



Justine Pluinage

Amazons

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Jackman Goldwasser Catwalk



Cover & interior images:
Justine Pluinage, *Amazons*, 2017, digital video (stills), 15 minutes

Film Credits:
Director of photography : Chuck Przybyl
Composor : Maxence Vandeveld
Editor and Color-Editor : Armin Zoghi

Born and based in Lille, France Justine Pluinage makes videos and films that present glimpses into people's lives as they grapple with the reality of being human. Within a documentary-style, Pluinage captures the ineffable energy of the chance encounter, in the vein of American artist Laurel Nakadate, as well as the sociological concern for human relationships seen also through the sensitive work of Elodie Pong.

Pluinage began her practice studying photography, which later developed into creating film and video, enabling her to tell thoughtful stories—both nuanced and humorous—about a wide range of mainly female subjects whose stories evolve on camera. Pluinage explores how human life unfolds across the mundane and momentous: she has captured the occasion of her cousin's cheerily bourgeois wedding and an afternoon in the life of a disabled couple as they cruise their town's streets by wheelchair, reveling in the joy of their connection, despite physical limitations. Riding on the edge of voyeurism, Pluinage considers personal identity as it evolves and is shaped by life experience; she has sensitively portrayed the pain of a mother grieving the loss of her son or an intense period of sexual curiosity in the artist's own life.

For *Resilient Images*, Pluinage spent ten weeks researching Chicago through its inhabitants to develop a new video work titled *Amazons* for Hyde Park Art Center's digital façade. Over this period, she met with a multi-generational group of women hailing from all parts of the city to glean an understanding of *resilience* in contemporary Chicago, a recurring theme in her work. The film features a notable poet-rapper and peace activist, a young artist living with alopecia who has created an ornate chainmail headdress to reclaim and adorn her physical appearance, a seasoned bodybuilder, a voguing performer, a dancer empowered by her own physical disability, a Latinx painter, an art and social justice philanthropist, as well as a one-year old taking her first steps.

A haunting electronic soundtrack audible from outside the building both guides and is guided by the women as they move across the city. A bass-heavy rhythm provides sonic foundation. Drums reminiscent of trance music or batucada, an African-influenced style of percussion, refer to the space of the dance club, where individuals come together for collective experience. Overlaid, emerges the lone guitar melody. This theme, which is both diffuse and constantly traveling, directly references the *Spaghetti Western* music made famous by Italian composers working in the 1960s, most notably Ennio Morricone. Woven into the soundtrack's fabric is the individual seeing herself reflected in communion with others.

In the face of personal trauma, financial hardship, persistent systemic injustice, and policy-level changes that dramatically transform their lives, the film's subjects demonstrate the human impulse to sustain life. For Pluinage, resilience is not only about healing, but rather represents a methodology for creating a life. People alter their environments, personal appearances, or behaviors, not merely to adapt and survive, but to thrive and delight in life, despite its obstacles.

Perseverance is enacted through walking. The film features each figure as she strides alone, moving freely in public spaces across the city, claiming and reclaiming space on Chicago's streets and carving out a place, however small, in the world. Walking is a political act, and Chicago is no stranger to those who walk in protest, particularly during Pluinage's visit shortly after the inauguration of President Donald Trump. However, the women in her film walk, not in organized protest, but as free citizens, embodying equal access and freedom to move, a right afforded to anyone inside the city—visitor or native.

Chicago is a city famously organized by a sophisticated grid system designed to enable free and safe passage for pedestrians. In 2017, however, the notion of safe passage is a contested one, a simple reality in many neighborhoods, while deeply fraught and largely denied to others in less patrolled, monitored areas. In the face of such disparity, these women move purposefully, freely, and confidently. They swagger with the self-possession of a cowboy in what the artist describes as a *modern western*. The women have not been “socialized to know their place,” as Rebecca Solnit writes in *Wanderlust*¹, reticent to walk in public spaces for fear of their personal safety. Rather, they strut with the confidence of a flaneur, perhaps not moving toward a particular destination, but simply as free agents. A collection of faith, rituals, and inventions, *Amazons* is a love letter to sustaining and thriving in Chicago through the journey of those discovering how to be alive today.

Amazons features: Jaqui Almaguer, Milenka Bermanovà, La'Drissa Bonivel, Itunuoluwa Ebijimi / Petty Crocker, Jessica Martin, Deone Jackman, FM Suprême, Simone Vanorlé.

Justine Pluinage completed her education at L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie in Arles, France. Her video and film work often adopts the documentary format, portraying intimate relationships among people and oscillates between realistic and dreamlike states, between observed time and narration. She has participated in exhibitions at Rencontres d'Arles, the FOAM in Amsterdam, the Ball in Paris and the Palais de Tokyo. She is the 2013 recipient of the Grand Prix at the 58th Salon de Montrouge.

¹ *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* by Rebecca Solnit. Viking Penguin, New York. 2001. pp. 232-246. ISBN 0140286012.