

"Boasting a narrative of extraordinary complexity and density,
stuffed with irony, humor and tales-within-tales...
IMAGINATIVE...FASCINATING AND VERY PERSONAL."

—Alissa Simon, VARIETY

Rocks in my Pockets

WINNER
BEST ANIMATED
FEATURE FILM
ANIMATOR
2014

WINNER
FIPRESCI PRIZE
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A crazy quest for sanity

AN ANIMATED FILM BY
SIGNE BAUMANE

ROCKS IN MY POCKETS A FILM BY SIGNE BAUMANE
HEAD WRITER KRISTIAN GASKIN • SOUND DESIGNER WESTON FONGER
EDITOR AND TRANSLATOR WENDY CONN ZHANG
COLOR GRADER AND PRODUCTION DESIGNER BASMA HASSIB
OF PRODUCER AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER STUBBS WINNER PRODUCER SIGNE BAUMANE
WRITER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER AND ANIMATOR BY SIGNE BAUMANE • A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE
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ROCKS IN MY POCKETS

A film by Signe Baumane

In the new animated gem *Rocks in My Pockets*, Latvian-born artist and filmmaker Signe Baumane tells five fantastical tales based on the courageous women in her family and their battles with madness. With boundless imagination and a twisted sense of humor, she has created daring stories of art, romance, marriage, nature, business, and Eastern European upheaval—all in the fight for her own sanity.

Employing a unique, beautifully textured combination of papier-mâché stop-motion and classic hand-drawn animation (with inspiration from Jan Svankmajer and Bill Plympton), Baumane has produced a poignant and often hilarious tale of mystery, mental health, redemption and survival.



LONG SYNOPSIS

Fighting for her sanity, a young artist uses wit and imagination to confront the secrets of her family's madness.

Rocks in My Pockets is a story of mystery and redemption. The film is based on true events involving the women of director Signe Baumane's family—including herself—and their battles with madness. It raises questions of how much family genetics determine who we are and if it is possible to outsmart one's own DNA. The film is packed with visual metaphors, surreal images and her twisted sense of humor. It is an animated tale full of art, women, strange daring stories, Latvian accents, history, nature, adventure and more.



Latvia, the late 1920s. Anna, a young woman, pretty and educated, falls in love with an adventurous entrepreneur, 30 years her senior. But with marriage comes great jealousy, and the entrepreneur hides Anna away in the forest, far from other men, where she bears him eight children. The Great Depression hits them hard. Then Latvia is overrun with invasions by the Soviets, then the Nazis, then the Soviets once again. Anna is a pillar of strength, defying the hardships, raising her young, teaching them survival secrets of the forest. But something inside her is terribly wrong.

Many years later, Signe, a young artist, asks her father, "How did my grandmother die?" He is evasive. His seven siblings are evasive as well. Signe strongly suspects that Anna committed suicide. Clues of mental illness had always leaked through the family stories. Signe suffers from depression herself. Her suicidal fantasies get her locked away for four months in a Soviet mental hospital. Three of her cousins, all women, battle madness, as well. Could there be a link between Anna and the four granddaughters?

Defying the stigma that silences so many, Signe takes us on a journey deep into her own depression where she looks to confront the family demons. But, unlike her cousins, she finds an assuring guide in animation and art.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: ON DEPRESSION

The idea for *Rocks in My Pockets* came from my stream of consciousness. Like most people I think about a wide variety of things, some fantastical, some mundane, but my mind keeps coming back to thoughts of “ending it all” and the ways I could go about doing it. Why? Why do I think this way? And why I am still alive despite such thoughts? I find the fragility of our minds fascinating. Life is strange, unpredictable, sometimes absurd and I try to see the humor in it all.



While I was studying at Moscow State University, I got pregnant and married the father of my future child, a Russian artist. After my son was born, I started having dark obsessive thoughts. I sought council with a local psychiatrist to whom I confessed that, at 18, I had tried to commit suicide by taking an excessive amount of Dimedrol. I was immediately sent to a Soviet mental hospital and locked away for four months. The official diagnosis was schizophrenia, but this was downgraded to the “lesser” one of manic-depression after my parents bribed medical officials.

Despite the diagnosis, I returned to the university, graduated successfully, and started my career as an animator.

It turned out that I was not the only one in my extended family having dark, obsessive thoughts. In fact, I had plenty of company. Unfortunately, not all of the sufferers were able to fend their demons off.

Rocks in My Pockets is dedicated to my family members who did not survive, and to my surviving family, who still live in the aftermath. The film is dedicated to the hope that we sustain in our darkest moments.

—Signe Baumane

DIRECTOR Q&A

Your animated short “Teat Beat of Sex” went to Sundance, Berlin and hundreds of other film festivals. Why after making successful, funny films about sex did you decide to make a film about depression?

Rocks in My Pockets is funny, too. In fact, I describe it as “a funny film about depression”. Well, maybe it's not an outright comedy, but it's full of irony and uses funny images to talk about serious matters.

The thing that interests me as an artist, one of the things, is the interaction of the inwardly personal with the outwardly social. We all have deeply personal experiences that we don't discuss, but we feel them, and when we externalize them, they become stories, and most likely they become really removed from the original inner experience. I want to bridge the gap between the internal and external, I want to communicate what it really feels like to be alive and go to a dentist, or have sex, or be depressed.

And yes, I do often address difficult, uncomfortable subjects in my films because I believe in confronting the things that bother me head-on.

The very idea of making a film on depression happened one November day in 2010 when I was struggling through another bout of obsessive thoughts of self-elimination. I started to write down the different scenarios of how I would not commit suicide (I am very finicky and controlling about those matters). Written down, those thoughts became absurd, funny and harmless. It occurred to me that other people might relate to this thought process and might find it amusing and disarming to hear them aloud. I then asked myself where these thoughts might come from, and the whole story started pouring out of me.

How did you think to involve your family into the story about your depression?

When I was a teen, I thought that my feelings were absolutely unique—adults seemed so impervious to suffering, and my peers were either beauty queens or bullies, their hearts cold as stones. I thought that I was the only one in the whole world feeling this pain. Characters in the books that I read were not too happy either, but they had reasons to suffer, as their lives were full of unimaginable hardships. I had no obvious reasons to be miserable.

Then I started to see mental collapses in my family and it made me think that those collapses might be connected. What did my three cousins and I have in common? We shared the family DNA.

Now that I am older I cannot see my bouts of depression as disconnected from my family. Every bit of pain I feel makes me feel the deeper connection to my family's makeup, its past and perhaps its future.

It also makes me feel connected to millions of other people who go through similar experiences. I am not alone with my bouts of depression, which I suffer through twice a year.

But that is an interesting thought—the possibility that depression gets carried on to other generations by some gene, and that so many of us are condemned to suffer from the workings of this gene. I wonder if there might be some evolutionary advantage to all this suffering.

What does your family think about you making the film?

They are nervous. I heard that there are family discussions on why I should or should not make the film. The older generation is against letting the story out. But my cousins who lost their sisters to suicide are courageously embracing *Rocks in My Pockets* and even supported our Kickstarter campaign.

Why did you do the voiceover for the film?

This is a very personal story, and I felt that it had to be my voice telling it. I just couldn't imagine a stranger doing it.

I rehearsed with Sturgis Warner, a theater director, daily for seven weeks and at the end of the process we had an reading for twenty friends and colleagues to see what worked and what didn't. Based on the feedback, we made cuts and adjustments, rehearsed some more, then recorded the voiceover. With the voiceover in place, work on the animation and visual storytelling could begin.

When the animation was finished (with coloring and other processes still being worked on) we had three more test screenings of the film to make sure the audiences understood the story and connected with it. We cut out five minutes and made other adjustments to bring the final film to 88 minutes.

How has your view on depression changed? Has making the film helped you with your depression?

I don't make films in lieu of therapy, I make films to offer people my point of view, to provoke them to think differently, to engage them in a dialogue, and hopefully to entertain them.

So that's why I made the film, and I wrote the story the best I could at the time. But it took three years to make the film and one cannot help but change and gain fresh perspectives. I can now formulate better what my specific symptoms are because in *Rocks in My Pockets* there are six rocks, each representing a specific symptom of depression, and I had to name them. Now when I feel certain way I go: Aha, the rock of dread is bothering me today!

Making the film has certainly made me more aware of the symptoms of my depression.

The film has two fantasy characters: a creature living in the river representing the will to die, and a creature in the forest representing the will to live. I had never formulated my daily struggles so simply—I do have a will to live and it is fending off my will to die. They fight over me. Putting images on those two wills, I can now better see who is gaining the upper hand and when. Day after day the will to live has been winning, at least for now.

Do you think that women suffer from depression more than men?

I don't think depression discriminates between genders. There are statistics somewhere that say that men commit suicide more than women, while women are more likely to seek support from their communities, friends and family. The fact that women are more open to discuss the problem with other people makes for the anecdotal "evidence" that we are more prone to depression.

Why did you choose the combination of stop motion and traditional hand-drawn animation as your technique for this project?

I am a freelancer and will do a lot of things for money. Niccolo Gallivanoni, my friend and Italian distributor of "Teat Beat of Sex," found an opportunity for me to paint a huge Christmas mural for the flagship store of the Italian designer Aspesi in Milan. After I completed the mural, Aspesi asked if I could make him some paper-mache sculptures. Recklessly, I said yes. The few paper-mache objects I had made were small, the size of a paper cup. But he wanted his sculptures big.

"As tall as you and as wide as Niccolo," Aspesi instructed. It was an unusual challenge, but I grew to love working with paper-mache. I spent several months in Milan making and painting the sculptures, 30 of them, which Aspesi displayed all around his store. And I wondered how I could incorporate this new skill into my animated work.

While I was writing the script for *Rocks in My Pockets* I started to think how much I enjoy three-dimensionality in movies - the change of focus from background to foreground as well as parallax views. I then realized that I could create my own 3D images with paper mache.

It would be both fun and cheap. So I started making paper-mache sets, many of them, and they quickly filled my studio space. I painted them, then shot them with a digital camera often employing various stop motion techniques. These became the background images for much of the film. On top of these backgrounds I placed my hand-drawn two-dimensional animated characters creating a unique look, 2D on 3D. In all, I made 30,000 drawings for *Rocks in My Pockets*.

How did you finance the project?

As I was writing the script in 2010, I applied for a New York Council for the Arts grant through Women Make Movies. The grant was received at the end of that year, and Women Make Movies became the *Rocks in My Pockets* fiscal sponsor. The project also received a grant from The Jerome Foundation. At the early stages of the project we organized a couple of fundraising parties and had an IndieGoGo campaign.

Through private donations and grants we successfully raised enough funds for the majority of production, and so in 2011 I stopped fundraising to give all my time and attention to the making of the film. But by early 2013 money was running low. In January–February of 2013 we ran a successful Kickstarter campaign, and with the help of 800 backers we raised over \$50,000, enough to complete the film.

What and who are your influences?

I grew up in Latvia, which at that time was part of the Soviet Union, and I was really influenced by Eastern European poster art, illustration and animation. My greatest influence was Stasys Eidrigevicius, a Lithuanian-Polish illustrator whose rich, imaginative work still fascinates me. Then, of course, there is the great Czech filmmaker Jan Svankmajer, whose surrealistic approach to animation has had an everlasting influence on me. Russian animator-director Yuriy Norstein made moody, realistic short film called "Hedgehog in the Fog," which I have probably seen more than 78 times!

When I came to New York, my introduction to Bill Plympton's work influenced me in an entirely different way. It gave me permission to be funny and silly. And I learned a lot from Bill on how to make films cheaply.

My work is a combination of these two contradicting influences—the serious, moody, artsy Eastern European with upbeat, funny, gag-based American animation.

CREW BIOS

SIGNE BAUMANE (Director/Writer/Producer/Animator/Voiceover)

Signe Baumane was born in Latvia. She received a BA degree in Philosophy from Moscow State University in 1989. Eight months after giving birth to her son she was checked into a mental hospital and diagnosed as manic-depressive. Despite the diagnosis, Signe made three animated short films in Latvia before moving to New York in 1995. In New York she continued to work in the field of animation and made twelve more award-winning animated shorts. Her films have screened at Sundance, Berlin, Annecy, Venice, Tribeca and hundreds of other film festivals around the world. *Rocks in My Pockets* is her first feature film project.



STURGIS WARNER (Co-Producer/Voiceover Director)

Sturgis Warner has been part of the New York theatre scene for many years as an actor, director and occasional producer. He specializes in new plays and development. The voiceover script for *Rocks in My Pockets* was treated as a new play and was rehearsed as such, every day for seven weeks. He is Artistic Director of Twilight Theatre Company, a member of New York Theatre Workshop's Usual Suspects, and is on the Artistic Cabinet of The Lark Play Development Center.

KRISTIAN SENSINI (Music Composer)

Kristian Sensini is a composer for film based in Italy. He has worked with numerous productions in Italy and the U.S., specializing in thriller, drama, fantasy and documentary. He has a Jazz degree from Pesaro Conservatory (Italy) where he studied composition, arranging and classical flute. His teachers include Ennio Morricone, Michael Giacchino, Nathan Barr, Dave Grusin and Christopher YOUNG. Sensini has scored nine feature films. In 2010, 2011, and 2013 he received a total of six nominations for best score (Documentary, Promotion, Best Song, and Best Short categories) at the Jerry Goldsmith International Film Music Awards. He is sensitive to the language of film and has a unique ability to interpret and enhance it with his work.

WENDY CONG ZHAO (Editor/Composer)

Wendy Cong Zhao graduated from Boston University in 2011 with a BFA in Painting, and a BS in Film Production. For two years, she worked on *Rocks in My Pockets* as an editor and composer. She went on to work as a producer for Bill Plympton at Plymptoons. Wendy's own drawings have been featured in several publications.

WESTON FONGER (Sound Design)

Weston Fonger, sound designer/engineer at Yessian, began in NYC at Howard Schwartz Recording (HSRNY) assisting ADR (automated dialogue replacement) sessions on projects like *The Simpsons* and *X-Men: The Last Stand*. He also worked as a mixer/sound designer for nearly five years at audioEngine (NYC), for clients such as HBO, Sony, Converse, Revlon and Visa. His credits include films for Academy Award-nominated animator Bill Plympton, several TV pilots for comedian Dave Attell, Brian Iglesias' documentary film *Chosin*, Kitao Sakurai's feature film *Aardvark*, and others.

RASHIDA NASIR (Color Design/Production Manager)

Rashida Nasir graduated from the Pratt Institute with a BFA in Film/Animation in 2010, and has since worked at Little Airplane and London Square Productions. In 2011, she joined *Rocks in My Pockets* as production manager and color designer. She now works as a freelance animator and designer.

ROCKS IN MY POCKETS

A film by Signe Baumane

CREDITS

WRITTEN, DIRECTED, PRODUCED & ANIMATED BY
SIGNE BAUMANE

VOICEOVER
SIGNE BAUMANE

CO-PRODUCER/VOICEOVER DIRECTOR
STURGIS WARNER

MUSIC COMPOSED BY
KRISTIAN SENSINI

EDITOR/COMPOSITOR
WENDY CONG ZHAO

SOUND DESIGN
WESTON FONGER

COLOR DESIGN/PRODUCTION MANAGER
RASHIDA NASIR

USA • 2014 • 88 mins • Color/Animated • In English • 1.78:1 aspect ratio • Dolby 5.1
Not Rated • Formats: DCP, Blu-ray and HD-CAM



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