

KINO LORBER



Framing Agnes

A film by Chase Joynt



Canada / USA | 2022 | 75 min | 1:85:1 | Color | In English

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Synopsis

The pseudonymous Agnes was a pioneering transgender woman who participated in an infamous gender health study conducted at UCLA in the 1960s. Her clever use of the study to gain access to gender-affirming healthcare led to her status as a fascinating and celebrated figure in trans history. In this playful cinematic exercise that blends fiction and nonfiction, director Chase Joynt (*No Ordinary Man*) uses Agnes's story, along with others unearthed in long-shelved case files, to widen the frame through which trans history is viewed. Through a collaborative practice of reimagination, an all-star cast of trans performers, artists, and thinkers – including Angelica Ross (*Pose*), Jen Richards (*Mrs. Fletcher*), and Zackary Drucker (*Transparent*) – take on vividly rendered, impeccably vintage reenactments, bringing to life groundbreaking artifacts of trans history. This collective reclamation breaks down the myth of isolation among transgender history-makers, breathing new life into a lineage of collaborators and conspirators who have been forgotten for far too long.

Director's Statement

My practice is grounded in a commitment to using experimental and performative methods to put pressure on culture-making moments that impact the trans community: from animating medical technologies to tell a story about the institutional surveillance of gender to a satirical response to invasive and imagined questions about minoritized identities. *Framing Agnes* is born out of these fundamental short-form beginnings which are rooted in a belief that trans people should remain leaders of the trans movement, and narrators of trans stories. This project is uniquely positioned to address critical questions that are being illuminated by the current spotlight on trans issues.

The recent proliferation of stories about transgender rights and figures in popular media has resulted in unprecedented attention on gender non-conforming communities. Presenting one person's story, rather than a story about a group, is a common storytelling method in medical and media histories of trans people. In these stories, trans people are positioned in isolation – untethered from community and family – and therefore ever-vulnerable to harm and exploitation. In reality, trans communities have been navigating and world-building together behind the scenes since before “trans” was a thing. Isolation was, in fact, a narrative produced and patrolled by medicine and the media.

Representation of trans and gender nonconforming communities has changed dramatically in the last decade. *Framing Agnes* emerges as an incisive opportunity to both acknowledge social transformation and critically engage the flawed makings of history. Our project is emboldened by a team of artists motivated to blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction, past and present, in pursuit of a more expansive and nuanced future. Together, we invest in collaboration and performance as mechanisms through which we can imagine and enact social change.

— Chase Joynt
Director, Writer, Producer, *Framing Agnes*

Writer's Statement

There is no group of people more ubiquitously tied to our current decade's politics than trans people. *TIME*'s Transgender Tipping Point in 2014 was just that: the catalyzing moment that brought trans people into the mainstream consciousness in a way we hadn't been for nearly forty years. Competing efforts to legislate us into and out of existence sprang up in its wake across Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and beyond, alongside a massive wave of media portrayals on dramas, comedies, documentaries, and, yes, talk shows. These news stories, feature films, and guest appearances were sometimes positive, sometimes negative, but almost exclusively written and directed by and for non-trans people. Is there any narrative quite so moulded and packaged for non-trans people than our TV talk show appearances? From the earliest glimpse of Christine Jorgensen stepping a well-turned heel onto the tarmac at Idlewild airport in 1952 following her world-shaking sex change, to chants of "Jerry! Jerry!" as trans people are exposed and humiliated for applause on '90s trash TV, the media has taken it upon itself to tell the non-trans world how it should feel about us.

While some might write off this legacy of freakshow coverage for its politically incorrect and occasionally violent nature, *Framing Agnes* aims to show us how this may be one of the few arenas where our lives and our histories have been well-documented and linked to the contemporary times in which we find ourselves living, dying, and sometimes thriving. Whether it's the CBC interviewing trans woman Dianna Boileau for an unaired docuseries about women's issues in the 1970s, or the "world's first pregnant man" shocking audiences on Oprah in 2008, talk show appearances of trans people have a lot to say about the zeitgeist at any particular moment. Are we evidence of the sexual revolution's victory? Or a disconcerting development of the tech era? Are we a fundamental threat to heterosexuality? Or glamorous entertainers giving thrills to bored housewives?

Examining and upending these narratives, as *Framing Agnes* aims to do, will illuminate not only how media narratives about trans people have changed over time, but also how the concerns of an era are read onto the bodies of some of the most marginalized in society without their consent. While Canada moves to affirm non-binary identities legally, America bans transgender troops, and the UK systematically loses its mind in a panic over our bodies, *Framing Agnes*—and its new telling of trans history—couldn't come at a better or more urgent time.

— Morgan M. Page
Co-Writer, *Framing Agnes*

Producer's Statement

Framing Agnes is not the average documentary. Its genre-bending approach aims to engage and challenge audiences to become active participants in the remaking of trans history. By juxtaposing the story of Agnes in the 1950s with the celebrity of trans actors in our contemporary moment, the project aims to invite critical attention to questions of representation, authority, and truth-telling. As society wrestles with the legacy of histories told and buried, *Framing Agnes* offers something urgently relevant to help us move differently towards a more equitable future.

This project also represents another frontier of an emerging trend in nonfiction filmmaking. Throughout the many years of bringing this project to life, we worked diligently to mirror the world being produced on screen with everything that happened both behind and in front of the camera. In other words, the way we went about making this film is very much in line with the ethos and impulses of the film itself. Just as in the film, there is no “on” and “off” screen when you are collaborating with a team of people whose lives are implicated by the story being told.

As producers, we are deeply committed to engaging artistic voices from emerging queer communities and communities of color. This meant working outside traditional systems of funding, hiring, and producing. Through incredible collaboration, patience, and perseverance we were able to bring our fantasies for this project to life and couldn't be more thrilled for it to have its World Premiere at Sundance.

We imagine *Framing Agnes* will become an important object of study for those interested in popular culture, media studies, and the history of race, class, and gender. Through this project, we've been inspired to think critically and creatively about community history and the power we each have in the stories we choose to tell and believe.

— Samantha Curley and Shant Joshi
Producers, *Framing Agnes*

Cast Bios

Zackary Drucker (she/her) is an independent artist, filmmaker, and cultural producer. She has performed and exhibited her work internationally in museums, galleries, and film festivals including the Whitney Biennial 2014, MoMa PS1, Hammer Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, MCA San Diego, and SF MoMA, among others. Drucker is an Emmy nominated producer for the docuseries *This Is Me*, and was a producer on the Golden Globe and Emmy Award-winning Amazon show *Transparent*. *The Lady and The Dale*, her directorial debut for television, premiered on HBO in early 2021.

Angelica Ross, Founder & CEO, TransTech Actress, & Advocate (Media Kit [here](#))
From the board room, to film and TV sets to Capitol Hill, Angelica Ross (she/her) is a leading figure of success and strength, in the movement for Transgender and racial equality. A series regular on the ninth season of Ryan Murphy's FX hit *American Horror Story: 1984*, and confirmed to return for the currently untitled season ten, Angelica is blazing a trail, kicking open doors, and building her own table with ample open seats.

In 2020, Angelica became a face of Nicolas Ghesquière's pre-Fall campaign for Louis Vuitton — a campy homage to vintage sci-fi book covers.

Angelica's acting breakthrough came in the form of Ryan Murphy's Award Winning FX hit, *Pose* — which follows NYC's Black and Latino LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming ballroom culture scene, in the 80's and early 90's. Making TV history, the show features the largest transgender cast ever for a scripted series. *Vanity Fair* raved that "Angelica Ross steals many of her scenes as 'Candy'" the brashest member of the 'House of Abundance.'

Since studying acting at Florida Atlantic University, Angelica has appeared across numerous mediums, including film, television, and theatre. One project, the Emmy-nominated (Outstanding Short Form Comedy or Drama) web series *Her Story*, received special recognition at the GLAAD Media Awards. A segment Angelica appeared in on *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah, was honored with a GLAAD Award for Outstanding Talk Show Episode. She's also appeared in *Transparent* (Amazon), *Claws* (TNT), *Doubt* (CBS), and *Danger & Eggs* (Amazon).

Miss Ross also works behind the camera! She executive produced and appeared in the Daytime Emmy-nominated web series *King Ester* (2019), and in the short film *Missed Connections* (2017), which went on to be an official selection at the Outfest LGBTQ Film Festival, the La Femme International Film Festival, and the Baltimore International Black Film Festival.

Angelica Ross is the President of Miss Ross, Inc. and founder of TransTech Social Enterprises, a program that helps people lift themselves out of poverty through technical training, digital work creating a social impact, and bringing economic empowerment to marginalized communities.

Jen Richards (she/her) is a writer and actor whose work focuses on centering stories normally relegated to the margins.

Silas Howard (he/him) is a director and writer focused on telling honest narratives filled with groundbreaking characters. His credits include executive producing and directing on FX's Emmy nominated series *Pose*, directing Sundance premiere and IFC Films internationally distributed film *A Kid Like Jake*. His television credits include directing on multiple seasons of Emmy award-winning *Transparent*, Peabody award-winning *Dickinson*, *The Fosters*, *Faking It*, *This Is Us*, *High Maintenance*, *Tales of the City*, and Josh Thomas' *Everything's Gonna Be Okay*. He was a founding member of the seminal queer punk band *Tribe 8*, co-founder of San Francisco legendary cafe and performance space *Red Dora's Bearded Lady*, and a 2015 Guggenheim fellow.

Max Wolf Valerio (he/him) is an iconoclastic poet, writer, actor, and a long-transitioned man of transsexual history. He is half First Nations (Kainai/Blackfoot Confederacy, Treaty 7) from his mother's side, and began transition thirty-three years ago in San Francisco. Prior to "Framing Agnes" Max has been featured in several films including: "Max" (1992); "Gendernauts" (1999); and "Genderation" (2021) — Dir. Monika Treut. He acted in the trans cult films "Maggots and Men" (2009) and "Unhung Heroes" (2002). Recently, Miriam Atkin dialogues with him about poetry in the arts journal "Caesura" (Nov, 2021). Poetry: *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics* (Nightboat Books, 2013); an art book collaboration with SF artist Dana F. Smith *Mission Miracle Mile Trilogy +1* (2011). His memoir, *The Testosterone Files* (Seal Press, 2006) was a Lambda Finalist for 2006. His latest book of poetry is *The Criminal: The Invisibility of Parallel Forces* (EOAGH Books, 2019).

Stephen Ira (he/him) is a writer, filmmaker, and performer. His poetry has appeared in venues like *DIAGRAM*, *Poetry*, *Fence*, *American Poetry Review*, and *tagvverk*. As an actor, he has appeared at venues like *La Mama Etc*, *Dixon Place*, and *The Stud*, creating roles in new plays by poets like *Maxe Crandall* and *Bernadette Mayer*. As a filmmaker, his work has appeared at *OutFest*, *New Fest*, and the *Philly Trans Wellness Conference*. In 2013, he was a Lambda Literary Fellow. In 2019, he completed an MFA at the *Iowa Writers' Workshop*.

Jules Gill-Peterson (she/her) is a writer, historian, and author of the Lambda Literary Award winning book *Histories of the Transgender Child*. Her work on trans culture and politics has also been published or featured in *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *The Guardian*, and *NPR*. She is an associate professor of history at Johns Hopkins University.

Crew Bios

DIRECTOR, WRITER, PRODUCER:

Chase Joynt (he/him) is a director and writer whose films have won jury and audience awards internationally. His debut documentary feature, *Framing Agnes*, will premiere at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival. With Aisling Chin-Yee, Chase co-directed *No Ordinary Man*, a feature-length documentary about jazz musician Billy Tipton, which was presented at Cannes Docs 2020 as part of the Canadian Showcase of Docs-in-Progress. Since premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2020, *No Ordinary Man* has been hailed by *The New Yorker* as “a genre unto itself” and *Indiewire* as “the future of trans cinema.” The film has won 9 awards on the international festival circuit, including being named to TIFF Canada’s Top Ten. Joynt’s first book *You Only Live Twice* (co-authored with Mike Hoolboom) was a Lambda Literary Award Finalist and named one of the best books of the year by *The Globe and Mail* and CBC. Chase also directed episodes of *Two Sentence Horror Stories* for the CW, which are now streaming on Netflix. With Samantha Curley, Chase runs Level Ground Productions, a collaboratively run production company in Los Angeles.

CO-WRITER:

Morgan M Page (she/her) is a Canadian writer, historian, and artist based in London, UK. She is the creator of the trans history podcast *One From the Vaults*, and the executive producer of the investigative podcast series *Harsh Reality: the Story of Miriam Rivera* (Wondery, 2021). With Chase Joynt, she is the co-writer of *Framing Agnes*, as well as the *Queer Cinema Classics* book *Boys Don't Cry* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2022). Her work as a video and performance artist has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum, MOCA Taipei, and the Art Gallery of Ontario. In addition to her creative work, she is the co-founder of *Trans Abolitionist Futures*, a prison abolitionist reading group for trans and non-binary people in London.

RESEARCH DESIGNER, COLLABORATOR:

Kristen Schilt (she/her) is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, where she directs the Center for the Study of Gender & Sexuality. She is the author of *Just One of the Guys: Transgender Men and the Persistence of Inequality* and the co-editor of *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*. Her work has

appeared in *Gender & Society* and other journals. In 2019 she co-directed a short film with Chase Joynt, *Framing Agnes* that premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival.

PRODUCERS:

Samantha Curley (she/her) is an independent producer and creative entrepreneur based in Los Angeles. She is the Co-Founder of Level Ground Collective, a 501(c)3 artist collective and production incubator creating experiments in empathy. Together with Chase Joynt, she also runs Level Ground Productions, a collaborative production company engaging the most important issues of the contemporary moment. Her first film, *FRAMING AGNES* (dir. Chase Joynt) premiered as a short at the 2019 Tribeca Film Festival and will premiere as a feature at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival. She's also currently in production on *JFK8* (dir. Brett Story and Steve Maing) which follows a group of Amazon workers in their fight to unionize. Since 2013, Samantha has produced dozens of short films, podcasts, community events, and gallery installations. Her film projects have screened at festivals and won awards around the world, and she's received support from IDA, Field of Vision, Catapult, Ford Foundation, Just Films, Gotham, Hot Docs, XTR, and more. Samantha graduated with a B.S. from Northwestern University's School of Communication, an M.A. in Theology and the Arts from Fuller Seminary, and received an Executive Scholar Certificate from the Kellogg School of Management. In her free time she serves on the founding steering committee of the Eastside Women's Film Club, plays on a women's recreational basketball team in Los Angeles, and is a community organizer in LA's Echo Park neighborhood.

Shant Joshi (he/him) is a queer Indo-Canadian film & TV producer and president of Fae Pictures, based in Los Angeles and Toronto. His credits include the films *Framing Agnes* (Sundance), *International Dawn Chorus Day* (Berlin, TEDDY Award Winner), *Porcupine Lake* (Toronto), and *Noor & Layla* (BlackStar); the hit web series *Teenagers (CSAs)*; and the Dekkoo original series, *I'm Fine* (Outfest). He is an alum of the Producers Lab at the Canadian Film Centre, holds a Certificate in Entertainment Law from Osgoode Hall Law School, and was named to York University's inaugural Top 30 Changemakers under 30. He currently sits on the Canadian Media Producers Association's Restructuring, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Committee and on the Board of Directors for BIPOC TV & Film.

CO-PRODUCER, EDITOR:

Brooke Stern Sebold (she/they) is a nonbinary filmmaker/artist born and raised in Tucson, Arizona. Her work investigates gender and identity through writing, directing, editing, producing, and daydreaming. Brooke has cut five feature films including

ALASKA IS A DRAG (Netflix) and FRAMING AGNES (Sundance, 2022), which she also co-produced. Brooke also cut and co-produced FRAMING AGNES the short, which premiered at Tribeca in 2019. In 2007, Brooke co-directed the feature doc RED WITHOUT BLUE, which won the audience award at Slamdance and the jury award at Frameline. Brooke recently served as story consultant on the Amazon doc-series ALWAYS JANE. Currently, she edits the Emmy-nominated series, BRIEF BUT SPECTACULAR, which airs weekly on PBS NewsHour. Brooke loves crystals, doggies, triangles, and they/them pronouns sometimes.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:

Named one of Forbes 30 Under 30, **Alex Schmider** (he/him) is an award-winning film producer and the Associate Director of Transgender Representation at GLAAD, the nation's leading LGBTQ media advocacy organization. He is Producer of the Critics Choice Award nominated Hulu Original Documentary *Changing the Game* (2021) and Associate Producer of the Peabody Award Honored Netflix Original Documentary *Disclosure* (2020). Named one of *them's* 2021 Now List, honoring LGBTQ+ visionaries, he is also a member of the Producer's Guild of America's inaugural Create class.

Vivek Shraya (she/her) is an artist whose body of work crosses the boundaries of music, literature, visual art, theatre, and film. Her album Part-Time Woman was nominated for the Polaris Music Prize, and her best-selling book I'm Afraid of Men was heralded by Vanity Fair as "cultural rocket fuel." She is also the founder of the award-winning publishing imprint VS. Books, which supports emerging BIPOC writers. A seven-time Lambda Literary Award finalist, Vivek was a Pride Toronto Grand Marshal and has been a brand ambassador for MAC Cosmetics and Pantene. She is a director on the board of the Tegan and Sara Foundation, an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Calgary, and is currently adapting her debut play, How to Fail as a Popstar, for television with the support of CBC.

CINEMATOGRAPHY:

Aubree Bernier-Clarke (they/them) is a director and cinematographer based in Los Angeles and Portland, OR. In 2013, Aubree participated in AFI's eminent DWW directing workshop, through which they developed their award-winning narrative short, *The Night Is Ours*, starring Bex Taylor-Klaus. In 2019, Aubree's documentary short *A Normal Girl*, about intersex activist Pidgeon Pagonis, premiered at BFI Flare in London and the American Pavilion at Cannes Film Festival, and in 2020 won the Grand Jury Award for Best Short Documentary at the United Nations Association Film Festival.

Aubree's web series *The Library*, which seeks to illuminate various aspects of LGBTQI life and culture, is currently streaming on [Revry.tv](https://www.revry.tv). As a DP, Aubree shot the Chase Joynt-directed documentary short, *Framing Agnes*, which premiered at Tribeca in 2019. The feature version of *Framing Agnes* is set to premiere at Sundance in 2022. Aubree is also currently developing a podcast about gender in the rural South with journalist Casey Parks. Aubree is committed to using film to tell diverse stories, often focusing on LGBTQIA+ and social justice issues. When not making films, Aubree can be found traveling, cooking and spending time in nature.

Cast of Characters

Zackary Drucker as Agnes

Agnes approaches the UCLA Gender Clinic with one very specific goal: to have gender confirmation surgery. To accomplish this task, she produces an impenetrable narrative of self that does not allow for a fluidity or revision of experience. She is in a long-term committed relationship, and works as a secretary.

Angelica Ross as Georgia

Georgia is a trans woman from the South who is looking for help - from the Church, the military, and now the gender clinic. Due to the racist climate in Los Angeles at the time, she faces constant scrutiny by police and is unable to find work. Though far from her birth family and community, Georgia is happily married and eager to find new pathways for her future.

Jen Richards as Barbara

Barbara is located in the heart of a sprawling underground network of trans people in 1950s Los Angeles. As a community ambassador, Barbara is often responsible for educating doctors about the more intricate details of trans life and organizing meet-ups where people share resources about transition.

Silas Howard as Denny

Denny is an affable, working class man who finds himself occupying the borderlands between what we might now call butch lesbian and trans man. Uninterested in pursuing surgery, as he doesn't want to lose access to the lesbian community. Denny is partnered and employed.

Max Wolf Valerio as Henry

Henry lives a solitary life: a reclusive writer isolated and alienated from the world around him. Denied medical care, unable to get a job because his legal documents don't match his gender, Henry is experiencing a pervasive hopelessness about his tenuous position in the world.

Stephen Ira as Jimmy

Jimmy is a 15 year old kid who approaches the UCLA Gender Clinic feeling confident about his identity as a boy, even while his parents and doctors continue to tell him otherwise. Jimmy is playful and easy-going, often joking about himself and others throughout the interviews.

CREW

Director

Chase Joynt

Writers

Chase Joynt and Morgan M. Page

Featuring

Jules Gill-Peterson

Chase Joynt

Angelica Ross

Jen Richards

Max Wolf Valerio

Silas Howard

Stephen Ira

and

Zackary Drucker

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XTR

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Into The Noise

Inside Out Re:Focus Fund

Producers

Samantha Curley, p.g.a.

Shant Joshi

and

Chase Joynt

Co-Producer

Brooke Stern Sebold

Cinematography

Aubree Bernier-Clarke

Additional Cinematography

Ava Benjamin Shorr

Editors

Brooke Stern Sebold
Cecilio Escobar

Production Design

Becca Blackwood

Research Design

Kristen Schilt

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Chase Joynt	Host
Zackary Drucker	Agnes
Jen Richards	Barbara
Angelica Ross	Georgia
Max Wolf Valerio	Henry
Silas Howard	Denny
Stephen Ira	Jimmy

With

Jules Gill-Peterson

And Appearances By

Brian Michael Smith

Morgan M Page

Kristen Schilt