

OUR CITY DREAMS

A documentary film by
Chiara Clemente

85 minutes, color, 2008



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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Synopsis

Filmed over the course of two years, *OUR CITY DREAMS* is an invitation to visit the creative spaces of five women artists, each of whom possesses her own energy, drive and passion. These women, who span different decades and represent diverse cultures, have one thing in common beyond making art: the city to which they have journeyed and now call home - New York.

The artists profiled are Nancy Spero, who was at the forefront of the feminist movement of the late 50s and 60s and whose work continues to question the polemics of sexual identity and warfare; Marina Abramovic, a pioneer of performance art who uses her own body as a canvas to respond deeply to contemporary cultural issues; Kiki Smith, who addresses philosophical, social and spiritual aspects of the human body through work that incorporates glass, plaster, ceramic, bronze and paper; Ghada Amer, who paints erotic canvases in traditional needle and thread and who refuses to bow to the puritanical elements of Western and Islamic culture and "institutionalized feminism"; and Swoon, one of New York's most promising emerging artists, whose arresting and fugitive street art transmits the pulse of urban life. Director Chiara Clemente combines an intimate style of documentary filmmaking with the ephemera of city life surrounding each woman and the work she creates.

The documented year held many triumphs and challenges for each of the participating artists, and the audience will catch a glimpse into the processes of creation and inspiration. Chiara Clemente has captured many moments in these artists's lives, including Swoon's first solo exhibition at Deitch Projects in New York, Ghada Amer's return to her Egyptian homeland, Kiki Smith's traveling retrospective, Marina Abramovic's weeklong series of performances at the Guggenheim Museum in New York and Nancy Spero's preparations of a new piece for the 2007 Venice Biennale. Stylistically, the film will have the feeling of a textured collage that will be the culmination of the director's collaboration with the artist. Ultimately, *OUR CITY DREAMS* intends to bring a unique cultural and artistic experience to viewers and provide a testimony to the need to preserve great art and artists.

Director's Statement

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Artist Biographies

Swoon b.1977, Daytona Beach

Swoon moved to New York City in 1998 to attend Pratt University. In the years that followed, she has been recognized as an artist whose work reflects as well as directly impacts the city. In 2005 Swoon presented her first solo show in New York City at Deitch Projects and was invited to participate in PS1's groundbreaking exhibition GREATER NEW YORK. Later in the year, the Deitch show was recreated at Art Basel Miami. In 2006, Swoon was featured in both the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition Since 2000: Printmaking Now and in a semi-permanent installation at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. She was also seen floating down the Mississippi River as part of the Miss Rockaway Armada.

Inspired by traditional graffiti and other artists who have used the city as raw material, she has been using city walls and subways as a space for creating publicly engaging work. Swoon's worlds are populated by realistically rendered and evocatively cutout street people who are often drawn from her own life. These characters traverse a cityscape of the artist's own invention, and include symbols of urban life such as bridges, fire escapes, water towers and street signs that create shadows and spaces through which her figures move.

Ghada Amer b.1963, Cairo

After growing up in Cairo and living in France, Ghada Amer now lives and works in New York City. In 2007 her work was presented at the MACRO GALLERIES in Rome, and she has a solo show forthcoming at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. 2006 was an important year for Ghada Amer as it marked her Gagosian Gallery, New York debut. Featured prominently on the cover of the September 2006 issue of ARTnews, Amer participated in Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking, a group show at the Museum of Modern Art in the spring of 2006. In 2005 Amer's work was prominently featured in the Africa Remix exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London, and she created Yin Yang, an ambitious garden installation in the Giardini at the Venice Biennale.

Viewing Amer's hand-embroidered paintings, with their delicate trceries of stray threads involves a visual shift. Her work refuses to bow to the puritanical elements of both Western and Islamic culture and what could be called "institutionalized feminism" with its own persistent myth of feminine virtue. In recent years she has been fascinated with the impact of language and extended her repertoire to include domestic objects as well as garden installations.

Ghada Amer's work has been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions at such venues as Deitch Projects, New York (2000), the Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2000), the 2000 Whitney Biennial, New York, P.S. 1, New York (2000), the 2000 Kwangju Biennial, South Korea (2000); SITE Sante Fe, NM (1999), the 1999 Venice Biennale, the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale, and the Gagosian galleries in London and Los Angeles.

Kiki Smith b.1963, Nuremburg

One of the most influential artists of her generation, Kiki Smith grew up in New Jersey and has lived in New York City since 1976. Kiki Smith's first major retrospective, Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005,

was launched by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in November 2005 and subsequently traveled to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. During the 2005 Venice Biennale, Kiki Smith transformed the Querini Stampalia Foundation into a fairy tale universe with her piece *Homespun Tales*. In 2006, the artist created an illuminated ice sculpture for the Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy and received an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Smith was associated with the artist's collective Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Colab), and participated in the celebrated Times Square Show of 1980. By 1990 her work had come to international prominence, establishing Kiki Smith as a leading proponent of artists addressing philosophical, social, legal and spiritual aspects of the human body. Smith has had solo exhibitions at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark (1994), Whitechapel Art Gallery (London, 1995), The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (1997), the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (1998), The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (1998), The International Center for Photography, New York (2001), and The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2003-2004).

Marina Abramovic b. 1946, Belgrade

Marina Abramovic moved from Amsterdam to New York in 2004 to explore new creative territory. 2005 marked a major exhibition for this prolific performance artist at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum entitled *Marina Abramovic: Seven Easy Pieces*. Comprising seven consecutive nights of performance in the museum's rotunda, the event included a new piece by Abramovic, as well as her renditions of seminal performances by Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Vali Export, Bruce Nauman and Gina Pane. In 2005, she also premiered *Balkan Erotic Epic* at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York and traveled to Thailand to stage her epic work *God Punishing*, memorializing the 2004 tsunami.

Beginning as a painter, Abramovic subsequently shifted her focus to include conceptual work, sound pieces and performance art. In 1973-74 she performed several works entitled *Rhythm*, which stretched the limits of her body and mind. In 1975 she performed *Thomas Lips*, in which she cut, beat, and froze herself. That same year Marina Abramovic moved to Amsterdam where she met the artist Uwe Laysiepen (known as Ulay) with whom she would live and collaborate until 1988. After two years of traveling in China, in 1988, Abramovic and Ulay spent three months walking toward each other from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China. This journey provided the impetus for them to formally end their relationship. In 1989, with the assistance of Charles Atlas, she began working on *Biography*, which she first performed in 1992. Varying with every presentation, the work includes the artist's live re-creation, in greatly condensed form, of her earlier performance works.

Abramovic's art has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions, including shows organized by the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (1993), Museum of Modern Art in Oxford (1995), Museum voor Schone Kunsten Gent in Ghent (1997)

Nancy Spero b. 1926, Cleveland

As both an artist and activist, Nancy Spero's career has spanned fifty years. She moved to New York in 1964, during the Vietnam War, which greatly impacted her work. Spero's continuous engagement with contemporary political, social and cultural concerns is renowned. In 2007, she made her Venice Biennale debut at the age of 80. In 2005, Galerie Lelong (New York) presented her third solo exhibition *Cri du Coeur* (Cry of the Heart). Nancy Spero was featured at the Drawing Center's 2005-2006 exhibition *Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War*, and in 2006 was inducted as a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Nancy Spero's most recent solo shows were organized at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Kunsthalle Zu Kiel in Germany. The Metropolitan Transit Authority in New York commissioned a public project at the 66th Street Subway Station at Lincoln Center. In 2000-2001, Nancy Spero was included in many group shows such as Open Ends at MoMA, New York and the Kwangju Biennial, Korea. Projects include a solo exhibition of her War Paintings at Galerie Lelong, New York, an installation in the Egyptian Galleries at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and a joint exhibition at the Baltic Center, England with Kiki Smith in December 2003. In 1996 she was awarded the Hiroshima Peace Prize, together with her late husband, the painter, Leon Golub.

Personnel Biographies

Director/Producer: Chiara Clemente

Producers: Chiara Clemente, Tanya Selvaratnam, Bettina Sulser

Associate Producer: Eva Lindemann

Director of Photography: Theo Stanley

Editor: Martin Levenstein

Music: Thomas M. Lauderdale

Music Supervisors: Thomas M. Lauderdale, Susan Jacobs, Jonathan Friedman

Art Director: Nathan Kilcer

Consulting Editor: Melody London

Chiara Clemente's (Director/Producer) work revolves around questions of identity and cultural contrast. Her love for film came at an early age with her first video camera at the age of 12. Her affinity for art can be traced back to her childhood, tiptoeing around her father's paintings. Thus, the merging of visual art and film was an entirely intuitive process for her when she directed her first art documentary for the Rai Sat Art Channel in Italy in 2000. With the success of the first film she was invited to direct twelve more. Commissions included documentaries on contemporary artists and architects, including Jim Dine, Frank Gehry and Brice Marden. The documentaries evolved and soon she was collaborating with artists on short art films, such as *These Imaginary Boys* and *Know Yourself* with Adrian Tranquilli.

In 2002, Chiara directed and photographed 'Three Worlds: A Portrait of Francesco Clemente,' which premiered on Rai Sat Art and won best new documentary at Corto Circuito in Naples. In 2005, Chiara worked with Richard Tuttle and Mario Sorrenti on a short film commissioned by W Magazine for national distribution with its first Art Issue. Also in 2005, Chiara began work on her first feature documentary, 'Our City Dreams.' Over the course of two years, she followed five women artists: Nancy Spero, Marina Abramovic, Kiki Smith, Ghada Amer, and Swoon, all of whom live and work in NYC as well as around the world. Stylistically, the camera in the film is guided by the artist's perspective and becomes the window through which the viewer is drawn into the inner sphere of the artists' lives. The result is part documentary, part portrait, and part collaboration. After successful openings at Art Basel (where it opened the ArtFilm series), Locarno and Hamptons Film Festivals, 'Our City Dreams' will open at Film Forum in early winter 2009 followed by a Sundance Channel premiere in spring 2009.

This Fall, she will begin her third collaboration with Adrian Tranquilli. Chiara is currently completing a short film commissioned by Saatchi and Saatchi as well as working on adapting a book for the screen.

Tanya Selvaratnam (Producer) is a writer, actor, producer and activist based in New York. Her first feature production, *On_Line* directed by Jed Weintrob, premiered at the Sundance and Berlin Film Festivals in 2002 and played at numerous international festivals, followed by a theatrical release in 2003. She also produced *Domino*, a short film, directed by Gabri Christa, for The Black Filmmakers Foundation Lab and executive-produced *The F Word* for director Jed Weintrob. *The F Word* premiered at the Tribeca

Film Festival in April 2005 and began broadcasting on the IFC Channel in November 2006. In addition to OUR CITY DREAMS, she is producing Catherine Gund's WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE, a documentary about children and food politics.

Also a respected theater artist, Tanya has toured around the world with The Wooster Group's House/Lights and The Builders Association's Alladeen and Super Vision. She has been a guest actor at New Dramatists, the Lincoln Center Director's Lab and the Institute on Arts and Civic Dialogue (under the direction of Anna Deavere Smith). In 2007-8 alone, Tanya has been a resident artist at Yaddo, Voice and Vision Theater at Bard College, and Blue Mountain Center; and performed in Jay Scheib's This Place is a Desert at the Public Theater/Under the Radar Festival and his Obie-award-winning Untitled Mars/This Title May Change at PS 122, Rotozaza's Double Think at PS 122, 9 Scripts from a Nation at War at Documenta, Fiona Templeton's The Medead at Dixon Place, and a solo show at Issue Project Room. She is currently developing an opera of Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans with director Jay Scheib for the Walker Art Center (premiere: December 2008).

When not engaged in artistic pursuits, Tanya devotes her time to youth and international causes. She has worked as a coordinator with the Ms. Foundation, the United Nations and the World Health Organization and has served on the boards of The Third Wave Foundation, Artists for Tsunami Relief and Groundswell Community Mural Project. Tanya received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard University. She was born in Sri Lanka and grew up in Long Beach, California.

Bettina Sulser (*Producer*) is an independent art curator whose initial training was in classical dance. At the age of 17, Bettina was selected by Mikhail Baryshnikov to join the American Ballet Theatre and for eight years she toured extensively with the ABT in the U.S. and abroad, performing both classical and modern dance repertoires and working directly with legendary choreographers such as Agnes DeMille, Sir Kenneth Macmillan, Antony Tudor and Twyla Tharp. PBS Dance in America film credits include David Gordon's Murder and Sir Kenneth MacMillan's Romeo and Juliet. While pursuing a degree in Art History at Columbia University, Bettina danced with the Metropolitan Opera in productions as diverse as Verdi's Aida, Johann Strauss's Die Fledermaus and Philip Glass's The Voyage. It was during this time that she began lecturing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on images of dance throughout art history.

Bettina migrated towards corporate and private art collection management in 1996. Bettina oversees numerous prominent collections in the US and abroad, including the Donald L. Bryant, Jr. Collection and the Kate and Andy Spade Collection. She recently produced the short film Curiosity directed by Chiara Clemente for Saatchi and Saatchi and is currently developing a feature adaptation of James Crump's critically acclaimed documentary, Black White Gray, profiling the photography collector Sam Wagstaff. Bettina was recently named Photography Editor of Weegee Stories, a hybrid publication featuring original short stories by the Pulitzer Prize winning author, Robert Olen Butler, to be published by Narrative Library in early 2009.

Eva Lindemann (*Associate Producer*) has been working in the film and television industry in New York since the 1990s. She currently oversees the film department at Just Blue Films, Bruce Weber's film production company in New York City. She produces all of Mr. Weber's film projects. Her most recent film collaboration with Just Blue Films is the documentary film "A Letter To True" and the new short film "Wine and Cupcakes."

Eva is currently in pre-production on a concert film starring the legendary blues singer Dr. John that will be shot in New Orleans in the spring of 2008 and in post production on a feature-length documentary about the late, great actor Robert Mitchum. Before joining Just Blue Films Eva worked as an editor as well as a post production supervisor in New York on various independent film and television programs

including "Sex and the City," "Ed," "Spin City" and MTV's animated show "Daria." Eva also oversaw post production on several music videos as well as national television commercials.

Theo Stanley (DP) is a cinematographer and visual artist with experience in the fine art and commercial industries. His experience in cinematography includes Bruce Weber's films, "Chop Suey" (2001) and "A Letter to True" (2003), commercials (Ralph Lauren, Margaret Howell), as well as music videos. Outside of his commercial experience he has directed the photography for independent film projects and has professionally documented dance, theater and the visual arts. Theo has an MFA in painting and photography from SMU's Meadows School of the Arts.

Martin Levenstein's (Editor) most recent project is the Macedonian narrative dramatic feature film *Senki* (Shadows) directed by Academy Award nominated Director Milcho Manchevski. *Senki* had its world premiere at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival.

Levenstein works on both documentary and narrative projects and recently completed the segment I'm Back for the series Right To Return on New Orleans post Hurricane Katrina, directed and produced by Jonathan Demme. This segment aired on the Tavis Smiley Show (PBS), May 2007. Levenstein has edited on several other projects for Demme, including *The Manchurian Candidate* (with Carol Littleton and Craig McKay) and Bruce Springsteen videos.

In 2007 Levenstein was Associate Editor on director Noah Baumbach's *Margot At The Wedding*. He was Co-Editor (with Carol Littleton) of Jonathan Kasdan's Warner Bros. release *In The Land Of Women* and has worked with the directors Alan J. Pakula, Milos Forman, Barbet Schroeder, Louis Malle, Wayne Wang and Ted Demme, among others.

In the documentary category, he was Associate Editor of Bruce Weber's *Let's Get Lost*, the classic jazz film about trumpeter Chet Baker, and Co-Editor of Weber's short film *Backyard Movie*. *Let's Get Lost* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Feature Documentary and *Backyard Movie* played at the New York Film Festival. Other festival successes for Levenstein are the short films *Joe* screened in competition at the Cannes Film Festival and *Peephole*, invited to both the Hamptons and New York Film Festivals. Levenstein has also edited documentaries for PBS, Court TV and Hallmark Entertainment, Inc.

Thomas M. Lauderdale (Music) was raised on a plant nursery in rural Indiana and began his formal musical education at the age of six with Patricia Garrison. He has appeared with the Oregon Symphony, the Seattle Symphony, Chamber Music Northwest and the Oregon Ballet Theatre. Active in Oregon politics since a student at U.S. Grant High School (where he was student body president), he worked under Portland City Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury on the drafting and passage of the city's civil rights ordinance in 1991. Thomas graduated cum laude from Harvard with a degree in literature and history, and is the founder and artistic director of Pink Martini. He continues to study piano under Sylvia Killman.

Susan Jacobs (Music Supervisor) has provided the music supervision for dozens of films starting with "Shortcuts" and "Kansas City" for Robert Altman, more than a decade ago, and continuing with such films as "Basquiat," "Chicago Cab," "Chinese Box," "54," "Happiness," "Lulu on the Bridge," "Gloria," "Limbo," "Joe Gould's Secret," "Girlfight," "Before Night Falls," "Unbreakable," "Storytelling," "The Village," IMAX *Roving Mars*, "Everything is Illuminated," "Capote," "Sherry Baby," "Lady in the Water", "Little Miss Sunshine", "Married Life", "For the Bible Told me So", "Things We Lost in the Fire", "Diving Bell and the Butterfly", "Sunshine Cleaning" and "The Yellow Handkerchief". Susan started her career in music at Island Records. She was the assistant to Chris Blackwell for a number of years before going in to artist/composer/producer management; her clients were Hal Willner, Gavin Friday and Evan Lurie. She is currently managing Sophie Auster and composer Paul Cantelon.

Melody London (*Consulting Editor*) has been active in the independent film community for over twenty years. The first film she edited after NYU graduate film school was the internationally acclaimed *Stranger Than Paradise*. She worked as editor to Jim Jarmusch for his next five films, several of them winning major awards including Cannes Film Festival's Camera D'Or and the New York Film Critics Best Film of the Year Award. Other major award-winning films she edited include Frank Whaley's *Joe the King* and Rebecca Miller's *Angela*, both winners at the Sundance Film Festival. Melody also received the honor of being chosen by the American Film Institute to write and direct her own movie.

Due to her original interest in social issue documentaries, Melody has alternated her work in narrative films with producing and editing nonfiction films within diverse cultures. To date, she has edited nineteen feature films and seventeen documentaries. Melody has also collaborated with many prominent performance artists including Laurie Anderson, Peter Sellars, Richard Foreman, and The Wooster Group. She recently finished her first feature length screenplay, which has just gone into pre-production. Melody is very interested in working with young people and has taught full-time at both NYU Tisch School of the Arts and California Institute of the Arts.

Selected Press

“Manages to be not only a first-rate portrait of great artists but also an impressive look at the way they interact with the city that feeds their work.” –Bilge Ebiri, *New York Magazine*

“A lyrical documentary about the intersection of location and imagination.”
–Jeanette Catsoulis, *The New York Times*

“Vibrant & Illuminating! Tantalizing.” –Dennis Dermody, *Paper Magazine*

“Celebratory... a joyous infusion of life!... Clemente depicts these women in all of their fiery intensity and the profiles of *Our City Dreams* meld into a hymn of hope and courage for the fervor of artistic creation.”
–Paul Brenner, *Filmcritic.com*

"An intimate portrait of five women artists. Celebrates the metropolis as a cauldron of creativity."
–Leslie Camhi, *Vogue*

“Absorbing... (the) art, like the film itself, is powerful, daring and makes you think.”
–Gary Goldstein, *Los Angeles Times*

“A thoughtful, sometimes revealing look at creative lives and the forces that shaped them.”
–Maitland McDonagh, *Time Out New York*

“Exquisitely crafted... quite simply ranks as a work of art.” –Ronnie Scheib, *Variety*

“A fascinating film and a good introduction to five of the most significant artists of our time.”
–Jeremy Hatch, *San Francisco MetBlogs*

“A lyrical and joyful portrait.” –Matt Sussman, *Flavorpill*

“An entrancing slice of the life each woman and their art.” –Tricia Romano, *Black Book Magazine*

“Airy and intimate ... Candid and unpretentious.” –Fernando F. Croce, *Slant Magazine*

“An intimate series of portraits... Clemente’s film compellingly depicts the underlying, rather un-dreamy mores that propelled these individual careers in the bright lights of the big city—veracity, dedication, and commitment, to name a few.” –Lauren O’Neill-Butler, *ArtForum*

“Closely observed, beautifully shot and scored, and often moving.” –Maya Singer, *Style*

“A film about discovering your artistic passion at any age, about living authentically in a fractured world, and the importance of women in art.” –Brittany Shoot, *Feminist Review*

“This beautiful, patient, and thoughtful film examines what it means to be a woman working as an artist in the city that quivers with the energy of the past, present, and future.”
–Katie Rolnick, *Tiny Mix Tapes*

“Intimate opportunity to see how successful women artists navigate the art world while infusing their work with feminist consciousness.” –Nora Lee Mandel, *Film Forward*

“B+ ...Our City Dreams finds the myriad dimensions in a simple concept...the 15 minutes or so we spend with each artist is enough to see how they've turned their habitats, their gender, and their personal crusades into imaginative, eye-catching work.” –Noel Murray, *Onion AV Club*

"Filled with gorgeous shots of New York and from-the-heart discussions of artistry and inspiration, this wide-ranging appreciation is a nice glimpse into the artistic process."
–Joe Neumaier, *New York Daily News*

“*Inspired*...a collage of self-conscious acceptance and human struggle.”
–Nick McCarthy, *L Magazine*

“Fascinating...bracing in its spirit and also a refresher course in some of the permutations of what is now regarded as feminist art across the decades.” –Bruce Eder, *Allmovie Blog*