILM VAN ANNA HINTS



GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS "SMOKE SAUNA SISTERHOOD" DIRECTED BY ANNA HINTS FEATURING KADI KIVILÖ CREATED BY ANNA HINTS & EDVARD EGILSSON & EETER EDITOR HENDRIK MÁGARI TUSHAR PRAKASH OUTAIBA BAPHAMJI MARTIN MÄNNIK ANNA HINTS
DESIGNED BY HULÐAR FREYR ARNARSON PRODUCED BY TANEL KADALIPP PATRICK MCGINLEY FILMS PRODUCTION PRIIT PAASUKE CO-PRODUCERS JULIETTE CAZANAVE HLÍN JÓHANNESDÓTTIR EERO TALVISTU PRODUCED BY MARIANNE OSTRAT

ALEXANDRA FILM

OUTLOOK

CC BY NC ND

Creative Europe MEDIA

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ISLANDS

KEPLER 22

SACEM

Tartu Filmifond

GRUPPO PARIGLI

svt

GREENWICH

VEDETTE

SMOKE SAUNA SISTERHOOD

van Anna Hints

Vanaf 30 NOVEMBER in de Nederlandse bioscopen

Persvoorstelling
20 november 10:30
Het Ketelhuis, Amsterdam

VEDETTE 

Boeking: Babette Wijntjes | 06 – 53 65 36 62 | babette@vedettefilm.com

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Synopsis

Diep in de Estse bossen staat een sauna waar vrouwen samenkomen om zich onder te dompelen in rituelen, waar ze nader tot elkaar komen, samen lachen en waar pijn wordt uitgezweet. De vrouwen delen herkenbare universele verhalen en ervaringen en tonen zo up close and personal het meest intieme samenkomen waar zweetdruppels, water en tranen versmelten. De bijzondere traditie van deze rooksauna staat op de Unesco culturele erfgoedlijst en *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* won talloze prijzen op filmfestivals als Sundance en CPH:DOX.

Details

Estland | Documentaire | 89 min. | Ests



SMOKE SAUNA SISTERHOOD

Regievisie

Embracing Vulnerability: The Artistry of *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*

In *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*, I embarked on a transformative journey to uncover the raw and vulnerable stories that lie within the sacred space of the smoke sauna, where women share their experiences without judgement or shame. The film is an exploration of aesthetics, form, and technical approach that seeks to capture the essence of this ancient tradition, while fostering a sense of feminine solidarity and empowerment.

Aesthetically, I aimed to convey the intimacy and authenticity of the smoke sauna experience. The decision to focus the camera on the women's bodies rather than their faces was intentional, allowing the viewers to connect with the shared humanity and vulnerability, transcending the barriers of individual identities. This choice echoes the dark, safe, and transformative nature of the smoke sauna itself, where bodies become memory landscapes, and collective experiences are embraced.

The form and creative process of *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* were driven by intuition and trust. I approached filmmaking as an intuitive process, allowing stories to emerge organically during the smoke sauna sessions, without pre-scripted narratives. This approach allowed for genuine and unfiltered emotions to surface, creating a collective narrative of what it means to be born into a female body, transcending cultural boundaries and resonating with universal experiences.

Collaboration played a crucial role in the artistic vision of the film. Working closely with the women featured in the film, I fostered a space of trust, respect, and vulnerability. Each participant had autonomy over their stories, ensuring that the film was a true reflection of their experiences. The smoke sauna became a confessional, where no experience was too harsh or painful to be shared, and where the power of listening and witnessing became a transformative force.

Technically, filming inside a real heated smoke sauna was a challenging endeavor, but one that was crucial to capturing the genuine atmosphere. The decision to endure the physical hardships allowed us to delve deep into the transformative power of the smoke sauna. It was important to me that the camera work remained intimate and genuine, devoid of the male gaze, reflecting the true essence of the experience.

As a filmmaker, my curatorial vision was centered around creating a safe and inclusive space for women to share their stories. In doing so, I wanted to challenge the traditional norms of society, where topics like sexual assault and terminal illness are often silenced or relegated to the shadows. By shedding light on these issues, I sought to break down barriers and encourage open conversations.

The impact of *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* on the communities represented in the film has been profound. Viewers have connected emotionally with the stories, finding solidarity and empowerment in the shared experiences of these brave women. The film has become a catalyst for dialogue and healing, encouraging a broader conversation about the need for safe spaces and compassion in society.

Inspired by my roots in the South-East Estonian culture of Võromaa and Setomaa, and the profound teachings of my Võro granny, *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* is a tribute to the transformative power of the smoke sauna tradition. It is an ode to the sacred space where women have given birth, washed the dead, and healed for generations. Through this film, I hope to encourage a collective journey towards vulnerability and self-acceptance, where all voices are heard and valued, and where healing and empowerment flourish within the embrace of sisterhood.

Interview Anna Hints

Cineuropa: What inspired you to share the magic – and the secrets – of a smoke sauna and commit it to a documentary?

Anna Hints: When I was 11 years old, my grandfather had died, and my granny, my aunt, my niece and I went together to a smoke sauna. There, my grandmother shared with us the truth that my grandfather had cheated on her. Granny let the hurt and anger out, made peace with my grandfather, and the next day, she could bury him in peace. That was when I realised that a sauna is not just for cleansing the body, but also the soul.

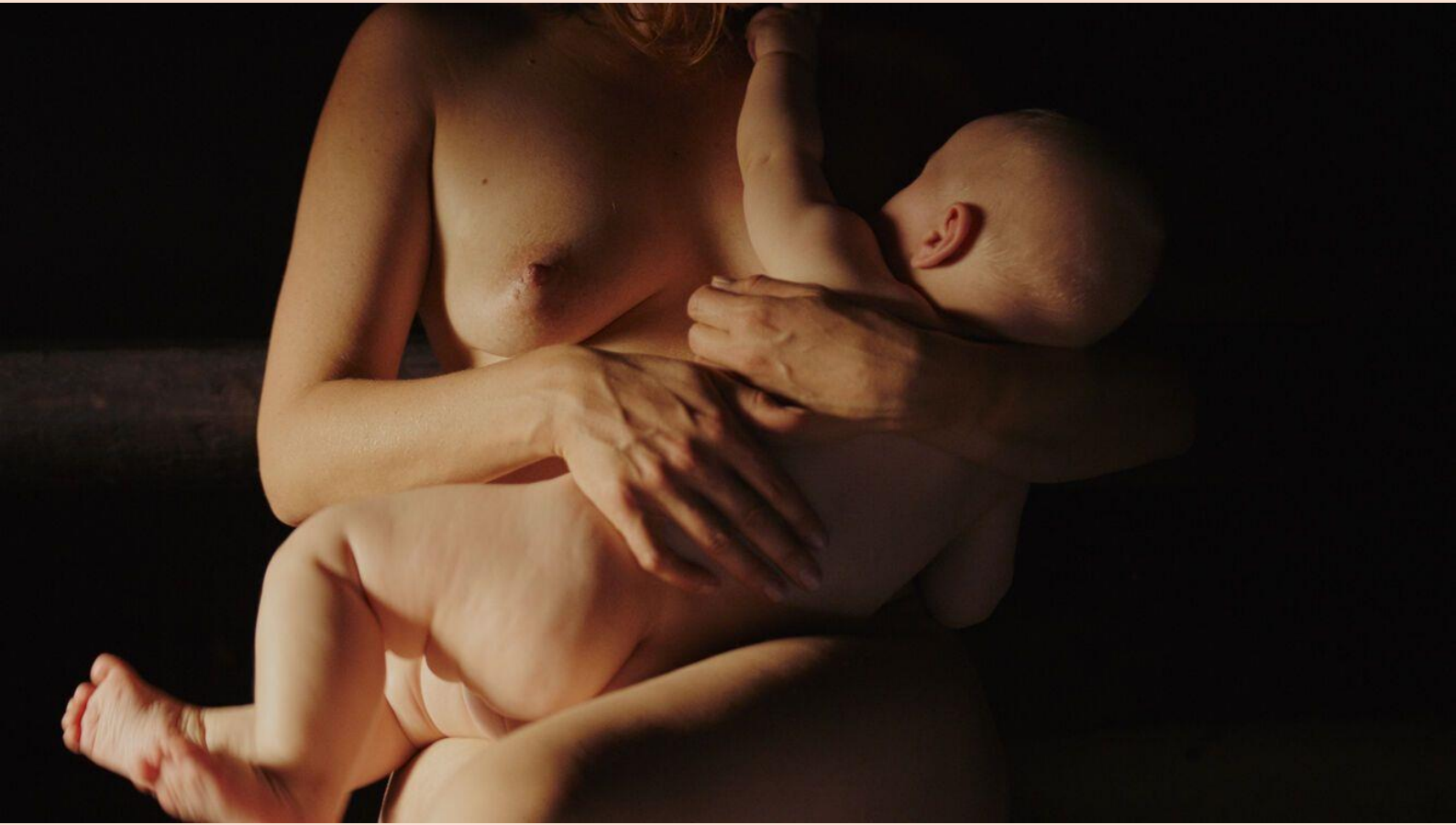
The concrete film idea came to me in 2015, when I was at a Buddhist monastery, participating in a silent retreat with my mother, with whom I have had a turbulent relationship. There, in the silence, I felt the importance of sharing our experiences and just how much power the voice has. In the protective darkness of the smoke sauna, all emotions can come out, and no experience is too harsh or too embarrassing; every voice has the right to express itself.

How did you approach the subject, knowing that a sauna is a place for secrets, but ones which would be amplified by appearing on the big screen?

That was a challenge and always is a challenge in this kind of filmmaking: how do you show a deep, secluded space on the big screen so that the essence of it remains? I believe this is the responsibility of the director: you have to create the safe space with your subjects and team, built on one of the most important assets that you have – trust. I believe in transparent filmmaking where, as a director, you do not trick your subjects, but are very honest and explain what your aim with the film is. Then people who come on board can really help you achieve that dream, and everyone knows why they are making it. I was always in the smoke sauna, too, reading the air to notice anything and asking to stop filming if someone felt uncomfortable. The way we produced this film was pretty magical – living all together in a South Estonian farm house.



The sisterhood formed throughout the process. Sisterhood doesn't even need to be between women; it doesn't depend on gender. It's about community. It is the connection between humans who support each other and with whom any story can be shared.



What about the practicalities of filming?

It is a very extreme situation for both the people and the technology. Standing in the heat for hours on end and filming or operating a boom is no joke. Cinematographer Ants Tammik and sound recordist Tanel Kadalipp created a cooling system, put ice bags around the camera and had an assistant ready with water for us all the time. The smoke sauna was actually very hot, and some cinematographers told me it just wasn't possible to film in it, or that we'd need to do it at lower temperatures. I was too stubborn to back down, because I felt we could only make this film in the real hot sauna. That heat was important for the subjects. At one point, we wanted to film smoke appearing, and we stayed too long, so we suffered smoke poisoning. We also lost two lenses and a monitor because of the heat and humidity.

Have the protagonists of the film seen it yet?

All the people who shared their stories or who have been recognisably present have seen the film. I have included the women who shared their stories in the editing process, showing them various versions and making them feel that the sisterhood lasts longer than just during production.

Kadi Kivilo is a kind of “sauna keeper” and space provider for other women in the film. It warms my heart that she is coming to Sundance. It gives me the feeling that the way we have created this movie means there is not just a sisterhood in the film, but also one around it.

Do you have any ideas about what you want to do next?

I am developing two feature-length fiction scripts. One is set in a near-future dystopia, where the entire world has become a rubbish tip, and the other one is deeply rooted in the mythology and folklore of South Estonia.



Biografie Anna Hints

Anna Hints is een Estse filmregisseur met een achtergrond in hedendaagse kunst en experimentele volksmuziek. Anna is geworteld in de cultuur van Zuid-Estland, maar haar tweede thuis is India. Anna's korte documentaire *For Tomorrow Paradise Arrives* (2021) zette aan tot een publieke discussie over voedselverspilling in Estland.

Anna's eerste lange documentaire *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* ging in januari 2023 in première op het Sundance Film Festival World Cinema Documentary Competition

programma, waarbij Anna de regieprijs won. De Europese première van de film vindt plaats op CPH:DOX en dingt mee naar de NEXT: WAVE AWARD.

Anna's volgende korte fictiefilm is *Weight of Light* (2023) dat het leven van vrouwelijke voddenrapers in Delhi beschrijft. Anna is zangeres in het electronic-folk trio EETER dat genomineerd was in de categorie Beste Filmmuziek bij de Estse Film en TV Awards 2018. EETER werkte samen met Icelandic componist Edvard Egilsson voor de originele score van *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*. Anna volgt momenteel een masteropleiding aan de afdeling Drama van de Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Crew

Regisseur : Anna Hints

Cinematografie: Ants Tammik

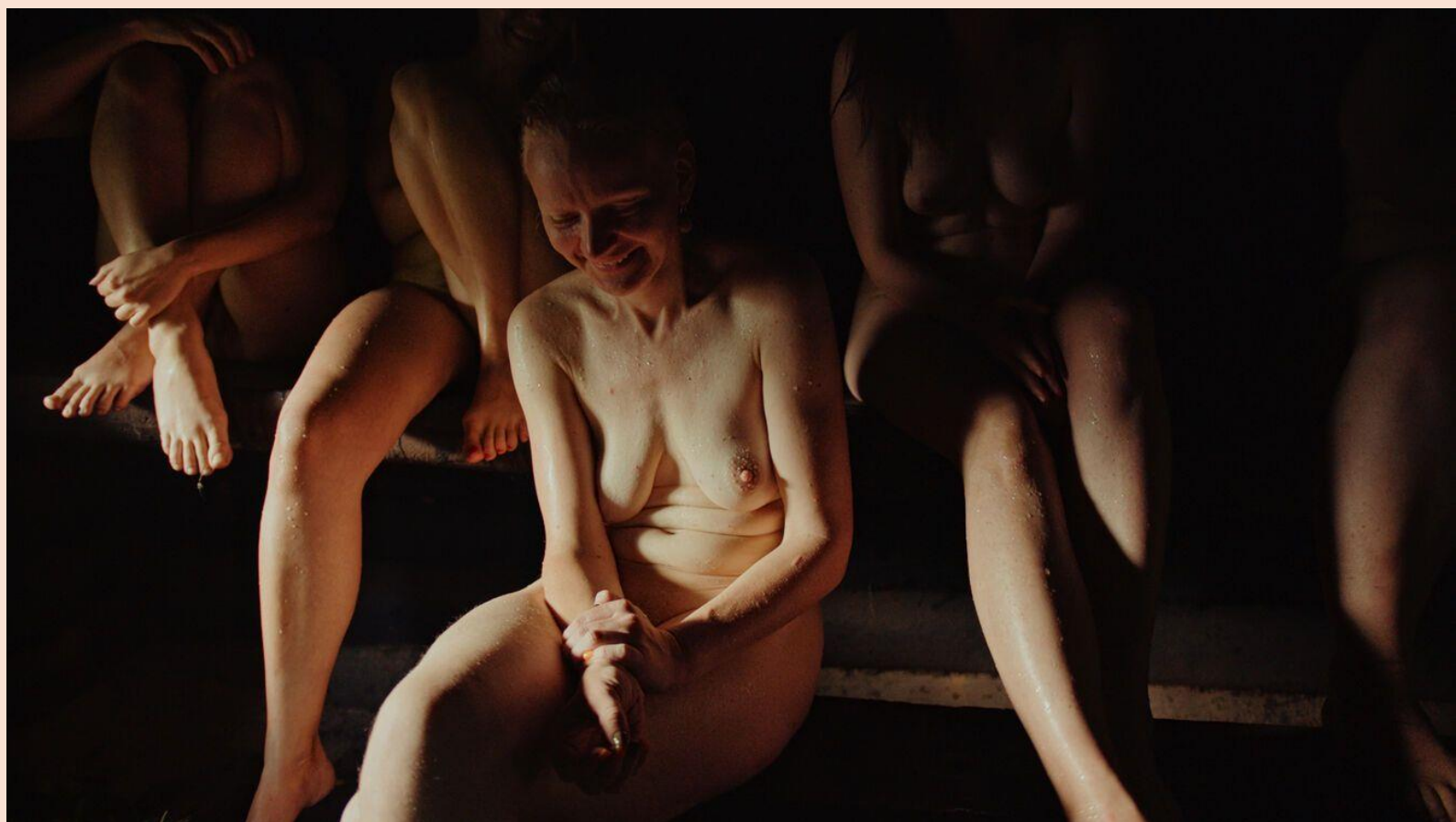
Edit: Hendrik Mägar, Tushar Prakash, Qutaiba Barhamji, Martin Männik, Anna Hints

Sound Design: Huldar Freyr Arnarson

Componist: Edvard Egilsson (Iceland) & EETER

Producent: Marianne Ostrat

Coproducenten: Juliette Cazanave, Hlín Jóhannesdóttir, Eero Talvistu
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Festivals and awards

Sundance Film Festival World Cinema Documentary Competition - Directing Award

January 2023, Park City, UT, USA

CPH:DOX in competition for NEXT: WAVE Award

March 2023, Copenhagen, Denmark

Stockfish Film Festival - Sundance Corner

March-April 2023, Reykjavík, Iceland

Hong Kong International Film Festival - Main Competition

April 2023, Hong Kong

San Francisco International Film Festival / Main Competition - McBaine Documentary Feature Award

April 2023, San Francisco, CA, USA

Alexander Valley Film Festival

April 2023, Healdsburg, CA, USA

HotDocs Canadian International Documentary Festival - Persister

April-May 2023, Toronto, ON, Canada

Millennium Docs Against Gravity - Main Competition - Newsweek Psychologia Award; Special
Mention The City of Poznań Freedom Award

May 2023, Warsaw, Poland

Beldocs - Eurimages Audencia Award for Best Female Director

May 2023, Belgrade, Serbia

DocsBarcelona - Opening Film / Main Competition

May 2023, Barcelona, Spain

Seattle International Film Festival - Competition

May 2023, Seattle, WA, USA

Sydney Film Festival - Europe! Voice of Women in Film

June 2023, Sydney, Australia

Sheffield DocFest - Memories

June 2023, Sheffield, UK

Transilvania International Film Festival - What's Up, Doc? Competition

June 2023, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

