

Suzanne Guacci On Her New Film, *T11 Incomplete*

FEBRUARY 12, 2020 | IN FILM INTERVIEW | BY SILKE BADER

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have its world premiere at Queer Screen's Mardi Gras Film Festival.

Guacci, whose debut *Stuff* screened at the Festival in 2016, spoke to us about her new film.

The title of the film, ‘T11 Incomplete’ was your starting point for the story, not only because it refers to the type of spinal injury the main character has experienced. Could you elaborate on what it signifies?

T11 incomplete was the starting point and it refers to an ‘incomplete’ severing of the 11th Thoracic vertebrae of the spine, causing paraplegia. Being an incomplete paraplegic means the patient still has some feeling; they are not completely numb.

I used T11 metaphorically for each character in the story. Each, in their own way, has had their own point in life where some damage occurred that altered their future, changing them forever. And, because this story is about people in the middle of their lives, I wanted it to apply to every character. When you hit your 30s, 40s or, like Kate in the story, 50s, you have probably had a bunch of things that have profoundly shaped who you are and the trajectory of your life, be it the death of a loved one, an illness, failure or abuse, or a divorce...

Whatever the case, we, collectively as human beings, all go through our own either literal T11 like Laura in our story, or a metaphorical one. What I really wanted to get across is that, as human beings, we have great resiliency and the ability to “feel” again and love again, despite the damage.

There’s a theme running through the film about how one bad decision can change a person’s life, is that an idea you felt

strongly about including?

That definitely is something that is addressed but I do think the bigger theme is forgiveness. Forgiving others, most certainly, but forgiving yourself, which is even harder most of the time. Forgiving yourself for whatever bad decisions and choices that resulted in destruction of your soul, or your family.

What else do you think/hope the audience will take away from the film?

I hope they get a sense there is a lot of grey in this world. And that people are imperfect. The same people we hold up one day are the same people we persecute when they fail the next day. Which is unfair. And of course, where you enter someone else's story matters. To Jack, Kate is a negligent, failure of a mother. To Laura, she is an angel.

The character of Kate is played by Karen Silas, who you worked with on Stuff. Did you have Karen in mind to play the part all along?

I did; I actually wrote it with Karen in mind. I had never written anything specifically for an actress before and it was a different way to write for me but wonderful to be able to hear her voice while I was writing.

Karen is a fantastic actress as you see in this film. Truly she is one of the best around and I have admired her work since I first saw her in Simple Men by Hal Hartley. When I got her for Stuff I was thrilled and since then we have become great friends and collaborators. I am very blessed to have her in my corner. That's the way a film like this gets made. Having an incredible actress believe in it and want to do it. She just gives so much of herself in the work. She's just a great lady.

All of the actors are superb (shout out to Zachary Booth who came to MFGG in 2017, and to young Maxim Swinton, who is a natural), did you have a hand in the casting?

I did. Maxim Swinton auditioned and as soon as he read, he just was it. The perfect Brady. Zach was actually suggested to me by Judy Bowman, our casting director. I knew his work from Keep the Lights On which was fantastic. When Judy mentioned him, I was a bit tentative because the part was originally written for a completely different body type and look than Zach.

Jack was originally a bit overweight, balding, kind of a loser ... but actually having Jack be so handsome and sort of physically 'perfect' adds an extra layer to the complexities of the character. Plus, he and Karen resemble each other which is nice. And you know, you need to be open as a director and a writer. Good ideas can come from anywhere and I could not have asked for anyone better than Zach. He is just one of the funniest and nicest guys around.

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Judy and I worked together on the casting for many months and we had many, many conversations and were very conscious of trying to have disabled actors and LGBTQ identifying actors on this project. We wanted to be inclusive to the groups that this film was representing. It wasn't easy and it took a lot of time to find the right people, but it was well worth it.

The character of Laura is portrayed as a sexual being and (spoiler alert) the sex scene between her and Kate is hot! This seems rare in terms of how people with disabilities are often

represented on screen, would you agree?

Absolutely. Unfortunately, that is the case. I wanted Laura to be just that; sexual, have desires, be desirable, everything that a beautiful, vibrant 35-year-old woman is, even as a wheelchair user. She still has all those other qualities. The wheelchair doesn't negate them.



How much of yourself went into the making of this film? It is so beautiful and thoughtful.

Thank you. I'm a bit of every character. I think when you write, you kind of have to be inside each character, somewhere.

It's a quietly intense film, how was the mood on the set?

It was a pretty light set. Karen is a fun lady. I think she shot every day but one, which is nuts, but she was consistently happy and relaxed. Zach is a riot. He cracks everyone up. And the other main players Kristen, Colin and Katy are such super people that most days were truly fun. There were some other days that I'd like to forget, ha! But the majority were light and great.

What are you hoping for once the film premieres at MGFF and you send it off into the world?

I hope it is well-received and it gets some momentum in the festival world and of course ultimately a fantastic distributor sees its beauty, snatches it up and gets it out there to the masses for us.

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Thank you to everyone at MGFF. We are so excited to have our world premiere with you all. We did plan to be there, but our circumstances have changed and sadly we can't be, but we are very grateful for the love you've shown for our film.

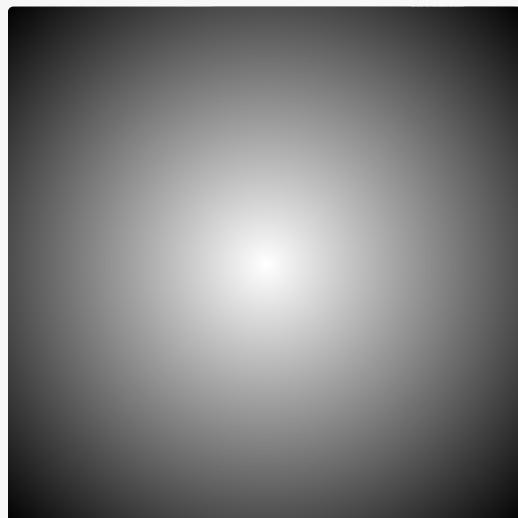
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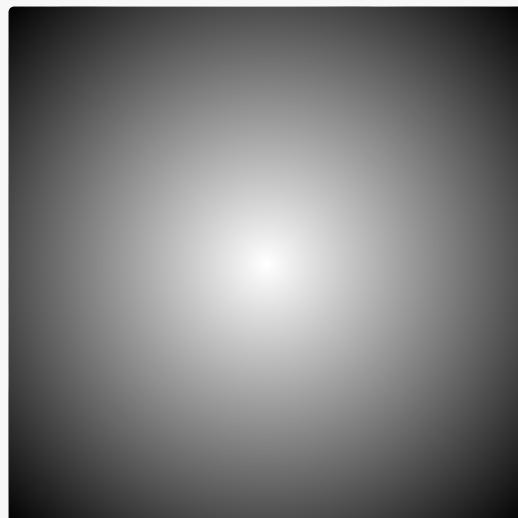
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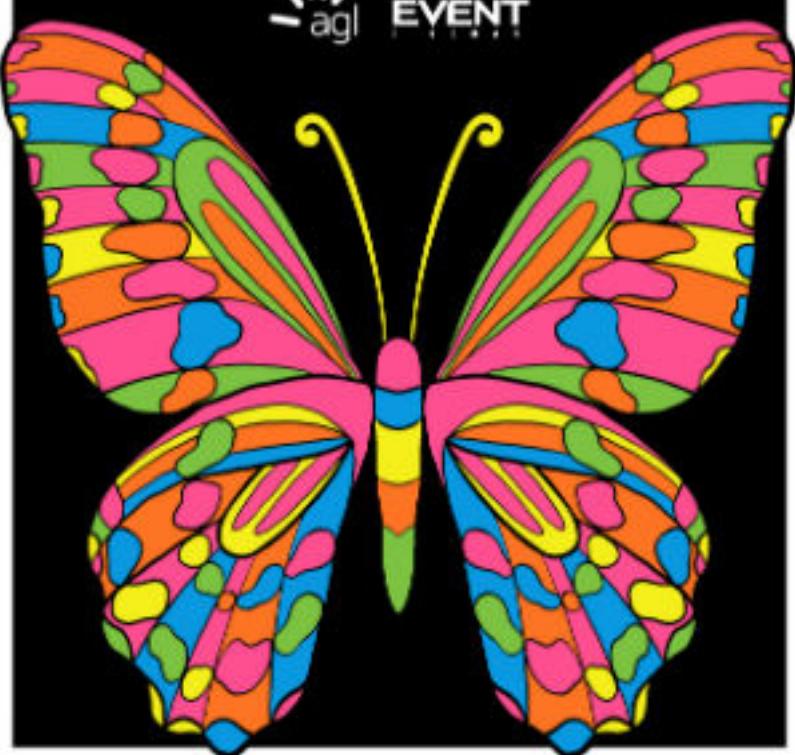
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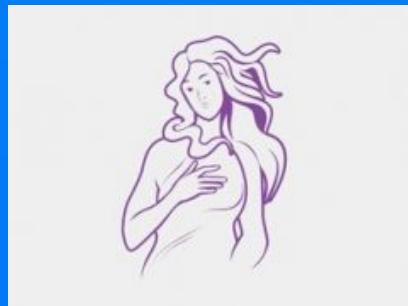
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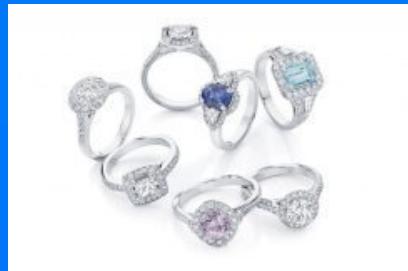
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