

Signs of Aging
a short film about living



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L-R: Stephanie Guzman, Liza Gipsova, Kelley Ray O'Donnell, Kristal Salazar, Marlaina Donato, Julie T Pham, Antu Yacob, Betsy Waldron
Photo Credit: Exploring Nomad Media

About Signs of Aging

Synopsis

A skin-cream salesperson sells her anti-aging potions to women-over-forty, by shaming them for having wrinkles. But one enigmatic young woman challenges her tactics, and finds a way for the others to understand that their changing faces are beautiful.

Production History

Signs of Aging was shot in September of 2019 in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. Production was funded, in part by a grant from The Greater Pike County Community Foundation. Post-production was completed in January of 2019. The film premiered on Amazon Prime Video on June of 2019. It has been screened at the Directed by Women Series in Brooklyn, New York, the PA Indie Shorts Film Festival in East Stroudsburg Pennsylvania and at the New Hope Film Festival where it was nominated for a Female Eye Filmmaking Award. *Signs of Aging* is now available to watch, for free on Vimeo.



A still frame from *Signs of Aging*

Director's Statement

As a woman over forty, I'm told that there are many things I need to fix: my hair, my skin, my body. The regular maturation of a biological human are considered "flaws" in this time of plasticized beauty. I am saddened by aggressive advertisements and news programs telling women how to "correct" the natural signs of aging. The marketing term "anti-aging" is particularly damaging. If you are not aging, you are not alive. I feel that "anti-aging" is offensive to the memory of those who died before they were able to get wrinkles.

Though I am personally most attuned to the beauty industry's marketing tactics to mature women, I know that there is intersectionality in the oppressive way that "beauty" is marketed around the world. The focus on white, young skin without marks or variations, as a beauty ideal, is very damaging to the human psyche. To exclude a majority of the world's population from beauty ideals is ridiculous, yet we see it done all the time in advertisements.

I believe it's time to fight back. Not by bringing down the beauty industry or forgoing creams and makeup all together. But I believe that we can take back our power when choosing which products we buy. Are we buying a cream because we have been told it will "fix" something "wrong" with us? Or can we consciously decide that a particular product makes our skin feel soft or comforted or energized- and so we choose it for our own well-being- not to fit into an unachievable and oppressive ideal?

I perhaps think about these things a bit too much, but I have spent a lifetime feeling that there was something wrong with my face, my skin, my hair, my body. And I'm just done with all of that. I made this film to start the conversation. My hope is that people will watch it and change their minds, even a little bit, about what and who is beautiful. It's all of us.



DP Liza Gipsova, Key Grip Natalia Majette and AC Stephanie Guzman executing a camera move



Writer/Director Tara Gadoski directs a scene. Actors L-R Bisserat Tsegai, Antu Yacob, Betsy Waldron; DP: Liza Gipsova



Kelley Ray O'Donnell and Antu Yacob take a break on set



Camera Assistant Stephanie Guzman checking a shot

Photo Credit for all four photos: Exploring Nomad Media

Biographies of Lead Crew and Cast



Tara Gadomski, Writer/Director is an actor, filmmaker and journalist. *Signs of Aging* is her directorial debut. She is a 2019 Sundance Institute Knight Fellow.

Tara's short screenplay *Treadmill* was selected to be read at the inaugural Conversations in America Series of the Women in the Arts and Media Coalition in 2017. Her play *The Offering* won Best Play of the Network One-Act Festival in New York. She is also the recipient of an artist grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts for her work bringing improvisational theatre to rural schools. Tara has written and produced a radio drama podcast *Geste* and a webseries, *A Ladies Guide to Making Conversation More Interesting*.

As a journalist, Tara produces, writes and presents arts and human-interest radio documentaries for the BBC. A reporter for the past two decades, she covered the civil war in East Timor for both English and Portuguese language broadcasters. She's also reported from Singapore, The Seychelles, London and New York.

Tara's favorite screen acting credits include: *Orange is the New Black* (directed by Jodie Foster); *The Blacklist* and *Horace and Pete*. She has performed on stages throughout Europe and the UK and co-wrote and performed in a new musical *Lost Pirates* that debuted at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Tara trained at New York University, Universidade Classica de Lisboa, The Academy Drama School and New Writing South in the UK. Photo Credit: Exploring Nomad Media

Liza Gipsova, Director of Photography, is a New York City-based cinematographer fascinated by humans, light and stories of identity, location and the why. She enjoys collaboratively developing and crafting the visual language unique to each story, and puts social relevance at the forefront.

She draws from an exhaustive background in traditional, digital, photographic and theater arts, before coming up in the ranks of the camera department and co-founding Curiouser Creative, an award-winning media production company.

Along with her work in narrative film, she regularly creates branded material for the National Symphony Orchestra, Julliard School of Music, *Teen Vogue* and Levi's. A graduate of American University, she also trained in cinematography at the Film and TV Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Photo Credit: Exploring Nomad Media





Penny Middleton, Producer and Production Designer, is an actor, writer, producer and artist. Her abstract oil paintings reflect elements of nature mixed with themes of light overcoming the darkness both in physical and psychological terms. A keen and detailed craftsman, Penny also creates objet d'arte that draw on her experience of living in the US as a women of color. Her crafts seek to find the core elements of a human experience and turn these ephemeral concepts into beautiful hand-held objects.

As a writer and filmmaker, her monologue *Paradox* was selected to be performed at 50IN50 at New York's The Billie Holiday Theatre. She was the Grand Prize Winner of the Independent Film School's 6-day Filmmaking Challenge. Her webseries, *A Ladies' Guide to Making Conversation More Interesting* won Best Film in the Tiny Film Festival.

Penny's versatile acting credits include commercial, television, short films, improv, and theater - she even played Matt Damon (in John Anderson's staging of *Ben and Matt*.) She is currently starring in *The Female Role Model Project* at 3LD Art and Technology Center in New York. Photo Credit: Exploring Nomad Media

Lauren Flack, Assistant Director and Associate Producer, is a New York based Director and Producer originally from Kansas. She is the Co-Founder Little Blondie Films and is a Co-Producer of Shorts Night Film Festival (SNFF) in downtown NYC. Her most recent directing credits are: *American Ballet Theatre* (Fall 2018 Promo Campaign, AD), *Outgrown* (AD), *Signs of Aging* (AD). Recent film producing credits include: *Like Glass* (Nitehawk Shorts Fest, SCAD Film Fest) and *The Maiden* (2018). She has helped produce content for clients such as: Girl Scouts, Carnival Cruise Line, NatGeo, Pantene, truTV, The Swiss Institute, FX, Discovery, Hallmark, Cisco, and FOX. She is a proud member of NYWIFT, NYC Women Filmmakers and is the Director of Volunteers at Arts On Site (NYC Arts Non-Profit). Photo Credit: Exploring Nomad Media



PRINCIPAL CAST



Antu Yacob is an Oromo Ethiopian-born, Bay Area to Minnesota raised, New York based actor. She is a graduate of Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University Masters in Fine Arts Acting program. Antu is Founder of Shaggae's Song P.A.C., a nonprofit organization that develops new works focused on international women's issues. She teaches Acting at Rutgers University. Antu is a proud member of both the Actors' Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA. Photo Credit: Chia Messina



Bisserat Tseggai: "The Good News." That's what my name means. I am equal parts proud and grateful to be a daughter of two Eritrean-Americans who fled a war to pursue their dreams of an education and a good life for themselves and their children. They are the reason I am able to do what I love. TV credits include: *Law & Order SVU*, *Billions*, *Luke Cage*, *Seven Seconds*, *Orange is the New Black*. Photo Credit: David Noles Photography



Kelley Rae O'Donnell: Member of New York's LAByrinth Theater Company and The Actors Center Films include: *The Irishman* (Martin Scorsese), *The Understudy* (James Fauvell), *Little Piggy* (Micheline Auger), *The Empty* (directed by Tom Escovar), TV includes: *Shades of Blue* (NBC), *Like So Many Things* (IFC), *One Life to Live* (ABC). Theater credits include: 10 x 10 New Play Festival at Barrington Stage Company directed by Julianne Boyd and John Miller-Stephany, John Patrick Shanley one-act play *Hot Bubbles*, *Different Words for the Same Thing* (directed by Thomas Kail), *The Atmosphere of Memory* by David Bar Katz and directed by Pam MacKinnon (with Ellen Burstyn and John Glover), Furby in *The Discarded* by Jan Rosenberg and directed by Isaac Klein for Vertigo Theatre at BAM in Brooklyn. Member of SAG-AFTRA and Actors' Equity. Photo Credit: Dirty Sugar



Melanie Martinez: Originally from Texas, Melanie attended the renowned Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. At Tisch, she studied at Circle in the Square and Classical Studios and received her BFA in Acting. Melanie received the Circle in the Square Studio Award upon graduation. Melanie has toured across the country with The National Shakespeare Company and performed with many other award winning New York City theatre companies including the Jean Cocteau Repertory Company (performing with them in Sao Paulo, Brazil), Target Margin, Salt Theatre Company, and Inverse Theatre Company. In 2005, Melanie became the first host of the PBSKids Sprout network's original program *The Good Night Show* and by mid-2006 had achieved true pop icon status. Melanie has been an official Wish Granter and Wish Guide for the Make-a-Wish Foundation for several years and enjoyed being a SAG-AFTRA Foundation BookPALS Reader to NYC public school students. Photo Credit: Melissa Hamburg



L-R: Kelley Rae O'Donnell, Julie T Pham, Bisserat Tseggai, Antu Yacob, Betsy Waldron, Melanie Martinez
Still frame from *Signs of Aging*

Credits

Written and Directed by Tara Gadomski
Director of Photography: Liza Gipsova
Assistant Director: Lauren Flack
Music by: Marlaina Donato

Producer and Production Designer: Penny Middleton
Editor: David C. Valdez
Post-Production Sound: Douglas Horvat

Cast:

Kelley Rae O'Donnell; Bisserat Tseggai; Antu Yacob; Melanie Martinez; Julie T. Pham; Debby Waldron; Marlaina Donato

Production Manager: Luz Cabrales

Gaffer: Julia Gowsky

Sound Recordist: Wes Ranson

Colorist: Winston Hoy

Costume Designer: Lara Ferris

Key Hair and Makeup: Marina Christine

Production Assistants:

Nicholas Arnold; Josh Bidwell; Penelope Bohunko; Hunter Huff; Meggie Roche; Kyle Santos; Taber Starnes; Tony Susi

Camera Assistant: Stephanie Guzman

Key Grip: Natalie Majette

Boom Operator: Kristal Salazar

Set Designer: Nicole Sanchez-O'Dwyer

Costume Assistant: Bridget Ferris

Prop Artist: Jessica Meoni

Location Manager: Jay Starnes

Catering: The Newfoundland Hotel

Craft Services: Emma Starnes

Music:

Angel in the Storm

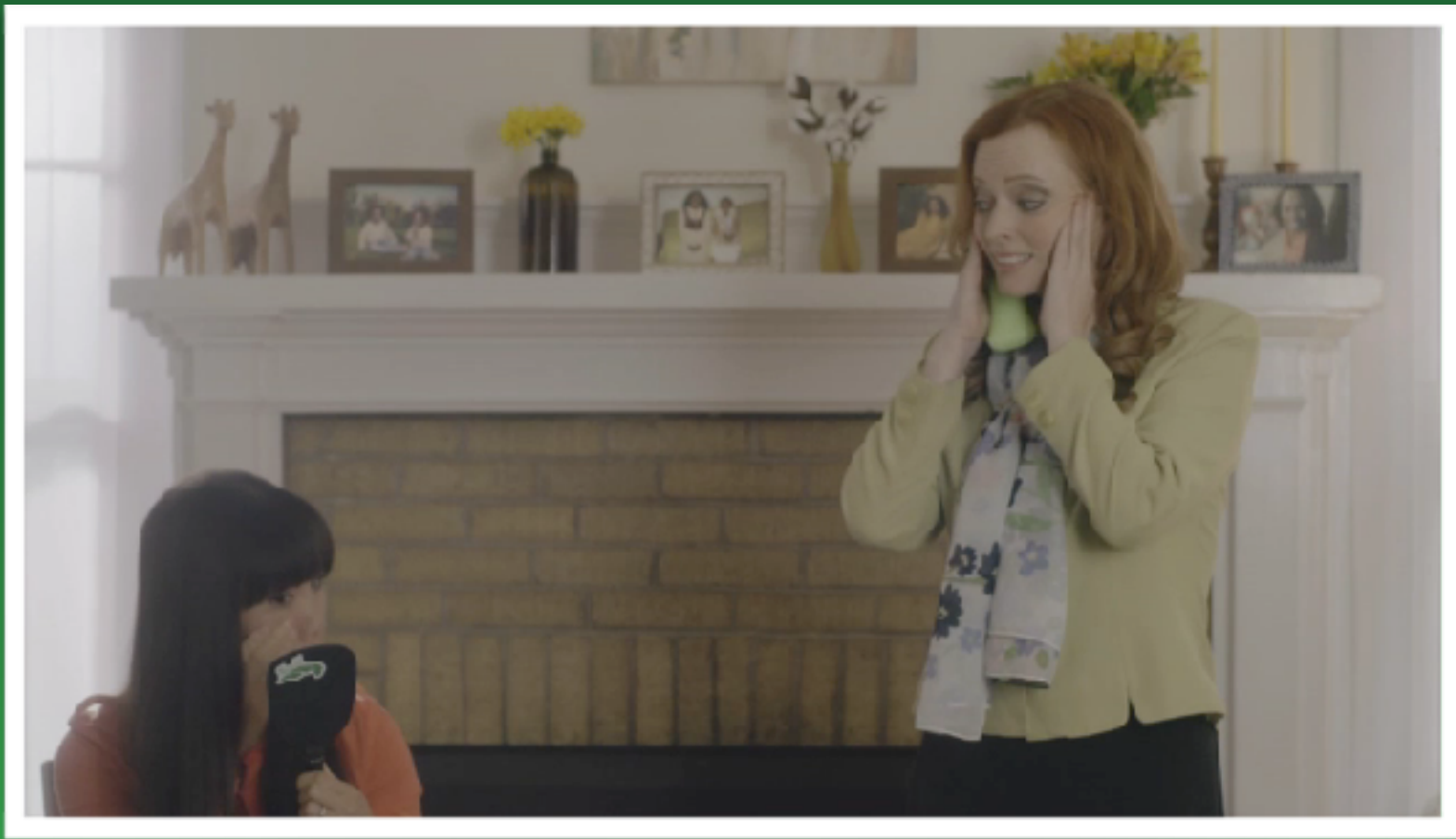
Journey Back to Innocence

Pieces of Joy

Composed, produced and recorded by Marlaina Donato

Special thanks to SAG-AFTRA; Scranton Films and the Greater Pike County Community Foundation

Special thanks to all our supporters on Fractured Atlas and beyond



Julie T Pham and Kelley Rae O'Donnell
Still frame from *Signs of Aging*

Links

[Signs of Aging on Vimeo](#)

[Signs of Aging Instagram](#)

[Signs of Aging Facebook](#)

[Tara Gadomski's personal website](#)

[Signs of Aging email](#)

[The News Eagle article about Signs of Aging](#)



L-R: Julie T Pham, Melanie Martinez, Marlaina Donato, Antu Yacob
Still frame from Signs of Aging

FAQs

Q: How did you cast the twin sisters?

A: Writer/Director Tara Gadomski already knew Bisserat Tseggai and wanted her to play the role of young Denise. She asked Bisserat the odd question: “Do you know anyone who could be your twin sister, but about a decade older?” Amazingly, Bisserat did know someone: Antu Yacob. Though they had never met before, both Bisserat and Antu had been told by mutual friends, for years, that they had a “twin” in the industry. It was an absolute joy to cast these two awesome women in *Signs of Aging*. The whole cast brilliant to work with.

Q: Is there more to the story? What happens next?

A: We’ve been asked this a lot! Tara wrote *Signs of Aging* as a stand-alone short film, though she and the actors developed strong backstories to all the characters. At this point, there isn’t a plan to expand the story, but we never say never!

Q: What gear and software did you use?

A: We shot on a Panasonic EVA1 in 4K. Sound was mixed on a Zoom F8, recorded with Sennheiser mics. We edited on Adobe Premiere and color graded on DaVinci Resolve.

Q: What were the greatest challenges of making this film?

A: Like with most independent films, the hardest part of making *Signs of Aging* was finding the money to do so. We are very grateful for the donations we received from friends and family through our fiscal sponsor, Fractured Atlas. We also received a grant from the Greater Pike County Community Foundation. But the majority of the film was funded from our own pockets. We took on extra jobs and shifts to make it work.

Q. What were the greatest joys of making the film?

A: Writer/Director/Producer Tara Gadomski had a clear vision for the two days of filming: that every single person on set would be treated equally, with value and dignity. There would be no yelling or making people cry. Because we had a mixture of both experienced and less-experienced cast and crew, we made sure it was also a learning set where anyone could ask questions. This felt like a great achievement. Our crew was 75 percent female, so it’s possible that this energy added to the good vibes. But we believe that all humans tend towards kindness, and we wanted to emphasize that on and off screen.