

GRAINS OF SAND

Documentary 85 min.
Germany/USA

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Filmed over 8 years, Grains of Sand accompanies the filmmaker's mother and mother-in-law, artists and close friends, as they enter their ninth decade. Through conversation, memories and artwork, along with reflections by the filmmaker herself, they create together this positive coming-of-age story.

TEAM

Director/Producer: Sarah Gross
Co-Producer: Athena Kalkopoulou
Director of Photographer: Mies Rogmans
Editor: Nicole Fischer
Composer: Momo Djender

TRAILER

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SYNOPSIS

Margot & Barbara, close friends and artists, and the director's mother & mother-in-law, meet for a work retreat in a stone farmhouse in the German countryside. They are both on the cusp of their 9th decade. As they begin to work on the large stones they have brought to sculpt, they embark on a conversation about creativity and aging, exploring what it means for them to arrive at this stage of their lives. Their wrinkled hands become dusty as they scrape and chisel the stones.

Margot was born in England and now lives in San Francisco with her husband of over 60 years. In her studio she reflects on the struggle it took for her to maintain her painting practice as she navigated expectations as a wife and mother. She visits the gravesite she and her husband have chosen outside the city. On green sloping hills of the burial grounds in Marin, Margot imagines how it will be to live alone if Peter dies first.

In her studio in Hamburg, mother-in-law Barbara explains how after her divorce she didn't have much money. She found a way to support herself with a part time job so that she would have time to paint every day. She hopes she can continue painting until her very last gasp. Barbara shares an apartment with her second husband, and observes how their relationship is changing now that they are approaching 80.

The farmhouse becomes a yearly ritual where the women share their pasts, discuss their artistic processes, and reflect on their changing roles as artists, women, and mothers. Margot and Barbara aren't looking back on their lives. They are living them.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Grains of Sand offers a counter-narrative to the marginalization and invisibility of older people in our society, particularly women, by affirming the importance and relevance of their work and life experiences. The film unpacks formative moments in their biographies, reflects on how they grappled with traditional societal expectations of women, and creates space for issues of aging usually ignored by society - such as fear of death, illness, and body pain.

We see the beauty and privilege of reaching such an age, too, as the poetic, steady camera of DoP Mies Rogmans captures the grace and strength of these women -- their joy and determination from decades of living, etched beautifully into their faces and their magnificently wrinkled, dust-covered hands sculpting the stones.

Grains of Sand is a truly European story: Margot, the filmmaker's mother, is Scottish and grew up in England; Barbara, the filmmaker's mother-in-law, is German and grew up in what is now Poland. The two friends grew up in countries at war with one another – formative childhood experiences which now unite them and give them a shared perspective on the world. They belong to the last remaining generation who can personally talk about the impact of WWII on their lives even today.

Just as the underlying layers in a painting inform the finished picture, so do our memories and past experiences play a shaping role in our present moment. Grains of Sand works with this metaphor, building visual layers through grainy super 8 films, archival footage and photographs and interweaving them with present day scenes and interviews, in vibrant 4K cinematography.

The filmmaker's close, personal relationship with the protagonists provides a layer of intimacy and reflection. Poetic black and white Super 8 imagery - mist rising off the lake, or sunlight pouring through flowers - creates a narrative space for voice overs, which reflect upon the main questions of the film and push the story further.

"Grains of Sand" is a testament to the power of art and friendship and a personal exploration of what it means to age and continue becoming oneself. In the true sense of the phrase, it is a story of two women's coming-of-age at 80.



SARAH GROSS, Director/Producer

Sarah Gross' prior works have been shown in festivals around the world and broadcast on PBS nationally and Deutsche Welle internationally. Grains of Sand is her fourth feature-length documentary. Gross has citizenship in the USA, UK and in Germany and is based in Berlin.

MIES ROGMANS, Director of Photography.

Professor for cinematography, Amsterdam National Film School, DoP for fiction and documentary films for 25 years.

NICOLE FISCHER, Editor.

Over twenty years experience in documentary and fiction editing. She co-edited the documentary, Garage People, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival 2020 and won the Heiner Carow award.

MOMO DJENDER, Composer.

Momo is a gifted musician and composer who has scored many films, including 5 film projects in collaboration with Sarah Gross. He is a beloved musical TV personality in his home country Algeria. He played guitar and vocals on world tour with Sting for a year, and continues to perform on stage throughout Europe.

ATHENA KALKOPOULOU, Co-producer

Athena is a creative producer/consultant with over 20 years of experience in funding and outreach in the US and Europe. From 2020 - 2023 Kalkopoulou was the Director of Promotion at the Greek Film Centre. She has collaborated with the Sundance Institute, SXSW and the San Francisco International Film Festival.