

The following is a transcript from a conversation between Emily Zuberec, Fatine-Violette Sabiri and Nathan Donovan following a screening of Donovan's short film "Outburst".

The film was shown as part of Fatine-Violette Sabiri's photography exhibition, "The Lion's Share" on April 24, 2025 at Galerie Eli Kerr.

EMILY

A good place to start is with the question of how you two know each other. What do you both do? Is this the first time you've collaborated together? Has your friendship always been linked through your individual practices?

FATINE

We met through a friend in common. I always describe it as unlikely friendship because when we met I thought Nathan and I were so different. I was always surprised by how much we had in common and how much we were willing to share with each other. It's funny I was thinking about this today just in preparation for the talk but I feel that our friendship really blossomed during the pandemic. During these moments where we could just talk a lot. Our friendship wasn't built through activities but through connection. That's also when I started photographing you. There's this one photo of you I have that is through the window of your apartment because I couldn't go in there. I've actually never seen many of your apartments because you moved a lot during the pandemic. The first times we collaborated which was just me taking photos of Nathan during my little visits.

EMILY

So the film is the first intentional occasion in which you collaborated?

FATINE

That's where our mediums are different. Photography versus film. Film is such a conscious decision. You have to write it. You select so many people to be a part of it. But photography, at least the way I approach it, can be very spontaneous. There's a photo in my book where we were hanging out at my house and we were about to leave and Nathan put on his jacket and I was like "wait lets take a photo before we leave." In that way it's accepting to enter into my work. And that's a collaboration in a sense.

EMILY

This relates to where I wanted to start with this conversation which was with titles. The title of your film, "Outburst", carries a lot of weight. One in that titles are often the part that you touch first. But also if we're thinking of this in the context of Fatine's exhibition, "A Lion's Share." I wonder the title is in reference to in these two contexts?

NATHAN

For me the title of the film, the part I like the most, is that it sets up anticipation and expectation. And if that expectation is not met you have to ask yourself why. Is there a problem with how I feel about the word outburst? Is there a problem with what I wanted with the film? Is there a problem with the film itself? In life there are many moments of unfulfilled expectations, hidden meanings and disappointment.

EMILY

A point of initialization. It might be a moment we encounter visually or it might sit on the outside.

FATINE

A title is automatically loaded. You project on to it. The way I title my work is so simple. Like a photo which is just the name of the shop but people might read into that or think about what is there that they can't see. In the case of "Outburst" the title appears before anything else and then you're waiting.

NATHAN

I've spent lots of time waiting or wanting for something that never comes. That's a really nice idea for me in life. There's a real opportunity for joy when you are disappointed.

EMILY

It's a tangible way to play with time. Delaying it and making it feel kind of funky.

FATINE

I relate to this idea of reveling in the waiting. Even in constructing the show here. A lot of it is about waiting. The waiting that comes with shooting film photography. In

the case of making films there's a lot waiting as well.

With waiting in mind I wanted to talking about the framing and pacing of the film. It's all very minimal and slow; an aesthetics of monotony. How much of this mystery are you aware of and how much are you hoping people will project on to? Is there a truth of what is going on in the film?

NATHAN

Minimalism can have nasty connotations but it's not without merit as an entry point because I know many people would say this is a minimal film. But for me the film is not that slow. With opening letters for example you just know there's 100 things going on inside someone when they are reading that letter. For me that's a lot of movement.

FATINE

You trust your audience.

NATHAN

I'm not sure it's trust. Because either way that's what I see and that's why I did it that way.

What I also like about a quieter picture is the idea of inability. That's very important to represent in people that they might be incapable of reacting. Or they're incapable of an outward expression of emotion. And their lack of reaction can be seen as disappointing. I'm slow. I have to take my time. But quiet or silence doesn't mean that there's nothing going on. When the shot is long or it waits I can see a lot of things. Which is a great distinction with films that are called slow.

EMILY

In the case of writing this makes me think of "What is an event?" Where do we locate action? If you're telling a story about someone's life. Is it in grand movements or in accumulation of smaller things? And life is both obviously. It's a matter of allocating importance. Which comes through the dialogue also. The first encounter with dialogue in the film is the radio in the car. We learn about the character through what she's listening to. The radio grounds her in a world that is violent and antagonistic. I was wondering about the choice to show your main character in these particular set of circumstances.

NATHAN

That's a tough scene. For me a lot of the time maybe people don't believe me..It's a difficult scene, it's very violent of course. It's a horrible description of events. I had the radio scene in mind as an image before I found the sound. So I was listening to AM radio all day for a couple months. And when I first heard the clip which ended up in the film I was immediately drawn to the vitriol of the host. The way she describes the mother is completely lacking in empathy. And from there it becomes a question about love and the limits of love. Who is irredeemable? That's what I see in that scene. Of course there's the boy as well. We can't ignore him. But it's not about forgiveness. It's not about acceptance. The circumstances that people face they..I don't know the context of this mother's life that leads her to these brutal actions. I don't know..I don't have all the details but the way that the radio works in this film and it's just the radio more or less. Is that it's very digestible and it's easy. Damnation is very easy. It doesn't take very much effort. You say okay yeah that's a terrible thing and it's done. We don't have to think about it anymore and she's gets locked up. It's much more difficult to say this is very tragic but she is a person and what can we do with that and how do we live with that. It has to do with the speed of the film also. It's difficult to look at things for that long or it's a bit boring. Uninteresting but...

EMILY

It also gets into what do we do when we are made to sit in discomfort. You go into to the film not necessarily anticipating death. You approach it without a context and you're placed in and you have to sit and then make sense of it with the other action that follows or precedes it.

FATINE

We're grounding this character in violence and then there's the end of the movie. That last sliver of a second where there is laughter and how does this come in for you? I know when we shot that you didn't know it was going to go at the end necessarily or like what was going to happen with that. I'm curious to hear you talk about it more.

NATHAN

Well I think it's necessary in a film to have a bit of a

reprieve. Even in the event of all this nastiness people have the ability to smile. I do. I know other people do. That is the heart of the scene. We wrote it last minute and I was bit uncertain about where it would go. It makes me think of Toni Morrison when she talks about how you can't constantly hold on to crisis. You have to have love and you have to have the magic. That's also life. People will laugh for some reason while they are eating a hamburger alone. After they've dealt with some trouble.

FATINE

For context purposes we should address the fact that this was your first film. And how did you get to making a film and why did you want to (of course I know the answers to all this) but why did you get to want to doing this and where did you start from and how did you get there? Cause we're talking about collaboration and we're talking about laughter and hope. I think that this path that you've followed in film-making has a lot to do with this outlook.

EMILY (to FATINE)

It also ties into what you wrote in your exhibition text about finding these moments for yourself in photography, that people should read if they haven't. What do mediums do for us and why this particular one?

NATHAN

The transition into film had to do with community and lack thereof. Because before that I was doing more graphic design and digital illustration which is very solitary and there are not many problems there. I'm on the computer and the worst problem I could have is the color is..I don't like it.

When you're working on a film you're with people who you really like, I hope. You ask them to work really hard. And you could find yourself in some really difficult scenarios. You ask a lot of them and it's a huge risk. You ask for their time and you ask them to trust you and you ask them to think your idea is worthwhile. It's very naked. Nudity is a very important thing. To be as naked as possible. And to let people really see you. You don't really get that when you're alone. You don't have to face that. It's a bit too easy. To me a good film, when you're doing it right you're really close to the edge. Being out of control. And

you're with people who will help you. That's incredibly beautiful. I was in punk bands when I was young. You have the same love there. Everyone knows your name. You go play some songs in a condemned store front and there's not a big audience but it's doesn't matter. It's fun. When I was doing magazine illustrations I thought if my body showed up on the front steps of a corporation they would say, "who is that, we don't know him." When I work on films I think everyone is together in spirit and it's just very touching. It's part of the work also.

FATINE

Would you say you started writing films when you started feeling solitary because obviously I know you and I know there's this arc of how you've found yourself to live and go through life and this desire to reach out. And I think a lot about collaboration is about reaching out and taking that step. Sometimes I think about the fact that there are collaborators even for this exhibition. I would think of you as a collaborator because you support me. It's like speed dial. I call you crying or whatever. And to me the reason why so many people are capable of carrying their practices is because they have people supporting them which is part of the collaboration that makes the work capable of existing. I'm curious about the entanglement of you finding that more and more in life. Is that the driver to making a film or was that you felt like making a film would grant you this access and opportunity to reach out to people? Do you think they were intertwined?

NATHAN

It's more simple. I was tired of being alone in my apartment with no danger and no risk. I need to have some danger. And a film can be like that because of the emotional stakes.

EMILY

When you talk about collaboration then there is also a hindsight and archival quality to it. Which is what you're working in Fatine. Which is cumulated over time. As you were saying Nathan you can depict scenes which aren't the most buoyant. But in the fact that it was important to make or speak to something that hasn't previously been focused on in your own life. And getting to have that experience for yourself and for your community. It reaffirms what's

happening in your life outside your practice.

FATINE

I know what you mean. Last week I walked in here and I told Eli, "I'm gonna miss this part of my life." And Fred was like "you're already nostalgic." It's such a photographer's brain.

EMILY

It's also putting together moments which were not in proximity with each other whatsoever. In the way that you've passed through them. It's scene related also in what you do.

FATINE

We can speak of scenes but we can also speak of photos. Every photo has its load of meaning. But when you're making the exhibition. It's about where you're at at this moment surrounded by these images which are from different moments. The exhibition itself speaks of where you're at. And you have all these windows that are where you were. Maybe a scene is a similar thing?

NATHAN

A scene is different because it has everything on the other sides of it and everything which isn't in the frame. Also you don't decide. The scene goes on for a certain amount of time which you don't control. With a photo you decide when to start and stop.

FATINE

The way you weave them with each other produces its own meaning. Or it's own truth that you're consciously trying to explore.

EMILY

I had this one thought about this film in relation to your practice which is how far back do you have to go to tell a story? And where do you start? There's something about your practice Fatine that it could be an impulse to put everything you've touched in the room together and have them interact but obviously it can't be everyone. So you have to make a choice at some point. And with your film I wonder about the choice of where to start also. Why start where you start and why gather what you gather?

FATINE

It's hard because so much of it so intuitive. Am I doing this because I know where I'm going or am I trying to find out where I'm going by doing this? There are moments where you feel so lucid and other moments where you're like "I don't know why but I have a feeling." Throughout that you take a step back and the meaning emerges. You make intuitive choices and then meaning emerges because that's what you're reading things through. No matter where you're at in life you'll read things through those glasses. See those lights in different ways. I was talking about this photo with a Christmas tree. The whole show is about photography and a love of photography and waiting for the image. Capturing the image. Hunting the image. Christmas is exactly like this. Christmas day is never that grandiose. But the waiting and the anticipating is where the magic lies.

EMILY

It also relates to my favorite scene in the movie where the character is about to audition. An off-screen voice says "whenever you're ready." It makes me think when is she going to be ready? And what does being ready feel like? And what are we looking for in a character to express outwardly that they're ready? You're waiting for a moment which is vague to begin with and then we don't get it.

NATHAN

The beginning is very literal because with films the first scene should tell you what's going on to a certain degree. We don't see his face. We don't see the accident. It's that idea of details and what we believe we're owed. There are things about suicide that are bit selfish in the way that people interact with it. It's the same with the boy from the radio. The way we learn about that boy is very flat. I don't know anything about him. I just know all of these terrible things done to him by someone else's hand. The suicide is a bit flat because there are no details. And there's nothing to discover. Basic questions emerge like "what could we have done." People respond in this way because they are unsettled. They wish they could have done more or they were hoping for something else. He's gone that's it. That's what we know. There's some truth to that. Sometimes we look for information that doesn't exist and we go a bit mad and we get upset. That didn't fulfill my

fantasy about the situation. We might think if I could have done better the world would have changed.

EMILY

It's like being attached to a narrative. This is the path we're on. Or personal narratives that we feel compelled to follow but have the potential to go haywire.

NATHAN

Or they were never there to begin with.

EMILY

People look for retroactive cohesion.

FATINE

Which once again ends up being about what your predisposition is. Where you're at.

EMILY

Every movement in this film feels so intentional in a way even though it comes from a written script. The precision feels unsettling. Why do you think something could feel tense when it's intentional given what we've talked about.

NATHAN

Well one thing about intentionality when you shoot in public. You have to respond to things. I really like that because it takes the control away from me. The car scene for example was edited like that because some guy gives the camera the middle finger. So we have to cut there.

In terms of tension it comes from darkness as lack of detail. There's nothing there to help you. It reminds me of a memory with my dad. I grew up in Alberta and we used to go to this water park in Sylvan Lake. You would go down the slides on an inflatable inner-tube and then at the base of the slide there was a mechanical pulley system that sucked in the tubes and brought them to the top so you didn't have to carry them back up. I was a 60lb little boy and the current generated by the machine was pulling me in. I'm losing. I'm starting to panic. And as I'm getting closer and closer to this machine at the last moment my dad calls out "just stand up." And I stood up and it was fine. You get dropped into things all of the time. And you have to figure it out yourself. It's the only way. Of course you

can talk to people and that's important but you have to make the choice.

FATINE

The discomfort will change you.

NATHAN

He wanted me to panic. He wanted to push me to the very last moment to see if I could do it on my own. And that's love. To be there waiting on the side and to encourage the ones we love to find solutions on their own. That's gratifying and empowering. I like when films do this.

FATINE

And also discomfort in making the movie. Like you said there's reasons why the film is cut this way and how much the absence of control makes the movie. And it's the same question for me in making images. You set out with an idea or you think you're going to get something very specific and at the end of the day what makes the image is all the moments you didn't expect. No matter how much you tell yourself you're gonna take photos of that restaurant. When you arrive there are people there and you want to respect them. Film and photography are mediums which force you into life itself. It's limitations and other people. And reality which is outside of your control. I think that's really healthy.

EMILY

That reminds me I was asking you "why did you take this picture?" and you said "because the light was nice on this animal." There is something in the simplicity that can lead to abstraction.

AUDIENCE QUESTION

The movie is very emotionally detached until the last scene where Fatine finds happiness in a hamburger. I was wondering if that scene was her falling out of character or was that scripted?

NATHAN

I don't know if I can answer that. Well first of all it's a good question because many people comment on the film being cold. I agree and I don't agree. Yes it is cold in a sense. The camera is far away. But I like to see that kind of

person. As I mentioned earlier, the incapable person. When someone is silent or unable to "emote" that's not detached or cold for me.

The end of the film is me making Fatine laugh yeah. It was written in a sense.

FATINE

I had no idea what you were doing at all. You were just like I want to film this hamburger scene and it's okay if you break character. And then you purposefully made me laugh.

NATHAN

Yeah that was a lot of pressure for me.

EMILY

One thing that we didn't talk about was the phone conversation which is one of expectation. It's interesting that it's literally in the script.

FATINE

The mother has expectations in that conversation. The viewer has expectations that the girl will break down or confide.

NATHAN

With the dialogue the mother is not listening. Her own needs and desires are the priority. So in the end her view of the daughter is fractured by her own perspective.