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Dear Elsa:
10 Letters + 10 Experiments

by

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Abstract

Dear Elsa: 10 Letters + 10 Experiments is a short form personal experimental documentary in which I attempt to embody and communicate with the ghost of the radical poet, model, performance artist, sculptor, and time traveler, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874–1927) about living and creating as a womxn artist. Through a series of ten channeling experiments and ten letters to Elsa, I explore themes of sex, art, and madness as they relate to Elsa and me as womxn artists. Considered the first American dadaist, Baroness Elsa was an early innovator in interdisciplinary art practices. Often blurring life and art and using her own body as material, she was a radical proto-feminist who challenged current ideas about sex, gender, and the role of womxn in public and private spaces. She transgressively and aggressively charged through her life constantly trying to claim her right to take up space as an artist, gendered human, and sexual being.

Dear Elsa is a journey—it is my journey from falling in love and lust with Elsa, to wanting to *be* Elsa and claim her art-as-life as my own, to paying tribute to this art ancestor and saying goodbye. I use my body to try to scratch and pull Elsa into existence, to write her onto me, to write myself into ecstasy. I use Elsa to try to understand this womxn body of mine, to feel it, take space with it, give it voice. I seek meaning, connection, some sure knowing in this body and life. Ultimately, as Elsa drifts away from me, into death, madness, and isolation, I drift toward light, celebration, dance, and play. I drift toward care, a good life. I release Elsa and in doing so, step into the unknown of my *own* life as a womxn artist.

Project Description and Process

I first encountered the Baroness in my 2nd year of the IMA program in Professor Rachel Stevens' Non-Linear Storytelling course. In a chapter titled "Language Games" from the book *Critical Play* by Mary Flanagan, I read the following:

The radical Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874-9127), whose absurdist performances predate most Dada events, took various guises: performer, poet, art model, and sculptor. She abided by rules that could not be accounted for under existing social conventions, and at times her behaviour was more radical than that of the historically established Dada "founding fathers." These artists, she thought, were 'all cowards who, while producing unconventional works, still insisted on a conventional lifestyle and traditional gender roles'... Between 1913 and 1923, the German-born artist committed acts of gender-bending, absurdist acts of performance, experimental writing and law breaking in an attempt to "live Dada"—that is, to embody the process of questioning and creation Dada represented. Wandering the streets of New York with a shaved head, wearing mass produced everyday objects such as kitchen cutlery, automotive taillights, spoons, vegetables, and even a bra made of tomato cans, the baroness openly declared her actions and objects "works of art." (131)

I was struck by Elsa's crossing of disciplines, her radical approach, her revolutionary vision, the way she utilized her body and performance, her feminist exploration of sexuality and gender. I liked that she broke rules. I liked that she lived in New York. I liked that she shaved her head. There was an immediate connection between Elsa and me that was not intellectual or coherent—I felt it in my body, something sharp to the gut. In my class notes, I wrote, *Project - make something about Baroness Elsa.*

I continued my research and as I learned more about Elsa, the connection between us, across time, intensified. At this particular moment in my life and career as a feminist womxn artist, I was grappling with issues of emotional health, financial stability, relationship, community, identity, ownership, and autonomy. I was experiencing waves of depression, mania, and panic attacks. I had drained my savings account, much of it going into film projects that seemed to mostly be met with rejection and disappointment. I felt deeply isolated in my creative

community. I was coming out of a series of intense romantic and sexual relationships and separations. I had only been out as queer for a few years. I saw patriarchy thriving around me. I worried that the kind of art I wanted to make would not provide me with any sustainable kind of life. I didn't know what else I would do. There was something about Elsa that seemed to speak to each broken part of me. I heard her whispering—*there is a way*. I followed her voice.

I began with the channeling experiments, conducting the first six during Professor Marty Lucas' Documentary II summer intensive course. As Elsa sought to “embody the process of questioning and creation Dada represented,” I sought to embody the process of questioning and creation Elsa represented to me. It didn't make sense to do some kind of straightforward biographical research-based exploration of her. It did make sense to experience her through her work and life by reading about her, reading her poetry, looking at images of her sculptures and visual artworks, looking at photographs of her, and then turning on the camera, standing in front of it, and seeing what happened. My research became an embodied exploration—could I feel what she felt? Could I feel her in the room? What would happen next? I used images from her work and what I read about her to inspire scenes, costumes, and gestures. For example, in the first experiment, I play with the brown water dripping from my sink pipes as a “place to start.” This references Elsa's sculpture, *God*, which is a piece of plumbing mounted on a mitre box. But it also speaks to the domestic body as plumbing, the toilet humor that Elsa was fond of, and the idea of art lurking anywhere and everywhere. I shot all of the experiments by myself. I followed my instincts completely. I rearranged my entire apartment into a set. I used whatever I had on hand as props: tin foil, vegetables, plastic wrap, a blender, a vibrator, flowers and thistle, a mirror, trash on the street. I allowed each experiment to unfold organically. I welcomed nonsense

and chaos, darkness and playfulness. These experiments became the foundation of my project and a guide for my process.

I continued working on *Dear Elsa* during an Independent Study course with Professor Marty Lucas and an Advanced Studio course with Professor Kelly Anderson. My relationship with Elsa developed. Art became life. I saw her everywhere. I felt her in everything I did. Lines began to blur—between me and her, between art and life, between creating something and losing oneself. The themes of sex, and art, and madness became the lenses through which I viewed and interacted with my world and as I did, other themes began to emerge.

I thought about feminism, how Elsa fought for female sexuality as a bodily right, for her place in the art world, for autonomy in her relationships. I thought about my feminism and the current experience of being a womxn in a hetero-patriarchal society where female sexuality, bodily autonomy, and equality in pay, recognition, and influence are still constantly threatened.

I thought about gender, how Elsa traveled a spectrum of gender in her appearance, performance, and action, and refused traditional notions and expectations of gender. I thought about how I was recently coming out as nonbinary, finding a home for my identity in gender fluidity, and revealing an always somewhere known desire to expand, challenge, and transgress the labels assigned to me. Simultaneously, I was confused about how this evolution of identity fit into my feminism and I saw my confusion reflected in the challenging conversations happening in my communities.

I thought about sexuality, Elsa's sex binge early years, her three traumatic marriages, her hunger for sexual exploration and pleasure, the way she pursued and demanded it, her sexual

dissapointment and dissastisfaction with men, her long non-romantic but deeply intimate relationship with the writer Djuna Barnes. I saw how thin the line was between her expansive eroticism and her passion for art making. I thought about my own short lived marriage, my dissatisfaction with my relationships with men, my coming out as queer and my love for womxn, my rejection of traditional relationship structures, and the sense that sex and art came from a similar place of creation in my body.

I thought about womxn and madness, hysterical womxn, raging womxn. Elsa was thought to be crazy by most and was hospitalized for nervous breakdowns multiple times throughout her life, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes not. I thought about my own wild swings between mania and depression and how they fueled my creative work and also left me exhausted and hopeless.

I thought about resources, how Elsa was in poverty for much of her life, often stealing and begging for financial support from friends to survive. I thought about my own much less dire but ever present struggle with money and resources ever since I had decided to work freelance in order to pursue being an artist and filmmaker full time.

I thought about legacy, how Elsa was unpublished for most of her life, how she was left uncredited for major creative contributions, and how she was largely excluded from art history. The ultimate story of this erasure is the significant evidence that the hugely influential readymade sculpture, *Fountain*, which has always been credited to Marcel Duchamp, was actually created by the Baroness. When I learned this, I was shocked. What did it mean that this hugely influential work was created by a woman whose name no one knows? What did it mean

that perhaps instead of a patriarch of modern art, there was a matriarch and she had largely been left out of the history books? I thought about my own work and life. Could I be unwritten too? Was it inevitable?

These themes and my worries circled and spiraled until I felt that the project had expanded beyond the experiments. I needed to talk to other womxn. I had a sense that these worries were all connected, that it all had something to do with being a radical, feminist, artist womxn, and that I was not alone. So I sought the company of other womxn, to learn from them, to comfort me in my spiraling, to blow up the project from being just about me and Elsa to addressing the larger experience of a group of particular womxn.

Over the course of a year, I interviewed ten womxn about these themes of feminism, sexuality, creative practice, art as life, gender, resources, legacy, madness, my project and journey, and their own connections to Elsa. I used the same guides I used for the experiments—instinct, serendipity, intuition, and chaos—to inform my choice of subjects and my interview process. I started with a performer, Julia Melfi, after I saw her perform a two-minute play about the Baroness as part of the New York Neo Futurists' production *The Infinite Wrench*. We wandered through Greenwich Village, where Elsa once lived, and talked about Elsa and *Fountain* and about the myth of the singular male artist. Then I interviewed the poet and my partner, Alicia Mountain. We laid in bed in my apartment and she read Elsa's poems and we talked about poetry and being unwritten and what I was trying to communicate to her through Elsa. I didn't know how these interviews would fit into the final film but I felt like I

was having important conversations about themes that mattered to me and were central to Elsa's and my experience, of living and creating as a feminist artist womxn.

I continued. I interviewed Yin Q., a ritual bdsm practitioner about nonbinary feminism and sex work. I interviewed Eloise Sherrid, a visual artist and filmmaker, as we wandered through the woods. I interviewed Synead Nichols, a singer and performer in a dance studio, and she looked into the lens and sang. At the kitchen table, in banana costumes, I interviewed Marisa Lark Wallin, a playwright and performer who wrote a play about the Baroness in high school and says Elsa is in everything she does. At a ranch in Utah, I interviewed Micol Hebron, a professor and scholar who studies and makes work about the gender gap in the art world. I interviewed Ventiko, a photographer, who halfway through the interview decided we should continue in her bathroom where she lit pink smoke bombs and descended fully dressed into the bath. I interviewed Su Friedrich, an experimental documentary filmmaker who has made films for decades and fights for women and lesbians, who rolls her eyes at the question of pronouns, and who insists that she will never again be the "only woman" at a film festival or industry panel. I interviewed Connie Madden, my mom, in her kitchen while she cooked macaroni and cheese. She said, "This connection between you and Elsa might be something only you can know."

In a way, she was right. Ultimately, these interviews did not make it into the final film. In the advanced stages of editing, I tried to put all of the pieces together—the experiments, and the interviews. I played with the idea of gathering all of the womxn together for a meal, to watch a cut of the film and discuss it, and filming this conversation, perhaps collectively creating a ritual centered around Elsa. I created an opening sequence of me directly addressing the camera, giving

some biographical information about Elsa, and trying to explain how all of the themes presented in the film were connected. Yet, as I tried to fit the pieces together, the connections seemed to disintegrate. By trying to capture and contain this infinite conversation, by trying to answer questions that are not meant to be answered, by asking these womxn to hold something so slippery, I found that the most important part, what had catalyzed and guided the entire project, was getting lost in the result—the sense of *embodiment* that was the connection.

Still, the interviews were an important part of the journey and the material itself is full of compelling, haunting, beautiful, and thought provoking moments, conversations, performances, and stories. The interviews led me to a sense of collectivity and multiplicity and raised challenging questions about my relationship with Elsa and my approach to making a film about/with her that informed the rest of my process. What was once imagined to be a feature length film has solidified into a non-traditionally structured film project that will consist of a thirty minute film made primarily with the experiments, the “beating heart” of the work, and a collection of shorter “limb” videos made from the interview footage that extend out from this the primary work. These videos will range from pieces of conversation on a certain theme, to solo performances of a play or a song or a poem, to voiceover and graphic representation of statistics, to playful moments of interaction between me and the subject, to portraits of each womxn. I envision them with titles like, “Julia Performs Her Short Play in the Men’s Public Restroom in Prospect Park,” “Micol Describes the Gender Gap in the Art World,” “Marisa Tells the Story of How She Almost Died,” “Amanda Tries on Su Friedrich’s Glasses While Su is In the Bathroom,” and “Alicia Reads Her Poem, *Entreaty Now*, to Amanda, to You.”

Eventually I conducted four additional channeling experiments. These all took place in a new apartment. I tried to connect with Elsa again, to become a ghost, to become her. The experiments became chaotic, confusing, violent, and hopeless. As I continued to attempt to embody Elsa, I lost myself. As my attempts to scratch and pull her into existence seem to fail, new attempts were made, each more intense than the last, as if I needed to draw blood to draw her out. The final experiment is a release of Elsa, a tribute and a goodbye, and an acceptance of what I learned from her, what I take from her, and how I might begin to imagine a sustainable life as a feminist womxn artist—something about radical care, slowness, breaking binary thinking, endless nuance, play, flirting, laughter, a good life.

Throughout the entire process, I was writing the letters to Elsa. Parts of these accompany the experiments in the film, one letter as voiceover under each experiment. However, the most crucial writing happened over a few weeks after I had reckoned with attempting to combine the interviews with the experiments. This shift allowed me to let go of what the film was *not* about and focus entirely on what it *is* about—my connection and communication with Elsa and the themes of sex, art, and madness. From this place, I wrote. I examined each experiment and brought myself back to that moment, remembering what it felt like to run thistle down my torso, to get in the bathtub with beets, carrots, and onions, to crawl naked under the bed with a lightbulb, to push all of the furniture to one side of the room and shave my head against a bare wall, to lay my face on a mirror on the floor for a nebulous amount of time, to go to the bar and watch flamenco dancers and wait for them outside, to hang my dirty underwear on the clothesline, to scrub my knees raw with steel wool, to watch the leaf of a plant burn and shrivel, to dance in my kitchen in a pink bikini, flowers tucked into it, wearing a gold dildo. I

remembered how Elsa inspired each of these moments, how they unfolded like magic. I pulled 60 quotes from Elsa and laid them out on my living room carpet to see what she had to say. I moved them around, threw most out, and drew a line with her voice, between her journey and mine. The letters tell the story of my journey, from meeting Elsa, to falling in love and lust with her, to wanting to claim her life, to choosing my own. It tells of my experiences and connections, my questions and demands, my hopes and hopelessness.

In the final editing stage, I combined these new letters with the experiments and imagery of the Baroness with her quotes. The final film's structure is based on the chronological order of the experiments, paired with the letters, and the quotes and imagery as transitions between them. This is the beating heart film. It is a film about the process of making the film. It is a film about the relationship between two feminist artist womxn across time. It is a film about losing and finding myself.

Representation of both me and Elsa shifts as our relationship does. Elsa is my crush, lover, idol, obsession, muse, guide, stalker, demon, and art ancestor. I am a womxn in love, a womxn with desire, a womxn that is just a body, a womxn alone, a womxn with ideas, a womxn seeking. The experiments shift visually as our relationship changes. In the beginning the experiments consist of static shots designed to simply capture objects and actions and cuts between wide shots of the space and close-ups of elements within the scene. For example, the opening experiment is a series of medium still shots, alternating between below the sink and above it, into a corner of the bathtub, flowers beneath my head in focus, my face out of focus, and sections of my body from head to toe. This haphazard pattern continues in the next few

experiments as my desire for Elsa deepens. In the fourth experiment, I am closer to her and the aesthetic shifts. The camera gets closer in the close-ups and further in the wide shots. There is movement now, some shots drifting as I shoot my body handheld. These shifts reflect Elsa in the space, as if she is helping to guide the camera. At the end of Act I, the final experiment is a series of still shots from one high angle, looking into a mirror placed on the floor. At this moment, I am in a dark place, hopeless and lost, and the cuts between me gesturing in the mirror leading to a final long shot of my head on the mirror covered in branches and dead flowers, create a vision of the claustrophobic and disoriented internal space I am in. With the beginning of Act II, there is another major shift as my focus goes from trying to access Elsa through my love for her to trying to access her through her artistic life. The sixth experiment is a significant outlier visually as a means of communicating this major shift, mainly because it is the first experiment that shows me outside of my apartment. There is a timidness in the shots, from under the bar looking up at my face, dancers obscured by bar patrons, medium shots of my body in the bathroom mirror that pass with quick camera movement. Here, I am trying something new, expanding into a new way of being. As a result, the experiments become both more stylistic and chaotic, using overlays, sped up footage, repetition and compositing, as I grasp at ways to live and create from a place of continually heightened ecstasy. In the final experiment, there is play and joy and so there is brightness, the lights in the room shining directly into the camera, sparkling air, bright colors. It begins with a wide shot down the hallway. In between are playful medium shots, into the window, into the light, my body moving through the image to create ghostly silhouettes and flares. The wide shot from the hallway is returned to throughout. Here, I am releasing Elsa and so there is some distance, space to allow for separateness. I am my own ghost now.

I chose to make a film rather than perhaps a written exploration or live performance piece because the camera seemed an apt tool for channeling, a portal between worlds. When I turn the camera on and step in front of it, there is a spacious opening for anything that is not reality. The only boundary I have between life and art, between this time and place and their dissolution, between Elsa and me, between myself as performer and prop and living, breathing, needing, wanting human, is the record button on the camera. I see this when I look at the footage. The result is footage that has the gritty aesthetic of solitary, organic filmmaking, of playfulness and experimentation. There is something indescribable too, some kind of magic, perhaps a ghost.

Dear Elsa is a journey, one rooted in *embodiment*. It is meant to touch the senses first, to create bodily sensation. I am curious about what happens if a connection is made when we start from this place—connection to ideas, dreams, stories, experience, and to one another. I am curious what it feels like to watch this film and how that sensory experience can be a link between me and a viewer. I hope that trying to articulate the shape of the ever evolving universe inside me opens a portal for a viewer to see something related in themselves and perhaps even be inspired to share it in some way.

This journey has taught me so much and changed me. I have learned about making a film by yourself. I have learned about collaboration. I have learned about an important woman. I have learned how to listen authentically to my artistic instincts. I have learned how to practice care of my body, mind, and heart, creatively, in relationships, and when I am alone. Perhaps most importantly, I have gained a new vision for a concept of *embodied filmmaking* and a perspective

from which to approach future projects, with slowness and gentleness, allowing the journey to unfold.

Research Analysis

My research for *Dear Elsa* has been focused on Elsa's life and art, dada and surrealist art movements, and queer and feminist theory and film. Unsurprisingly, there is minimal information about Elsa. Irene Gammel's book, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity – a Cultural Biography*, is the only biography and has been my primary source for the story of Elsa's life and work, in the context of the places she lived, the political, social, and artistic movements surrounding her, and the communities and relationships she was involved in. In the introduction, Gammel asks,

“What, then, is [Elsa's] contribution today? Is it to art or antiart? Poetry or antipoetry? What ultimately is that haunting quality of her work that so tenaciously anchored itself in the collective memory of international modernists? What is her principle of nonacquiescence...?” (6).

What follows is a detailed portrait of the Baroness as “artist/warrior/woman,” rooted in these questions. It portrays a life of sexual adventure, artistic explosion, and dada evolution as we travel with Elsa from Berlin to Munich, New York, and Paris and cross paths with such notable figures such as Marcel Duchamp, Ernest Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, Ezra Pound, Jane Heap, and William Carlos Williams. Thus this book provided a foundational understanding of Elsa and specific stories and details served as points of inspiration for the channeling experiments and letters. Additionally, the transitional quotes in the film are sourced from this book.

Elsa's poetry and artwork, again minimally documented, have also been sources of creative inspiration. This includes her first major collection of poetry, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, published 84 years after her death, as well as her sculptural works such as *God*, *Enduring Ornament*, *Cathedral*, *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, and *Limbswish*, and visual works such *Dada Portrait of Berenice Abbott*.

Other written sources include articles and books about the dada, surrealist, and avant-garde art movements to provide political, social, and historical context. For example, In *Irrational Modernism*, Amelia Jones writes an account of New York Dada, with the Baroness at the center, in order partly to "suggest... its debt to radical feminist figures such as the Baroness" (11). She writes:

"The Baroness, then, became a sign of the ruptures in the social (and gender) fabric during this highly charged period – of the uncontainable, violent, feminizing, debased and debasing effects of modernity... In her inimitably fluid and destabilizing way—queer in her disruption of both the gender and homo/heterosexual axes of sexual identity... she serve[s] to disrupt this art historical study of New York Dada, reenacting the very irrational effects that she so dramatically stood for at the time, performing the seedy and seamy underside of modernism that discourses of high art and architecture have labored to contain through their dominant models of rational practice" (10).

I also researched queer and feminist theory to provide a framework for the process and form. For example, In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam offers a queer theory perspective that informed my process and the resulting structure, aesthetic, and content of the film. He writes about what he calls "low theory" as a way to "look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations" (2). He continues:

"Low theory tries to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop. But it also makes its peace with the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal... in order to push through the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing, and into a more chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing" (2).

Furthermore, I explored feminist texts about gender, sexuality, and the body to ground myself in the concept of *embodiment*. For example, in *Pleasure Activism*, adrienne maree brown compiles a powerful collection of stories, poems, and essays about the concept of pleasure as radical and revolutionary. She writes, “Pleasure Activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy” (13). She describes one of her “Pleasure Principles” and writes, “The deepest pleasure comes from riding the line between commitment and detachment. Commit yourself fully to the process, the journey, to bringing the best you can bring. Detach yourself from ego and outcomes” (14). This principle became a guiding light for me throughout the journey of the project and helped me form the conclusions I reached in the final channeling experiment.

Additionally, many experimental and feminist films served as inspiration, for form and content, and also as the canon I hope my film will be situated in. Chantal Akerman’s 1968 first film, *Blow Up My Town*, portrays a woman alone and isolated in her apartment, experimenting with domesticity, playing with space and body, in absurd ways. She tapes around the door frame while eating an apple. She litters the floor with objects and pushes them around with a broomstick. In the last shots, she lights a bouquet of flowers on fire with the stove and lays her head on the burner. This film seems to speak directly across time to *Dear Elsa* and positions both in a category of experimental non-fiction films about womxn in their homes, finding nuance of creation and destruction throughout their domestic spaces and roles. Valie Export’s 1973 film, *...Remote...Remote...* shows her cutting into her own cuticles, the blood dripping into a bowl of milk in her lap. This film is symbolic of radical feminist art of the time as she deconstructs and subverts the gaze and the objectified woman by enacting pain and violence on her own body in

response to societal gender standards. In *Dear Elsa*, I use effort, pain, and violence on my own body as means of connecting my work as a feminist womxn artist to that of womxn like Export working in the 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps more importantly, I use these practices as a way to transcend the body, lose myself, and access a connection across space and time. Agnes Varda's 1988 film, *Jane B. for Agnes V.*, documents actress Jane Birkin and Varda in playful conversation about feminism that ranges from staged scenes to fantastical reenactments to direct conversation. This film was inspiration for *Dear Elsa* as wild experiment, collaboration, and dialogue between filmmaker and subject. Many other films, filmmakers, texts, and works of art served as references for my project in regards to its theoretical roots in an experimental nonfiction form. It is performative and reflexive. It references the traditions of personal essay and epistolary film. It prioritizes process, experimentation, and presence with self, camera, and subject. Each of these qualities can be traced through a lineage of artistic and filmic expression that continues to expand as I encounter new and old work, broaden my knowledge of the canon, and find articulation for *Dear Elsa* conceptually and theoretically.

Completion, Audience, and Exhibition

The next phase of *Dear Elsa* will be finishing this "beating heart" film which will include sound design, color correction, finalizing graphics and titles, and incorporating an original score through the transitional moments. I plan to work with both a sound designer and colorist who I have established relationships with through years of creative collaboration. While the sound design will be minimal and will mostly consist of mixing the current soundscape to make the experiments feel realistic and present, there will be moments of hyperreality to enhance the sense

of a conversation occurring across time and space. For example, the voiceover of Elsa's quotes will sound more distant and removed than my letter narration which will be clear and direct. Similarly, the color correction will be minimal, mainly to add a level of consistency to the footage. I am also working with a graphic designer to create title cards, lower thirds, and graphic representations of Elsa's quotes incorporated with the cyanotype footage of Elsa. I also intend to work with a musician to compose a building score of music cues for the transition moments that creates a thread of consistency throughout the journey and also as an emotional device to weave connections between the experiments and Elsa's quotes. Lastly, I need to confirm access to and credit for the photographs of Elsa used in the transition sequences, many of which are in the public domain.

With this final cut completed, I will develop a distribution strategy and simultaneously begin to build the collection of "limb" videos from the interview footage. My distribution plan will include submitting *Dear Elsa* to an extensive list of festivals in experimental and nonfiction categories as well as those geared towards feminist, queer, performative, and reflexive approaches, and researching distribution options. Concurrently, I will focus on editing the interview footage into the collection of short videos and conceptualizing a way to present the project in its entirety. I imagine this could manifest as a website or gallery installation.

Additionally, I hope to build a community with and for feminist womxn artists to provide support and space to have deep dialogue around the film and the questions raised by it. This will happen in a variety of ways including screenings with a workshop component and gatherings to share and discuss work, art, and experience.

The primary goal of the “beating heart” film is to create an embodied film experience that can resonate in the sensory experience of any viewer. Beyond this, I am deeply curious to know how anyone relates to it and I hope that connection and meaning is as personal for my audience as my experience of making it has been. Furthermore, I hope this embodiment grounds the viewer in their bodies and from this place, inspires their curiosity about Elsa and the extending themes present in the collection of videos. I intentionally choose not to provide a biographical narrative of Elsa for my audience as a way to challenge our collective accountability to complex characters, primarily womxn, obscured throughout history. Similarly, I don’t attempt to draw concrete connections between the specific interview videos and my relationship to Elsa in a traditional or cohesive way. Instead, I provide the interview videos in a separate, fragmented collection, as questions rather than topics, with the intention that a viewer chooses to explore these from the perspective of their own embodied experience.

The target audience for *Dear Elsa* is a community of radical feminist artist womxn I intend to connect with and create through this project. I seek to find and bring together these radical feminist artist womxn to build an intergenerational, intersectional community, and a platform from which to uplift, examine, care for, and find solidarity in our identities and experiences. I hope to ignite a collective conversation that begins the process of imagining new ways to create art, care for ourselves and one another, and infuse our work and lives into the past and future story about womxn’s art, bodies, and lives.

I also hope to reach a wider audience that includes a broad scope of people across spectrums of gender, sexuality, and discipline to collectively explore the ways in which all of us are affected by the stories told about womxn's art, bodies, and lives.

As an experiment in documentary, I intend to also present this film to academic creative audiences to engage dialogue around studies of performance, process, reflexivity, and multiplicity within the genre of experimental nonfiction film.

Conclusion

I am interested in the experiences and evolutions of intimacy, identity, body, and connection. Working primarily as a filmmaker, I explore these concepts and their fluidity through a range of experimental and hybrid video-making practices. My videos provide questions rather than answers, points of connection rather than completed paths, and exist in the cracks between art and life, subject and collaborator, nonfiction and performance, and the environment and materials with which they are made. I am not interested in representing the world "as it is" but in using image and sound as material to manipulate time and memory, seek the unknown, and in doing so, create space for new possibilities of being and connecting. My priority is experimentation, both in what I present and in my process. I am interested in collecting and using material in new ways, in new types of creation and collaboration, in ways of working that are non-hierarchical, non-linear, intersectional and include space for emotion, wholeness, and learning. Everything I make is feminist and queer.

My impossible goal as a filmmaker and artist is to seek truth inside, to attempt to embody it. I pursue the unknown. I want to time travel. I want to gently disrupt consciousness. My work

is about what I discover as I journey through this vast internal landscape, this strange human experience. Through my work in the IMA program, I have strengthened and articulated this artistic core and *Dear Elsa* is the culmination.

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