

ALL FALL DOWN PRESS PACK

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***All Fall Down*(2009) 94 min., HDCAM by Philip Hoffman**

World Premiere Berlin at International Film Festival 2009

North American Premiere at Toronto International Film Festival 2009

Jihlava International Documentary Festival, Czech Republic 2009

Festival Internacional Del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, Havana 2009

Festival du Nouveau Cinema, Montreal 2009

Steve Gravestock, Toronto International Film Festival 2009:

Piecing together the various narratives of Philip Hoffman's brilliant *All Fall Down*, his first feature-length work after innumerable magnificent shorts, is one of the most invigorating and rewarding pleasures you're likely to have in a cinema this year. Merging a personal essay with a regional history, *All Fall Down* is constructed from artifacts, beginning obliquely with scratched, black-and-white aerial footage of southern Ontario and an agitated man describing the deterioration of his health on the soundtrack.

The voice belongs to writer George Lachlan Brown, whose life took an unforeseen and tragic course when he was in his thirties. Seen only in home-movie footage and heard on countless phone messages that grow increasingly aggravated and anxious, Brown resorts to living in shelters (he has health, economic and immigration problems) after losing his car. An outsider desperate for any attention and unable to deal with the situation in which he finds himself, Brown struggles to find equilibrium while his imagination turns to wild conspiracy theories. Developing alongside this tale is an investigation of a genuine regional historical figure, who we discover to be hardly what she seems. These two storylines are juxtaposed with Hoffman's serio-comic use of footage from a historical docudrama that he made but was never properly paid for. (A running tally counts the value of the footage until Hoffman uses enough to balance the fee he expected for the project.)

All Fall Down smartly references Wallace Stevens's classic modernist poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," which analyzes how different perspectives can seem utterly irreconcilable yet completely logical depending on the context. As Brown's entreaties to his unnamed former wife grow more disconnected and outrageous, we start questioning how much we actually know about people – and what constitutes a personality. Is the real George Lachlan Brown the person we hear on the voicemails, the father playing with his daughter in the home movies or someone else entirely? Hoffman's own links to Brown are intimate and complex.

What emerges is a film that is at once mysterious, visually and aurally stunning, heart-rending and intellectually rigorous.

Long Description:

All Fall Down (Philip Hoffman 94 min, 2009 Canada HDV) is an experimental documentary that takes as its starting point a nineteenth century farmhouse in Southern Ontario, Canada, and asks the question 'what has been here before?' The film weaves together a complex temporal structure that juxtaposes the lives of two figures, one historical (Nahneebahweequa: a nineteenth century aboriginal land rights activist) and the other contemporary, writer George Lachlan Brown (an ex-pat drifter and father of the filmmaker's step daughter) across two hundred years. The film explores these characters through a variety of archival materials: diaries, landscape paintings, photographs, heritage films, poems, phone messages, maps, historical reenactments, songs) that express the complexity of time and the politics of land.

The paintings and writings of Homer Watson and Paul Kane are featured and explored in the film, along with writers George Orwell and Wallace Stevens. Contemporary figures such as organic farmer and raw milk advocater Michael Schmidt also appears in the film.

Composers Toni Edelmann and Tucker Zimmerman have created the music for the film and the film was co-written with Janine Marchessault.

The film is structured through Hoffman's extraordinary landscapes of Southern Ontario which make the temporal fabric shimmer, bringing us a meditation on childhood, property, colonialism, ecology, and love.

Short Description: *ALL FALL DOWN* (Philip Hoffman 94 min, 2009 Canada HDCAM) takes as its starting point a nineteenth century farmhouse in Southern Ontario and juxtaposes the lives of two figures: Nahneebahweequa, a nineteenth century land rights activist; and writer George Lachlan Brown, an ex-pat drifter and father of the filmmaker's step daughter — bringing us a sumptuous meditation on childhood, property, ecology, and love.

*see bottom of page for credit list

Philip Hoffman's bio:

A filmmaker of memory and association, Philip Hoffman creates highly 'personal' yet universal works, which weave fiction and documentary in an experimental 'diarist' cinema. His filmmaking began in his hometown of Waterloo, Ontario, with a boyhood interest in photography. As semi-official historian of family life, Hoffman became intrigued by questions of reality in photography and later in cinema. After completing his formal education which includes a Diploma in Media Arts at Sheridan College and a Bachelor of Arts in Literature at Wilfrid Laurier University, Hoffman began working on his films, as well as teaching film, digital-based media. He is currently a full-time faculty member in the Film Department at York University in Toronto.

“Philip Hoffman has long been recognized as Canada’s pre-eminent diary filmmaker. For over twenty-five years he has been straining history through personal fictions, using the material of his life to deconstruct the Griersonian legacy of documentary practice. As an artist working directly upon the material of film, Hoffman is keenly attuned to the shape of seeing, foregrounding the image and its creation as well as the manufacture of point of view. Hoffman’s films are deeply troubled in their remembrances; he dusts off the family archive to examine how estrangement fuels a fascination with the familiar surroundings of home.

Mortality forms the absent centre of Philip Hoffman’s oeuvre, a body of films that seems to foreshadow a penultimate loss that will take the maker to the outer and inner reaches of grief. Through the repeating figure of death—whether a boy lying on a Mexican roadside in *Somewhere Between...*, the death of an elephant at the Rotterdam Zoo, in *?O,Zoo!*, or his uncle’s legacy of insanity and death in *passing through/torn formations*—Hoffman approaches the limits of representation and the ethical burdens of vision and reproduction.” (Karyn Sandlos, Toronto Images Festival, 2001)

He has screened his work in England, Holland, Australia, Malaysia, Cuba, Finland, Estonia, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Russia, France and the USA. In 1987, *?O,Zoo! (The Making of a Fiction Film)* received a Genie Nomination (in the Documentary Category), and First Prize in the Experimental Film Category at the Athens International Film Festival. In 1991, the Sydney International Film Festival in Australia honored Hoffman with a retrospective of his work. In 1994, *Technilogic Ordering* received jury citations at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Ann Arbor Film Festival, *Chimera* (1996) won a 1st Prize at Athens Film Festival, and *Destroying Angel* (1998) has won three awards at festivals in the USA. *Kokoro is for Heart* (1999) is Hoffman’s 15th film. In 2001 Hoffman was featured at the Images Festival for Independent Film and Video. *What these ashes wanted* (2001) premiered at the festival and received the Telefilm Canada Award. As well, at the festival a book about his work was launched: *Landscape with Shipwreck: First Person Cinema and the Films of Philip Hoffman* contains over twenty-five essays/writings by academics and artists. He has also received a 2002 Golden Gate Award, New Visions, from the San Francisco International Film Festival, as well as the Gus Van Sant Award from the Ann Arbor Film Festival for *What these ashes wanted*. In

2008, *Rivers of Time: The Films of Philip Hoffman* was published, which is a collection of essays on Hoffman's work edited by Tom McSorley at the Canadian Film Institute. *All Fall Down*, Hoffman's first feature length film had its World Premiere at the Berlin Film Festival in 2009, and will have its North American Premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival this September.

Since the mid-80's, Hoffman has been giving workshops in film co-operatives and schools throughout Canada and abroad. He has been a Visiting Professor of Film at University of Helsinki and University of South Florida in Tampa. Hoffman also teaches a summer workshop, Film Farm Retreat, to support hand-made short films. Participants learn to process their own film, and develop a short project. Films made at the workshop have received several awards, and workshop programs have been screened in San Francisco, New York, Vancouver, Regina, Toronto and Helsinki.

"The films of Philip Hoffman have revived the travelogue, long the preserve of tourism officials anxious to convert geography into currency. Hoffman's passages are too deeply felt, too troubled in their remembrance, and too radical in their rethinking of the Canadian documentary tradition to quicken the pulse of an audience given to starlight. He has moved from his first college-produced short, *On The Pond*—set between the filmmakers familial home and his new found residency at college—to a trek across Canada (*The Road Ended at the Beach*); from Holland, where he was invited to the set of Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* and made *?O,Zoo!* (*The Making of a Fiction Film*) to Mexico for his haiku-inspired short *Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan and Encarnacion*; from *passing through/torn formations* pan-continental dialogue of madness and memory to *Kitchener-Berlin's* oceanic traversal; and finally, to *river*, a landscape meditation that leads inevitably home. Denoting the family as source and stage of inspiration, Hoffman's gracious archeology is haunted by death, the absent centre in much of his practice, a meditation on mortality and its representation. His restless navigations are invariably followed by months of tortuous editing as history is strained through its own image, recalling Derrida's dictum that everything begins with reproduction. Hoffman's delicately enacted shapings of his own past is at once poetry, pastiche, and proclamation, a resounding affirmation of all that is well with independent film today." (Mike Hoolboom, *Inside the Pleasure Dome: Fringe Film in Canada*, 2001)

"Philip Hoffman received a diploma in media arts from Sheridan College in 1979 and a B.A. in English literature from Wilfrid Laurier University in 1987. While a student at Sheridan, he was part of that burgeoning group of filmmakers, including Richard Kerr and Mike Hoolboom, who came to be known as the Escarpment School. He returned to Sheridan College as a full-time instructor in 1986, and later, joined the film and video department at York University in 1999. Every summer since 1994, Hoffman has run his own craft-centered film workshop at Mount Forest, Ontario.

If, according to Mike Hoolboom, "the Escarpment School typically conjoins memory and landscape in a home-movie, documentary-based production that is at once personal, poetic and reflexive," Hoffman inflects these priorities in a distinctly personal way. If the works of Rick

Hancox repeatedly return to the sites of his youth, Hoffman's entail an archaeological journey toward unknown places and unfamiliar times.

Almost without exception, Hoffman's work involves exorcism and espousal, from the shuffling off of inadequate ideas concerning his sense of self in the early films (*On the Pond*, 1978; *The Road Ended at the Beach*, 1983) to a Buddhist-like reconciliation with the inevitability of loss and death that characterizes his later works: *Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan & Encarnacion* (1984); *?O, Zoo! (The Making of a Fiction Film)* (1986); *Kitchener-Berlin* (1990) and *What these ashes wanted* (2001). Hoffman contests the claim to the truth characteristic of conventional documentaries; *?O, Zoo!* handles these themes with great playfulness, whereas both *passing through/torn formations* (1998) and *What these ashes wanted* confront them directly, without irony. *passing through/torn formations* took Hoffman to Europe in a search of the origins of his mother's family. If a sense of doubling occurred in *?O, Zoo!* and in the very title of *Kitchener-Berlin* — in passing through it becomes schizophrenic, with his cousin Leesa's face split in the corner mirror that his uncle Wally uses to help settle his deranged mind.

And if death and dying is a presence in many of these works, it arrives unexpectedly at the end of *Destroying Angel* (1998), a film co-directed by Hoffman's friend Wayne Salazar that celebrates Salazar's homosexual marriage in spite of his ongoing struggle with AIDS. Suddenly there is a phone call. A candle flickers out. Hoffman must hurry home because of the imminent death of Marian McMahon, his companion of many years who is ill with cancer. The full exploration of this relationship and its sudden loss become the poignant affirmation of *What these ashes wanted*. Hoffman has stated that his desire was "to illuminate the conditions of her death... the mystery of her life and the reason why, at the instant of her passage, I felt peace with her leaving... a feeling I no longer hold." The catalogue for the Toronto Images Festival described the film as "*What these ashes wanted* is not a story of surviving death, but rather of living death through a heightening of the quotidian moments of everyday experience."

The complete works of Philip Hoffman incontestably establish him as an independent filmmaker of intricate artistic achievement and philosophical depth. (Canadian Film Encyclopedia, Peter Harcourt)

Filmography (Philip Hoffman films)

All Fall Down, HDCAM 94 min., 2009

World Premiere Berlin at International Film Festival 2009

North American Premiere at Toronto International Film Festival 2009

Jihlava International Documentary Festival, Czech Republic 2009

Festival Internacional Del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, Havana 2009

Festival du Nouveau Cinema, Montreal 2009

What these ashes wanted, 16mm, 55 min., 2001

Golden Gate Award, New Visions, San Francisco International Film Festival - 2002

Gus Van Sant Award, Best Experimental Film, Ann Arbor Film Festival - 2002

Telefilm Canada Award, Images Festival – 2001

Opening Series 4, 16mm, 10 min., 2000

Kokoro is for Heart, 16mm, 7 min., 1999

`Best Experimental', Athens International Film Festival – 2000

Destroying Angel, 16mm, 32 min., 1998 (co-maker Wayne Salazar)

`Best Experimental', Chicago Lesbian & Gay Film Festival - 1998

`Best Documentary', Oshawa-Durham Independent Film Festival - 1998

`Best Doc', the University of Portland Queer Film Festival -1998

Chimera, 16mm, 15 min., 1996

`Best Experimental', Athens International Film Festival - 1997

Sweep, 16mm, 30 min., 1995 (co-maker Sami van Ingen)

`Award of Quality', Finnish Cultural Ministry, Helsinki - 1995

Opening Series 3, 16mm, 7 min., 1995 (co-maker, Gerry Shikatani)

Technilogic Ordering, 16mm, 30 min., 1994

`John Spotten Award', Jury Citation, Toronto Film Festival - 1994

Jury Citation, Ann Arbor Film Festival, Ann Arbor - 1994

Opening Series 2, 16mm, 7 min., 1993

Opening Series 1, 16mm, 10 min., 1992

Kitchener-Berlin, 16mm, 34 min., 1990

river, 16mm, 15 min., 1979-89

passing through / torn formations, 16mm, 43 min., 1988

`Award of Merit', Athens Film Festival - 1989

?O,Zoo! (The Making of a Fiction Film), 16mm, 23 min., 1986

Experimental Film Award, Ann Arbor Film Festival - 1988

Genie Nomination, Academy of Canadian Cinema - 1987

1st Prize, Athens International Film Festival -1987

Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan & Encarnacion, 16mm, 6 min., 1984

The Road Ended at the Beach, 16mm, 33 min., 1983

Festival Guild Award, Ann Arbor Film Festival - 1983

On The Pond, 16mm, 9 min., 1978

Retrospectives (selected)

Canadian Film Institute, Ottawa CANADA- 2008

Rotterdam International Film Festival, `Film Farm Films', HOLLAND - 2008

Havana Film Festival, Cuba – 2006

Anthology Film Archives, NYC – 2006

San Francisco Cinemateque, USA -2004

IVFest Video Festival, Trivandrum, INDIA - 2003

Images Festival, Toronto, CANADA –2001

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA - 1999

Sydney International Film Festival, Sydney, AUSTRALIA - 1991

Off-Stream Festival, Amsterdam, HOLLAND - 1992

Canada House, London, UNITED KINGDOM - 1990

Bio Illusion Cinema, Helsinki, FINLAND - 1990

Chinsegut Film Festival, Tampa, USA - 1989

Salso International Film Festival, Salsomaggiore, ITALY - 1986

Rotterdam International Film Festival, Rotterdam, HOLLAND - 1986

Books (on Philip Hoffman)

McSorley Tom. **Rivers of Time: The Films of Philip Hoffman**. CFI, 2008.

Sandlos, Karyn & Hoolboom, Mike. **Landscape with Shipwreck: First Person Cinema and the Films of Philip Hoffman**. Insomniac Press, 2001

Reviews & Publications:

All Fall Down review in POV WINTER 2009: 'Barns, Britts and Birthrights: Philip Hoffman's **All Fall Down**', by Scott MacKenzie

* downloadable reviews and publications for All Fall Down and other Hoffman films
(under All Fall Down and under Filmography):

www.philiphoffman.ca

***All Fall Down* (credits)**

film by Philip Hoffman

written by Philip Hoffman and Janine Marchessault

production participation in order of appearance:

Mike Hoolboom (walker)
George Lachlan Brown (father)
Jessie Marchessault-Brown (daughter)
Janine Marchessault (narrator)
Bill Fitzgerald (archeologist)
Michael Schmidt (organic farmer)
Stephanie McMullen (historian)

music composed and performed by:

Toni Edelmann `Metsa' (Forest) piano and percussion
&
Tucker Zimmerman `River Barge' (voice) & `Barns Falling Down' (guitar)

cinematography and editing: Philip Hoffman

sound mix: Timothy Muirhead

on-line supervisor: Jon Hedley

titles: Francisca Duran

production assistance:

Josh Bonnetta
Bill Byers
Denis Day
Doug Darroch
Charlie Egleston
Christine Harrison
John Kneller
Omid Jesmi
Nico Pereda
Claudius Pinto
Catherine Mondragon
James Reckseidler

assistance from:

Bruce County Museum
Cape Croker First Nations
Exclusive Film and Video
Grey Roots Museum
Homer Watson Museum
Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto
Royal Ontario Museum
Technicolor
York University Department of Film

Text References:

Campbell Cork, Ed., *Normanby Reflections: A History of Normanby Township*

Bill Fitzgerald, *On the Threshold of a Dream: Paul Kane*

Bill Fitzgerald, *Stage 1 and Stage 2 Archeological Assessments: Lots 28-34, Concession 3, Sarawak Township, Grey County*

Celia Haig-Brown, “Charged with the unpardonable sin of marrying a White Man”: *Nahnebahwequa in the struggle for justice*

Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist: Among the Indians of North America*

Gerald Noonan, Redefining the real Canada: *Homer Watson's Spiritual Landscape*

George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*

Wallace Stevens, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*

Homer Watson, *A Landscape Painter's Day*

Financial Assistance:

The Canada Council for the Arts

The Ontario Arts Council

