

KINO LORBER

Presents

TRUMAN & TENNESSEE: An Intimate Conversation

**Directed by Lisa Immordino Vreeland
Voiceovers by Jim Parsons and Zachary Quinto**

****Official Selection - 2020 Telluride Film Festival****

****Official Selection - 2020 NewFest****

****Official Selection - 2020 Hamptons International Film Festival****

Run Time: 81 Minutes

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SYNOPSIS

Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams — writers, celebrities, geniuses — catapulted to fame in the 1950s, sparking a friendship and rivalry spanning nearly 40 years until their deaths within a year of each other. Inextricably entwined, and fixtures of their age, they were creative powerhouses (and gay men) who dealt with success and its evanescence in vastly different ways. In *Truman & Tennessee: An Intimate Conversation*, filmmaker Lisa Immordino Vreeland (*Love, Cecil*, *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict*, *Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has to Travel*) brings the two forces together in a unique and fascinating *tête-à-tête*, comparing and contrasting their trajectories through dueling voices — the writers' own, culled from archival footage, and the voices of actors Jim Parsons and Zachary Quinto (*The Boys in the Band*) portraying, respectively, Capote and Williams at various stages of their lives. Both created rich, imaginary worlds and characters (Blanche DuBois, Holly Golightly) that left indelible marks on the era — and both paid the price of colossal success and fame through alcoholism and periods of artistic stagnation. Immordino Vreeland, whose growing body of work examines the working lives and social impact of 20th-century creative visionaries, adds two more remarkable subjects to her *oeuvre*, tumultuous compatriots who electrified the culture with words steeped in the nascent forces that shaped them.

A CONVERSATION WITH FILMMAKER LISA IMMORDINO VREELAND

How did Truman and Tennessee become the latest subjects in your growing body of work on 20th-century creative visionaries?

Originally, I was going to do a Truman documentary focusing mostly on his writing because I felt that all the films we've seen so far about him center on Truman towards the end of his life when he was destroyed by alcohol, or the Truman who only wanted to be famous. I wanted to show a different side of him. But my producer Mark Lee suggested we throw Tennessee Williams into the story. I'd done all my research on Truman, so I put everything on the backburner and immersed myself in Tennessee's world. Out of that came this fascinating new direction for the project.

The movie is structured around their friendship. Was there a spark of inspiration that helped you organize this piece?

There was a Vanity Fair column by the Mexican painter and photographer Miguel Covarrubias that was published between 1931 and 1934 it centered on impossible interviews between famous people that historically couldn't have taken place — fictional back and forths between Sigmund Freud and Jean Harlow, Sally Rand and Martha Graham, or Joseph Stalin and John D. Rockefeller. Covarrubias drew caricatures and made up the conversations — he basically could say anything he wanted, and did. I kept thinking about this concept while also thinking about Truman and Tennessee as writers, and how much they had in common. The best thing about them was they knew each other, and had many real conversations.

Why did you want to make this movie?

I knew there were certain moments, historically, when Truman and Tennessee were together — in Italy, for example, where they vacationed with their boyfriends. And there were other moments I knew I could recapture from books and letters. But I was more interested in constructing an entire movie around their friendship, letting these writers speak for themselves about their creativity, their process, what drove them to write, the struggles

and passions of being an artist, the difficulties of trying to make a name for yourself, and maintaining that kind of success at a certain level. I wanted to make a movie about two writers telling their own stories, in their own words. And it's all their words, so it became a question of putting those words together.

Describe the structure of this piece.

There's no chronology — it's the conversation between them that guides the whole film. It's a back and forth between the two of them, and it gave us a lot of freedom to create the movie out of that. They were not best friends, but there was mutual admiration and even disdain — more on Truman's part than Tennessee's, but these were two very different people who often crossed paths in life.

What did Truman and Tennessee have in common, in your opinion?

They were two of the most important literary voices in America during the 20th century, and they were both from the Deep South, sharing the common ground of broken childhoods and wanting to write from a very young age. They both had absent fathers, they both suffered from depression, and they both became alcoholics. And they shared this joie de vivre of living in Europe and being expats. Their friends in Europe overlapped, including Paul and Jane Bowles and Donald Windham. I don't know if that happens that much today in the fields of creativity because the world was much smaller during their time.

What made these two writers different from one another in terms of their public personas?

With Tennessee, you can see how magnanimous he was through the David Frost interviews in the movie — he's so positive and sincere and welcoming and frank as a person, whereas with Truman, you never quite know if what he's saying is truthful or authentic. Truman also didn't go that deep in his conversations, whereas Tennessee talked about human suffering and emotions with tremendous depth, which he wove into his plays. But I was far more curious about their creative process and what made these people tick. I

wanted to explore the inner workings and inner lives of these two men in a very intimate way.

What was your research process for this movie?

I'm known for being very archival-heavy, and I immerse myself deeply in all of my subjects. I go to libraries, and read everything that's ever been written, including letters and whatever else I can get my hands on. For this one, I went to a lot of different libraries, including ones that hold the archives of both writers. Tennessee's archives are at the University of Texas and I had some proxy researchers there who sent me amazing material. He was always writing, so there's vast amounts of material on him. Truman has a literary trust run by his former lawyer, Alan Schwartz, who was also Tennessee's lawyer at some point, so I started to see commonalities emerge between the two of them. We licensed some tapes from Larry Grobel's interview with Truman that was originally intended for Playboy Magazine, but was never published, and we used David Frost's interviews with both of them, which was a fascinating discovery. The conversations are so intimate. With Frost it was always a more personal approach to interviewing — he leans forward and almost touches his subjects, and he's able to draw things out of them that rivals like Dick Cavett were never able to achieve. Frost is clearly making Truman and Tennessee uncomfortable, but he gets them to open up, and we see that in the movie.

How did you decide upon Jim Parsons and Zachary Quinto as voice-over actors for the movie, and what did each bring to their respective roles?

They are both kindred spirits in a way, and friends, having recently worked together on the revival of *The Boys in the Band*, but they are also gay men who know and respect the theatrical world and the written word of both subjects. Zach is a huge fan of Tennessee Williams, and has performed his work on stage. The film was actually locked before Covid-19 struck but the pandemic worked in our favor because both Jim and Zach were available, and excited to be part of the movie. Zach pointed out to me that Tennessee has this kind of lazy drawl in his conversations where he drops his letters, or rolls them, and he totally captured that in his voice-overs. With Jim, I asked him to give

Truman gravitas because people don't tend to think of that when they see Truman speaking. Jim gave Truman's words real consequence and depth — it's not Truman making pronouncements.

You shot some of your own footage for the movie; where did you film and why?

Archival footage is an important factor in my work but I wanted to treat it differently this time around — I didn't want it to look old and archival; I wanted it to convey a different feeling than a typical documentary. I knew early on that I wanted to make a very beautiful film with multiple layers, the layers representing part of the creative process, this notion of Truman and Tennessee going through the thought process. But I also wanted to go out in the world, to counterbalance the more abstract footage. We wound up using a lot of original footage in the movie, which our director of photography Shane Sigler shot with a Bolex camera in Italy, Sagaponack, and New York, because Truman and Tennessee were both there at various times in their lives. We got incredible footage of Ischia, the island that was so important to them.

Describe the music in the film...

It's a Covid score, and the music came from this incredible Italian composer, Madi, who created his compositions under lockdown in Italy, during the early days of the pandemic. Italians weren't allowed to go outside when he started composing the movie. Madi has been classically trained and as he composed, he kept Truman and Tennessee in mind, their complexities, and their creativity. We wanted it to have a more European sound to it and feel that he has captured that. While composing he used the layers of footage and the words as a guide to where the music was going.

You don't shy away from the two writers' creative decline before they died (within a year of each other) in the 1980s. What fascinated you about this period?

Alcohol had become central to their lives, perhaps contributing to the failure of their careers, along with the depression they both suffered from. They also came from families of alcoholics — Tennessee's father was a big drinker and

Truman's mother died from an overdose of pills and alcohol. Their careers declined in very different ways beginning in the late 1960s. From the moment of *In Cold Blood*, when Truman was at the peak of his powers, he started to crash down, and his creativity was seriously stunted during the decade that followed. He may not even have been writing much at all. There was the whole farce around his incomplete novel *Answered Prayers*, because he was so drunk all the time. With Tennessee, you saw that he was frequently drunk, and a mess, but he was openly talking about his problems, and he was also writing consistently during the 1970s and early '80s. He may have been turning out lesser works, but he was productive.

They were also gay men who came to prominence when it wasn't spoken of, or allowed. How do you think this affected their careers?

Tennessee was a sex addict, and his diaries are full of these stories. Truman was more standoffish about sex, until later in his life when he would go out with straight-acting men — or men who were more straight than gay — and they were clearly taking advantage of Truman, in it for the money. Tennessee was more clearly and openly gay, he had a lot of different male companions in life, though he was paying for sex most of the time. That was another thing about being gay and not being readily accepted — it was part of being in that world.

Did they have a rivalry? And if so, how did it affect their friendship?

With Truman, you feel like he wasn't always honest in his life, whereas Tennessee had this big, welcoming spirit that made him come across as authentic and warm. Truman was more jealous of people, or the success of other people, including Tennessee's, whereas Tennessee was a more generous spirit in terms of his self and his emotions. Truman was also prone to hyperbole, insisting he was a child genius, which we don't even know is accurate even though it has become part of his history. Tennessee didn't have the desire to make up these stories, there was a sincerity to him that was different, and he was also working so much more than Truman, which might explain Truman's jealousy.

Aside from the writing, what do you think each contributed separately to the culture of their times?

Tennessee was always about his words; Truman became a persona and did anything he could to capitalize on it. In Tennessee's case, it's his thought-provoking words and plays, and the honesty of them. He showed that what was on stage could be an authentic and true representation of human emotion. His words have become the vernacular of a lot of things — and not just theater. Truman represents an early celebrity figure, and when we think of him now, we think of him more for his fame than his writing. Andy Warhol went out of his way to hang out with him and record hours of conversation, and it helped create Truman's persona — this kind of persona is a central part of our lives today.

In your growing body of work on the working lives of 20th century creative visionaries, is there a specific through-line that connects your work?

Each time I make a movie, I feel like I'm taking one more step toward telling a story in a new and different way. You can make a documentary with or without talking heads, but it was very clear to me on this movie that there would be no talking heads involved. What's more real than having these people speak for themselves, through archival footage and with actors? I tried this to a certain degree with my previous film, *Love, Cecil*, which included talking heads, but also featured Rupert Everett playing Cecil Beaton. When you let your subjects speak for themselves, it makes them feel more real and authentic. There's always this slight feeling of the underdog in these people who went on to redefine themselves in life, and it's important to me in my work to redefine them for today, and for future generations.

TIMELINE - Tennessee Williams

1911 - March 26th - Thomas Lanier Williams is born in Columbus, Mississippi.

1932 - His father forces him to withdraw from university and work as a clerk in a St. Louis shoe factory.

1939 - Williams moves to New Orleans and changes his name from "Tom" to "Tennessee". Several of his one-act plays earn local awards, eventually garnering the attention of agent Audrey Wood.

1945 - After a successful run in Chicago, *The Glass Menagerie* moves to Broadway, earning Williams the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play.

1947 - Williams meets and falls in love with Frank Merlo... *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens on Broadway, earning him a Pulitzer Prize.

1955 - *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opens on Broadway, earning Williams his second Pulitzer Prize as well as another Tony Award for Best Play.

1963 - Frank Merlo dies of lung cancer and Williams succumbs to deep depression.

1965 to Early 70s - Williams writes and produces several plays, but none are performed for longer than weeks or several months.

1975 - Williams publishes *Memoirs* in which he frankly details his addictions, family, and sexuality.

1983 - February 24th - Williams is found dead from asphyxiation in his New York City residence at the Hotel Elysee.

TIMELINE - Truman Capote

1924 - September 30th - Truman Streckfus is born in New Orleans, Louisiana.

1933 - Truman moves to New York City where his mother resides, now re-married. His teenage years are spent confronting parental cruelty and their caustic reaction to his sexuality, though he continues to write and socialize.

1942 - Truman completes his last formal education (high school) and begins working as a copyboy at *The New Yorker*. Dissatisfied, he returns to Monroeville and continues writing short stories, including what will become his first novel.

1948 - *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is published to great acclaim. Capote meets Jack Dunphy and the two begin a relationship that will last until Capote's death.

Early 1950s - Capote writes and publishes multiple works spanning essays, the stage, and screen - each garnering praise, success, and attention.

1958 - *Breakfast at Tiffany's* debuts to adulation. Capote begins initial sketches for his summation of the jet set titled *Answered Prayers*.

1978 - Capote's drug and alcohol abuse is at such an advanced stage that he discusses in a televised interview the extremity of addiction and depression. He attempts multiple rehabilitation programs, ultimately unsuccessful.

1984 - August 25th - Capote purchases a one-way ticket to California and appears on Joanne Carson's doorstep, claiming ill health. He dies shortly after in her Los Angeles home.

CREW BIOS

Lisa Immordino Vreeland (Director and Producer)

Lisa Immordino Vreeland has been immersed in the world of fashion and art for the past 25 years. Her first book was accompanied by her directorial debut of the documentary of the same name, *Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has To Travel* (2012). The film had its European premiere at the Venice Film Festival and its North American premiere at the Telluride Film Festival. It went on to win the Silver Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival and the fashion category for the Design of the Year Awards—otherwise known as “The Oscars” of design—at the Design Museum in London. Her second film *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict* premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival (2015) and had its European premiere at Art Basel. *Love, Cecil* premiered at the Telluride Film Festival in 2017 and went on to win the Audience Award at the Hamptons International Film Festival. It was accompanied by her second book *Love, Cecil* published by Abrams. In addition, Immordino Vreeland directs the award-winning short documentary series *Art of Style* for M2M (Made to Measure.)

Mark Lee (Producer)

Mark Lee is Executive Chairman of Barneys New York serving at the Board of Directors’ level after a more than seven-year tenure as Chief Executive Officer. A lifelong theatre and film devotee and supporter of the arts, he has also co-produced film and Broadway Productions. Mark was an Executive Producer of the 2011 documentary film *Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has To Travel, Every Act of Life* about playwright Terrence McNally and *Love, Cecil*. Together with Dorothy Berwin, Mark is a founding trustee of Berwin Lee London New York Playwright Inc. a nonprofit foundation in support of emerging playwrights. Mark has also been a co-producer of the Broadway productions of *Mother’s and Son’s*, *It’s Only A Play*, *The Visit*, as well as the London Young Vic and West End productions of *The Inheritance*.

Jonathan Gray (Producer)

Jonathan Gray has been producing and executive producing narrative and documentary films for over 20 years. His credits include *Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has to Travel* (2011 Venice International Film Festival); *Blue Caprice* (2013 Sundance Film Festival); *Words with Gods* (2014 Venice International Film Festival – an anthology featuring directors such as Héctor Babenco, Emir Kusturica, Bahman Ghobadi and Mira Nair); *Nightingale* (2014 HBO - Emmy®-nominated); and *Dark Night* (2016 Sundance Film Festival). Jonathan is also a practicing attorney concentrating in independent film and is the founding partner of Gray Krauss Sandler Des Rochers LLP (“GKSD”), a prominent entertainment law firm with offices in New York and West Hollywood. GKSD has served as production counsel on hundreds of independent films, including *The Station Agent*; *Precious*; *Black Swan*; *Beasts of the Southern Wild*; and *Moonlight*. In addition, Jonathan is an adjunct professor at Columbia University School of the Arts, and a frequent lecturer at NYU, SVA and other universities.

John Northrup (Co-Producer and Editor)

John Northrup is a documentary producer and editor, serving as associate producer on *Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has To Travel* (2012), and editing and co-producing *Wilson In Situ* (2012), which tells the story of theatre legend Robert Wilson and his Watermill Center. More recently, he has co-produced the feature documentaries *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict* (2015) and *Love, Cecil* (2017), on famed twentieth-century British photographer/designer Cecil Beaton. In addition to editing *Kusama – Infinity* (premiered at Sundance, 2018) on artist Yayoi Kusama, and *Fire Music* (New York Film Festival, 2018) on the free jazz movement, he produced and edited the award-winning short documentary series *Art of Style* with director Lisa Immordino Vreeland for M2M. He is currently editing a feature documentary on money in politics for Green Hummingbird Entertainment.

Bernadine Colish (Editor)

Bernadine Colish has edited a number of award-winning documentaries. Her most recent projects, *Love, Cecil* (2017), portrait of the photographer and

designer Cecil Beaton, premiered at the Telluride Film Festival and won the Audience Award at the Hamptons International Film Festival; *A Whale of Tale* (2016) premiered at the Busan Film Festival and *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict* (2015) premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. *Herb & Dorothy* (2008) won the Audience Award at several film festivals; *Body of War* (2007), premiered in the Toronto Film Festival, winning Best Documentary, was also named Best Documentary by the National Board of Review; and *A Touch of Greatness* (2006) aired on PBS and was nominated for Best Documentary Emmy®. Other editing credits include: *Absolute Wilson*, *Band of Sisters*, *Bringing Tibet Home*, *Ella Fitzgerald - Something to Live For*, *Herb & Dorothy 50x50*, *Rise and Dream*, *The Buffalo War* and *The Tiger Next Door*. Her work has also appeared on HBO, Sundance Channel and the PBS series: *Independent Lens*, *Frontline*, *American Masters* and *Nova*.

Shane Sigler (Director of Photography)

Shane Sigler is a Brooklyn-based director and cinematographer. Born, raised, and informed by the American midwest, Shane studied photography and film as an assistant to iconic fashion photographer Bruce Weber before beginning his own career as an accomplished director and DoP. Recent film credits include the documentary feature *Love, Cecil* (dir. Lisa Immordino Vreeland / Zeitgeist Films), the narrative feature film, *Stray Dolls* (2018 Tribeca IWC Schaffhausen Grant Winner), narrative short-film *Love Comes Later* (2015 Cannes Film Festival Semaine de la Critique), *Dirty Money: Drug Short* (Netflix / dir. Erin Lee Carr), produced by Oscar®-winning filmmaker, Alex Gibney. Recent commercial clients include Louis Vuitton, Calvin Klein, Tiffany's, Christian Dior, Vogue, Chanel, GAP, Nike, American Eagle, and Ralph Lauren. Shane runs Cabiria Films, a full-service production and post-production company in Soho NYC, and is a member of the International Cinematographers Guild Local 600.

CREDITS

A Film By

Lisa Immordino Vreeland

Voice of Truman Capote

Jim Parsons

Voice of Tennessee Williams

Zachary Quinto

Directed and Produced by

Lisa Immordino Vreeland

Produced By

Mark Lee

Produced By

Jonathan Gray

Produced By

John Northrup

Co-Executive Producer

Brian Devine & Brook Devine

Edited By

Bernadine Colish

Director of Photography

Shane Sigler

Original Music By

Madi

A Fischio Films Production

In Association With

Peaceable Assembly and

Gigantic Studios

KINO LORBER

With a library of over 4,000 titles, Kino Lorber Inc. has been a leader in independent art house distribution for 35 years, releasing 30 films per year theatrically under its Kino Lorber, Kino Repertory and Alive Mind Cinema banners, garnering seven Academy Award® nominations in nine years. In addition, the company brings over 350 titles yearly to the home entertainment and educational markets through physical and digital media releases. With an expanding family of distributed labels, Kino Lorber handles releases in ancillary media for Zeitgeist Films, Cohen Media Group, Greenwich Entertainment, Artsploitation, Palisades Tartan, Menemsha Films, Raro Video, and others, placing physical titles through all wholesale, retail, and direct to consumer channels, as well as direct digital distribution through over 40 OTT services including all major TVOD and SVOD platforms. In 2019, the company launched its new art house digital channel Kino Now which features over 1000 titles from the acclaimed Kino Lorber library. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kino Marquee initiative was launched in 2020 pioneering "virtual theatrical" releases of art house films with revenue shares that allows audiences to support almost 400 local independent theaters.